Invoking a “War Without Hate”: The Second World War in North Africa as a Total War in Experience and Memory

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Abstract

This dissertation argues that the Anglo-German imperial struggle for North Africa during the Second World War fit the schema of "total war" far more closely than is generally understood, both in conception and in soldiers' lived experiences. Only after 1945 did the North Africa campaign become the sanitized conflict of British and German popular memory, dominated by the story of a "desert war" waged in an empty landscape. Wartime records reveal the German war in North Africa to be no aberration from the trend toward the totalization of warfare on the Eastern Front. Radicalized and racialized violence and brutality dominated both British and German soldiers' experience of the war, and were perpetrated against soldiers, prisoners, and civilians alike. Surveilled soldiers' conversations reveal that the North African environment worsened the violence of warfare, rather than alleviating it.

However, over the years following the war's conclusion, the narrative of the war transformed from one of enemy soldiers locked in desperate, existential combat into one of respectable and even sympathetic opponents in a more limited struggle: a chivalric "war without hate." Likewise, the desert environment came to signify something quite different: an enemy in and of itself in a unique "desert war." The built environment and North Africa's inhabitants, ubiquitous in wartime accounts, disappeared, replaced by the narrative of "empty" space. The metamorphosis of the North Africa campaign from total warfare into an edifying story of European comrades in arms required deliberate diplomatic, political, and cultural work by members of the VDAK, the *Traditionsverband* for former Afrika Korps soldiers, and their British allies. This work helped to cement the Cold War alliance, aided German remilitarization, shaped the mythology that continues to surround the Wehrmacht and the figure of Erwin Rommel, and enabled reconciliation with the former British enemy on the basis of a common, European, imperial past.

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The Second World War in North Africa: Total War, the Environment, and British Memory

> The desert war of 1940-43 is unique in history; it was fought like a polo game on an empty arena… Apart from a few inhabited places along the coast there were neither towns nor villages to provide shelter or obstacles. There was almost no civilian population to get in the way of the battle. The desert campaign was therefore war in its purest form.
> *The Desert Generals*[1]

Introduction

The Eastern Front of the Second World War is often depicted as an apocalyptic struggle of life and death, an ideal-typical "total war" of chaos and escalating, unlimited violence.[2] The predominant narrative of the Second World War in North Africa,[3] however, remains that of a "war without hate,"[4] an honorable, manly struggle dominated by the clash of generals Erwin Rommel and Bernard Montgomery, a war during which German and British soldiers faced one another in an empty desert landscape.[5] Yet the conflicts were not as radically different as suggested by their depictions. Despite the enduring "clean hands" mythology surrounding the front, the war in North Africa was a brutal struggle marked by radicalizing violence, the demonization of the enemy, the blurring of boundaries between soldiers and civilians, genocide, and limitless plans for destruction and domination.

The Wehrmacht's North Africa campaign, like the one in Eastern Europe, was a "total" conflict, sharing four essential similarities: the contest's place in the war's overall strategy, the

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[1] Correlli Barnett, *The Desert Generals* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 23.
[2] See Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Bernd Greiner, eds., *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1945* (Washington D.C.; Cambridge: German Historical Institutes; Cambridge University Press, 2005); Bavaria Atelier (Firm);Royal Film Produktions.;Fox Lorber Home Video (Firm);AUC Library. and Joseph Vilsmaier, *Stalingrad* (New York, NY : Fox Lorber Home Video, 1993).
[3] This dissertation uses the geographic label "North Africa" to refer to the countries in the region contested by the German Afrika Korps and the British Eighth Army between 1941 and 1943: Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia.
[4] The German title for Erwin Rommel's edited papers, published in 1950, was *Krieg ohne Hass*
[5] For example: Erwin Rommel and Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *The Rommel Papers* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953); John Bierman and Colin Smith, *Alamein: War without Hate* (London: Viking, 2002).

logistical difficulties posed by the environment, Germany's genocidal ambitions, and the overall combat casualty rates. Strategically paralleling the push for the Baku oilfields of the USSR, the Afrika Korps in North Africa hoped to reach Middle Eastern oil to sustain the German economy and war effort, aiming to build what Dietrich Eichholtz called an "oil empire."[6] The enormous logistical problems of fighting in the desert were not fundamentally different than those fighting in the Eurasian Steppe: the German campaign in North Africa was, like the Eastern Front, was marked by inadequate resources and overstretched supply lines in a mainly flat terrain dominated by armor.[7] As in Eastern Europe, Germans deported and murdered Jews from areas under their own and their allies' control, and evidence shows that Nazi leadership intended to extend the Holocaust at least as far as Palestine.[8] Finally, although the numbers of soldiers involved were far smaller than on the Eastern Front, casualty rates in North African battles were often the same or similar.[9]

Despite these similarities, memories, representations, and narratives of the war in North Africa differ dramatically from those of the Eastern Front: it is often seen as a "clean" struggle between rivals, not a war of annihilation between mortal enemies. Much of extant historical writing on the topic repeats a familiar story of the war in which the wily "Desert Fox" Erwin Rommel and his opponent Bernard Montgomery fought honorably in an environment lacking vulnerable civilians, a chess-like contest of wits which saw the Afrika Korps nearly snatching

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[6] Dietrich Eichholtz, *Krieg um Öl: ein Erdölimperium als deutsches Kriegsziel (1938-1943)* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2006); Robert Goralski, Russell W Freeburg, and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Oil & War: How the Deadly Struggle for Fuel in WWII Meant Victory or Defeat* (New York: Morrow, 1987); and Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London ; New York: Verso, 2011) for an analysis of energy networks' centrality to modern politics.

[7] Library of Congress. and Margaret Wagner, *The Library of Congress World War II Companion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 520.

[8] Klaus M. Mallmann et al., "Beseitigung der jüdisch-nationalen Heimstätte in Palästina," in *Deutsche - Juden - Völkermord. Der Holocaust als Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2006).

[9] See the discussion of casualty rates in Chapter 1

victory from the Eighth Army.[10] Outnumbered as defenders at Tobruk and then unlikely victors of the pivotal battle at El Alamein, popular representations of the North Africa campaign deployed heroic imagery celebrating the efforts of all combatants.[11]

This dissertation argues that the Anglo-German imperial struggle for North Africa during the Second World War fits the schema of "total war" far more closely than is generally understood, both in conception and in soldiers' lived experience. It was only after 1945 that the North Africa campaign become the sanitized conflict of British and German popular memory, dominated by the story of a "desert war" waged in an empty landscape. Wartime British and German records reveal the German war in North Africa to be no aberration from the trend toward the totalization of warfare on the Eastern Front in terms of the war's aims, nor from the radicalization and racialization of violence. Violence, death, and brutality dominated both British and German soldiers' experience of the war, and were perpetrated against soldiers, prisoners, and civilians. Moreover, I argue that the North African environment worsened the violence of warfare, rather than alleviating it, or transforming into a common enemy that united the adversaries. I go on to demonstrate how the story of the North Africa campaign was cultivated by some former Wehrmacht officers and their British allies to aid the Cold War struggle against the Soviet Union. Following the Second World War's conclusion, members of the VDAK, the *Traditionsverband* for former Afrika Korps soldiers, worked to promote the interpretation of the war in North Africa as a "war without hate" in an empty desert, allowing for reconciliation with the former British enemy on the basis of a common, European, imperial past. VDAK leaders made this Cold War reconciliation contingent, however, upon their own professional, social, and

[10] See, for example: Ian Baxter, *Afrika-Korps*, Images of War (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword, 2008); Robin Neillands, *The Desert Rats: 7th Armoured Division, 1940-1945* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991).
[11] For example: Henry Hathaway, *The Desert Fox: The Story of Rommel*, Biography, Drama, War, 1951; Robert Wise, *The Desert Rats*, Action, Adventure, Drama, 1953.

national rehabilitation. This interpretation of the war, promoted by the VDAK and British conservatives interested in German rearmament against the Soviet Union, came into conflict with opposing narratives popular with British veterans, public, and politicians. It was not until the 1970s that the British government acceded to joint commemorations of the war with the former enemy and then NATO ally, finally enshrining the sanitized narrative of the "desert war."[12]

I argue that the refashioning of the Second World War in North Africa from a "total war" into a knightly "war without hate" depended on discursive transformations of three interlocking elements central to the wartime experience and postwar perception and memory of the conflict: the natural environment, the human context of North Africa (including the built environment and region's indigenous inhabitants), and enemy soldiers. While wartime records show that the perceived harshness of the North African environment amplified rather than reduced the combat's deadly intensity, over the years following the war's conclusion, the desert environment came instead to signify something quite different: an enemy in and of itself in a unique "desert war." The built environment and North Africa's inhabitants, ubiquitous in wartime accounts, disappeared, replaced by the narrative of "empty" space. At the same time, enemy soldiers locked in desperate, existential combat became respectable and even sympathetic opponents in a more limited struggle, foreshadowing the NATO alliance against the Soviet Union. The metamorphosis of the North Africa campaign from total warfare into an edifying parable of European comrades in arms required deliberate diplomatic, political, and cultural work by VDAK elites and their British allies, work that helped to cement the Cold War alliance, aided German remilitarization, and shaped the Cold War mythology that continues to surround the

[12] See, for example: Barnett, *The Desert Generals*; Martin Kitchen, *Rommel's Desert War: Waging World War II in North Africa, 1941-1943* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Samuel W Mitcham, *Rommel's Desert War: The Life and Death of the Africa Korps* (New York: Stein and Day, 1981).

Wehrmacht and the figure of Erwin Rommel.

Historiographical Context

Following three discursive components integral to the way the war was experienced and remembered, I draw on and intervene in ongoing historiographical discussions on "total war" and the experience of the Second World War, environmental history, and the memory of the Second World War in Britain.

The Second World War in North Africa: Total War

The standard genealogy of the concept of "total war" traces its origin to Carl von Clausewitz's formulation "absolute war" in *Vom Kriege*.[13] Total war's first, most complete modern articulation came after the First World War in Erich Ludendorff's *Der Totale Krieg*, before further elaboration by mid-century theorists.[14] Roger Chickering and Stig Förster have argued that the standard "master narrative" of modern military history follows a teleological march toward the arrival of "total war" in the twentieth century.[15] Starting in 1792, when the forces of Revolutionary France "revolutionized combat by… sheer numbers and… intensity," European warfare embarked on "growth in both intensity and expanse… en route to totality," culminating in the "Century of Total War."[16] In the First World War, combatants sought to

[13] Hew Strachan, "Essay and Reflection: On Total War and Modern War," *The International History Review* 22, no. 2 (2000): 341–70.
[14] Roger Chickering, "Total War: The Use and Abuse of a Concept," in *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914*, ed. Stig Förster, Roger Chickering, and Manfred F. Boemeke (Washington, D.C; Cambridge, U.K.; New York: German Historical Institute ; Cambridge University Press, 1999), 16; Raymond Aron, *The Century of Total War.* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1954).
[15] Manfred F. Boemeke, Roger Chickering, and Stig Förster, eds., *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914* (Washington, D.C; Cambridge, U.K.; New York: German Historical Institute ; Cambridge University Press, 1999), 13; Chickering, "Total War: The Use and Abuse of a Concept," 13.
[16] Chickering, "Total War: The Use and Abuse of a Concept," 14.

mobilize "all of their resources, human and material," to defeat the enemy, while by the Second, "[w]hatever distinctions remained between the military and civilian sectors… vanished inexorably."[17] With civilians and soldiers rendered fungible targets of extraordinary violence, in this telling, total war was global, unlimited, and "unprecedented" in its "intensity and extent."[18]

However, Chickering and Förster observed that if the "master narrative" of total war predicted progressive totalization of warfare over the nineteenth century, the results of historical research have frequently repudiated this prescribed pattern of development.[19] Research has complicated the story of total war juxtaposed against the "limited and regulated affair, fought out for limited aims, according to accepted rules of engagement by small, professional armies" imagined to have taken place in the 18th century, just as it has the Eurocentric discourse of military evolution entirely endogenous to Europe.[20] Rather than mere "small wars," a term originally intended by Charles Callwell in 1896 to signify limited, colonial engagements,[21] scholars such as Manfred May and Trutz von Trotha have traced the origins of total war to colonial warfare itself.[22] May argued that "[c]olonial wars" such as in the Philippines "might be seen as practice runs for the world wars that followed."[23] The total warfare that unfolded on the Eastern Front of the Second World War may also be interpreted as having taken place in a colonial context. German thinkers long conceptualized Eastern Europe as a colonial space, one

[17] Ibid., 15.
[18] Ibid., 16.
[19] Ibid., 19.
[20] Ibid., 21.
[21] Strachan, "Essay and Reflection," 353.
[22] Manfred F May, "Was the Philippine-American War a 'Total War'?," in *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914*, ed. Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Manfred F. Boemeke (Washington, D.C; Cambridge, U.K.; New York: German Historical Institute ; Cambridge University Press, 1999); Trutz von Trotha, "The African Colonies of Imperial Germany," in *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914*, ed. Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Manfred F. Boemeke (Washington, D.C; Cambridge, U.K.; New York: German Historical Institute ; Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[23] May, "Was the Philippine-American War a 'Total War'?," 457.

characterized by emptiness and backwardness.[24] Nazi polemicists frequently compared German camps to Boer War precedents established by the British Empire.[25] Dreamers of a continental German empire found inspiration in the United States' settler-colonial genocide of the North American continent.[26] This dissertation builds on these insights, revising the Eurocentric narrative of war's evolution, and pointing toward a colonial context for "total war," arguing North Africa served as a similar colonial "laboratories" of modern violence.[27]

Modris Eksteins and Peter Sloterdijk have argued that truly modern "total war" emerged during the First World War. According to Eksteins, Germans pioneered total warfare first by perpetrating atrocities against Belgian civilians, then by pushing the technological and spatial boundaries of combat and waging increasingly unrestricted warfare on sea and in the air.[28] German total war reached its apex in 1917 as defeat became increasingly certain: "[d]eath took on a creative function… war now held moral value of its own, without regard to foresight or hindsight."[29] Sloterdijk proposed that the expansive logic of the "total war" which began in trenches of the First World War necessarily entailed "environmental war," referring to the weaponization of breathable air through poison gas attacks.[30] The role of the environment is key to Sloterdijk's formulation: "classical warfare" directed violence against enemy soldiers as

[24] Robert L. Nelson, *Germans, Poland, and Colonial Expansion to the East: 1850 through the Present* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 22; David Furber, "Near as Far in the Colonies: The Nazi Occupation of Poland," *The International History Review* 26, no. 3 (2004): 541–79, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40110519.
[25] Christian Goeschel and Nikolaus Wachsmann, "Before Auschwitz: The Formation of the Nazi Concentration Camps, 1933-9," *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 3 (July 1, 2010): 525, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009410366554.
[26] Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), chap. 12.
[27] Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1997), 5.
[28] Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 156–57.
[29] Ibid., 198.
[30] Peter Sloterdijk, Amy Patton, and Steve Corcoran, *Terror from the air* (Los Angeles; Cambridge, Mass.: Semiotext(e) ; Distributed by the MIT Press, 2009), 98.

"manly" opponents, while this new, modern, totalizing war of "terrorism" meant destroying the "environmental conditions of the enemy's life."[31] Following Sloterdijk, this dissertation argues that that the environment, not only pertaining to the conditions sustaining life, was a central to the evolution of total war.

Lacking a universally accepted definition and at odds with its "master narrative," Chickering and Förster have proposed using the concept "total war" as a Weberian "ideal type," with conflicts evaluable for "totality… in four dimensions: mobilization, methods, aims, and control."[32] Besides the attempt to totally mobilize an entire economy, society, and their material resources for the war effort, which is beyond the scope of my dissertation, Chickering argued "total war" signified a tendency toward "the radicalization of warfare, the abandonment of the last restraints on combat... the systematic erasure of basic distinctions between soldiers and civilians" in a conflict in which "governments pursue extravagant, uncompromising war aims… and they justify these goals through the demonization of the enemy."[33]

The Second World War's Eastern Front is often presented as an archetypical instance of a "total war," particularly following Chickering and Förster's categories of "aims," "methods," and "mobilization." It was a nightmarish space of limitless, radicalizing, and genocidal violence where the boundaries between civilians and soldiers vanished utterly, and Nazi leadership pursued fantastical dreams of *Lebensraum*.[34] Although German leaders were reluctant to totalize the country's social and economic mobilization for war before the final years of the conflict,

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[31] Ibid., 16.
[32] William Mulligan, "Review Article: Total War," *War in History* 15, no. 2 (April 1, 2008): 211–21, https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344508091768; Chickering, Förster, and Greiner, *A World at Total War*.
[33] Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, "Are We There Yet? World War II and the Theory of Total War," in *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1945*, ed. Bernd Greiner, Roger Chickering, and Stig Förster (Washington D.C.; Cambridge: German Historical Institutes; Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.
[34] Alex J. Kay, Jeff Rutherford, and David Stahel, eds., *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2014).

historians including Omer Bartov and Wolfram Wette have demonstrated that the German military waged an unlimited "total" war of annihilation against the Soviet Union. The *Wehrmacht*, steeped in Nazi ideology, engaged in unprecedented atrocities on the Eastern Front and actively committed genocide.[35] Scholarship by Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer has found that for German soldiers, the brutality and violence of total war and genocide were so ubiquitous that they simply became the "normal" background to their lives.[36]

In contrast to this image of total war in the east, the "clean war" remains the prevailing understanding of the war in North Africa, particularly when analysis is restricted to the North African battlefield itself. Indeed, Hew Strachan has argued that the desert of North Africa came "closest" to the "ideal" of a "landscape… devoid of human occupation and where the only obstacles were those set by nature," brushing aside accounts of prisoner executions as excesses of the "heat of battle" in an otherwise reasonably chivalric conflict between worthy opponents.[37] In the standard telling, North Africa was an exception to the trend toward totalization; indeed, one German officer was "inclined to think of the romantic idea of a knight's tourney,"[38] an aberration from the narrative of romantic disillusionment brought on by the horrors of the First World War.[39] In fact, many narratives of the experience of the North Africa front have focused on the war's exceptional civility, supposing a war in which German and British soldiers

[35] Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: history, myth, reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).
[36] Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer, *Soldaten: on fighting, killing, and dying : the secret World War II transcripts of German POWs* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012); Harald Welzer, *Täter: wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2005).
[37] Hew Strachan, "Total War: The Conduct of War, 1939-1945," in *A World at Total War : Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1945*, ed. Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Bernd Greiner (Washington D.C.; Cambridge: German Historical Institutes; Cambridge University Press, 2005), 40.
[38] Ibid., 41.
[39] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Samuel Lynn Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Atheneum : Maxwell Macmillan International, 1991); Yuval N Harari, "Martial Illusions: War and Disillusionment in Twentieth-Century and Renaissance Military Memoirs," *Journal of Military History* 69, no. 1 (2005): 43–72.

respected one another as honorable adversaries or recounting familiar narratives of the triumph over adversity.[40] The Afrika Korps and its leaders' alleged discipline and moral comportment have long been the mainstay of popular representations of the conflict.[41] Befitting a more "civilized" conflict, David French argued that British soldiers were little influenced by official anti-German propaganda, and that they were mostly "reluctant killers" who were "products of a civic culture that deprecated public violence." French claimed British soldiers "were largely apolitical and they identified more strongly with their families and their homes than with any public institution or ideology" and sought "to defeat, not to exterminate, their enemies." Nevertheless, inconsistencies even appear in narratives that emphasize the front's supposed civility in North Africa. Evocatively, French cited an order from German General von Arnim in Tunisia demanding the punishment of soldiers who talked "about the fair way in which the British treated their prisoners."[42] Strachan similarly cited a racialized complaint by Rommel himself that New Zealanders "had repeatedly broken international law by massacring wounded and prisoners of war," which was attributed to Maori soldiers.[43]

New research over the past two decades has, however, challenged this narrative, indicating that the war in North Africa was more "total" than previously allowed. The 1990s saw a pivotal reevaluation of the Wehrmacht's involvement with Nazism and its participation in the Holocaust.[44] Historians such as Georg Reuth, Ian Beckett, and Mark Connelly have likewise

[40] Neillands, *The Desert Rats*; Baxter, *Afrika-Korps*; Bierman and Smith, *Alamein*.
[41] See, for example, Hathaway, *The Desert Fox*; Alfred Weidenmann et al., *Der Stern von Afrika*, Drama, War (Neue Emelka, Producciones Cinematográficas Ariel, 1959); Horst Wiganko, *That Was Our Rommel*, Documentary, War, 1954. While not directly addressing the North Africa campaign, the influential *The Battle of the River Plate*, 1956, served as a model for future filmic representations of the honorable German soldier.
[42] D. French, "You Cannot Hate the Bastard Who Is Trying to Kill You...' Combat and Ideology in the British Army in the War Against Germany, 1939-45," *Twentieth Century British History* 11 (2000): 22.
[43] Strachan, "Total War: The Conduct of War, 1939-1945," 41.
[44] Bartov, *Hitler's Army*; Wolfram Wette and Deborah Lucas Schneider, *The Wehrmacht: history, myth, reality* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2007).

challenged the foundations of the "Rommel Myth."[45] Much like the "Wehrmacht debate" following the 1995 "Wehrmacht Exhibition" in Hamburg challenged the myth of the German army's "clean hands,"[46] research by historians Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cüppers helped provoke in 2008 a German art installation questioning the mythology surrounding Erwin Rommel, most importantly his status as unsullied by Nazism or the commission of genocide.[47] Scholars are reexamining German aims in North Africa and revising the extent of Nazi ambitions in the Middle East towards those suggestive of a "total war" of – in principle and in conception – unlimited geographic scope. Mallmann and Cüppers argued that the Nazi government planned to murder the Jews of Egypt, Palestine, and beyond.[48] Dietrich Eichholtz has challenged the notion that the German government simply aimed to prop up its Italian ally, proposing instead that the Nazis sought an "oil empire" in North Africa and the Middle East.[49] Pivotal scholarship on the Holocaust in North is expanding not only our understandings of genocidal Nazi aims in the region, but the enormous violence by the Wehrmacht and its Italian allies that is erased by Eurocentric understandings of the war.

This dissertation contributes to the ongoing reevaluation of the Second World War in North Africa, arguing that far from the "war without hate" of popular memory, the war was fits the model for "total war" outlined by Chickering and Förster. The narrative of a "desert war", I argue, masks the way it was waged and experienced by the soldiers who fought in it.[50] German

[45] Ian F. W. Beckett, *Rommel: A Reappraisal* (Pen & Sword Military, 2013); Ralf Georg Reuth, *Rommel: The End of a Legend*, trans. Debra S. Marmor and Herbert A. Danner, 1st Edition (Haus Publishing, 2020).
[46] Bartov, *Hitler's Army*; Wette, *The Wehrmacht*; Robert Loeffel, "Soldiers and Terror: Re-Evaluating the Complicity of the Wehrmacht in Nazi Germany," *German History* 27, no. 4 (October 1, 2009): 514–30, https://doi.org/10.1093/gerhis/ghp078.
[47] Berthold Seewald, "Erwin Rommel, Held Der 'Sauberen Wehrmacht,'" *Welt Online*, December 21, 2008, sec. Feuilleton, http://www.welt.de/kultur/article2905248/Erwin-Rommel-Held-der-sauberen-Wehrmacht.html.
[48] Mallmann et al., "Beseitigung der jüdisch-nationalen Heimstätte in Palästina."
[49] See also Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*; Eichholtz, *Krieg um Öl*.
[50] See Chapter 2

aims in North Africa were essentially unlimited, efforts to demonize the British enemy and remove limitations on military violence were likely successful, and that women, prisoners of war, and non-combatants were subjected to gendered and racial violence.

The Desert Environment, Wasteland, Empty Space

After the conclusion of formal hostilities, in popular representations of the war in North Africa, the desert environment itself discursively transformed into an enemy in a "desert war." North Africa was now an "empty" desert landscape, nearly devoid of buildings and inhabitants, a mere backdrop for war between European powers, while enemy soldiers, once mortal enemies in an apocalyptic "total war," came to be figured as fellow Europeans in the struggle against the arid environment. Long-standing European environmental discourses of "the desert" as a "wasteland" or an "empty space" served to conceal the violence of total war while enabling the recasting of a conflict between the forces of the British, German, and Italian empires over the colonial domination of North Africa as a contest between European nation-states.

European conceptions of "the desert," brought to North Africa by British, French, Italian, and German colonialists, are the products of a long history intertwined with European imperialism. In her genealogical examination of desert discourses in *Arid Lands*, Diana Davis showed how Ancient Greek notions of the desert as potentially productive and valuable land, though far from ideal, gave way to conflicting medieval and early modern Christian visions shaped both by recognition of Arab art and science, and horror at the Muslim conquest of the holy land. Travel writing "portrayed deserts as difficult, magnificent, and exotic," derived from their association with sin and the Garden of Eden. Deserts might be "wastelands… occupied by evil people," as "only sinful people lived in the desert." Before European arrival in the Americas, the Western imaginary of the desert "combined Christian views of the desert as sublime and

profane mixed with remnants of classical thinking about deserts and environmental determinism at the edges of the habitable world."[51]

By the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, deserts came to be understood as "wastelands," or "unproductive, ruined or untilled land."[52] Places that were "inhospitable, undesirable landscapes lacking in value… the opposite of the Edenic ideal," they were "landscapes in need of repair – used and abused by indigenous and nomadic peoples," spaces which justified colonial intervention and capitalist-scientific development: "landscapes… ravaged by overgrazing or as lush and fertile but poorly developed."[53] They were "wastelands" specifically due to human mismanagement, deforestation, and irresponsibility: lands desiccated by the failures of their violent, ignorant, non-European inhabitants or destroyed by Arab invaders.[54] Cleared of trees, the desert's inhabitants were punished with drought, ensuring a long epoch of decline. North African deserts were imagined to be evil, ruined, and guilty places, ones which imperialists frequently sought to rescue from their inhabitants, expropriating their lands and enriching European settlers. Representation and memory of the North Africa Campaign as a "desert war" drew on this discourse of the North African desert as harsh, inhospitable, and despoiled: it was a fundamentally non-European enemy against which to fight and struggle, one whose inhabitants were rendered morally negligible.

The image of a "desert war" in a specifically "empty" landscape produced colonialist views which were blind to the people who inhabited the region as well as violence done to them. Scholars like Eve Vincent have shown that the concept of a desert as a "blank space" was

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[51] Diana K. Davis, *The Arid Lands: History, Power, Knowledge*, Kindle Edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), chap. 2.
[52] Ibid., chap. 1.
[53] Michael Egan, "Foreword," in *The Arid Lands: History, Power, Knowledge*, by Diana K Davis, Kindle Edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016).
[54] Vittoria Di Palma, *Wasteland: A History* (New Haven ; London: Yale University Press, 2014), 18.

fundamental to settler colonialism, noting references to deserts connoting "the ghastly" and the "culture less," signifying "only lack," places with "no monuments, no history… with no origin, no reference points."[55] The colonial construction of "of the desert as empty, dead and disused" obscured the history of habitation, enabled policies aimed at expropriating and reshaping the land, and facilitated the colonization of new lands. Contributing to and aided by the juridical concept of *terra nullius*, or "nobody's land,"[56] the effacing discourse of emptiness justified the seizure of land from backwards, indolent indigenous inhabitants and even the reckless despoilment of the natural environment.[57]

After the Second World War, the discourse of North Africa's "empty desert" obscured the atrocities and violence perpetrated in the region, as well as the presence of the people who inhabited it, hiding the murderous chaos of total war. In total war, colonial subjects, their built environments and the natural world were among the first to be subjected to the extremes of violence not previously allowed in the conduct of war against fellow Europeans, much as in German South-West Africa and British Iraq.[58] As Peter Sloterdijk argued, violence against the environment was itself a defining characteristic of total war.[59] Davis and Priya Satia have shown that the environmental discourse of the "desert" both obscured and justified immense violence

[55] Eve Vincent, "'Never Mind Our Country Is the Desert,'" in *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity*, ed. Tracey Banivanua-Mar and Penelope Edmonds (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 57.
[56] Andrew Fitzmaurice, "The Genealogy of Terra Nullius," *Australian Historical Studies* 38, no. 129 (April 1, 2007): 1–15, https://doi.org/10.1080/10314610708601228.
[57] Roslynn D Haynes, *Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film* (Cambridge, UK; New York, US: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 66–67; Tracey Banivanua-Mar, "Carving Wilderness: Queensland's National Parks and the Unsettling of Emptied Lands, 1890-1910," in *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity*, ed. Tracey Banivanua-Mar and Penelope Edmonds (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 75.
[58] Isabel V Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, NY [u.a.]: Cornell Univ. Press, 2006); Priya Satia, "'A Rebellion of Technology'/ Development, Policing, and the British Arabian Imaginary," in *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Diana K Davis and Edmund Burke (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011).
[59] Sloterdijk, Patton, and Corcoran, *Terror from the air*, 98.

against its peoples even outside of the context of a world war. After the First World War, British military forces imagined Iraqi nomads to be "rugged inhabitants of a harsh environment," people capable of tolerating "'random acts of violence' not considered possible for village dwellers." The discursive construction of the desert as an empty wasteland inhabited by backwards, suspect, or irrelevant nomads "combined with an 'environmental imaginary of land so barren that bombardment could not possibly worsen it.'" In doing so, the British "identified Arabia as a 'state of exception'" which permitted and concealed "excessive brutality."[60]

My findings show that the Second Word War in North Africa likely formed a similar "state of exception" where the established norms of war and "civilized" behavior did not apply. European environmental imaginaries of the desert, Satia has argued, "license departure from universalist principles of law and humanity for exceptional technologies and rules."[61] Consequently, I argue that the North African "desert" was particularly conducive to total war, not a disconnected aberration. Further, I demonstrate that the discourse of "empty space" in the "desert war" came to obscure battlefield horrors that evoked the First World and the Eastern Front, masking violence not only against civilians but between combatants under the conditions of combat.

Beyond sanitizing the conflict, shifting perceptions of North Africa's environment and its people disguised the war's imperial context, contributing to the myth of "national" war as Britain and Germany experienced post-colonial migration to former metropoles, in an era which saw the collapse of formal imperialism.[62] The discourse of white, imperial solidarity against a hostile,

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[60] Davis, *The Arid Lands*, chap. 4; Satia, "'A Rebellion of Technology'/ Development, Policing, and the British Arabian Imaginary."
[61] Satia, "'A Rebellion of Technology'/ Development, Policing, and the British Arabian Imaginary," 43.
[62] Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain : Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997); Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Sonya Rose, *Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-*

foreign desert constructed here formed one basis for Anglo-German rapprochement. Here, I am building on the work of Martin Francis, who identified the "erasure of empire" and its replacement with a "struggle against the pitiless forces of nature" as a central feature to 1950s British film representations of the Second World War in North Africa.[63] This "erasure," Francis argued, allowed for "the assertion of (white) colonial settler virility" and the creation of "a white man's war." Discursively emptying North Africa of its inhabitants hid the war's colonial context and its unrestrained violence, creating a clean, manly, and controlled "national" war fought between the white nations of Europe. The exoticizing discourse surrounding the "savage" desert environment consequently played a key role in reframing the Second World War in North Africa as a war between European nations.

Ultimately, in addition to legitimizing Cold War reconciliation, the narrative of British and German soldiers facing one another in a deadly alien environment contributed to the discourse of a shared European identity as the foundation for European integration. The contrast (implicit or explicit) of a pleasantly forested Europe against a debased desert wasteland reinforced the myth of North Africa and its inhabitants as the Orient contrasted to and producing the European Occident.[64] It helped delineate a European "civilizational identity" inhospitable to Muslim migration and define "Europe" as a continent composed of compatible white nation-states, a secularized Latin Christendom bound together by history, race, religious heritage, and

1945 (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Edward Ross Dickinson, "The German Empire: An Empire?," *History Workshop Journal* 66, no. 1 (October 1, 2008): 129–62, https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbn028.
[63] Martin Francis, "Remembering War, Forgetting Empire? Representations of the North African Campaign in 1950s British Cinema," in *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, ed. Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 114, 120.
[64] Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

now the specter of communism.[65]

The Memory of the Second World War and the Rommel Myth in Britain

Popular memory of the Second World War in the United Kingdom has long been dominated by the narrative of "the people's war" and heroic resistance during the blitz. According to this narrative, after the rescue of British soldiers at Dunkirk and the "finest hour" during the Battle of Britain, the British underdog staved off the German behemoth while resisting a brutal Luftwaffe terror bombing campaign. Under fire, the British people came together and forged a new national consensus and identity. This narrative of the war was never uncontested, and emerged over the 1940s and 50s through a complex process of negotiation in which some perspectives and stories were privileged over others.[66] The integrity of many components of the people's war narrative have long been challenged.[67] David Edgerton, for instance, has contested the vision of Britain as a plucky underdog facing an overwhelming Germany, arguing that British leadership was confident in the Empire's ability to defeat Germany on its own until the loss of Singapore.[68] Sonya Rose has demonstrated how the

[65] Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*; Jose Casanova, "The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms," in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, 1 edition (Oxford, N.Y: Oxford University Press, 2011); Anthony Pagden and Talal Asad, eds., "Muslims and European Identity: Can Europe Represent Islam?," in *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union* (Washington, DC : Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[66] Penny Summerfield, Dunkirk and the Popular Memory of Britain at War, 1940-58, -- also Geoff Eley, 'Finding 'the People's war", Mark Connelly, We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War (Harlow 2004), 90)

[67] Angus Calder, *The People's War; Britain, 1939-1945.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969); Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: J. Cape, 1991); John Ramsden, "Myths and Realities of the 'People's War' in Britain," in *Experience and Memory: The Second World War in Europe*, ed. Jörg Echternkamp and Stefan Martens (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).

[68] David Edgerton, *Britain's War Machine: Weapons, Resources, and Experts in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

prevailing narrative of British wartime unity obscured profound divisions along the lines of class, ethnicity, and gender.[69]

The place of the North Africa front in British popular memory remains relatively underexamined. Mark Connelly emphasized the significance of the North Africa campaign in British public consciousness during and after the war, in part due to timing, politics, and circumstances: Britain needed a victory after the fall of Singapore. Connelly argued that its popularity endured because "it was perceived to be a clean war, involving soldiers who respected each other in a… struggle that appealed to the sporting side of the British people." The North African environment itself connected to a "deep-rooted British cultural romance" with the desert, wilderness, and manly adventure.[70] In the popular narrative of the war, the Second Battle of El Alamein served as a key turning point, summarized by Winston Churchill: "[i]t may almost be said that before Alamein we never had a victory. After Alamein we never had a defeat."[71] Of course, the story of a pivotal triumph at El Alamein has been contested, and was even challenged as a "myth" in 1977 by Correlli Barnett during a BBC talk on Radio 4 titled "Myth versus History."[72] Alexander Joffe has recently examined the emergence of triumphal British narratives emphasizing the buildup to El Alamein and the successes that followed, arguing that they came at the expense of alternative accounts centering military failures of the early years in North Africa.[73]

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[69] Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-1945* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[70] Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It!: Britain and the Memory of the Second World War*, 1st ed (Harlow, England ; New York: Pearson Longman, 2004), 207.
[71] Ibid., 212.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Alexander H. Joffe, *Operation Crusader and the Desert War in British History and Memory: "What Is Failure? What Is Loyalty?"* (London ; New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350132900.

In British wartime perception and postwar popular memory, the North Africa campaign was inseparable from the myth of Erwin Rommel. By the end of 1941, Rommel had become the German general best known to the British public.[74] Initially a product of shrewd self-promotion and Nazi propaganda, Rommel's notoriety was amplified by American and British media, and Winston Churchill in particular. It was Churchill who, in January 1942, declared before the House of Commons that Rommel was "a very daring and skillful opponent against us, and may I say across the havoc of war, a great general."[75] The wartime success of the "Rommel Myth" owed also to face-saving measures by British military leaders suffering costly defeats in the North African theater of war; promoting the legend of Rommel's military genius excused the failures of the British officer corps. Following Rommel's and the Afrika Korps' ultimate defeat, the legend of Rommel's brilliance proved useful in raising the stature of Bernard Montgomery as Rommel's counterpart in British propaganda in publications and films like the 1943 *Desert Victory,* which situated Montgomery as Rommel's intellectual and strategic match.

The Cold War shaped the ways the Second World War was remembered over the postwar period, as "forgetting" the war's violence and genocide accompanied efforts to stabilize and rearm Western Europe.[76] Cold War politics on both sides of the Atlantic were enormously influential in the construction of the narrative of a "clean war": for General Claude Auchinleck, veteran of North Africa and, with Desmond Young, co-author of the popular Rommel biography first published in 1950, the "Desert Fox" provided the necessary "good German" unassociated with death camps for West German Cold War allies in need of "role models."[77] The use of such a

[74] Reuth, *Rommel*, chap. 3.
[75] Mark Connelly, "Rommel as an Icon," in *Rommel: A Reappraisal*, ed. Ian F. W. Beckett (Pen & Sword Military, 2013).
[76] Dan Stone, *Goodbye to All That?: A History of Europe Since 1945*, 1st edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
[77] Connelly, *We Can Take It!*, 215; Desmond Young and Claude Auchinleck, *Rommel* (London: Collins, 1950).

role model entailed the erasure (or, as Susan Miller has proposed, "purposeful occultation") of the North African Jewish experience of the Holocaust.[78] As editor of Rommel's papers and defender of Wehrmacht leadership, Basil Liddell Hart was, in particular, a very persuasive voice in promoting both the story of Rommel's greatness, and notions of a "war without hate."[79] The "Rommel Myth" that he helped cultivate formed a crucial foundation for the "clean hands" mythology that surrounded the Wehrmacht for decades.[80]

That mythology took on many forms. Patrick Major observed that British films in the 1950s featured the "image of the former enemy as part of the process of reconciliation," presenting a "sanitized" image of Rommel and the Wehrmacht with "clean hands" in the context of broader Cold War cultural mobilization against the USSR. British films and books addressing North Africa "set the precedent for the cultural rehabilitation of the Wehrmacht on screen."[81] Major argued that postwar Britain, America and Germany "colluded in the creation of a sanitized image of the Wehrmacht," and demanded for future scholars "to see the 'clean hands' mythologization of the Wehrmacht as part of an international process."[82]

The enshrinement of the "desert war" narrative, the story of a "war without hate," was indeed an international phenomenon, a contentious one which necessitated abandoning, or at the very least de-emphasizing alternative interpretations of the war.[83] This dissertation contributes to

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[78] Susan Rubin Miller, "Sephardim and Holocaust Historiography," in *The Holocaust and North Africa*, ed. Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019).
[79] Connelly, "Rommel as an Icon."
[80] Patrick Major, "'Our Friend Rommel': The Wehrmacht as 'Worthy Enemy' in Postwar British Popular Culture," *German History* 26, no. 4 (October 1, 2008): 520–35, https://doi.org/10.1093/gerhis/ghn049; Valerie Hébert, "From Clean Hands to Vernichtungskrieg," in *Reassessing the Nuremberg Military Tribunals: Transitional Justice, Trial Narratives, and Historiography*, ed. Kim Christian Priemel and Alexa Stiller (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).
[81] Major, "'Our Friend Rommel,'" 520.
[82] Major, "'Our Friend Rommel.'"
[83] On American involvement: Matthias Reiss, "The Importance of Being Men: The Afrika-Korps in American Captivity," *Journal of Social History* 46, no. 1 (2012): 23–47, https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_social_history/v046/46.1.reiss.html; Brian C. Etheridge, "'The Desert Fox', Memory Diplomacy, and the German Question in Early Cold War America," *Diplomatic History* 32, no. 2 (2008): 207–38, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24916182.

the project of revising the understanding of the Second World War in British memory, arguing that narratives of the war in North Africa war played a unique role in fashioning postwar understandings of the war as a whole, and in rehabilitating Anglo-German relations. In the form of proposed joint commemorations around the anniversary of the Battle of El Alamein, I show that the "chivalric" narrative faced decades of resistance from those who remembered the battle as a tremendous (and exclusive) national, imperial, and Commonwealth victory, one only reluctantly shared with former enemies or even allies like the United States. I also direct a deeper focus on the contributions of veteran organizations, in this case the VDAK, in molding the memory of the war. German combat veterans who fought in North Africa remain an underexamined and underexplored force in shaping the memory of the conflict.

Shifts in the way the war was remembered and commemorated concealed total war in North Africa, and envisioned a Europe of nations rather than empires, serving the demands of German rehabilitation, the Cold War, and European integration. Rather than a "total war," the war in North Africa became a limited struggle with smaller stakes: a matter of winning and losing rather than victory or destruction. German soldiers, once enemies in a war of annihilation, became honorable opponents, legitimizing their roles as rearmed partners in the Cold War alliance against the Soviet Union. The human context of North Africa faded, replaced by the "empty" and hostile desert, emphasizing a common environmental enemy for both sides, and a broader European colonial heritage The framing of the Second World War constructed here, the contrast of a struggle between "chivalrous" European nations in the "West" and one against the

"barbaric" and "Asiatic" Bolsheviks of the "East," was the position that ignited the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s.[84]

[84] See, for example: Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, "The Pre-History of the Holocaust? The Sonderweg and Historikerstreit Debates and the Abject Colonial Past," *Central European History* 41, no. 3 (September 2008): 482, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938908000599.

Chapters

Bringing together new scholarship on German war aims, an analysis of the popular *Feldzeitung* for German soldiers in North Africa, *Die Oase*, and archival records suggesting widespread violence against women and prisoners of war, the first chapter argues that the Second World War in North Africa, like the Eastern Front, fit the criteria for "total war" outlined by Roger Chickering and Stig Förster. First, I argue that new research into German goals in North Africa and the Middle East reveal a war with unlimited scope, both in terms of geography and genocidal ambition. Then, examining the radicalizing propaganda and pedagogical efforts directed at German soldiers in North Africa, most notably in *Die Oase*, I argue that these materials resembled those used elsewhere in the German war effort, such as the Eastern Front, and that they were most likely successful in constructing British and imperial forces as "total" enemy. At the same time, the prominence of indigenous North Africans in German discourse as political actors and potential allies put a lie to the notion that they formed a passive backdrop to the conflict. Despite political efforts to foster positive relations, archival sources indicate that North Africans were targets of racialized and gendered violence. The North Africa front cannot be isolated from the larger war — Allied records detailing brutal German treatment of prisoners of war in North Africa show that that this campaign was inseparable from the Nazis' broader racial and imperial project.

Utilizing primarily the vast body of secret observations and transcribed conversations of captured German officers in British archives, the second chapter argues that German, and most likely British soldiers as well, waged the Second World War in North Africa as a "total war." First, I show that the wartime environmental discourse surrounding German North Africa campaign greatly resembled that of the Eastern Front: German handbooks identified nearly

identical challenges to navigating the Eurasian steppe as the North African desert. I argue that the challenges posed by North African terrain exacerbated the violence of warfare, rather than alleviating it, contributing to a "radicalization of warfare" against civilians as well as between combatants. German soldiers themselves frequently compared North Africa both to the contemporary Eastern Front and to the Western Front of the First World War. Allied prisoner surveillance records reveal widespread German violence against North Africa's indigenous population, even at the expense of the broader Nazi political project in the region, showing the breakdown of perceived boundaries between combatants and noncombatants. Further evidence of the mistreatment and murder of prisoners of war, buttressed by findings suggesting a trend toward "total war" by British soldiers, demonstrates that the postwar discourse of a chivalric war waged in an "empty" desert served to obscure tremendous violence.

Examining publications and internal records produced by the VDAK, the veterans' association for former Afrika Korps soldiers, the third chapter analyzes the emerging postwar discourse of a "war without hate" fought in an empty "desert war." I argue first that the VDAK played a pivotal role in the promotion of the North Africa front as uniquely "chivalric" battlefield in the pursuit of specific political goals: the freeing of convicted war criminal Albert Kesselring, and the rehabilitation of the Wehrmacht in the face of "defamation." Strategically utilizing the international popularity of Erwin Rommel, VDAK leaders pursued these aims with an argument that relied on a reinterpretation of the North African environment: North Africa was a clean war because it was a desert war, one fought in an empty environment — and free from partisans. With Kesselring freed and former Wehrmacht officers guiding German rearmament, the VDAK newsletter, *Die Oase*, shows dramatic shifts in "remembering" the war over the 1950s and early 1960s, as early skepticism toward reconciliation with the former British enemy

evaporated. Meanwhile, in representations of the conflict published in the newsletter, the immense violence practiced and experienced during the North Africa campaign largely disappeared. As the VDAK embraced *Uralten Afrikaner*, veterans of imperial German colonial wars, Afrika Korps veterans reframed the *Afrikafeldzug* in the context of a glorified European colonial past, a site for bonding across former enemy lines in a common European tragedy and a struggle against the environment.

The fourth chapter analyzes how, over the course of the 1950s and early 1960s, German and British veterans, state actors, politicians, and the popular media contested the meaning of the Second World War in North Africa. I argue that their efforts helped cement the image of the "desert war" in popular memory in both Britain and Germany: a war without hate in an "empty" desert cleansed of indigenous North Africans. The chapter follows British interpretations of the Second World War in North Africa across three contentious Anglo-German encounters over the 1950s and 1960s: the VDAK's formation, its early demands, and reunions; the unveiling of the German memorial at Tobruk; and British commemorations at El Alamein. I show how popular as well as official British interpretations of El Alamein as an imperial triumph and a turning of the tide came into conflict with the narrative promoted by the VDAK, of the war as a "joint sacrifice" and a common European tragedy. Disagreements over how the war was to be remembered and commemorated, particularly proposals for join commemorations across former enemy lines, reveal how broader shifts in British narratives and discourses surrounding the Second World War in North Africa were influenced by the Cold War demands, European integration, imperial resurgence and weakness, and emerging American hegemony. It was only long after the humiliating Suez Crisis, and membership in the Common Market, that British leaders acceded to German and Italian calls for joint commemoration.

Chapter 1: Germany and Total War in North Africa

Introduction

The Eastern Front of the Second World War has come to signify the historical apotheosis of "total war." Here was where the twentieth century warfare's totalizing logic reached its climax in a bloody wave of murder and death, unfolding at its most unlimited, unbridled, and radical.[1] The North Africa front of that same war is understood quite differently. In representation and memory, the war in North Africa remains a "war without hate," an exceptionally "civilized" war fought by soldiers who, despite fighting under different flags, shared a mutual respect not only for the rules of war, but for each other. Commanded by the cunning and talented generals Bernard Montgomery and, especially, Erwin Rommel, the soldiers of the British Eighth Army and the German Afrika Korps tested one another in honorable combat across vast stretches of "empty" desert terrain in a spirit far removed from the Eastern Front's slaughter.[2] I argue that these two battlefields were not so different as their wildly divergent representations would suggest. This chapter will show that, despite the "clean hands" mythology still surrounding the front,[3] the war in North Africa was a struggle marked by radicalization and murder; the demonization of the enemy through totalizing racial propaganda; the erasure of boundaries between soldiers, prisoners, and civilians; genocide against the region's Jewish inhabitants; and fantastical, unlimited aims for power, control, and conquest.

Analyzing new or underexamined evidence of "unlimited" aims, ideological radicalization and brutalization, and instances of uncontrolled violence against prisoners of war

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[1] See Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Bernd Greiner, eds., *A World at Total War : Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1945* (Washington D.C.; Cambridge: German Historical Institutes; Cambridge University Press, 2005);.

[2] For example: Erwin Rommel and Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *The Rommel Papers* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953); John Bierman and Colin Smith, *Alamein: War without Hate* (London: Viking, 2002).

[3] Patrick Major, "'Our Friend Rommel': The Wehrmacht as 'Worthy Enemy' in Postwar British Popular Culture," *German History* 26, no. 4 (October 1, 2008): 520–35, https://doi.org/10.1093/gerhis/ghn049.

and civilians, I argue in this chapter that the German *Afrikafeldzug*, like the campaign in Eastern Europe, was a "total" conflict: it was unlimited in its goals, methods, and indiscriminate destructiveness. This chapter first discusses new insights in the recent historical scholarship into far-reaching German aims in North Africa. Then, it examines the radicalizing propaganda and pedagogical materials that German soldiers in North Africa were subjected to, arguing both that these materials shared many similarities to those used elsewhere in the German war effort, and, that they were largely successful in constructing British and imperial forces as a "total" enemy. I support this contention through findings in records for Allied prisoners of war in North Africa. Finally, this chapter analyzes the role of North Africa's inhabitants and North Africa itself in German propaganda, demonstrating that they were of paramount concern and the targets of violence, not simply forming passive backdrops to the conflict.

I make these arguments utilizing a model for "total war" drawing on the work of Roger Chickering and Stig Förster. In *A World at Total War*, Chickering and Förster suggested using the concept "total war" as a Weberian ideal type, according to which warfare is evaluable for "totality" in terms of "mobilization, methods, aims, and control."[4] This chapter focuses on the "totality" of German methods and aims in North Africa. Totality in "methods," according to this rubric, entailed a tendency toward "the radicalization of warfare," meaning the abandonment of restraints, mores, and legal restrictions in the waging of combat, including "the systematic erasure of basic distinctions between soldiers and civilians." Totality in "aims" would be indicated by the warfare's purposes, the pursuit of "extravagant, uncompromising war aims," aims which are, in turn, justified through "the demonization of the enemy."[5]

[4] William Mulligan, "Review Article: Total War," *War in History* 15, no. 2 (April 1, 2008): 211–21, https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344508091768; Chickering, Förster, and Greiner, *A World at Total War*.
[5] Chickering, Förster, and Greiner, *A World at Total War*, 2.

Hitler's genocidal campaign for *Lebensraum*, the war to remake Germany as a continental superpower on the Eastern Front of the Second World War, came closest to the "total war's" ideal type in terms of "aims," "methods," and ultimately "mobilization." It was against the threat of Judeo-Soviet Bolshevism from the east that Joseph Goebbels directed his explicit call for "total war" in February 1943.[6] Radicalized through training, indoctrination, and the practice of violence, it is well established that the Wehrmacht's racial, genocidal war of annihilation and conquest in the east would fit any understanding of total war.[7] With human lives structurally deprived of value, the Eastern Front came to be the blood-soaked site of unlimited violence, where prior distinctions between civilians, soldiers, and prisoners evaporated, resulting in tens of millions of deaths.[8]

The North Africa campaign shared four fundamental characteristics with the German war on the Eastern Front: the front's place in the broader war's strategy, the logistical and material challenges created by the environment, the Holocaust, and overall combat, though not civilian, casualty rates. Similar to the Wehrmacht's spring 1942 offensive toward the Baku oilfields in the Caucasus, the Afrika Korps's push toward (and past) the Suez Canal intended to seize the oil necessary to alleviate the country's chronic fuel shortages, support and supply the German war machine, and form the basis of what Dietrich Eichholtz has termed an "oil empire."[9] The logistical difficulties posed by combat in the desert resembled the ones on the vast Eurasian Steppe: the Afrika Korps was, like the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front, plagued by equipment

[6] "Goebbels' 1943 Speech on Total War," accessed October 21, 2021, https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/goeb36.htm.
[7] Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: history, myth, reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).
[8] Alex J. Kay, Jeff Rutherford, and David Stahel, eds., *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2014).
[9] Dietrich Eichholtz, *Krieg um Öl: ein Erdölimperium als deutsches Kriegsziel (1938-1943)* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2006); Robert Goralski, Russell W Freeburg, and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Oil & War: How the Deadly Struggle for Fuel in WWII Meant Victory or Defeat* (New York: Morrow, 1987).

problems, as well as shortages in fuel and all manner of supplies.[10] Just as in the Soviet Union, the Wehrmacht's war effort in North Afrika stretched supply lines past their breaking point, and soldiers were tasked with fighting at the very outer limit of the military's capacity to arm, sustain, and control them. Though waged on a different scale, the flat terrain of the North Africa front was, like the steppe of the Soviet Union, a suitable landscape for large, mobile battles decided by massed tanks.[11] Just as in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, German forces and their allies waged war against North Africa's Jews, segregating, enslaving, deporting, and ultimately murdering many of them. Had the campaign for Suez and the Middle East proved successful, German leaders aimed to extend the Holocaust to Palestine and beyond.[12]

Lastly, although the numbers of soldiers participating were generally smaller in North African battles than those on the Eastern Front, casualty rates in these battles were often the same or similar. During Operation Crusader in late 1941, British forces suffered casualties of 15%, including nearly 12% killed or wounded against the German-led army, which suffered losses of over 8% killed or wounded and 22% total, including those missing or taken prisoner.[13] In July 1942 North African combat operations, Axis forces suffered casualties of at least 17%, with nearly 12% killed or wounded, inflicting losses on the British of between 10 and 12% killed or wounded.[14] During the most famous battle of the North Africa war, the Second Battle of El

[10] Wehrmacht records show that the German military recognized environmental similarities between the vast open spaces and unfamiliar climates of North Africa and the steppe regions contested on the Eastern Front. See the discussion of the *"*Handbook for the War in Desert and Steppe," dated December 11, 1942, in Chapter 2.
[11] Library of Congress. and Margaret Wagner, *The Library of Congress World War II Companion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 520.
[12] Klaus M. Mallmann et al., "Beseitigung der jüdisch-nationalen Heimstätte in Palästina," in *Deutsche - Juden - Völkermord. Der Holocaust als Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2006); For essays on the topic, see Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, eds., *The Holocaust and North Africa* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019).
[13] Micheal Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts : A Statistical Reference to Casualty and Other Figures, 1618-1991* (Jefferson N.C.: McFarland, 1992), 805.
[14] Ibid., 805–6.

Alamein, higher estimates of Axis losses reach 25% killed or wounded, with particularly heavy casualties taken during the chaos of retreat. Including prisoners and missing soldiers, the German-led army lost between 37% and 61% of its strength in that battle and the aftermath alone.[15] Excluding the Battle of Stalingrad, these are similar rates to losses taken in the war in Eastern Europe. For example, German forces suffered 19% killed or wounded during the November-December 1941 battle for Moscow, 12% killed or wounded during summer combat for Sevastopol in 1942, 7% killed during the 1943 Battle of Kursk, 12% killed or wounded during combat in the Crimea in 1944, and 28% killed, wounded, or missing during the final battle for Berlin in 1945.[16]

Nevertheless, despite these similarities, the "clean war" continues to be the dominant interpretation of the war in North Africa, and the campaign typically occupies the role of an aberration in the trend toward the totalization of European warfare in the 19th and 20th centuries. After all, *Krieg Ohne Hass*, or "war without hate" was the German title of *The Rommel Papers*.[17] Explanations abound for this North African exceptionalism, ranging from environmental to cultural. Hew Strachan, for instance, has suggested that the war in the North African desert approached the "ideal" of a "landscape… devoid of human occupation and where the only obstacles were those set by nature."[18] Accounts of the British and German experience of the war in North Africa have, in many cases, focused on the war's supposed civility, suggestive of a

[15] Ibid., 807.
[16] Ibid., 841–42.
[17] Erwin Rommel, Lucie-Maria Rommel, and Fritz Bayerlein, *Krieg ohne Hass.* (Heidenheim: Heidenheimer Zeitung, 1950).
[18] Hew Strachan, "Total War: The Conduct of War, 1939-1945," in *A World at Total War : Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1945*, ed. Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Bernd Greiner (Washington D.C.; Cambridge: German Historical Institutes; Cambridge University Press, 2005), 40.

unique war in which German and British soldiers respected one another as honorable adversaries rather than mortal enemies.[19]

New scholarship has challenged the established interpretation, revealing that the war in North Africa was, in multiple respects, far more "total" than previously understood. This chapter will contribute to the ongoing re-evaluation of the North Africa campaign. First, I will review new research which indicates that Nazi Germany's aims in North Africa and the Middle East were essentially unlimited in scope. This chapter will then offer a perspective from my own research, particularly in materials published by the German army for soldiers in North Africa demonstrating that Nazi leadership sought to radicalize them against a demonized "racial" Anglo-Jewish enemy, preparing them for the breakdown of both restraint and limitations to combat. Further, my examination of records pertaining to the German treatment of prisoners of war in North Africa demonstrates that this effort was in some considerable degree successful.

Total War: Unlimited Aims and Geographic Scope

Historical literature published over the past fifteen years has established that German war aims in North Africa were as unlimited and fantastical as those for the Eastern Front. Scholars are continuing to reexamine German aims in North Africa and are revising our understanding of the extent of Nazi ambitions in the Middle East towards those suggestive of a limitless "total war." The Second World War was Nazi Germany's bid to remake the world, to revise the global distribution of wealth and power, to place Germany and a racially defined German national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) at its center. In a world long carved into empires locked in

[19] Robin Neillands, *The Desert Rats: 7th Armoured Division, 1940-1945* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991); Ian Baxter, *Afrika-Korps*, Images of War (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword, 2008); Bierman and Smith, *Alamein*.

apparently Darwinian competition, Adolf Hitler gambled on Germans' essential superiority, and their ability to bring temporary, relative military advantages to fruition before his enemies could mobilize their numerical and material superiority. Nazi leadership "believed it had fallen to them to establish an empire that would elevate them to the status of world power."[20] Drawing on an often contradictory understanding of the British Empire in India as ruled by a small caste of elite warriors, and the United States' expansion across the North American continent in the nineteenth century, Hitler's "war for global domination"[21] came to focus above all on the *Lebensraum* he and his allies aimed to carve out of Eastern Europe.[22] Eastern Europe, after all, formed the "Heartland" central to Halford Mackinder's 1904 influential "Geographical Pivot of History," in which he argued "who rules eastern Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World Island; and who rules the World Island commands the World."[23] North Africa was one piece of that larger conflict with "total" aims.

German aspirations in North Africa, consequently, were closer to the "extravagant" and "uncompromising" dreams of a "total war" than to those of a more discursively and materially contained "positional" war. German leadership was highly interested in controlling North Africa for its geopolitical and strategic value—and in order to harness the region's material resources to aid the German war machine. Dietrich Eichholtz has challenged the notion that the German government involved itself in the region merely to assist Mussolini's flagging Italian military, proposing instead that the Nazis sought an "oil empire" in North Africa and the Middle East.[24]

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[20] Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 2.
[21] Edward Ross Dickinson, *The World in the Long Twentieth Century: An Interpretive History* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520960961.
[22] Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 3.
[23] H. J. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *The Geographical Journal* 23, no. 4 (1904): 421–37, https://doi.org/10.2307/1775498.
[24] See also Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London ; New York: Verso, 2011); Eichholtz, *Krieg um Öl*.

Nazi fantasies of world power greatly exceeded their country's material resources. *Kriegsmarine* planners dreamed of a vast African colonial empire, replete with naval bases spanning from Narvik in the north to the Canary Islands, the Cape, and into the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean.[25] Axis strategists made efforts to expand the war's geographical scope as much as possible—for example by encouraging Francisco Franco's Spain to seize Gibraltar, or by demanding more active participation in the war by imperial forces loyal to Vichy France.[26] In the Mediterranean, North Africa, the Middle East, and the Caucasus, access to and control over oil production was one paramount military aim. Oil was, after all, critical for German war production, war industries, and military campaigns, and Germany was chronically short, dependent on vulnerable Romanian facilities and inefficient artificial production. In the fall of 1940, Hermann Göring and aligned experts, including Ernst Rudolf Fischer of I.G. Farben, and Bentz, planned the extent of a future German "oil empire" dominated by Kontinentale Öl AG. This empire was to include vast territories coming under German "control": the oil production of what is now Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Iran, as well as the interests of the Royal Dutch/Shell corporation in Iraq, and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Co. in Iran.[27]

The Afrika Korps was one important vehicle for Germany to seize control over oilfields, as was the disastrous German intervention in Iraq. Erwin Rommel later remarked that the Afrika Korps' very first offensive, launched on April 2, 1941, aimed to push British forces away not only from the Mediterranean coastline, but the region as a whole, and to secure Arabian oil for the forthcoming attack on the Soviet Union.[28] Following the implementation of Operation Barbarossa in June 1941 and its initial success, Nazi leadership schemed a grandiose pincer

[25] Dietrich Eichholtz, *War for Oil the Nazi Quest for an Oil Empire* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012), 33.
[26] Ibid., 34.
[27] Ibid., 34–38.
[28] Ibid., 34–35; Rommel and Liddell Hart, *The Rommel Papers*, 514–15.

movement through the Caucasus mountains and into Iran, ultimately meeting the Afrika Korps and German-trained Arab volunteers in the Middle East.[29] These plans, had they been successful, entailed the creation of a front nearly 2,000 miles in length, spanning three continents and across terrain of the utmost difficulty for European military forces.[30] Fantasies of German pincers meeting in the Caucasus continued long after the Second Battle of El Alamein in October and November 1942 determined the military outcome of the war in North Africa.[31] It is difficult to imagine more wildly fantastical goals across a broader geographical scope than those chosen and pursued by Nazi leaders.

German material and geopolitical aims in the region were inseparable from the total race war against "world Jewry" and its allies being waged on all fronts and around the globe. As elsewhere, historians have shown that the Nazi campaign in North Africa erased traditional boundaries between civilians and combatants concerning the region's Jewish inhabitants. Historians of the Holocaust in North Africa are producing fruitful new scholarship, most importantly on French and Italian involvement.[32] Historians Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cüppers have demonstrated that the Nazi government planned to extend its murder of the world's Jews at least to Palestine and beyond.[33] The mass murder of Egyptian Jews was likely only prevented by Rommel's defeat by Allied forces in Egypt. One *Einsatzkommando* unit was sent to accompany the Afrika Korps in July 1941, and awaited transportation from Athens to Egypt following Axis conquest, which never occurred.[34] In November 1942, following the

[29] Eichholtz, *War for Oil the Nazi Quest for an Oil Empire*, 72.
[30] Ibid., 70.
[31] Ibid., 84–87.
[32] Jens Hoppe, "The Persecution of Jews in Libya Between 1938 and 1945/ An Italian Affair?," in *The Holocaust and North Africa*, ed. Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, 2019.
[33] Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cuppers, *Nazi Palestine: The Plans for the Extermination of the Jews in Palestine* (New York, NY: Enigma Books, 2010).
[34] Ibid., 118; Additional sources are discussed in Susan Rubin Miller, "Sephardim and Holocaust Historiography," in *The Holocaust and North Africa*, ed. Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein (Stanford, California, 2019).

German invasion of Vichy Tunisia, *Einsatzkommando* units were deployed to Tunis, where they established forced labor camps, committed massacres, terrorized, robbed, and enslaved the Jews they were able to capture.[35] *Einsatzkommandos* established more than 30 labor camps for Tunis' Jews alone, aiming to conscript all young Jewish men they could find in service of the Axis war effort. They also imposed ruinous and punitive levies on Jewish property owners.[36]

These direct measures were accompanied by a vast propaganda campaign against North African Jews, replete with radio broadcasts and aerial leaflets in Libya and Tunisia hoping to turn North Africa's non-Jewish residents against their Jewish neighbors, although the efficacy of these measures is a matter of dispute.[37] Nearly two million propaganda leaflets were dropped over Egyptian cities in the summer of 1941, as Rommel's forces prepared to drive toward the Suez Canal.[38] These leaflets warned Egyptians about clandestine Jewish control, the impending creation of a new "Zionist Kingdom," and urged them to rise up against British forces.

Recent scholarship on the Holocaust in North Africa has revealed extensive Italian involvement in the persecution and murder of North African Jews, and identified indirect German support for genocidal Italian colonial warfare to suppress the region's population.[39] After much of Italian Libya was recaptured in 1941, Italian authorities launched a brutal campaign against its Jewish residents, allegedly on the account of their sympathy to British forces. Italian anti-Jewish measures escalated over 1942, with the full deportation of Libyan Jews only prevented by Axis defeat in May of 1943. Under Mussolini's orders, in February 1942, the Italian Ministry for North Africa announced the internment of all Libyan Jews in

[35] Mallmann and Cuppers, *Nazi Palestine*, 168.
[36] Ibid., 173–75.
[37] Hoppe, "The Persecution of Jews in Libya Between 1938 and 1945/ An Italian Affair?"
[38] Mallmann and Cuppers, *Nazi Palestine*, 109.
[39] Hoppe, "The Persecution of Jews in Libya Between 1938 and 1945/ An Italian Affair?"; See also: Ali Abd-al-Latif Ahmida, *Genocide in Libya: Shar, a Hidden Colonial History* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2021).

regional concentration camps, and those with foreign citizenship were deported to Italy. Thousands of Jews, along with non-Jewish indigenous North Africans, were deported to concentration camps under Vichy French control near Tunis, at Agareb, Sfax, and Gabes, and were placed under direct German control in November 1942. Thousands more were transported to forced labor camps all over the region. Survivors were liberated in the spring of 1943, when Allied forces seized the region.

Total War: Ideology and the Demonization of the Enemy

In the Middle East and North Africa, the forces of the British Empire and its allies, the victors of their own campaigns for global domination, were the primary obstacle to Nazi fantasies of unlimited wealth, power, and death. Some German leaders planning an overseas empire saw the Britain, rather than the Soviet Union, as Germany's ultimate military and geopolitical antagonist. Kriegsmarine admirals in particular were more likely to see Britain as Germany's main adversary in the war. Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, head of German military intelligence, even dreamed of overthrowing the neutral Afghan government, allying with the Soviet Union, and invading India.[40] Grand Admiral Erich Raedar, head of the Kriegsmarine until 1943, emphasized to Hitler that any campaign against the Soviet Union should be postponed until after victory against Britain, "our main enemy."[41] Between the fall of France in June 1940 and the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the British Empire was the only major military power at war with Germany.

In the service of German war aims, Wehrmacht propaganda and pedagogical materials aimed at educating and controlling their North African forces demonized the British enemy, just

[40] Eichholtz, *War for Oil the Nazi Quest for an Oil Empire*, 45.
[41] Ibid., 46.

as they did when directed at the Soviet enemy on the Eastern front.[42] Anti-British propaganda did so by utilizing a variety of themes and tropes. Pieces attacked British "plutocracy," the British Empire's perennial hostility to Germans, and Britain's racial composition. As the war dragged on, the pages of the Afrika Korps newsletter *Die Oase* increasingly emphasized the role of Jews in masterminding British intransigence. Identifying Britain and the British Commonwealth forces with the Jews justified any measures taken against them.

Although Nazi ideology situated the British enemy higher than the Slavic peoples of Eastern Europe, Jews, and non-white peoples in the imagined hierarchy of races, the white inhabitants of Great Britain and their colonial descendants were nonetheless subordinates and enemies in the larger world-view and racial policy that undergirded the Nazi project. Eastern Europeans and Jews were near the bottom. The German nationalism that informed Adolf Hitler and Nazi planners drew on a long tradition of anti-Slavic thought that imagined eastern Europeans to be culturally and racially alien, as well as filthy, diseased, and incapable of self-rule.[43] *Generalplan Ost*, the project to reshape European populations and transform Germany into a global superpower, entailed vast demographic restructuring and "Germanisation" of the continent.[44] The German scheme aimed to eliminate of tens of millions of "superfluous" inhabitants occupying the eastern *Lebensraum*,[45] a plot vaster and more total than the most ardent Nazis had dreamed for Britain itself. Even less worthy of life were Nazi leaders' and

[42] Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, "Are We There Yet? World War II and the Theory of Total War," in *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1945*, ed. Bernd Greiner, Roger Chickering, and Stig Förster (Washington D.C.; Cambridge: German Historical Institutes; Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.
[43] Vejas G Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[44] Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 53.
[45] Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, *Architects of Annihilation: Auschwitz and the Logic of Destruction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 292.

propagandists' ultimate enemy, the Jews.[46] The Jews, Nazi leadership believed, were controlling both the Western Allies and the Soviets from the shadows in an enormous conspiracy aimed at Germany's destruction. On the Eastern Front, the Wehrmacht waged simultaneous total war against the Slavic peoples of Eastern Europe the continent's Jewish population.

In contrast, Britain and the British Empire occupied a peculiar and often contradictory place in Hitler's and the Nazis' vision of the world.[47] Nazi attitudes toward Britain prior to the outbreak of the war were quite mixed, with some seeing Britain as Germany's primary enemy, and others identifying Britain as "racially" at least predominantly "Germanic" and therefore a potential ally.[48] In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler propounded the view that Britain's true geopolitical opponent was the United States, which hoped to "inherit" the British Empire. In his unpublished *Zweites Buch*, and in multiple public pronouncements, Hitler expressed hope for an alliance with Britain in the interest of defeating France and the Soviet Union, and for discouraging British leaders from orienting toward the United States. Andreas Hillgruber identified ten distinct stages in Hitler's policy toward Britain between 1933 and 1945, arguing that Hitler only reluctantly abandoned his plans for an alliance with a nation whose empire he admired, and which he believed to be Germany's racial kindred, and came to express increasing preoccupation with imagined Jewish influence over the British government as the war progressed.[49]

As Nazi hopes for reconciliation with Britain declined in the later 1930s, particularly following the abdication crisis of 1937, and as hopes for a Germanic alliance faltered, Nazi

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[46] Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 9.
[47] Andreas Hillgruber, "England's Place in Hitler's Plans for World Dominion," *Journal of Contemporary History; London* 9, no. 1 (January 1, 1974): 5–22, https://search.proquest.com/docview/1297328955/citation/65AFF60406D940AEPQ/1.
[48] See Gerwin Strobl, *The Germanic Isle: Nazi Perceptions of Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 16; Peter Mandler, *The English National Character : The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven [Conn.] ;;London: Yale University Press, 2006), 179.
[49] Hillgruber, "England's Place in Hitler's Plans for World Dominion," 15.

propaganda turned against Britain.[50] Nazi thinkers identified a senescent quality to the British character and Britain's ruling class, a decadence and sluggishness that stood in stark contrast to Germany's youthful vigor.[51] Once war began, Nazi writing condemned "British social backwardness"[52] and plutocratic capitalism, as well perennial anti-German hostility. Another theme that emerged in this period was condemnation of British hypocrisy surrounding colonial atrocities, particularly those directed against individuals of white European descent, such as the Boers of South Africa. The accusation of plutocratic capitalism, identified with Jewish racial infiltration, was one way to explain why Britain chose war with Germany.[53] Jewish intermarriage with the British nobility and Jewish immigration suggested "progressive de-nordification in all strata of British society."[54]

Research has shown that propaganda and ideological indoctrination profoundly influenced the German soldiers who fought in the Second World War. Christopher Browning noted that the extensive training and educational materials produced to indoctrinate the members of the genocidal Reserve Police Battalion 101 had a "considerable effect" in molding the Battalion members' perceptions both of themselves and the world. In explaining the crimes these "ordinary men" committed, however, Browning emphasized the psychology of the primary group, "the mutually intensifying effects of war and racism… in conjunction with the insidious effects of constant propaganda and indoctrination."[55] Equally important were the hierarchical structures of the German military and society as a whole, and traditions of deference and

[50] Gerwin Strobl, *The Germanic Isle: Nazi Perceptions of Britain* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 108.
[51] Ibid., 224.
[52] Ibid., 225.
[53] Ibid., 144.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, Revised Edition (HarperCollins Publishers, 2017).

obedience. Omer Bartov emphasized that years of indoctrination "distorted soldiers' perception of reality." Nazi "propaganda relied on a radical demonization of the enemy and on a similarly extreme deification of the Fuehrer," and Bartov forcefully argued for the "astonishing efficacy" of their efforts at ideological control, particularly under the conditions of total war on the Eastern Front.[56] More recent scholarship, including that by Bruce Sait, has established that the long-term process of racial and genocidal radicalization began years before the war. As consequence, the genocidal orders issued during Operation Barbarossa "were not sudden radicalisations of military policy. Instead they were steps in a series of progressions along a path that had begun almost a decade earlier."[57] This was the training, education, and military culture that Germans brought to North Africa, laying the groundwork for total war.

I contend that Afrika-Korps indoctrination and educational materials were likewise profoundly influential in molding German soldiers' experience and behavior in North Africa. If Nazi efforts to demonize Britain failed at home, as Gerwin Strobl has argued,[58] they were most likely to succeed in the Afrika Korps. Despite the enduring myth of the "clean hands" of the Wehrmacht, which may have clung the longest to Erwin Rommel and the Afrika Korps, the North Africa front was no exception to the Wehrmacht's murderous radicalization.[59] German materials aimed for soldiers' consumption, as well as some of those aimed at the broader public, represented Britain as a "total," existential enemy rather than a mere opponent, one allied to Germany's nemesis of "world Jewry."

[56] Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, 8.
[57] Bryce Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht: Nazi Ideology and the War Crimes of the German Military* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019).
[58] Strobl, *The Germanic Isle*, 2000, 131–32.
[59] Major, "'Our Friend Rommel.'"

Die Oase: Feldzeitung der Deutschen Truppen in Afrika

Die Oase, or "The Oasis" served as the wartime weekly field newspaper for German soldiers fighting in North Africa in the Afrika Korps, and began publication and distribution in March 1941.[60] The chronologically latest extant issue of the newspaper is dated February 13, 1943, though only one issue dated after October 1942 survives in the archive. A later issue of the much more rudimentary *Die Karawane* ("The Caravan"), a field newspaper for German soldiers in Tunisia, also survives. *Die Oase*, and front newsletters like it, were a carefully crafted works of political pedagogy. General Werner von Blomberg, appointed armed forces minister in 1933 shortly after the Nazis came to power, wasted no time implementing policies of military Nazification. Service newspapers served as one component of this project, which published articles encouraging soldiers to read and understand *Mein Kampf* published as early as August 1933.[61]

Die Oase provides us with an insight into the ideological worldview, motivations, and behavior of German soldiers in North Africa. The stories, world news articles, thought pieces, and political exhortations reveal the indoctrination of soldiers in a total war. The newspaper's content suggests a "total" conflict, fitting the schema proposed by Chickering and Förster, entailing "systematic erasure of basic distinctions between soldiers and civilians" in a war in which "governments pursue extravagant, uncompromising war aims… [and justified] through the demonization of the enemy."[62] This was a publication aiming to shape soldiers fighting against an absolute enemy, against whom any and all measures were both necessary and justified.

[60] BArch, RH 24-200/126, *Die Oase*: *Feldzeitung der Deutschen Truppen in Afrika*, 1941-1942.
[61] Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*.
[62] Chickering and Förster, "Are We There Yet? World War II and the Theory of Total War," 2.

The German military took the Nazi regime's preoccupation with domination of information to an extreme. The Wehrmacht prioritized control over soldiers' access to news, foreign influences, and even contact with families and friends back home. The military determined the media that soldiers consumed "through its distribution of heavily propagandized, compulsory newspapers and magazines that presented a censored, blinkered view of the world and the soldier's role in it."[63] In such an isolated and controlled environment, ideological influence would be maximized, as would the peer pressure of the soldiers' primary group.

Later accounts suggest that *Die Oase* was popular with the average German soldier who fought in North Africa. It is no coincidence that the veterans of the Afrika-Korps who formed the *Verband Ehemaliger Angehöriger Deutsches Afrika-Korps* in 1951, the Afrika Korps veterans' association, soon began publishing their own bi-monthly periodical under the same name, and continued to do so until 2014. The later *Die Oase*'s contributors and promotional material clearly and explicitly argued for direct continuity between the wartime newspaper *Die Oase*, distributed to Afrika Korps soldiers at the front, and the new VDAK newsletter. Advertisements for the newsletter, such as the one included in the program for the 1954 VDAK *Bundestreffen* in Heidelberg, framed it as such. This promotion, which appeared in subsequent reunion material for many years, consisted of a wartime photograph of a German soldier reading the Wehrmacht-produced and distributed *Die Oase*, with the following accompanying text: "In the desert, *Die Oase* was often the only connection to the other fronts of the war, [and] especially to home. Today *Die Oase* is the only tie that binds 'old Africans' in their homeland and around the world."[64]

[63] Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht*.
[64] BArch, B469/5 1/2, Festaufgabe, Bundestreffen 1954 Heidelberg, p. 26.

Article and letters published in subsequent decades further bolster the argument that *Die Oase* was both widely read and influential. Internal wartime records similarly suggest the newspaper was popular with the soldiers, with the rear army printing guidelines for access and distribution,[65] and registering complaints about supply shortfalls.[66]

Die Oase told soldiers what Nazi leadership and high command wanted them to hear, forming one piece of the vast apparatus of indoctrination and enforcement that molded the Wehrmacht in preparation for and in service to Hitler's wars of annihilation. In North Africa, the newspaper served as a primary vehicle for ideological influence. One update from *Panzer-Propaganda-Kompanie Afrika* dated March 17, 1942 observed that material limitations meant the company's efforts at "intellectual support" had been reduced to *Die Oase* alone during the preceding month.[67] The author of the report, a Major Fischer, lamented that they had not yet overcome the many technical difficulties faced by the newspaper's publication, including unreliable assistance by Italian technical staff, and a recent aerial bombing attack that struck an editor's house, destroying considerable materials. The propaganda company no longer had any "books, games, etc.. and all relevant supplies have been completely handed over to the troops. The replenishment of these stocks is solely a question of transportation." A propaganda company report dated September 19, 1942 likewise emphasized the importance of the 15,000 *Die Oase* issues distributed every Thursday, also noting two film screenings in the preceding month and

[65] BArch, RH 23/118, fol. 148, Deutsches Afrika-Korps, Kdt. rückw. Armeegebiet, Abt. Qu, Besondere Anordnungen Nr. 33, 9.8.41.
[66] BArch, RH 23/115, fol. 32-34, Kdt. rückw. Armeegebiet 556, Panzer-Armee Afrika, Abt. 1C, Tätigkeitsbericht der Abt.Ic für die Zeit vom 1.April – 30.April 1942., May 4, 1942.
[67] BArch, RH 19-VIII/65, p. 20, Panzer-Propaganda-Kompanie Afrika, Anlage "D": Tätigkeitsbericht über die geistige Betreuung der Truppe durch die Propaganda-Kompanie Afrika in der Zeit vom 8. – 28 February 1942, March 17, 1942.

music concerts from vehicle loudspeakers.[68] On October 3, 1942, the propaganda company reported similar actions, noting as well the popularity of their film and loudspeaker program.[69]

Recognizing *Die Oase*'s value, officials took measures to overcome persistent obstacles to its supply and distribution. According to a propaganda company report dated March 1942 and covering the period November 1, 1941 to February 6, 1942, the newspaper's production was plagued by problems owing to the mobile, dynamic nature of the front, Germany's reliance on Italian resources and cooperation, and limited supplies. *Die Oase* was initially printed in Benghazi, but was forced to relocate to Catania, Sicily following the British occupation of the city. For a time, papers were ferried across the Mediterranean with other vital war supplies. Once Axis forces returned, they attempted to resume publication in there, despite ongoing challenges due, in part, to the loss of Italian civilian staff.[70] Nevertheless, while army intelligence complained about *Die Oase*'s production and distribution shortfalls, the newspaper's content and effectiveness was rarely in doubt.[71]

Die Oase fulfilled its function in the war for soldiers' minds in multiple respects. Its authors exhorted German Soldiers to embrace the principles and values of the Nazi "New Man," an "Aryan" soldier conquering and enforcing order in a racially defined German empire.[72] *Die Oase*'s pages are filled with cries for German soldiers to bear the burden of their task in forging a

[68] BArch, RH 19-VIII/85, p. 7, Panzer-Propaganda-Kompanie Afrika, Tätigkeitsbericht über die geistige Betreuung der Truppe durch die Propaganda-Kompanie Afrika von 1.8 – 30.8. 1942, September 19, 1942.
[69] BArch, RH 19-VIII/91, p. 12, Panzer-Propaganda-Kompanie Afrika, Tätigkeitsbericht der Panzer-Propaganda-Kompanie Afrika für die Zeit vom 1.9 – 30.9. 1942, October 3, 1942.
[70] BArch, RH 19-VIII/52, p. 87, Panzer-Propaganda-Kompanie Afrika, Anlage "E": Tätigkeitsbericht über die geistige Betreuung der Truppe durch die Propaganda-Kompanie Afrika in der Zeit vom 1. Nov. 1941 bis 6. Febr. 1942, March 10, 1941.
[71] BArch, RH 23/115, p. 32-34, Kdt. rückw. Armeegebiet 556, Tätigkeitsbericht der Abt.Ic für die Zeit vom 1.April – 30.April 1942., May 4, 1942.
[72] Peter Fritzsche and Jochen Hellbeck, "The New Man in Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany," in *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared*, ed. Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 302–42, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511802652.009.

new geographic destiny for Germany, and to sweep aside the forces of history that left the nation without *Lebensraum*. The paper was largely geared against the British Empire, and was produced for soldiers fighting British and imperial troops. Demonizing British and Imperial soldiers and justifying war against the British Empire were consequently core concerns for *Die Oase*. Britain and its Commonwealth allies were, after all, fielding the only major enemy military force facing Germany until the onset Operation Barbarossa in late June 1941, and in North Africa, they were the only significant military opposition until the United States' arrival in November 1942 in Operation Torch.

Contributors to *Die Oase* constructed the British enemy as a total one, an enemy against which all means were warranted. They painted a picture of unmitigated British aggression, rapacity, and greed, and ultimately identified British forces as loyal to Germany's Jewish enemy in a war in which Germany was on the defensive.

Die Oase pursued these aims in multiple ways — including, for example, printing messages from the Führer; pieces castigating and demonizing the British enemy; voluminous antisemitic conspiracy theories; articles celebrating past and future German colonialism; Orientalist narratives and colonial and fantasies about the Middle East, including calculated admiration for North African leaders and anticolonial movements; and largely quotidian news stories from the *Heimat* or the world at large. *Die Oase* pieces vilifying Britain often made historical and geopolitical arguments: the British were "imperialist" thieves who had "plundered" the world, robbing Germany of its colonial possessions and its destiny as a world power through "encirclement." The British, moreover, operated entirely the wrong type of empire: it was a "capitalist" empire that was racially incoherent, and one with permeable ethnic boundaries. On the international and imperial stage, Britain was a lawless menace: violating the

neutrality of countries like Ireland. English brutality, greed, and exploitation were slowly but inexorably provoking resistance, not least by heroic resistance movements in North Africa and the Middle East. Most threateningly, *Die Oase* came to link the British to the ultimate world-threatening menace, the Jews, who were masterminding Germany's destruction and puppeteering the nation's enemies behind closed doors.

Many of the themes in *Die Oase*'s anti-British propaganda align with those identified by Strobl in *Germanic Isle*. Strobl observed four major tropes in such pieces: comparisons of British decadence and sluggishness, including technological backwardness, to German youth and vigor; criticism of British "capitalism" as "plutocratic" and grotesquely unfair juxtaposed against German National Socialism; allegations of British hypocrisy and colonial brutality; and denunciations of British culture, or lack thereof, as crassly commercial and essentially soulless.[73] Strobl argued that the Nazis were largely unsuccessful in discouraging widespread popular sympathy with Britain. Despite a concerted campaign to turn domestic opinion against Britain, "admiration and the old longing for an understanding with Britain often shone through," and revealed a real and persistent divide between the views of the German leadership and ordinary citizens.[74] However, locked in desperate combat in North Africa, these ideas were received in a vastly different context from the civilian world, even under the conditions of war. Moreover, Strobl underemphasized the significance of antisemitism to anti-British propaganda from the very beginning.

[73] Strobl, *The Germanic Isle*, 2000, 223–26.
[74] Ibid., 131–32.

Anglo-Jewish Plutocracy and "Anticapitalism"

Die Oase articles frequently denounced Britain as a "plutocracy" and applauded Germany as a supposedly "anticapitalist" revolutionary power. A May 11, 1941 article titled "The Power of Gold is Destroyed" celebrated the power of the German economy under Nazi leadership while condemning "plutocratic England," painting a stark contrast between the German social order in which human labor is "purposefully directed… and thus aimed at a maximum benefit for the community," and "British plutocracy," in which labor languished under poor organization and systematic exploitation. This disparity would prove to be deciding factor in the final battle (*Endkampf*) against Britain.[75] The article claimed the international gold standard was a British scheme aimed at German subjugation (Britain and British-aligned countries controlled most of the world's gold, after all), one cleverly foiled by Adolf Hitler's foresight. With the fall of "high capitalist" France, England[76] remained "the last bastion of the capitalist system" soon to be "swept away by the revolutionary force of National Socialism."

The next surviving issue of *Die Oase*, dated May 14, 1941, led with the "The Background of the Conflict" on its first page, published under the pseudonym Hermann Wacker.[77] The article positioned the Second World War in a long history of German national struggles: "the country looks to us because we are standing before the vital nerve of an enemy that meant to incite the world against us Germans in order to destroy Germany, and this time to destroy it more thoroughly than with the shameful peace treaty of Versailles." Germany's "sacred obligation" was "to strike the enemy of all freedom-loving peoples, England" in the region that constituted its "vital nerve" (*Lebensnerv*). There, they would "secure Germany's future by permanently

[75] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Die Macht des Goldes ist gestürzt," *Die Oase*, Folge 25, 11. Mai 1941, p. 2.
[76] Terms for England, Britain, the British Empire, and the United Kingdom were often used interchangeably.
[77] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Die Hintergründe des Konflikts," *Die Oase*, Folge 27, 14. Mai 1941, p. 1.

breaking the power of high Jewish finance… and thus forever ending the possibility of nations bleeding to death for the sake of money-hungry plutocratic cliques… Never before have we had this adversary, England, the most underhanded troublemaker of the globe," in such a vulnerable position. The British Empire was a "capitalist" one, and its capitalist excesses stood in stark contrast to the harmonious conditions of National Socialist Germany.

Present and past conditions in South Africa were a consistent target for *Die Oase*.[78] An article on the country's "poor whites" noted the existence of 300,000 of them languishing "in deep misery," relegated to abject slums on the outskirts of cities, often existing half-starved in what should have been one of the richest countries in the world. The problem lay in "capitalist profitability," and the resulting pressure on wages. South Africa, *Die Oase* argued, was dominated by a tiny layer of English settlers and anglicized Boers, and capitalist incentives forced them to hire the lower-paid indigenous laborers rather than their "hungering and starving national compatriots (*Volksgenossen*)." *Die Oase* returned frequently to the Boer War. The June 1, 1941 issue denounced Britain's satanic "sadism," and the Empire's commission of atrocities in the war in South Africa. One article included a discussion of the experiences of South African exile Paul Krüger, which were also the basis of the 1941 anti-British propaganda film *Ohm Krüger*.[79] Britain's behavior in the Boer War was characterized by massacring countless civilians, and butchering women and children, some starved to death in camps. Most horrendous may have been the British use of "kaffirs to exterminate (*auszurotten*)" the Boer women and children: "'The kaffir chiefs carried out murders and atrocities from which even the English soldier would recoil.'" These "kaffir hordes" accompanied the British army, and completed the destruction the British had begun. The war revealed "England's true face" of monstrous greed

[78] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Arme Weise in Südafrika," *Die Oase*, Folge 30, 18. Mai, 1941, p. 2.
[79] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Zwei Männer urteilen über England," Folge 32, 1. Juni 1941, p. 9.

and cruelty. The war against Britain was thus a struggle between "two worldviews." On the one hand, stood Britain's "hard, cold materialism, which degenerates into the most brutal egoism." Germany, on the other hand, embodied "idealism, which alone forms the basis of true civilization."

British horrors were not restricted to those committed against their colonial subjects. The intentional bombing attacks on Axis military hospitals, for example, were condemned as "crimes" or "terrorist attacks." An October 12, 1941 article recounted how a "terrorist attack on the hospital at Bardia killed 7 wounded Italian soldiers, the latest crime by the British Air Force claimed another 14 deaths and 14 injuries as victims."[80] The British perpetrated "terrorist" measures in Iraq when they crushed the German-aligned uprising.[81] The British bombing of Beirut was "terrorism" and described using similar language to alleged Soviet atrocities.[82] One article denounced England as the "enemy of all peoples."[83] Another claimed Cecil Rhodes' primary allies were Jews, and published a fabricated quote vowing his own hatred against Germany: "I hate them because I am English… I will only have peace in the grave when Germany is destroyed."[84]

Die Oase writers drew extensive connections between Britain and "world Jewry." On the same page as the May 11, 1941 article "The Power of Gold is Destroyed," an article titled "Homicidal Piety" *(Totschlagefrömmigkeit)* began with a bizarre narrative of Jewish history, largely drawing on the Hebrew Bible, arguing that Jews perpetrated untold atrocities wile justifying them with the assertion that they had been commanded by God. "You're wrong, you

[80] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Angriffe auf ein Lazaertt," *Die Oase*, Folge 50, 12. Oktober 1941, p. 2.
[81] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Britischer Terror im Irak," *Die Oase*, Folge 58, 9. Dezember 1941, p. 2.
[82] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Protest gegen die Bombardierung Beiruts," *Die Oase*, Folge 38, 6. Juli 1941, p. 12.
[83] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Feind Aller Völker," *Die* Oase, Folge 47, 21. September 1941, p. 4.
[84] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "'Ich hasse sie, weil ich Engländer bin'!", *Die Oase*, Folge 50, 12. Oktober 1941, p. 10.

mean the devil!" was the appropriate retort.[85] In an example of virulent Nazi secularism, *Die Oase* described the British as now engaging in similar behavior: "Nowhere is one so emphatically called to the will of God; nowhere is Sunday held so sacred; nowhere is there so much prayer as in Great Britain. It is, however, Jewish homicidal piety." British church officials "in pious competition with the Great Rabbi claim that it is their sacred duty to carry out the excommunication of us National Socialists, i.e. to exterminate us like a plague. The current war is called a 'crusade.' 'God wants it!' is what echoes to us from Great Britain, Canada, South Africa, Australia." The extent of British hypocrisy and treachery was even indicative of long term Jewish racial pollution: "Jews and Englishmen have been merging into a single entity for two centuries." Finally, "the mask has fallen!" German opinion of the English national character had been in decline since the First World War, and now "we recognize the sinister synthesis of piety and mammonism."

Britain was nation guided by the interests of the war industry, its aims achieved by brutal intelligence services, treachery and murder, but finally "the long chain of broken words and lies have opened our eyes." When facing British hypocrisy and the notion that the British were commanded by God, a German should respond exactly as he does to the Jewish enemy: God has commanded you do that? You are wrong; it is the devil." The article concluded with a quote from Adolf Hitler, certain of final victory "'even if the world were full of devils,' that is, full of Jewish-English prophets of homicide (*jüdischenglischer Totschlagepropheten*)."

The May 11, 1941 issue of *Die Oase* included another piece tying Germany's war with Britain and its impending war with the United States to the struggle against Jewish dominance:

[85] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Die Macht des Goldes ist gestürzt," *Die Oase*, Folge 25, 11. Mai 1941, p. 2.

"That is the difference! Here Dejudaization - there Judaization" (*Hier Entjudung - dort Verjudung*).[86] The article defined the German soldiers' place in the Second World War:

> Dejudification or Judaization? That's the war was that was imposed on us in September 1939. We clearly see two fronts: on the one hand, Germany and its allies, who are determined to free themselves from alien elements and shackles; on the other side, the judaized (*verjudete*)… Great Britain, the Dominions and the United States of America.

While Nordic peoples had pioneered all the great cultural developments of Europe, Jews spread "mammonism," a "degeneration" which transformed money into the measure of all things. The choice faced by Germany was either denordification (*Entnordung)* or dejudification, which the *Die Oase* applauded the government under Hitler, Goebbels, and Rosenberg for implementing.

Nazi antisemitism was widely encouraged and promulgated in regions under German control or influence, and included efforts far beyond the pages of *Die Oase*. What made the paper unique was the North African context, and the protracted ground war against British forces, emphatically and repeatedly identified with the Jewish enemy.

Supposed irrational and relentless British hatred or fear of Germans was another trope in *Die Oase*. The June 25, 1941 *Die Oase* announcing Germany's new war with the Soviet Union included a piece attributed to the Führer himself on the subject.[87] England's "hateful policy of encirclement" had begun immediately after the First World War, accompanying a "conspiracy between Jews and Democrats, Bolsheviks, and reactionaries with the sole aim of preventing the establishment of a new German national state" and to render the Germans again helpless and immiserated. The British had rejected coming to peaceful terms with Germany following the French defeat, were themselves under the control of "international Jewish warmongers," and

[86] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Hier Entjudung – dort Verjudung," *Die Oase*, Folge 25, 11. Mai 1945, p. 2.
[87] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Der grösste Aufmarsch, den die Welt je sah," *Die Oase*, Folge 36, 25. Juni 1941, p. 1.

continued to encourage ever greater international aggression on the part of the Soviets. As early as 1936, Hitler claimed, Churchill had announced his decision to encircle Germany out of fear of the country's emerging power, and was hellbent on the nation's destruction.

The June 25, 1941 issue of *Die Oase* included an article by *Sonderführer* Dr. Ernst Bayer: "The Mask Has Fallen."[88] Bayer linked the war against Jews, the British, and now the Bolsheviks: "Jewish-Bolshevik agitators and global conspirators." Along with American "gangsters," these nefarious forces wanted a "world of robbery, brutal oppression, lawlessness, and lies," the rule of chaos and violence.

"The Politics of Madness" by the pseudonymous Hermann Wacker argued Germany stood against "insatiable" and wealthy England, "the clearest representatives of materialism, the heartless capitalist," which wanted nothing more than to hoard wealth and preside over the poverty of others: "the have-nots should humbly eat the crumbs that fall from the Lord's tables."[89] Behind Britain lay the power of "international Jewry" which "feels destined to dominate the world" and whose prosperity relied on the broadest possible base of enslaved peoples. "It is the Star of David that shines above the front. Jewry, and the entire robbing, gold-greedy," faithless and "uncreative" world had conspired against the "creative German people. And this world consisted exclusively of Jewry and its friends permitted before the golden calf (*zum goldenen Kalb zugelassenen Freunden*)." Jews had employed lies, deceit, propaganda, and murder to further their aims, motivated by the "blind hatred and unfathomable greed" that dominated the Jewish character: "The Jews of London, the United States, and the Soviet Union were allied… against all creative forces of the world." The Soviet Union held the same goals as

[88] BArch, RH 24-200/126, Sonderführer Dr. Ernst Bayer, "Die Maske ist geffallen," *Die Oase*, Folge 36, 25. Juni 1941, p. 2.
[89] BArch, RH 24-200 /126, Soldat Hermann Wacker, "Die Politik des Wahnsinns," *Die Oase*, Folge 36, 25. Juni 1941, p. 2.

Germany's Jewish enemies elsewhere, "the same as those of the plutocratic cliques of London and Jewish high finance of Wall Street: the subjugation of [all] peoples under the Jewish thumb, world domination from the money bag (*vom Geldsack her*)."

Following the invasion of the Soviet Union, *Die Oase* saw a new emphasis on "Judeo-Bolshevik" atrocities, particularly in the city of Lviv.[90] The front-page article for the July 13, 1941 *Die Oase*, also by "Hermann Wacker," described the war as a "struggle between two worlds."[91] On one side mobilized the forces of "Judeo-Bolshevism," world Jewry, the free masons, big business, and the "terrible excesses of Jewish sadism," and on the other stood National Socialism.

Die Oase contributors likewise tied the theme of South African oppression to the forces of world Jewry. In the November 29, 1941 issue, an article mocked South African Prime Minister Smuts as the "King of the Jews" for having been honored by "Anglo-American Jewry" when speaking in support of a Jewish "national home" in the Middle East.[92] It was significant that he spoke in "completely judaized Johannesburg," a place where, twenty years earlier, *Die Oase* claimed, Boers had heckled him as traitor, accusing Smuts of selling them out to "British imperialism and Jewish gold," and greeted him with the call "hail the King of the Jews!"

At the same time, some articles in *Die Oase* did express elements of amazement or even begrudging admiration for the British Empire. The November 22, 1941 *Oase* included a full-page article on the "Construction of the British World Empire."[93] The article observed that a quarter of the world's two billion people languished under British rule, approximately five hundred million people, larger than any empire in history. Reviewing different British territorial

[90] Also known as Lvov and Lemberg
[91] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Der Kampf zwischen zwei Welten," *Die Oase*, Folge 39, 13. Juli 1941, p. 1.
[92] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Afrikanisches Allerlei," *Die Oase*, Folge 56, 29. November 1941, p. 2.
[93] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Der Aufbau des britischen Weltreiches," Folge 55,22. November 1941, p. 3.

organizations, from dominions, protectorates, and mandates, *Die Oase* argued the "white dominions" were the heart of the empire. Canada and Australia, with their vast material resources but sparsely populated territories appeared to impress the author the most, though it was feared the white population of the latter country might be overwhelmed by East Asians. There was little to say about New Zealand, except for the country's low population and the dubious decision to grant "almost equal rights" to the Maori. The British Empire and these white dominions were unified in two respects: the monarchy on the one hand, and by race, culture, and language on the other. *Die Oase* drew attention to the following problem areas: South Africa, with its ethnically mixed population, including a large number of demoralized "white proletarians," and Ireland, having suffered under eight centuries of oppression, which remained a subordinate dominion within the commonwealth despite its independence. *Die Oase* took issue with what it perceived to be the incoherent structure of the British Empire: "Is the Commonwealth a unitary state, a confederation, a federal state, a real union, [or] an alliance?" suggesting that its internal disorganization could potentially lead to the empire splitting apart. Nevertheless, it cautioned that an imminent demise was unlikely. What is "absolutely certain," is that "a life-and-death struggle is required before the world system that England represents" would accede to Axis demands.

An April 12, 1941 piece titled "They Are Not Anglo-Saxons At All!" and largely devoted to the United States, argued that the British had used their Anglo-Saxon ethnicity more like a "corporate stamp" than a true ethnic identity.[94] English references to the "British Commonwealth of Nations as a racial entity" are nowhere to found, noting the anomalous French population in Canada, and the Boer population in South Africa. In Britain itself, "three racially and historically

[94] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Es sind gar keine Angelsachsen!", *Die Oase*, Folge 14, 12. April 1941, p. 2.

distinct peoples live side by side." The imposition of a sense of Anglo-Saxon unity in the empire was a "brilliant counterfeit trick" which deluded diverse peoples into believing they were bound by blood and familial loyalty to the English motherland.

Colonialism and the Middle East: Kolonialgeist ist Pioniergeist!

Nazi Germany's connections to both the Imperial German past and the broader phenomena of European imperialism have been thriving topics of historical inquiry over the past two decades.[95] Both in its wartime and postwar iterations, *Die Oase* provides extensive evidence for deep, explicit links between the Nazi war effort and the European imperial project. *Die Oase* was an emphatically colonialist newspaper. This unequivocal focus on extra-European colonialism differentiated it most particularly from equivalent papers provided to soldiers on the Eastern Front. Article after *Die Oase* article called on Germans to celebrate their colonial past and embrace an imperial future. For example, one piece titled "Early German Colonial Policy," dated April 16, 1941, celebrated the 50th anniversary of the founding of the *Schutztruppe für Deutsch-Ostafrika*.[96] Multiple articles in *Die Oase* aimed to firmly establish continuities between Nazi Germany and the earlier German colonial empire, and celebrations of Germany's colonial past continued to appear long after the onset of Barbarossa, such as a full-page article on German East Africa in 1916 dated October 19, 1941.[97]

One strand of historical argumentation presented in *Die Oase* was that Britain had stolen Germans' colonial destiny, a crime currently being redressed by the very North Africa campaign

[95] See: Benjamin Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe," *European History Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (July 1, 2005): 429–64, https://doi.org/10.1177/0265691405054218; Willeke Sandler, *Empire in the Heimat: Colonialism and Public Culture in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Michael Perraudin and Jürgen Zimmerer, *German Colonialism and National Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2011).
[96] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Frühzeit deutscher Kolonialpolitik," *Die Oase*, Folge 17, 16. April 1941, p. 2.
[97] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Deutsch-Ostafrika 1916," *Die Oasei*, Folge 51, 19. Oktober 1941, p. 3.

being waged by the paper's readers. Authors described the ongoing war in North Africa as one linked to the imperial German past of the 19th century or even beyond. The primary second-page article in the March 19, 1941 issue of *Die Oase* titled "The Colonial Spirit is the Pioneer Spirit!" recounted an unbroken timeline of German migration and expansion from the Middle Ages through the *Drang nach Osten* and oversea emigration, driven by their Nordic race and the forces of history: "the same forces - old Viking blood - drove our bold African explorers out, inspired the founders of the German colonial empire in Africa and the South Seas."[98] This supposed racial colonial spirit and broader continuity with the Wilhelmine empire appeared repeatedly in *Die Oase*. The March 26, 1941 issue concluded with another historical timeline of German conquests and colonization labeled "Germany's Right in Africa."[99] That march of historical events began with the year 1400 BC, included among German conquests the Vandal invasion of North Africa and Leif Ericson's expedition to the Americas, and spanned the Wilhelmine years. Leaving little doubt as to which NSDAP department held the most sway over these *Die Oase* editorials, the timeline concluded with the founding of the *Kolonialpolitischen Amt* of the NSDAP in 1932.

Nazi racial thinking was not solely obsessed with Jews, Aryans, Slavs, and Roma. It drew on colonial models of difference and hierarchy, most prominently scientific racism and social Darwinism, pioneered in the British Empire and the United States. These models held colonial peoples, especially Black Africans and their descendants, to be less than human.[100] Those notions were largely taken for granted, forming the seldom-questioned background of accepted knowledge and permeated representation in film, literature, and nearly all walks of life. As late

[98] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Kolonialgeist ist Pioniergeist!", *Die Oase*, Folge 2, 19. März 1941, p. 4.
[99] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Deutschlands Recht in Afrika," *Die Oase*, Foge 3, 26. März 1941, p. 5.
[100] Clarence Lusane, *Hitler's Black Victims: The Historical Experiences of European Blacks, Africans and African Americans During the Nazi Era.* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 184.

as the early 1930s, colonial exhibitions in German zoos displayed Africans and American Indians.[101] Hundreds of Black Germans were sterilized, and the 1930s saw a campaign spearheaded by Joseph Goebbels against Jazz music, seen "as a source of alien cultural racial disease."[102]

The Nazi permutation of European colonial racial ideology was amplified in the pages of *Die Oase*. For example, one article, "The World War in East Africa", celebrated First World War German colonial heroism in the face of "natives," the British blockade, and a hostile natural environment.[103] Other articles celebrated the adventurous heroism of exploring untamed lands and defeating "savages."[104] Colonialist pieces identified the African continent as a place abounding in untapped natural resources. An article on this topic, "Africa as a Reservoir of Raw Materials" claimed the impending Axis victory would bring about a "General Revision" in the world colonial order in favor of Germany and Italy.[105] Britain had neglected the colonies it had seized from Germany at Versailles and had failed to "develop" them. The author noted the resources Germany stood to gain included bananas, cocoa, oil, fruit, copper, cinnamon, and valuable ore.

Die Oase's treatment of North Africa, Nazi preoccupations with Islam, North Africa's inhabitants, and regional leaders refute the myth that North Africa took place in a largely unpopulated, "empty" desert. The indigenous inhabitants of North Africa, and the Islamic world more broadly, played a significant role in the narratives spun by *Die Oase*. Nazi racial theory held the indigenous inhabitants of North Africa and the Middle East, largely identified as

[101] Ibid., 56.
[102] Ibid., 184.
[103] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Weltkrieg in Ostafrika," *Die Oase*, Folge 17, 16. April 1941, p. 6.
[104] BArch, RH 24-200/127, *Die Oase*
[105] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Afrika als Rohstoff-Reservoir," *Die Oase*, Folge 17, 16. April 1941, p. 6.

"Arabs" and "Berbers," to be genetically inferior, appropriate subjects for European colonial domination.[106] In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler celebrated European imperial control over India and the Orient, and mocked "anti-imperial movements as a 'coalition of cripples', which, because of 'racial inferiority' could never be an ally of the German people."[107] Alfred Rosenberg, moreover, celebrated European colonial rule over the Islamic world.[108]

Soon after Nazi seizure of power, however, Nazi leaders showed themselves to be more pragmatic.[109] Hitler and Nazi leaders were deeply influenced by the belief, popularized by German nationalists and imperialists during turn of the twentieth century, that Islam served as an opportunity to undermine Germany's enemies, France and Britain.[110] With strategic concerns in mind, the Nazi government aimed to avoid offending "Muslim opinion" in North Africa, the Middle East, and beyond. Turks, Iranians, and Arabs were excluded from the Nuremberg Laws following outcry in Turkey, Iran, and Egypt.[111] At the same time, Hitler distinguished Islam and race – Islam was a laudable religion, but its practitioners were member of an inferior race.[112]

Nazi representations of North Africa and its inhabitants drew on ideas with a genealogy to the German colonial empire, earlier Orientalist traditions, as well as Nazi racial ideology, subsequently transformed by geopolitical concerns. As a consequence, many of the representations of non-Jewish North Africans presented in *Die Oase*, usually identified simply as "Arabs," were what their creators most likely believed to be positive ones, reflecting German political concerns about broader Muslim opinion. In *Die Oase*'s telling, the Afrika Korps was

[106] David Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 56.
[107] Ibid., 83.
[108] Ibid., 84.
[109] Ibid., 56.
[110] Ibid., 18.
[111] Ibid., 56.
[112] Ibid., 65.

received in the region as liberators from British and Jewish oppression, and contrasted against British forces who "bloodily oppressed the Arab struggle for freedom."[113] One war story from North Africa, for example, recounted the supposed experience of German soldiers upon reaching the city of Benghazi.[114] When the sound of their vehicles woke the city's inhabitants, a cry rang out from house to house: "'The Germans are here!' In seconds, the streets are filled with a jubilant, surging crowd. The vehicles have to stop, our men are pulled out, hugged and carried on their shoulders. Nobody slept that night." Benghazi had endured difficult times: when occupied by Australians, its inhabitants "learned the horrors of looting," and tens of thousands of Arab and Italian residents had fled. *Die Oase* authors hoped for and repeatedly encouraged an Arab uprising against Britain, though articles were worded carefully to avoid offending their Italian allies, then deeply involved in a brutal and genocidal campaign to suppress the Italian Empire's North African colonial subjects.

Numerous pieces referenced the oppression of Arabs in Palestine. For example, An August 24, 1941 article on a hypothetical partition of Palestine discussed by the British House of Lords argued that such a scheme was part of the "well-known British principle of 'divide-and-rule'" and would have involved the oppression of Arab Palestinians.[115] British plans for the future were to brutally appropriate any Arab rights in the region and import Jews *en masse*.

Egypt was another major topic, and various pieces discussed the history of the country, its culture, the makeup of its people, and Islam. "The Population of Egypt" portrayed the country's inhabitants as consisting predominantly of an "unchanged" racial stock dating back

[113] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Sir Achibald Wawell," *Die Oase*, Folge 2, 19. März 1941, p. 2.
[114] BArch, RH 24-200/126, Kriegsberichter Frhr. von Esebeck, "Ueber Benghasi in die Cyrenaica," *Die Oase*, Folge 10, 8. April, 1941, p. 2.
[115] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Teilung Palästinas," *Die Oase*, Folge 45, 24. August 1941, p. 4.

thousands of years.[116] The author, Major Purper, divided Egypt's population into seven racialized categories based on their proportionate size. The largest group, the "peasants," who formed the "core" of Egypt's population, lived difficult lives of agricultural drudgery, and were distinguished by their "clumsy limbs," "light brown" skin color, distinctly Africanized facial features, and "narrow skulls." Purper compared the second group, Coptic Christians, disfavorably to Egyptian Muslims. In his telling, Copts' "fanatical" and murderous behavior was ultimately suppressed by the far more reasonable and pragmatic Arab Muslims. The third group, "Bedouins," were "pure Arabs," but now relegated to isolated groups on the Sinai Peninsula and along the Nile. Brief overviews described "Berbers" (Amazigh) as "less hardworking than Egyptians," but possessing a greater degree of "cleanliness," "Sudanese Negroes" as largely "the descendants of slaves," and differentiated various smaller groups defined as "immigrants," including Jews, Persians, Turks, Syrians, Armenians, and lastly, various European colonists. Other Muslim lands were spotlighted for explanation as well; for example, the April 9, 1941 issue a contained lengthy article about the Arabian Peninsula.[117]

The paper expressed a form of admiration for certain characteristics believed to be present in Islam. The July 6, 1941 issue contained a lengthy article by the same Major Purper on "The Mohammedans and their Teachings," celebrating the history of Islamic expansion, the spread of learning, the Arabic language, as well as the power of Islam in bringing unity to such broad lands: "despite [diverse] peoples and racial differences, Islam offers a picture of great unity."[118] Other comments included the observation that Islamic restrictions against eating pork,

[116] BArch, RH 24-200/126, Major Purper, "Die Bevölkerung Aegyptens," *Die Oase*, Folge 39, 13. Juli 1941, p. 3.
[117] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Kraftfeld Arabien," *Die Oase*, Folge 11, 9. April 1941, p. 2.
[118] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Die Mohammedaner und ihre Lehre," *Die Oase*, Folge 38, 6. Juli 1941, p. 7.

came from Jews, as did some of Mohammed's early ideas, though the Prophet rejected the more "repulsive" Old Testament laws.

These articles expressed a similar perspective to *Der Islam*, a handbook issued by the Wehrmacht high command in 1941, aiming to smooth over relations between the Wehrmacht and the Arab inhabitants of the region. In highly stereotyped guidelines explaining the tenets of the religion, traditional clothing, prayer, and other features, *Der Islam* and books like it instructed soldiers in proper and supposedly inoffensive behavior, hoping to prevent misunderstanding and provide "every possibility for communication and sympathetic cooperation."[119]

Orientalism was omnipresent and inescapable in *Die Oase*. This discourse was described in part by Edward Said as constructing an "absolute demarcation between East and West,"[120] one that entailed the production both of "the Orient" and "the West," while imbuing knowledge and power to West over its Other. Multiple articles in *Die Oase* expressed an Orientalist fascination with "the phantasm of the harem,"[121] perceived exotic North African customs involving women, and included stories about harems, as well as imagined details about of the seclusion of women and the veil. In doing so, the newspaper situated "the Orient" both as an object of desire, and an Other to be dominated, understood, and controlled. Articles were preoccupied simultaneously with the Orient's "sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy" and its "backwardness, degeneracy, and inequality with the West."[122]

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[119] Cited in Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War*, 124; BArch, RW 6/696, Oberfeldarzt Prof. Dr. Ernst Rodenwaldt, "Der Islam," Tornisterschrift des OKW Abt. Inland, 1941 Heft 52.
[120] Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 39.
[121] Malek Alloula, *The colonial harem* (Minneapolis, MN; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).
[122] Said, *Orientalism*., 223-224

For example, a brief description of Chania, the capital of Crete, titled "Chania, beloved daughter of the south" described how when one is walking down the "narrow, angled alleyways and through the colorful, vibrant squares of the old town… you are already in the middle of the magical realm of the Orient… [where] harem air blows from the small barred windows."[123] An article on summer in Egypt mentioned the "black veil worn by Egyptian women."[124] One piece published in the August 13, 1942 *Oase* included a small cartoon of a harem scene: a nude woman wearing only a veil with her presumed husband and the caption "Take off the veil!" "No," she replied, "I'm a decent girl."[125] Such customs were depicted as ancient, timeliness, and antithetical to modernity, while alluring, enticing and mysterious: a piece in the September 28, 1941 *Oase* observed that in Kemalist Turkey, "The Orient is increasingly stripped of its magic and assumes the forms of life in the West that are sober and factual, functional and non-ceremonial." Signs of such an occurrence included the replacement of caravans by "modern trucks" and the falling of women's veils.[126]

Unsuccessful Efforts to Limit Racial and Gendered Violence

Unlike efforts to provoke hatred and violence against the British and especially Jewish enemy, it seems that *Die Oase*'s awkward proscriptions for intercultural understanding had limited effect. According to a report on the topic written by Ahmed Biyoud, a North African living in France but employed by the Germans, North African prisoners of war had often learned "that the real opinions and feelings of the Germans seem to contradict the proclamations and

[123] BArch, RH 24-200/127, "Chania, liebliche Tochter des Südens," *Die Oase*, Folge 83, 30. Juli 1942, p. 2.
[124] BArch, RH 24-200/127, Kriegsberichter Armin Schönberg, "Sommersaison in Aegypten," *Die Oase*, Folge 85, 13. August 1942, p. 2.
[125] BArch, RH 24-200/127, "Den Schleier abnehmen!", *Die Oase*, Folge 85, 13. August 1942, p. 10.
[126] BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Es geht auch ohne feilschen," *Die Oase*, Folge 4, 28. September 1941, p. 6.

broadcasts of German government offices."[127] German racism permeated every encounter: "we are termed 'colored' or even 'black'; almost every German soldier… [makes it clear] that he counts us to be one of the most despised races of the world. Even expressions like 'Jew,' 'Nigger,' 'black scoundrels' etc. are not uncommon."[128]

Even beyond the broader racial focus in their training and education, German soldiers had been exposed to virulent propaganda against French North African soldiers early in the war, including lurid accounts of mutilation, which were used to justify the murder of thousands of captured colonial prisoners.[129] The propaganda in question included cartoons and illustrations depicting North Africans raping and murdering defenseless Europeans, an oriental horde unleashed in the heart of Europe. David Motadel has argued that this propaganda was highly influential.[130] Germans often made little distinction between Black and North African prisoners. For instance, a captured French Moroccan prisoner transferred to Germany "remembered German civilians who had been assembled by the Nazi authorities and were spitting at North African prisoners, calling them 'dirty Negroes.'"[131]

Records for German *Feldgendarmerie*, a branch of military police under Afrika-Korps command, may suggest a picture of sexualized and racialized violence on the part of Afrika Korps soldiers in the region.[132] Such violence, like that against women on the Eastern Front,

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[127] Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War*, 130. citing BArch RH 2/1765, Biyoud, Memorandum, "Denkschrift zur deutschen Nordafrikapropaganda, insbesondere in den Kriegsgefangenenlagern," March 1942
[128] Ibid.
[129] Raffael Scheck, "French Colonial Soldiers in German Prisoner-Of-War Camps (1940–1945)," *French History* 24, no. 3 (September 1, 2010): 420–46, https://doi.org/10.1093/fh/crq035.
[130] Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War*, 131–32; Sophie Wagenhofer, *"Rassischer" Feind - politischer Freund?*, *"Rassischer" Feind - politischer Freund?* (De Gruyter, 2020), 21–24, https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783112208700/html.
[131] Raffael Scheck, *French Colonial Soldiers in German Captivity During World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 43.
[132] BArch, RH 23/115, fol. 47, p. 2, Taetigkeitsbericht der Gruppe Ordnungsdienste vom 1.2.1942 - 28.2.1942, Beitrag zum Kriegstagebuch.

would be indicative of the totalization of warfare.[133] Internal directives repeatedly emphasized to German soldiers that their visits to brothels were to be restricted to a Wehrmacht brothel located on Via Tassoni (for non-officers), and only during certain times of day and certain times of week.[134] Entering brothel outside those times was prohibited, and the Field Gendarmerie was instructed to report any infraction for punishment. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to identify the women in the Wehrmacht brothels in North Africa. On the Eastern Front, military brothels were initially meant to be staffed by "racially suitable volunteers hired to provide sexual comfort to German soldiers at the front."[135] Dissatisfied by the number of women "willing" to provide this "sexual comfort," in many cases Germans forced local women into sexual slavery, even though this violated stated German prohibitions against sexual contact with ethnic Slavs.[136]

Wehrmacht visits to other brothels identified as "Arab" or "Italian" were strictly prohibited. Records, however, indicate that Wehrmacht soldiers repeatedly violated prohibitions against visiting those brothels. This became such a problem that an August 1941 message from Italian police authorities complained that German soldiers had repeatedly destroyed signs affixed to non-German brothels' doors prohibiting their access, often under the influence of alcohol. Moreover, "[i]n some cases, the German soldiers invaded the brothels by force and the women are even abused, especially Arab women."[137] German authorities resolved to improve soldiers'

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[133] Birgit Beck, "Sexual Violence and Its Prosecution by Courts Martial of the Wehrmacht," in *A World at Total War : Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1945*, ed. Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Bernd Greiner (Washington D.C.; Cambridge: German Historical Institutes; Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[134] See: BArch, RH 23/115
[135] Jeffrey Burds, "Sexual Violence in Europe in World War II, 1939—1945," *Politics & Society* 37, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 39, https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601108329751.
[136] Maren Röger and Emmanuel Debruyne, "From Control to Terror: German Prostitution Policies in Eastern and Western European Territories during Both World Wars," *Gender & History* 28, no. 3 (2016): 702, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12245.
[137] BArch, RH 23/118, fol. 146, p. 2, Deutsches Afrika-Korps, Kdt. rückw. Armeegebiet, Abt. Qu, Besonder Anordnunge Nr. 32, 3.8.1941.

instructions in this regard, to remind them of German racial laws and the punishments for violating them.

Nevertheless, this ban was repeatedly violated. For example, the *Feldgendarmerie* reported 28 violations of the ban for the week of September 5, 1941 to September 11, 1941.[138] From September 6 to 15, 1941 a motorized Gendarmerie unit reported 6 visits to Italian and Arab brothels, and a total of 83 serious violations of discipline.[139] In February of 1942, daily patrols of a forbidden Tagiura brothel reported 19 visits, where despite the prohibition, soldiers "damaged the reputation of the German Wehrmacht (in some cases) through their behavior."[140] A Gendarmerie report for August 1941 stated that following "incidents" by German soldiers when visiting brothels located in Homs, "it became necessary to close the brothels for German soldiers," which was subsequently carried out by German and Italian forces.[141]

In October of 1941, Italian police officials took Field Gendarmerie members on a tour of several local brothels, showing that the prohibition signs on both Italian and Arabic were properly installed, and that adequate inspections were carried out. The previous night, however, it was reported that German soldiers had attempted to force their way into an Arab brothel, and additional security and patrolling by the Italian police was determined to be necessary.[142] Brothels in Misurata were closed to German soldiers in June, 1941, as were those in Taigura, Castell Benito, Zuara, and Zavia in September 1941.[143]

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[138] BArch, RH 19-VIII/316, fol. 6, Sto. Feldgend, Taetigkeitsbericht f.d.Zeit v.5.9. – 11.9.41, September 12, 1941.
[139] BArch, RH 19-VIII/316, fol. 15, Stabsoffizier der Feldgendarmerie bei der Panzergruppe Afrika / OQu, Taetigkeitsberiqht der Feldgendarmerie v.6.9.-15.9.41, October 3, 1941.
[140] BArch, RH 23/115, fol. 47, Taetigkeitsbericht der Gruppe Ordnungsdienste vom 1.2.1942 - 28.2.1942, Beitrag zum Kriegstagebuch.
[141] BArch, RH 23/111, fol. 352, Taetigkeits bericht der Gruppe Ord. Dienst vom 1. Bis 31. August 1941.
[142] BArch, RH 19-VIII/316, fol. 30, Blatt 2 zum Taetigkeitsbericht vom 31.10.41.
[143] BArch, RH 23/111, fol. 347, Taetigkeitbericht der Gruppe Ordnungsdienst vom 1. Bis 30. September 1941; RH 23/111, 354, Taetigkeitsbericht der Gruppe Ord. Dienst vom 1. Bis 30. Juni 1941.

Unauthorized brothel visits continued unabated. For example, in January of 1942, an officer was sentenced to five months in jail for attempted to enter an Arab brothel in a highly drunken state and, when he was not granted admission, fired two shots from his service pistol, injuring an Arab woman.[144] That month, Italian police reported another German soldier had forced his way at gunpoint into an Arab residence.[145] One report dated January of 1942 indicated a soldier admitted to have taking part in a break-in and robbery in the Arab Quarter of Tripoli, and in the process, having shot one of his comrades.[146] In March of 1942, two soldiers were sentenced to four weeks imprisonment for visiting a forbidden Italian brothel, and another three weeks for disobedience.[147] As when managing sexual violence on the Eastern Front, the Wehrmacht's primary aim appears to have been maintaining discipline and avoiding contamination by racial inferiors.[148]

The topic of sexual violence in the Second World War is a large one,[149] and these limited findings provide few details. However, the prominence of violence in these horrific accounts, both explicit and implicit, and German soldiers' apparent notoriety in committing acts of violence against North African women specifically, might be seen as suggestive of the trend toward total war, the "brutalization of warfare" and unrestricted violence.[150] Moreover, they underline the prevalence of colonial violence in the Second World War in North Africa. Like

[144] BArch, RH 23/118, fol. 252, Kdt. rückw. Armeegebiet, Panzerarmee Afrika, Besondere Anordnungen Nr. 5, 1. Februar 1942.
[145] BArch, RH 23/118, fol. 259, Kdt. rückw. Armeegebiet, Panzerarmee Afrika, Besondere Anordnungen Nr. 8, 15. Februar 1942.
[146] BArch, RH 23/115, fol. 47, Taetigkeitsbericht der Gruppe Ordnungsdienste vom 1.2.1942 - 28.2.1942, Beitrag zum Kriegstagebuch, p. 2.
[147] Barch, RH 23/118, fol. 274, Kdt. rückw. Armeegebiet, Panzerarmee Afrika, Besondere Anordnungen Nr. 15, 15. März 1942.
[148] Beck, "Sexual Violence and Its Prosecution by Courts Martial of the Wehrmacht," 331.
[149] Regina Mühlhäuser, "Reframing Sexual Violence as a Weapon and Strategy of War: The Case of the German Wehrmacht during the War and Genocide in the Soviet Union, 1941–1944," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 26, no. 3 (September 15, 2017): 366–401, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/669873.
[150] Burds, "Sexual Violence in Europe in World War II, 1939—1945," 36.

Eastern Europe under Nazi occupation, North Africa was place where ordinary rules of European behavior did not apply. North Africa was a colonial "state of exception" which was capable of permitting and concealing "excessive brutality."[151]

Total War: Prisoners of War

Prisoner of war records indicate that effectiveness of the totalizing, violent radicalization that permeated *Die Oase*, as well as other Wehrmacht educational and pedagogical materials. Much like the escalating oppression, enslavement, and murder of North Africa's Jewish population occurring during this time, the murder and mistreatment of prisoners of war should be taken as indications of the success of Nazi propaganda and the trajectory toward "totality" in North Africa, emblematic of the increasingly unlimited "violence" and "methods" in a total war conceived of as a struggle between life and death. British investigations into German treatment of prisoners of war in North Africa reveal a trend toward the conditions of total war: the removal of restraint to combat, and the use of unlimited, previously illegal means.

On the Eastern Front, German and other Axis forces murdered Soviet soldiers in enormous numbers, with tens of thousands of surrendering soldiers shot out of hand. Those who survived their initial capture faced the likelihood of a gruesome death. Of the more than five and a half million Soviet soldiers captured by the Wehrmacht, at least 3.3 million had died by the end of the war, either murdered, starved, or worked to death, a death rate of 57%.[152] British and Commonwealth soldiers were not captured on this scale, nor did they die in anything

[151] Diana K. Davis, *The Arid Lands: History, Power, Knowledge*, Kindle Edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), chap. 4; Priya Satia, "'A Rebellion of Technology'/ Development, Policing, and the British Arabian Imaginary," in *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Diana K Davis and Edmund Burke (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011). These themes are addressed further in Chapter 2

[152] S. P. MacKenzie, "The Treatment of Prisoners of War in World War II," *The Journal of Modern History* 66, no. 3 (1994): 510, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2124482.

approaching those proportions. The number of British and Commonwealth soldiers in German and Italian captivity was far lower: estimates range from 34,000 to 40,000 initially imprisoned in Germany, and approximately 70 to 80,000 held in Italian camps until the Italian defeat in late 1943.[153] Approximately 68,000 British and Commonwealth troops were captured in North Africa.[154] The death rate for all British prisoners who ended up in German hands has been estimated at between 3 and 5.1%, bearing little similarity to the extraordinary Soviet experience, though slightly higher than French, Belgian, or Polish numbers.[155] One explanation for the discrepancy between analogous combat casualty rates between the Eastern Front and North Africa on the one hand, and divergent prisoner of war death rates on the other, is the higher position that white British and Commonwealth soldiers held in the Nazi racial hierarchy than Slavs. Another explanation could be deliberate policy decisions.

Neville Wylie has argued that Anglo-German diplomacy played a significant role in the "'relatively' benign" German treatment of British prisoners of war.[156] Despite the war, several exchanges of heavily wounded prisoners were negotiated, and both Nazi and British leadership were aware of the importance of prisoners to domestic opinion on the other side. One example of this was the so-called "shackling crisis," of October to December 1942, a series of retaliations against British and German prisoners. When the German High Command announced the shackling of prisoners as retaliation following the discovery of dead German soldiers with their hands tied behind their back, Churchill announced similar measures, and thousands of prisoners

[153] Juliette Pattinson, Lucy Noakes, and Wendy Ugolini, "Incarcerated Masculinities: Male POWs and the Second World War," *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 7, no. 3 (August 2014): 179–90, https://doi.org/10.1179/1752627214Z.00000000042; S. P Mackenzie, *The Colditz Myth British and Commonwealth Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany* (Oxford; New York; Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2006), 101.
[154] Clare Makepeace, *Captives of War: British Prisoners of War in Europe in the Second World War* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).
[155] MacKenzie, "The Treatment of Prisoners of War in World War II," 510; Neville Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy: Britain, Germany, and the Politics of Prisoners of War 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 266.
[156] Neville Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, 266.

in both German and British hands were held in manacles.[157] The situation was largely defused by Christmas 1942 following negotiations through Swiss intermediaries.

Nevertheless, postwar British war crime investigations documented evidence of German cruelty to Allied prisoners of war in North Africa, painting a grim picture of death, mistreatment and abuse. The evidence, mostly in the form of sworn statements, details systems of forced labor in violation of the Geneva Convention, poor material conditions, as well as myriad instances of cruel and brutal treatment, including torture, beatings, and starvation, and murder.

British and Commonwealth soldiers captured in North Africa were primarily transferred to a series of Italian-run prisoner of war camps outside of Benghazi where murder and abuse were rampant. Inspired in part by proclamations from the Fascist government, racist indoctrination, and German influence, Italians "reviled the British for their cooperation with the Jews, and reproached them for their use of 'soldiers of every color'—a practice that allegedly insulted the racial standing of the Italian people by forcing them to fight against racially inferior people."[158]

For those in German captivity, accounts of Germans murdering British and Commonwealth soldiers suggest the unrestricted violence of a total war, both in combat and during imprisonment. Some records indicate soldiers were murdered shortly after surrender, either as retaliation or punishment. A Sergeant Prince reported seeing a gunner named Setterfield and one other soldier shot in Tobruk by the Germans upon surrender in May 1942.[159] G. Browning, a soldier in the 7th Armored Division who was captured by German soldiers on April

[157] MacKenzie, "The Treatment of Prisoners of War in World War II," 492.
[158] Patrick Bernhard, "Behind the Battle Lines: Italian Atrocities and the Persecution of Arabs, Berbers, and Jews in North Africa during World War II," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 3 (December 1, 2012): 425–46, https://doi.org/10.1093/hgs/dcs054; Hoppe, "The Persecution of Jews in Libya Between 1938 and 1945/ An Italian Affair?"
[159] TNA: WO 311/1337, Copy of Extracts from CSDIC Reports, Report No. CIF/D17/15.

6, 1941, stated that immediately upon capture, an SS captain demanded information about Allied army positions at gunpoint.[160] Upon receiving no reply after counting to three, the SS officer shot a man Browning was with, a Lieutenant Harvey, who died six hours later.

A captured German officer, Clemens Kopp overheard witnesses boasting about one series of such killings after an assault on Tobruk in early May 1941: "I heard the following during the next few days from men in the 3rd Company: That about 12 Australians were taken prisoners, and that about three or four of them were killed on the spot." A young officer cadet named Linde "boasted that he had killed a prisoner by hitting him over the head with a spade," and another German soldier, "Werner Schwalb had shot one or two prisoners in cold blood."[161] Guenther Pabst, a German who had been captured at El Alamein, also spoke with Allied authorities about his conversations with Werner Schwalb. Schwalb informed him that his "regiment made an attack in front of Tobruk on 1 May 1941 on British positions and had heavy losses from hidden sharpshooters who were also picking off medical orderlies." When his regiment captured British trenches, "(2) Officers and (6) other ranks were captured by his platoon, of which he was in command." Schwalb was "in such a rage that he ordered a private under his command to kill these prisoners with a shovel. He ordered their helmets taken off and they were hit over the head with a shovel from the front. The prisoners never whimpered but fell down without a sound."[162]. Admittedly, the German's superior officer wanted to press charges against him for this action.

Patrick Hickey, a New Zealander who was captured by German soldiers outside El Alamein on July 22, 1942, detailed the shooting of Captain John Birch, a fellow New

[160] TNA: WO 311/1182, Ref: MI9/INT/Q MIS-X, Form 'Q,' received by JAG on January 6, 1946.
[161] TNA: WO 311/1183, Ref: HQS 9139-6, Interrogation of PW ME 043886, Uffz. Kopp, Clemens, March 29, 1946, p. 2.
[162] TNA: WO 311/1183, Affidavit of Guenther Pabst, PW 050292, the Medicine Hat Internment Camp, February 6, 1946.

Zealander.[163] Hickey witnessed two German soldiers drive Captain Birch away from the main column of prisoners, stopping a few yards away from him. Birch was ordered to leave the jeep "by a German of higher rank than a Corporal… The man struck Captain Birch on the head with the butt of his Tommy Gun felling him to the ground. The German then, at a range of one yard, fired several shots into Captain Birch's chest."[164] Hickey never knew the soldiers' names, but he recognized the uniform of the Afrika Korps, a feature of the shooting that was corroborated by other witnesses.

Other British investigations included the torture of an English prisoner identified as Charles Jones.[165] Captured *SS-Standartenführer* Rauff Walther, a member of the *Einsatzkommando* assigned to Tunis, stated that his unit had interrogated Jones, who was suspected of working for British intelligence services. Jakob Bertram, another captured German, claimed that the man was shot in the leg during an escape attempt. Then, "without administering medical aid, his guards bound his arms and legs in such a manner that his wrists and ankles were joined behind his back and threw him into his cell face down. There he remained for three days without food or water, unable to change his position, suffering intense pain, and lying in his own excrements."[166] British authorities were unable to corroborate this story.

In an account that was corroborated by multiple witnesses, William Gregory, a New Zealand engineer, reported retaliation by his German captors in June 1942.[167] The day after his capture, a German officer subjected them to a thorough interrogation and search. The "[o]fficer told us through an interpreter that the New Zealanders had been guilty of unfair fighting on the

[163] TNA: WO 311/1176, Statement of Patrick Joseph Hickey, Palmerston North, New Zealand, April 29, 1946.
[164] Ibid.
[165] TNA: WO 311/1180, Statement of SS-Standartenfuehrer Rauff Walther, 'Z' German Hospital, Caserta, June 20, 1946.
[166] TNA: WO 311/1180, Ref: BAOR/15228/2/C.1618, Subject: Alleged War Crimes., SS-Sturmscharfuehrer Hartwig, November 8, 1945.
[167] TNA: WO 311/1166, Statement of William A. Gregory, Kaikoura, New Zealand, May 21, 1946, p. 1.

previous night, that they had bayoneted wounded men, therefore as a reprisal he was lining us all up in the sun." The New Zealanders were forced to stand in the sun for five hours without food or water, enforced at gunpoint. Several men fainted, but were offered no assistance.[168] The prisoners were then sent to a transit camp near Tobruk, where "conditions were very bad" and they were forced to work, before being transported to Italian camps at Benghazi and Derna.[169] In Italian hands, soldiers faced "indiscriminate shooting," beatings, murder, and torture.[170] Frederick Alpe, another captured New Zealander told investigators that this German reprisal was for an attack in which New Zealand troops were alleged to have bayonetted wounded Germans in their sleep. According to Alpe, the sleeping Germans who had indeed been bayonetted were not previously wounded.[171]

As accounts of murder and torture suggest the violence of total war, the Germans' consistent use of prisoner labor in violation of the Geneva Convention point at unlimited methods, unrestrained by the Geneva Convention and limited mainly by concerns over reciprocal British violence.

Germans subjected Allied prisoners in the Tripoli region to forced labor in wretched conditions in German-run camps as early as the spring of 1941, such as *Feldpost 12545*.[172] The number of prisoners at *Feldpost 12545* ranged from over one hundred to approximately four or five hundred, and included a mix of British, Australian, and Sudanese soldiers, who were housed on the outskirts of Tripoli in unsanitary and wretched conditions. William Timmons, a British Lance Corporal reported that during the period from June 1941 to January 1942, while he was a

[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid., 2.
[170] TNA: WO 311/1166, Statement of Ross Gifford Smith, Durban, South Africa, December 15, 1945, p. 1.
[171] TNA: WO 311/1166, Statement of Gurney Frederick Alpe, Auckland, June 18, 1946, p. 1.
[172] TNA: WO 311/305, Ref: 95/UK/G/21, United Nations War Crimes Commission, United Kingdom Charges Against German War Criminals, Charge No. UK-G/B.21, Statement of Facts, May 8, 1944, p. 1.

prisoner in this camp, prisoners were forced to work between ten and sixteen hours per day moving food, munitions, and other war supplies.[173] Australian Army Medical Corps officer E.M. Broomhead spoke of prisoners being forced to unload ammunition, bombs, and other war materials in the Tripoli docks, working "in the blazing heat of midsummer."[174] Broomhead was captured by Germans in Libya in April 1941, transferred to an Italian prisoner of war camp in Benghazi, then was sent to the German *Feldpost* outside of Tripoli in June 1941.[175] Any prisoners determined to be able to walk were forced to work up to twenty hours a day, "[s]even days a week. There was no respite." Rations were so meager that the exhausted men feared for their lives, and were only able to survive by stealing food during weekly labor operations at a food dump.[176] Even in those "days of stark brutality," Italian and German soldiers' relished cruelty with "unnecessary zest,"[177] having "driven prisoners of war to the limit of human endurance."[178] By Christmas 1941, "men were gradually becoming broken in health, more than one had noticeably grown gray" and worked in an exhausted "kind of daze."[179] A young German guard, dissatisfied by the pace of work by an Australian private named Clive, shot off his middle finger on Christmas Eve of 1941.[180] Clive was denied medical treatment for an extended period

[173] TNA: WO 311/305, In the Matter of: Conditions and treatment of prisoners of war at Feldpost 12545 Prisoner of War Camp, Tripoli, Tripolitania, North Africa, Affidavit of William Joseph Timmons, York, July 23, 1945, p. 1.
[174] TNA: WO 311/305, United Nations War Crimes Commission, United Kingdom Charges Against Italian War Criminals, Charge No. UK-G/B.22, Statement of Facts, May 8, 1944, p. 2.
[175] TNA: WO 311/305, Interrogation of SX 5729 PTE. E.N. Broomhead, A.I.F., Curzon Street House, May 13, 1943.
[176] TNA: WO 311/305, Ref: 95/UK/G/21, United Nations War Crimes Commission, United Kingdom Charges Against German War Criminals, Charge No. UK-G/B.21, Statement of Facts, May 8, 1944, p. 2.
[177] TNA: WO 311/305, United Nations War Crimes Commission, United Kingdom Charges Against Italian War Criminals, Charge No. UK-G/B.22, Statement of Facts, May 8, 1944, p. 3.
[178] Ibid., 4.
[179] TNA: WO 311/305, Extracts from Chapter 8 of the Manuscript of the Book by Private No. S.X.5729, E.N. Broomhead, Australian Army Medical Corps, Entitled "Barbed Wire in the Sunset," Exhibit to September 9, 1943 Affidavit, p. 3.
[180] Ibid., 2.

of time, and his finger "became very badly infected."[181] Other accounts of brutality in this camp included beatings and interrogations.[182]

The *Feldgendarmerie* were notorious for abusing prisoners. On one occasion, a particularly cruel officer beat a prisoner clutching a pack of cigarettes in a wounded hand "with such force that it opened and the package flew across the yard, then he walked away and trampled the cigarettes into the dust." The Gendarmerie inspired "an atmosphere of hushed horror whenever they approached the camp."[183]An officer named Heller or Muller, identified as a member of the Afrika Korps "ordered sentries to shoot in any case of disobedience. This NCO used to strike and kick PoWs; he also used to hit them with a rifle butt" as they went to work, and "[t]his treatment was specially applied to coloured PoWs."[184] One prisoner "was caught trying to escape and… was shot twice in the right leg, once in the left, twice in the body and bayonetted from a distance of four feet."[185]

At *Feldpost 12545* "[c]onditions in the camp were cramped. A hundred men were packed into a room which normally might have been enough for thirty. There were five latrines to serve some 350 men. Many prisoners suffered from jaundice and boils."[186] According to Robert Brawn of Sheffield, "the ill treatment of prisoners was a general policy." He told investigators of "one incident where an Australian Private was beaten up by *Unteroffizier* Heller and one or two guards without justification." Another involved the shooting of an Australian Private named

[181] TNA: WO 311/305, Affidavit of Cyril George Hooper Rodgers, C.G.H.R.1, War Crimes Commission, Prisoner of War Camp – Tripoli 1941-1942, April 18, 1945, p. 2.
[182] TNA: WO 311/305, Extracts from Manuscript by Private E. N. Broomhead: Chapter 7, p. 4; Chapter 8, p. 1.; Affidavit of Cyril George Hooper Rodgers, p. 2.
[183] TNA: WO 311/305, Extracts from Manuscript by Private E. N. Broomhead, Chapter 7, p 5.
[184] TNA: WO 311/305, Ref: MD/JAG/FS/31/8(3), Loose Minute, Interim Report from A.F.H.Q., (C) Tripoli, Source: 689464 L/Cpl Rodgers, C.G.H. – K.R.R.C.
[185] TNA: WO 311/305, Ref: MD/JAG/FS/31/8(3), Loose Minute, 2. Tripoli Camp, Source: No. 935486 Gnr Rhodes, W., June 2, 1945.
[186] TNA: WO 309/1234, Affidavit of 1433896 Corporal Robert Brawn, Pioneer Corps, Westminster, August 13, 1945.

Davies in the hand for not working fast enough moving ammunition, and a further incident where "another Australian Private named Griffiths was struck by a German." Geoffrey Summerfield, a Lieutenant in the Royal Army Medical Corps, described Heller as "a typical Nazi prototype" who "always resorted to abuse or striking on the least provocation." Summerfield recalled an instance he took an "Australian Private [named] Drew into a room and severely beat him," as well as another in which "he beat up a sick Sudanese, Mohammed Surag" claiming that Surag was pretending to be sick, "malingering."[187]

Around the same time, June 1941, 300 Allied prisoners were transferred out the Benghazi POW camp and placed under German control to be used as laborers in a German-run camp adjacent to the larger Italian camp.[188] Alexander Ligget, a Northern Irish sergeant who was captured in June 1941, reported seeing "many occasions" of beatings by German guards. [189] He recalled "R. Walton of… the Middlesex Yeomanry, who was severely beaten with a fly swatter on the face and back and was also severely kicked." However, the beatings "were looked upon our men as nothing compared with the agony undergone while carrying out the particularly onerous work. Ninety-five per cent of the working party were suffering from dysentery and all had jaundice, but all were compelled to work with the exception of those unable to stand." Gordon Beazley, an English tank captain, reported "the German guards used fists, sticks, boots and rifle butts to 'encourage' prisoners at war"[190] Beazley stated that the "grossly inadequate" rations were attributed to Erwin Rommel himself, who deducted around 1/3 of the June 1941

[187] TNA: WO 309/1234, Affidavit of Geoffrey Summerfield, County of Chester, March 15, 1946, p. 2.
[188] TNA: WO 311/1181, Ref: 2774/UK/G/498, United Nations War Crimes Commission, United Kingdom Charges Against German War Criminals, Case No. UK – G/B 500, Short Statement of Facts, April 3, 1946.
[189] TNA: WO 311/1181, Affidavit of Alexander Ligget, Porterdown, February 26, 1946, p. 1.
[190] TNA: WO 311/1181, Affidavit of Gordon Herbert Beazley, Captain in the Royal Tank Regiment, Westminster, December 14, 1945, p. 1.

rations as retaliation for British mutilation of German soldiers in Crete, and saw the written order to that effect.[191]

Following the capture of Tobruk in June 1942, Germans evicted wounded soldiers that they determined to be mobile, marching them to a new camp several miles away without food or water. At the new camp, they were provided no further medical treatment.[192] According to one witness, "there were about 30,000 British and Imperial P.O.W. in this camp with absolutely no washing or sanitary facilities,"[193] though most of these prisoners were transferred to the larger Italian-run camps or to Italy in August of 1942.[194] The system of forced labor continued in the Tobruk camp as well. British investigations into the Tobruk camp determined "prisoners were illegally employed in loading & unloading ships, digging trenches, and other work ancillary to the German war effort. Prisoners in ill-health and [those] unable to work hard were kicked & beaten, some died of lack of water."[195]

German guards were also employed in Italian prisoner camps. Sepoys Nasir Ali and Sardah Mahommed reported seeing a British prisoner at the Benghazi camp in November 1942 "shot and killed because he remonstrated with a German Guard about the rough handling. A high German Officer who investigated this incident said that it was an accident."[196] Suspected sympathy or coordination with Jews was also a justification for Italian brutality against captured British soldiers, and they treated non-white soldiers with particular contempt.[197]

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[191] Ibid., 1-2.
[192] TNA: WO 311/1177, Ref: 35/1(1F), War Crimes, Director General of Medical Services, South Africa, to JAG, London, April 11, 1946.
[193] TNA: WO 311/1177, Ref: 103/UK/G/23, United Nations War Crimes Commission, United Kingdom Charges Against German War Criminals, Case No. UK – G/B23, Short Statement of Facts, May 18, 1944, p. 2.
[194] TNA: WO 311/1177, Affidavit of Richard Denis Davy, Lieutenant-Colonel, R.A.M.C., Westminster, August 27, 1945, p. 1.
[195] TNA: WO 311/1177, Ref: G.D. 3/4, United Nations War Crimes Commission, British Charges against German War Criminals, Charge No. UK – G/B 108, Short Statement of Facts.
[196] TNA: WO 311/301, Report No. AIO/11/5-178, January 14, 1943.
[197] Hoppe, "The Persecution of Jews in Libya Between 1938 and 1945/ An Italian Affair?"

Soldiers forced to work unloading German ammunitions were at further risk of attack from their own government. Collin Campbell, a British Artillery officer who was captured in March 1943, was told by fellow prisoner, Lance Corporal MacDonald, that when he and his fellow prisoners had been forced at gunpoint to carry munitions, "they came under very heavy shell fire from our own guns as a result of which eight British prisoners of war were killed."[198]

Colonial Prisoners in North Africa

The experience of captivity for non-white soldiers who fell into German hands was harsher than those of white ones. Germans murdered thousands of Black soldiers who fought in the French military during their spring 1940 campaign. In some cases, Black prisoners of war were subjected to medical experimentation aiming to develop medical treatments for tropical diseases, and over the summer of that year, "Nazi doctors subjected hundreds of French colonial prisoners from Stalag XVIIA in Kaisersteinbruch (near Vienna) to degrading anthropological analyses."[199] At the same time, select groups of prisoners were seen as valuable targets for recruitment or propaganda. Raffael Scheck has argued that, following the initial massacres and abuses, German policies toward their Black prisoners changed, in part owing to the aim of undermining support for de Gaulle and the British Empire.[200] Approximately 15 to 17,000 Indian prisoners of war were captured in the Mediterranean by German and Italian forces, the majority of whom fell into Italian hands. Germans made significant efforts to recruit these prisoners into either Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army or the German Free India Legion.[201] Efforts

[198] TNA: WO 311/1179, Affidavit of 212887 Lieutenant Colin Forbes Campbell, Westminster, October 15, 1945.
[199] Scheck, "French Colonial Soldiers in German Prisoner-Of-War Camps (1940–1945)."
[200] Ibid.
[201] G. J. Douds, "The Men Who Never Were: Indian POWs in the Second World War," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 27, no. 2 (August 1, 2004): 189, https://doi.org/10.1080/1479027042000236634.

were likewise made to recruit prisoners for the German-Arab Training Unit.[202] Nevertheless, in most cases, Germans imposed a strict racial hierarchy, as observed by Édouard Ouédraogo, a Burkina Fason during his captivity in Europe: "[f]irst came the British, then the white French, the North Africans, and finally the black soldiers."[203]

In North Africa, Italians were particularly cruel to their non-white prisoners. Camps segregated Allied prisoners of war by race: non-whites were sent to separate, inferior camps, provided meagerer provisions, and were used as forced laborers to move military supplies. They were also targeted for beatings and random murder.[204] On one occasion, a white British gunner observed an Italian guard murdering five Indian prisoners simply on the grounds of their race, and post-war investigations into Italian camps have uncovered a litany of additional abuses. [205]

Despite their potential propaganda value, the German treatment of non-white prisoners in North Africa was significantly worse than what they imposed on the British and white dominion solders. In the words of one investigator, it "seems to have been exceptionally bad."[206] At the German-run prisoner of war camp near Tobruk, non-white prisoners were segregated and placed in a separate area on the western side of the compound.[207] The violence guards engaged in on the non-white side of the compound was harsher. It was reported that "[p]unishment for escaping was to be beaten and whipped. Afterwards escapers were put in a hole which had been specially

[202] Thomas J. Kehoe and Elizabeth M. Greenhalgh, "Living Propaganda and Self-Serving Recruitment: The Nazi Rationale for the German-Arab Training Unit, May 1941 to May 1943," *War in History* 24, no. 4 (November 1, 2017): 520–43, https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344516641457.
[203] Scheck, *French Colonial Soldiers in German Captivity During World War II*, 34.
[204] Bernhard, "Behind the Battle Lines"; Hoppe, "The Persecution of Jews in Libya Between 1938 and 1945/ An Italian Affair?"
[205] Bernhard, "Behind the Battle Lines," 436.
[206] TNA: WO 311/305, JAG/VW/16109, Ref: 31/8(3)B, Subject:- War Crimes, January 13, 1946, p. 2.
[207] TNA: WO 311/1337, 277108 Pte K. Williams (July 1942), Extracts from Interrogation Reports Concerning PW Camps in Tobruk, Appendix 'M', January 14, 1946, p. 2.

dug and left there for three days without food or water. Then they were sent to the Italian" camps.[208]

British investigative records include Indian and South African accounts, as well white witness' testimony on this brutality. The former category included men like Allan Bowey, who stated that in Tripoli, he saw "Sudanese prisoners struck to the ground by senior German NCOs for trifling offences,"[209] and the latter, Nicholas de Jager, a South African soldier who was captured by Germans and transported to a German camp near Tobruk.[210] De Jaeger described grueling forced labor, particularly involving the transportation of military materials. When sickness prevented him from working, "I was taken out by a German guard, and tied to a pole in the sun. I was not allowed to wear a hat, nor was I given any food or drink. I had to remain like this for the rest of the day."[211] De Jaeger frequently witnessed "soldiers using the butts of rifles on the prisoners, and on one occasion shortly before the El Alamein push started, I saw one of the German Guards fire at one of our native soldiers, as he was walking back to camp. The shot killed the native." De Jaeger said "I could not understand why the guard fired on this prisoner, he was not attempting to escape." Beatings by guards were frequent.[212] According to Robert Cain, a mixed race South African soldier from the 3rd C.C. Battalion,

> Germans were just as brutal in their assaults as the Italians, and I was once struck with a rifle butt by a German sentry because I complained of being too ill to work. A coloured soldier named Roberts of 2nd Lt A.A. was on one occasion locked in a dark cell, handcuffed from noon until 9-10pm the same day, because of his complaint that he could not work on the bad and short ration.

On another occasion, Cain witnessed a German officer threatening "to shoot two S.A. coloured soldiers who refused to work as they had no boots… They were compelled to work barefooted"

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[208] Ibid.
[209] TNA: WO 311/305, JAG/VW/16109, Ref: 31/8(3)B, Extract from Form 'Q' No. SX8460, Bowey, Allan Edgar, S/Sjt. 2/8 Field Ambulance, R.A.M.C (20 June 1941 to 31 July 1941), Submitted to JAG on January 13, 1946.
[210] TNA: WO 311/1170, 100, Affidavit of Nicholas De Jager, Pietermaritzburg, August 16, 1943.
[211] Ibid.
[212] TNA: WO 311/1170, 111, Affidavit of No. C. 305149 Gnr. John Jordaan, Pietermaritzburg, September 20, 1943.

and at gunpoint.[213] Mixed-race South African prisoners of war "were employed from 17 to 22 hours a day chiefly loading and unloading ships" and aircraft.[214]

Rifleman Jas Bahadur of the 2/7 Gurkha Rifles was captured by Italian forces in June 1942 and subsequently handed over to German forces, who sent him to the Tobruk camp. At Tobruk, conditions were so bad "we were given so little water that some of us had to moisten our lips with our own urine to keep them from cracking."[215] Provided hardly any food or water, prisoners were forced to work nearly non-stop. Bahadur said "I felt very ill and seemed to get worse every day, but I could get no medical treatment. We were not allowed to report sick and no notice was taken of our ill-health… We had to go on working and be beaten if we were too weak to work to their satisfaction."[216] He was fed only a small loaf of brown bread of approximately 6 oz and a pint of water every 24 hours. "We were all starving and thirsty – in fact some of my friends died for want of water."[217]

Lieutenant Corporal Bergsma witnessed a Black South African tied to a post in the sun, apparently as a punishment for disobedience during forced labor. To make the punishment even more painful, "jam had been spread on the victim's face to attract flies."[218]

A number of non-white prisoners of war were transferred to the Mersah Matruh camp, and placed under the supervision of Van Eyck, a captured white South African sergeant, who

[213] TNA: WO 311/1170, 85, Affidavit of No. C. 277035 Gnr. Robert Henry Cain, Pietermaritzburg, August 12, 1943.
[214] TNA: WO 311/1337, 277108 Pte K. Williams (July 1942), Extracts from Interrogation Reports Concerning PW Camps in Tobruk, Appendix 'M', January 14, 1946, p. 2.
[215] TNA: WO 311/1177, Ref: G.D. 3/4, United Nations War Crimes Commission, British Charges against German War Criminals, Charge No. UK – G/B 108, Short Statement of Facts, p. 2.
[216] TNA: WO 311/1177, Ref: G.D. 3/4, United Nations War Crimes Commission, British Charges against German War Criminals, Charge No. UK – G/B 108, Particulars of Evidence in Support.
[217] TNA: WO 311/1177, GD 3, 20/3, Statement by No. 7592 Rfm. Jas Bahadur 2/7 Gurkha Rifles, No. 15 Indian General Hospital.
[218] TNA: WO 311/1337, Copy of Extracts from CSDIC Reports, Report No. AIO/11/5 - 155 App 'B', No. 167812 L/Cpl. Bergsma, A.E, Tobruk, August 1942.

was employed by the Germans as an interpreter and intermediary for the camp.[219] According to Van Eyck, who was interviewed after the war by British investigators, "conditions in the camp were very bad." Soldiers were routinely beaten, provided extremely low-quality food, forced to dig their own latrines, and subjected to a regime of harsh labor.[220] According to Havildar Nur Khan of the 3/2 Punjab Regiment, Black south Africans were treated "extremely badly by the Germans while they were sick."[221] A captured soldier named Timothy Fisher was "badly beaten up with a stick and tied to a pole for a day," then denied food and water the next morning.[222] A number of prisoners were killed by RAF bombing while moving war materials.[223]

Conclusion

The evidence discussed in this chapter supports the argument that the Second World War in North Africa was fought and experienced very differently from the gentlemanly, "civilized" conflict, the "war without hate" of trans-Atlantic popular memory and political convenience. It is clear that the war in North Africa paralleled the "totality" of Germany's war against the Soviet Union in multiple respects. As in Eastern Europe, German war aims were essentially unlimited: the Wehrmacht intended to advance not only to Egypt and the Suez Canal, but onward through the entire Middle East, meeting forces from the Eastern Front in the Caucuses. Just like in Eastern Europe, the Wehrmacht in North Africa was pervaded by Nazi racial ideology, and that

[219] TNA: WO 311/1178, Ref: JAG/VW/16103, Subject:- War Crimes – P. W. Camp Mersa Matruh, Extract from C.S.D.I.C. Report, Mersa Matruh Camp, Submitted to JAG on January 3, 1946.
[220] TNA: WO 311/1178, United Nations War Crimes Commission, British Charges against German War Criminals, Charge No. UK – G/B 107, Particulars of Alleged Crime.
[221] TNA: WO 311/1178, Ref: CRME/9709/AG5, Subject: Treatment of British Prisoners of War, Statement by No. 13535 Sig. Havildar Nur Khan, 3/2 Punjab Regiment.
[222] TNA: WO 311/1178, Ref: MD/JAG/FS/35/2(3F), War Crimes: Ill-treatment of Timothy Masinga at Mersa Matruh P.O.W. Camp, February 12, 1946.
[223] TNA: WO 311/1178, Extracts from C.S.D.I.C. Reports, Report No. A10/11/5-177, 13535 Havildar Nur Khan, 3/2 Punjab, Mersa Matruh, September – October 1942.

ideology informed German violence against North Africa's civilian population. Scholars have demonstrated that the project of murdering of the region's entire Jewish population was likely only prevented by military defeat and German material limitations. My examination of *Die Oase* shows extensive efforts to remove limitations on violence against the British and imperial adversary and transform them into a total enemy. Findings in post-war British investigations into abuses against prisoners of war show that while the Germans may not have systematically murdered their prisoners, they were indeed handled abominably. Prisoners were subjected to horrendous treatment, including forced labor, torture, and, on multiple occasions, murder. Field Gendarmerie records suggest strategic efforts to restrict gendered and racialized violence against North Africans may have been unsuccessful. At the same time, Nazi leadership's political concern over the perspectives of North Africa's Muslim inhabitants refute narratives of the war occurring in an "empty" space.

The next chapter builds on these findings in an examination of first-hand accounts of the Second World War in North Africa, mainly from Allied prisoner of war records for German soldiers who were fought in the region. It focuses on discourse surrounding the natural desert environment, the human context of North Africa (the built environment and local inhabitants), and enemy soldiers. Taken together, these two chapters provide a new model for understanding how the Second World War in North Africa was waged and experienced at the time. Far from a "good" or "honorable" war, in both conception and experience, this was an unconstrained, brutal, racialized and radicalizing struggle inextricable from murder and death.

Chapter 2: The Environment and the Experience of Total War in North Africa

Introduction: The "Desert War"

Over the years following the Second World War in North Africa, in representations and memories of the conflict, the desert environment discursively transformed, metamorphizing into an enemy in a "desert war." North Africa was depopulated, an "empty" desert landscape almost bereft of a built environment or residents, a passive background for a war fought by European powers. Opposing soldiers, once "total" enemies in a war of annihilation, came to be imagined as fellow Europeans sharing a common struggle against an alien, non-European environment. European environmental discourses on "the desert" obscured the violence of total war, allowing for the reframing of the conflict as a chivalric "war without hate."

In stark contrast to the obfuscating discourse of a "desert war" that continues to dominate popular memory, I argue that the Second World War in North Africa was a total war, and was experienced as such by many of the soldiers who fought there. Drawing on *Die Oase*, official publications, propaganda, and records detailing German treatment of British prisoners of war, the previous chapter argued that the North Africa front of the Second World War fit the criteria for "total war" outlined by Roger Chickering and Stig Förster. The postwar transformation in perception and memory — away from totality and toward a clean, even romantic contestation — was aided by broad shifts in three thematic elements central to the postwar perception and memory of the conflict: the natural desert environment, the human context of North Africa (the built environment and local inhabitants), and enemy soldiers. During the post-war period, the discourse of a "desert war" against the hostile North African environment came to hide the violence and chaos of total war perpetrated and experienced by German and, potentially, British forces.

Drawing largely on the vast catalog of secret observations and transcribed conversations of captured German officers, this chapter argues that many of the soldiers who fought in North Africa experienced and practiced the Second World War in North Africa as a total war. First, I examine discourse surrounding the natural environment as it appears in German records, arguing that the wartime discourse of the "desert" was conducive to total war rather than forming an empty backdrop for European armies. Second, I examine how German soldiers spoke of North Africa's population, both Muslim and Jewish, including members of the German Arab Training Battalion, drawing attention to accounts of violence against civilians, indicative of the blurred boundaries between combatants and noncombatants. Third, I argue that German discussions about their British and Imperial enemy reveal any notions of a "war without hate" were far from universal: many expressed absolute hostility without reservation. Next, I assess the intensity of violence and combat in German discourse, highlighting how participants drew comparisons to the First World War and the Eastern Front, and incidences of murder or mistreatment of British prisoners of war. I conclude by examining British and Allied atrocities in North Africa, including the murder or abuse of prisoners of war and violence against indigenous North Africans, arguing that while not conclusive, these findings suggest the British war in North Africa may have been "total" as well.

This chapter primarily examines the vast corpus of transcribed conversations between captured Axis soldiers under British control. Between 1939 and 1945, over 10,000 German prisoners of war and nearly 600 Italian ones were imprisoned or transferred through British facilities designed for clandestine surveillance and monitoring in the interests of military intelligence.[1] The Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre (CSDIC) and a network of

[1] Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer, *Soldaten: on fighting, killing, and dying : the secret World War II transcripts of German POWs* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), sec. Appendix 1.

connected interrogation and surveillance facilities around the Mediterranean produced nearly 18,000 individual protocols transcribing, translating, and summarizing conversations between German POWs and almost 2,000 between Italians. Additional records survive from interrogations and debriefings from elsewhere the British controlled, as well as American archives. The soldiers in British facilities were largely, but not exclusively, officers of middling to upper ranks rather than lower rank officers or common enlisted or drafted soldiers. When possible, I draw particular attention to accounts from lower ranking soldiers, such as privates and sergeant, aiming to draw conclusions from as diverse a group as possible.

Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer authored the most influential study on these protocols. They argued that "[a]s a rule German soldiers were not 'ideological warriors.' Most of them were fully apolitical."[2] Brutality and extraordinary violence, then, found their origin more in soldiers' "frames of reference," or their psychologically, historically, and culturally conditioned mentalities, as well as practical every-day concerns. Scholars such Omer Bartov and Wolfram Wette, on the other hand, have argued that German Soldiers' specifically ideological radicalization began years before the Second World War, and their radicalization shaped their behavior.[3] I propose that the protocols for German soldiers who fought in North Africa indicate the conditions for violent radicalization and brutalization were not fundamentally dissimilar than those on the Eastern Front. In both places, soldiers experienced enormously traumatic combat, committed atrocities, and executed prisoners.

[2] Ibid., sec. Frame of Reference: War.
[3] Bryce Sait, *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht: Nazi Ideology and the War Crimes of the German Military* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019); Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: history, myth, reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006). See also the discussion in Chapter 1.

It should not be surprising that the war in North Africa resembled that in Russia, because there were direct connections between the two fronts. Soldiers who fought on the Eastern Front or the Balkans went on to fight in North Africa, and many of those who began or continued their military service in North Africa were redeployed elsewhere, such as Italy. For instance, the Hermann Göring Fallschirm-Panzer division saw combat first in Barbarossa before being dispatched to North Africa, and was ultimately implicated in up to one third of all civilian massacres in Italy.[4] In captivity, soldiers frequently talked about atrocities, rumored or witnessed, across Europe, and what happened in Europe was nearly always their primary concern. A sergeant captured at Cap Bon in May 1943 recounted a harrowing story relayed to him by a friend fighting in Russia. The sergeant's friend watched a fellow German soldier beat a starving Polish civilian to death with a shovel, and spoke of witnessing a "shattering episode" in which an eighteen-year-old girl was raped, and three hundred people were forced to dig their own graves, undressed, and murdered. The same sergeant met a participant in such atrocities in Tunis, a former SS man who claimed to have been forced into the organization because he spoke Polish. In Litzmannstadt, this man witnessed the gruesome sight of seventeen thousand Jewish people stripped naked and "butchered… men, women, children, without any scruple," and shoved into a mass grave. According to the sergeant, "the things he saw… really unhinged his mind, for he used to run round the huts in the Tunis camp at night and shriek aloud." The screaming of victims was "always ringing in his ears - He's half insane with it now!" [5] *Generalmajor* Walther Krause, captured in Tunisia in May 1943, spoke of hearing about a massacre in Greece, where "villages were immediately razed to the ground and everybody men,

[4] Carlo Gentile, "Politische Soldaten. Die 16. SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Division „Reichsführer-SS" in Italien 1944," accessed May 23, 2020, https://www.academia.edu/711149/Politische_Soldaten._Die_16._SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Division_Reichsf%C3%BChrer-SS_in_Italien_1944.
[5] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 55 (G), August 24, 1943, p. 2.

women and children were herded together and slaughtered."[6] Such conversations were not unusual, and on occasion included first-hand accounts from the Balkans, Greece, or Russia.[7] Knowledge of such horrors was widespread.

Unfortunately, no analogous body of source materials exists for British soldiers who fought in North Africa. As a consequence, my conclusions about violent radicalization and British warfare's trend toward "totality" in the region are necessarily tentative. Outside the period of the Afrika Korps' rapid advances, and when British supply lines were overstretched, the British position in North Africa was generally far less tenuous than the Germans'. German soldiers were chronically short of basic supplies and war material, and above all, fuel, particularly by the end of 1942.[8] While British forces struggled with shortages as well, most notably in combat during the spring and summer of 1941, after Churchill redeployed significant North African forces to elsewhere in the Mediterranean, the British government was able to directly exploit the productive capacities of entire continents in an enormous colonial empire mobilizing for the war effort.[9] While cut-off from much of the European economy, Britain maintained access to the long-distance trade and the world market. Britain's position was so secure that much of British leadership remained convinced of the Empire's ability to defeat Germany on its own until the humiliating defeat at Singapore shattered Britain's position in Asia.[10] At the same time, there is considerable evidence suggestive of British soldiers' own brutalization and the radicalization of "total war," complicating any notions of a German

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[6] TNA: WO 208/4167, S.R.G.G. No. 739, January 1, 1944.
[7] For example: the Balkans in TNA: WO 208/4179, G.R.I.G. 44, Report on a conversation between Capitano Colombo and a British Army Officer, July 3, 1943; Russia in WO 208/5508, Special Report CS.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 62 (G), September 13, 1943, p. 2.
[8] Martin Kitchen, *Rommel's Desert War: Waging World War II in North Africa, 1941-1943* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 401.
[9] Robin Neillands, *Eighth Army: From the Western Desert to the Alps, 1939-1945* (London: John Murray, 2004), 45.
[10] David Edgerton, *Britain's War Machine: Weapons, Resources, and Experts in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 76.

Sonderweg in the North Africa Campaign. Some evidence in this vein appears in conversations between German prisoners of war discussing possible British executions and rumors of Allied cruelty. Other pieces of evidence come from soldiers' journals, published sources, surviving German records, and finally, from British war-trials across the region. Taken together, these sources, while not conclusive, are suggestive of disorder, violence, and chaos on the British side as well.

Environment, Expectations, and Shortages

After the Second World War, the discourse of a "desert war" came to signify a common enemy shared by both Axis and Allied forces, an empty setting for a sanitized conflict between "civilized" opponents rather than mortal enemies, often with the desert itself situated as a common foe. The discourse of a "desert war" emerged in conversation with longstanding European conceptions of the desert, intertwined with imperial forms of knowledge and power imposed on North Africa by European imperialism. Long before the Afrika Korps arrived in the region, European colonialists had come to accept the idea of the "desert" as signifying profoundly "foreign," lands, places that were "exotic, fantastic, or 'abnormal'" in the ways that they diverged from the European norm.[11] Formulating the desert as a natural environment that was "barren" and "inhospitable,"[12] one in many cases determined to have been made so by the ignorance or destructiveness of the people who lived there, helped to enable the expropriation of indigenous land for European settler-colonialism.[13] The postwar discourse of the Second World

[11] Diana K Davis and Edmund Burke, eds., *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011), 3.
[12] Diana K. Davis, *The Arid Lands: History, Power, Knowledge*, Kindle Edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), chap. 1.
[13] Davis and Burke, *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*; Davis, *The Arid Lands*.

War in North Africa built on this "environmental orientalism"[14] in situating the "desert" itself as a non-European enemy, an opposing force displacing both the war's participants and its victims. After the war, the discourse of the desert's "emptiness" masked the experience of battles with a destructive intensity that provoked comparisons to the Eastern Front and to the First World War.

George Steinmetz has provided an invaluable framework for understanding the ways precolonial categories and discourses interfaced with later colonial policies. Rejecting an unbroken line from accounts by European explorers and missionaries to resultant colonial governance ("the devil's handwriting hypothesis,"[15] which Steinmetz attributed to Said), Steinmetz detailed how precolonial representations and ethnographic writing, conflict and competition between colonial elites, and the behavior of colonial subjects, helped determine the heterogenous trajectories of German colonial policies in the Wilhelmine era. These outcomes diverged greatly, ranging from a form of paternalism in Samoa to genocide against the Ovaherero in Southwest Africa. The elements that shaped colonial policy included "cross-cultural identification,"[16] whereby German colonizers identified with the "imago" of the colonial subject, an image built from elements in the "ethnographic reservoir" of precolonial writings, and "indigenous realities," such as colonial "subjects resisting or actively coauthoring European ethnographic representations."[17] In this way, colonial policy may be seen as "dialogic," with European and indigenous actors responding to one another. In the case of the Afrika Korps in North Africa, pre-war environmental, scientific, and ethnographic discourses shaped German

[14] Gísli Pálsson, "Human-Environmental Relations: Orientalism, Paternalism and Communalism," in *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Philippe Descola (London: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004), 66.
[15] George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 25.
[16] Ibid., xviii.
[17] Ibid., xix.

expectations for the place, and set the stage for German encounters with its indigenous population.

Older discourses on the "desert" and its "emptiness" formed part of the discursive "reservoir"[18] of knowledge and expectations that Europeans brought to the North African battlefield. During the Second World War, the desert's "emptiness" came not only to hide the violence of combat between European imperial powers, but also violence against North Africa's indigenous inhabitants in total war, much as it did in inter-war Iraq.[19] Diana Davis and Priya Satia have argued that the discourse of the "desert" as an inhospitable, "harsh," and "rugged" and "empty" place fostered, obscured, and legitimized violence against colonial subjects in North Africa and the Middle East. Satia demonstrated the centrality of this desert discourse to British repression in Iraq following the First World War, and in subjecting Iraqis to murderous aerial bombardment. The supposed alienness and emptiness of the "desert" helped to British imperialists to discursively and legally segregate the region and its inhabitants in "'a state of exception' that allowed excessive brutality."[20] Non-Europeans under colonial domination have long been the targets of such exceptional violence in the colonial laboratory for "total war." Indeed, Manfred May, Trutz von Trotha, and Jürgen Zimmerer traced the origins of total war to colonial warfare.[21] Satia has argued that environmental discourses of the desert specifically

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[18] Ibid., xviii.
[19] Priya Satia, "'A Rebellion of Technology'/ Development, Policing, and the British Arabian Imaginary," in *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Diana K Davis and Edmund Burke (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011).
[20] Davis, *The Arid Lands*, chap. 4; Satia, "'A Rebellion of Technology'/ Development, Policing, and the British Arabian Imaginary."
[21] Manfred F May, "Was the Philippine-American War a 'Total War'?," in *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914*, ed. Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Manfred F. Boemeke (Washington, D.C; Cambridge, U.K.; New York: German Historical Institute ; Cambridge University Press, 1999); Trutz von Trotha, "The African Colonies of Imperial Germany," in *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914*, ed. Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Manfred F. Boemeke (Washington, D.C; Cambridge, U.K.; New York: German Historical Institute ; Cambridge University Press, 1999); Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller, *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika: der Kolonialkrieg (1904-1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2003).

enabled "departure from universalist principles of law and humanity for exceptional technologies and rules."[22] I argue therefore that the colonial discourses surrounding the North African "desert" made warfare approaching "totality" more rather than less likely. This chapter identifies considerable evidence that the Second Word War in North Africa may have also served as a similar "state of exception" where established laws of warfare did not apply. The records discussed in this chapter, including Allied surveillance protocols, show that North Africans were the targets of murder and destruction.

In observed and transcribed wartime conversations, German soldiers spoke of fighting a "desert war" and engaging in "desert warfare," of combat distinguished by the natural environment in which it was waged.[23] However, wartime discourses of "the desert" and "desert warfare" differed from the narratives that came to predominate in subsequent years in the following respects: the arena in which combat was waged was rarely understood to be "empty," and the perceived harshness of the desert environment contributed to the war's totality rather than forming an exception from it. At the same time, the environmental discourse surrounding the German "desert war" in North Africa greatly resembled those associated with the total war on the Eastern Front.[24] The wartime discourse of a harsh and brutal "desert" battleground reveals that the extraordinary difficulties faced by German forces waging combat in North Africa, like in Eastern Europe, made the warfare there more brutal, desperate, and chaotic. Enormous logistical and supply challenges, unfamiliar temperatures and diseases, and conditions experienced and understood as extraordinarily harsh eroded military morale and discipline. At the same time,

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[22] Satia, "'A Rebellion of Technology'/ Development, Policing, and the British Arabian Imaginary," 43.
[23] TNA: WO 208/4136, S.R.M. 74, November 20, 1942.
[24] Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Bernd Greiner, eds., *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1945* (Washington D.C.; Cambridge: German Historical Institutes; Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Orientalist and colonial environmental imaginaries conceptualizing North Africa as a profoundly foreign and alien space, a "state of exception," meant soldiers felt less inhibited by behavioral strictures they might have held to closer to home.[25] All the while, the desert was, of course, never a blank canvas. The people and places of the North African that so frequently receded or disappeared in post-war representation loomed large in captured soldiers' conversations and military records.

The environmental conditions of the war in North Africa resembled those of the Eastern Front, the archetypical total war, in two key respects, one discursive, and the other practical: it was permeated by a discourse of "emptiness," while combat over vast distances produced enormous logistical challenges. Both of these proved conducive to total war. Much like North Africa, the expanses of Eastern Europe that the Nazis hoped to conquer and colonize were imagined to be "empty," notions with deep roots in German thought. Kristin Kopp observed that Gustav Freytag's 1855 novel *Soll und Haben* depicted Poland as a "vast, barren, 'wasteland'" marked by "unvaried endlessness."[26] During the First World War, "soldiers and administrators alike spoke of 'Russian conditions,' of a landscape of emptiness."[27] Nazi plans for the eastern Europe colonial settlement of these supposedly "empty" spaces. For instance, in August 1940, Josef Goebbels commented on an August 1940 meeting on Himmler's resettlement project: "we have to settle the empty spaces of the east," a notion voiced in Hitler's commentary on the region, as well as works such as *Raum und Rasse*. In this vision, "the indigenous inhabitants were… rendered invisible," akin to the United States' colonization of the North American

[25] Davis, *The Arid Lands*, chap. 4; Satia, "'A Rebellion of Technology'/ Development, Policing, and the British Arabian Imaginary."
[26] Robert L. Nelson, *Germans, Poland, and Colonial Expansion to the East: 1850 through the Present* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 22.
[27] Ibid., 126.

continent.[28] A sense of coloniality shared by Eastern Europe and North Africa was apparent to some Germans at the time. Hans Frank, Governor General of General Government Poland, initially saw German occupation of Poland as analogous to the "protectorate" of Tunisia.[29]

Much like North Africa, the Eastern Front saw the German military strangled by logistical and environmental challenges. The vast distances of the German advances of 1941 and 1942 in Operation Barbarossa were logistically unsustainable, covered huge distances and experienced extraordinarily poor conditions.[30] Omer Bartov has argued that the enormous spaces of the Eastern Front and the physical hardships German soldiers endured, combined with Nazi ideology, were conducive to the "barbarization of warfare on the Eastern Front."[31] Bartov argued that on the Eastern Front, "the brutality of the fighting itself" and "the harsh living conditions at the front" were key factors contributing to the war's totalization. The unfamiliar and deadly environment, in that case most notoriously the harsh Russian winter, vast Eurasian steppe and northern forests, features frequently in experiential narratives of the front.[32] David Stahel has argued that these challenges faced by German army in the east resulted in "radicalization in tactical methods and strategic choices." Tactical radicalization "manifested itself in the increasingly arduous experience of warfare as dangerous material shortages, unceasing operational demands, and unprecedented losses overwhelmed units."[33] Harsh conditions thus contributed to the totalization of operational warfare in the east.

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[28] Ibid., 159.
[29] Ibid., 169; see also David Furber, "Near as Far in the Colonies: The Nazi Occupation of Poland," *The International History Review* 26, no. 3 (2004): 541–79.
[30] For example, Geoffrey P. Megargee, *War of Annihilation: Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front, 1941* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).
[31] Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941-45: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare*, Second Edition (Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, in association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2001), 106.
[32] Christina Morina, *Legacies of Stalingrad: Remembering the Eastern Front in Germany since 1945* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[33] Alex J. Kay, Jeff Rutherford, and David Stahel, eds., *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 19.

Wehrmacht records indicate that German military authorities recognized environmental similarities between the vast open spaces and unfamiliar climates of North Africa and the steppe regions contested on the Eastern Front. The *"*Handbook for the War in Desert and Steppe," dated December 11, 1942 and distributed by the Wehrmacht High Command, is addressed to soldiers fighting in both regions.[34] According to the book, deserts were "spatially vast, completely barren areas" marked by low rainfall, little plant-life and largely unpopulated, divided into a number of different typologies, such as "sand desert" or "stone desert," and specifically identified with "North Africa and the Near East." [35] Steppe regions also saw little rainfall, though a rainy season made them "relatively lush" compared to deserts. In the summer, the steppe climate of southern Russia, for example, resembled the desert, while winter "resembled European or, as the case may be, Russian conditions."[36] The guide concluded "Only motorized troops, especially tank troops, are suitable for war of movement in the desert," while in steppe areas with sufficient water supplies, non-motorized troops might also be appropriate.[37] Warfare in arid "Mohammedan lands" required "special consideration to Mohammedans' sensitivity in religious matters," such as maintaining a respectful distance from Muslim women, as well as care for dealing with the sand and dust that could impede motorized equipment.[38]

With these distinctions acknowledged, the handbook recommended a wide array of nearly identical lessons, training, and equipment for soldiers fighting in the desert and the steppe. In both regions, soldiers needed to prepare for combat over large distances, firing at enemies at long range, and required provisioning with heavy weapons.[39] They needed to be prepared to fight

[34] BArch, RH 2/3641
[35] BArch, RH 2/3641, "Taschenbuch für den Krieg in Wüste und Steppe von 11.12.42", December 11, 1942, p. 7.
[36] Ibid., 11.
[37] Ibid., 12-13.
[38] Ibid., 14-15.
[39] Ibid., 12-13.

in small, loose combat groups, spread out over great distances, and trained to act independently. Soldiers fighting in both the desert and steppe were particularly exposed to aerial attack, surprise attacks by forward motorized enemy forces, and ambushes by enemies descending by parachute.[40] The book also made lengthy recommendations for keeping soldiers safe and maintaining fighting efficiency in both the desert and steppe. These included guidelines for soldiers on the march,[41] when attacking and defending,[42] camping and accommodations,[43] camouflage,[44] hygiene,[45] maintaining equipment, and measures to stave off disease. Similarities between the two environments were apparent to German soldiers in the field. Claus Hausmann, for instance, observed motorized soldiers pushing onward "as if in a sandstorm," as dust and dirt flew into the air when Germans advanced in the summer of 1941.[46]

A portion of the German environmental discourse lends credence to the narrative of struggle against the "empty" desert. The harsh climate demanded a certain "suitability of character," since fighting entailed "combat not only with the opponent, but also the rigors of the land and the climate."[47] Most importantly, both the steppe and desert necessitated particular attention to cardinal directions and "finding one's way."[48] The desert is an "almost pathless space in which there are often no landmarks," making them easy places to become lost both at night and during the day. Becoming lost in a desert or "waterless steppe means certain death."[49]

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[40] Ibid., 22-23.
[41] Ibid., 30-31.
[42] Ibid., 34-35.
[43] Ibid., 38-39.
[44] Ibid., 42-43.
[45] Ibid., 44-45.
[46] David Stahel, "Radicalizing Warfare: The German Command and the Failure of Operation Barbarossa," in *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941*, ed. Alex J. Kay, Jeff Rutherford, and David Stahel (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 28.
[47] "charakterliche Eignung" in BArch, RH 2/3641, "Taschenbuch für den Krieg in Wüste und Steppe von 11.12.42", December 11, 1942, p. 12-13.
[48] BArch, RH 2/3641, "Taschenbuch für den Krieg in Wüste und Steppe von 11.12.42", December 11, 1942, p. 14-15.
[49] Ibid.

Troops therefore required maps, compasses, aerial photographs, and most importantly, "complete mastery of the stars" to aid in navigation. The need for astronomical navigation was a key experiential lesson from both regions, and the guide devoted considerable attention to instructing its practice. "Experiences of Fighting in Desert and Steppe," a paper dated January 3, 1943, summarized many of these guidelines, and the undated "Leaflet for Navigation in the Desert" went into methods of astronomical navigation in further detail.[50]

One consequence of the discourse of the desert's harshness and emptiness was the widespread, indiscriminate deployment of landmines by both sides, with deadly repercussions to the present day. Starting with the British mining of the Egyptian border in 1940, and continuing through the conclusion of hostilities, British forces planted enormous numbers of mines in the Qattara Depression, the area around El Alamein, and across the North African coastal region where much of the fighting took place. German and Italian forces planted vast quantities of landmines known as "the Devil's Garden," which "were laid in random, clustered-shaped patterns at varying depths such that if one mine is lifted, the other will detonate."[51] The Egyptian government has estimated the existence of approximately 248,000 hectares of minefields in the Western Desert containing 17 million landmines.[52] Between 1945 and 1997, the landmines caused at least 7,611 injuries, many of which required amputations and lengthy hospitalizations, or resulted in terrible psychological trauma, and 690 deaths.[53] These numbers, which come from official Egyptian sources, are very likely to be gross underestimates owing to the challenges of

[50] BArch, RL 32/135, "Erfahrungen über Kampf in Wüste und Steppe", 3. Jan. 1943.
[51] Mohamed Kadry Said, "Landmines from External Powers in World War II at El-Alamein in Egypt," in *Security and Environment in the Mediterranean: Conceptualising Security and Environmental Conflicts*, ed. Hans Günter Brauch et al., Hexagon Series on Human and Environmental Security and Peace (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 2003), 513, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-55854-2_32.
[52] Ibid., 514.
[53] Ibid., 516.

data collection. The region's Bedouin inhabitants, "invisible" and morally negligible to the European powers, have ultimately constituted the bulk of the landmines' victims.

In conversations transcribed during British captivity, many German soldiers emphasized the hardship of their experiences of the North African environment. Some Germans were shocked by the contrast between their own expectations, what they had been prepared to expect in their training, and the reality they encountered. General Wilhelm Ritter von Thoma, captured in May 1942, recalled a conversation with an Austrian captain new to Africa that month, describing his shock at the harsh conditions. The Austrian "had thought it would be quite different. He had imagined palms and Arab girls serving coffee… but he found sand-fleas."[54] In general, discussions about the environment focused on the "emptiness" and distance, heat, disease, and vulnerability, concerns which were in some cases interlinked. Thoma claimed that in North Africa, "there were so many people ill with that damned jaundice; they had no vitality and that affected all the troops."[55] Things "were very much better" in Russia. In another conversation, Thoma bemoaned the "enormously long lines of communication" and "that horrible desert… it nearly drove us mad."[56] In yet another moment, he referred to "this damned desert, the 600 km stretch to Tripoli, where there is absolutely nothing."[57]

Related examples appear throughout the protocols. A Luftwaffe major captured in October 1942 complained how in Africa, "[t]his ghastly heat makes everything unbearable… It was awful."[58] An infantry lieutenant captured near Alamein in October 1942 spoke of suffering from diseases brought on by the environment. When one had sand-fly fever, "your head, stomach

[54] TNA: WO 208/4136, S.R.M. 73, p. 2.
[55] TNA: WO 208/4136, S.R.M. 115, November 24, 1942, p. 2.
[56] TNA: WO 208/4136, S.R.M. 73, November 20, 1942, p. 2.
[57] TNA: WO 208/4136, S.R.M. 146, December 5, 1942.
[58] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 608 (G), November 3, 1942, p. 4.

and legs all ache, and you run a high temperature. Our men only had one blanket each. We had no quinine, and we had a lot of cases of malaria. We had injections against typhoid." Despite precautions, he claimed "[e]very fourth, or fifth man got jaundice."[59] Sergeant Erlmeier, a telephonist captured in Tunisia in May 1943, recalled learning that in North Africa, the air itself was toxic: "The African air is so bad for sunbathing because it contains far too little oxygen. The people who sunbathed in spite of all warnings were taken ill with dreadful digestive troubles."[60]

The harshness of the desert environment led some soldiers to imagine it served as a test of manhood, or an opportunity to prove their masculinity. A lieutenant/corporal captured in March 1942 near El Aleima discussed a Captain Rothschul, who told other officers, "You needn't think yourselves superior to me in your experience, I'm a hundred times your superior. Wait until I've been in the desert just two weeks, and I shall know all about everything."[61] In a conversation dated November 1942, Thoma spoke of scolding a commander who was bragging about his Party loyalty medal in such terms. "I told him: 'A few weeks in the desert will show you exactly how much that [Party gold medal] is worth out here.'"[62]

However, rather than moderating or abating the intensity of North African warfare, desperate conditions accentuated the struggle against the enemy. Instead of becoming an enemy in and of itself, or simply transforming into war against the desert, the environmental challenges intensified existential combat with the enemy, making it all the more fierce and brutal. In a conversation with General Ludwig Crüwell, captured in May 1942, Thoma described the artillery barrages faced by soldiers in North Africa as "the sort of thing you used to get in the last war." Crüwell claimed that "in the desert it's far worse" to face such attacks because of the lack of

[59] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 612 (G).
[60] TNA: WO 208/4163, S.R.X. 1818, July 2, 1943.
[61] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report, C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 481 (G), May 4, 1942.
[62] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report, C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 623 (G), November 19, 1942.

cover; the desert made soldiers exposed and vulnerable.[63] As predicted by the "Handbook for the War in Desert and Steppe," soldiers reported that the flatness and openness of much of the North African combat region created challenges when facing enemy forces and enabled easy flanking maneuvers. Thoma argued they should "let the English have this miserable desert."[64] A lieutenant in a reconnaissance unit captured in December 1941 remembered being warned "to always be on your guard in the desert," meaning enemy forces could appear unexpectedly from any direction.[65]

Similar perspectives appear throughout the protocols. An infantry captain captured at El Alamein in October 1942 argued that "the desert has caused an entirely new situation. The men get boils and abscesses through having no drinking water." All of the men there were suffering from disease. They ate poor quality food and faced diseases such as malaria, jaundice, sand-fly fever, and typhoid. The captain's main concern, however, was the shoddy equipment received from Germany and his army's material inferiority versus the British: "Whole companies of ours are wiped out, positions broken up. The men responsible should be court martialed." [66]

An infantry lieutenant captured in October 1942 near El Alamein regaled a fellow captive with a litany of complaints about his time in North Africa that similarly blended material, military, and environmental obstacles: "What we've been through recently has been terrible. We arrived in July. Uninterrupted artillery fire, bombs, flies, dysentery… The food was bad and unappetizing… Two weeks ago there was an outbreak of typhoid… we haven't enough equipment."[67]

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[63] TNA: WO 208/4136, S.R.M. 74, November 20, 1942, p. 2.
[64] TNA: WO 208/4136, S.R.M. 92, November 20, 1942.
[65] TNA: WO 208/5518, M.E.S.P. 13, December 16, 1941, p. 3.
[66] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report, C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 608 (G), November 3, 1942, p. 3.
[67] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report, C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 611 (G), November 8, 1942.

Poor Material Conditions and Low Morale

In transcribed German conversations, the most pervasive challenge created by warfare in the North African environment resulted from the logistical and supply problems the desert created. These logistical problems resulted in privations, shortages, and ultimately, greater violence, disorder, and chaos. The recurring theme in North African protocols is of poor discipline and general misery. For example, in a conversation dated November 1942, an infantry captain captured at El Alamein spoke of hunger and material shortfalls: "At one time we weren't able to wash for a fortnight." Another officer agreed, "They sent me to the desert without any proper clothes. My unit was known as the stepchild of the German army."[68]

Soldiers reported that these shortages hurt discipline and morale, and made extraordinary violence increasingly necessary to hold the army together. One Wehrmacht lieutenant told that "[t]he equipment of the Afrika Korps was miserable… the rations in Africa are shocking." Discipline was so poor that "two hundred and forty loaves and forty slabs of chocolate" were stolen; "the bastard who did it shot himself."[69] In a January 1942 protocol, Major-General Artur Schmitt indicated that provisions were so scarce that he gave orders that "any of our men caught stealing would be shot."[70] In this case, logistical shortfalls and supply challenges were directly linked to violence: Schmitt continued to face chronic difficulties with both water supply and discipline in the Bardia region in particular.[71]

In March 1943, a lance corporal captured in North Africa in January of that year argued that Afrika Korps morale was particularly low because officers were taking "the best for

[68] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 608 (G), November 3, 1943.
[69] TNA: WO 208/5507, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. MU/3/4 (G) (363 (G)).
[70] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 397, January 1, 1942.
[71] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 399, January 8, 1942.

themselves." This petty corruption trickled down the ranks: "After a little while, the sergeants began doing the same, and then the corporals did so too. And if a private plucked up enough courage to speak about it, he soon disappeared." Discipline was reportedly maintained through executions and punishments. Indeed, in his company "alone there were no less than seven men shot."[72] A captain captured in Halfaya in January 1942 similarly discussed the execution of deserters in the Bardia region, claiming "they had stolen food. It was a very serious matter… I was president. There were six death sentences. Everyone in Halfaya had to sign the order… The first case was a very bitter one, he had stolen jam from a comrade."[73]

Miserable and unfamiliar environmental conditions and suspected corruption drove conflict and suspicion between German and Italian forces, helping to erode barriers to and generalize violence. According to a 2nd Lieutenant captured in March 1942, the "[t]he first thing that Rommel did when he took over the command in Africa was to have ten Italian officers shot for treachery."[74] In another example, a captured Wehrmacht lieutenant reported how Italians soldiers were brought in "under suspicion" and shot.[75]

In other cases, more disorganized violence erupted between the German and Italian allies. For instance, a Luftwaffe lieutenant captured in Tunisia in May 1943 recounted a story of a shooting match between German and Italian officers in a Tunis Brothel.[76] A lieutenant/corporal captured near Agedabia in January 1942 recounted an incident where Italian soldiers fired on German positions. In response "we fired back. What a fuss there was then! We had fifteen to twenty men killed and twenty wounded. The wounded ran across the desert like mad dogs. We

[72] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. No. 703 (G), March 7, 1943.
[73] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 440, February 13, 1942, p. 2-3.
[74] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 479 (G), April 3, 1942.
[75] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 606 (G), October 31, 1942, p. 3.
[76] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 2 (G), May 30, 1943, p. 6.

had to chase after them and bundle then into the lorry."[77] As a consequence "the company… got to such a state of nerves that the men yelled at each other over the most trivial matters."

Decline in discipline was frequently linked to poor material conditions. Speaking of North Africa, a lieutenant captured in Greece in March 1942 reported "our food was appalling. The men's shirts were in ribbons, their shoes and socks full of holes, and they went for months and months without any leave."[78] According to a corporal in an air news unit captured in Bardia in January 1942, "I've had some sad experiences here in Africa. Defeat after defeat, losses and death the whole time. It was ghastly. Towards the end we had to steal to get anything to eat."[79] An anti-aircraft lieutenant captured in Halfaya that month spoke similarly of a "terrible period of starvation in Halfaya. The last days were really ghastly. We had received nothing at all, not even by air."[80] He preferred captivity where there were "no dirt, no rats, no lice and no deserters to worry about." Life in the Oases Company was especially difficult: "with us, they had 18 deserters. The way the men used to run away!" [81]

A corporal captured at El Aleima in March 1942 complained of "very low" morale: "You can't imagine what [it's] like - for six whole weeks we never got a drop of fresh water, we couldn't wash and we never had the clothes off our bodies." They also suffered from lice. High casualties, of course, took their toll too: "in my company, three company commanders have already been killed. Out of two hundred men, there were only forty left." The corporal talked about how "Leutnant Klinke went forward and was hit. He lay there in front of the position with a shot in the back."[82]

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[77] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 458 (G), March 10, 1942, p. 2.
[78] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 479 (G), April 3, 1942.
[79] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 430, February 1, 1942, p. 2.
[80] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 434, February 5, 1942, p. 2.
[81] Ibid., 3.
[82] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No.485 (G), April 10, 1942.

Shortages in North Africa were not limited to war materials. Efforts to address German manpower shortfalls further eroded morale and military discipline, making the war more chaotic and violent. These efforts included Waffen S.S. foreign legionaries, as well as division of ex-convicts dispatched to North Africa under the heading Division 999. Addressing looming manpower shortages, Hitler had ordered the formation of a new penal brigade in January 1942 consisting of individuals who had previously been evaluated as inappropriate for military service: criminals, many of whom were imprisoned on explicitly political grounds.[83] Those selected for the new brigade were German men serving sentences for terms of up nine years, as well as prisoners who possessed in-demand military skills. In training, the men largely fell into three groups: professional soldiers who were often ashamed of serving in a penal battalion, antifascists, and those deemed to be a "true criminal element."[84] The brigade was unavailable for Stalingrad, though a small battalion was dispatched to the Eastern Front, where it met little success. The brigade was subsequently deployed first to Belgium and France, and then to North Africa as "African Division 999" in early 1943, with Rommel advised that "those specific troops… could be sacrificed to gain time."[85] A large proportion of these soldiers surrendered as soon as the opportunity arose or were captured when the Afrika Korps surrendered in May 1943. A remainder of these soldiers was redeployed to Greece, where they were engaged in anti-partisan operations, and on some occasions deserted to join partisan groups.[86]

[83] Charles Burdick, "Prisoners as Soldiers: The German 999th Penal Division," *Army Quarterly and Defense Journal* 102 (1971): 65–69.
[84] Ibid., 67.
[85] Ibid., 68.
[86] Robert Niebuhr, "Between Victors and Vanquished: Wehrmacht Prisoners of War in Yugoslavia," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 29, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 139–59, https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2016.1129880; Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941-44* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 200.

According to a Wehrmacht officer captured in Tunisia in May 1943, Division 999 "had some terrible characters among them; you have no idea the trouble there was, the devilment that went on – unbelievable."[87] The soldiers received a form of amnesty, with military service replacing time served in prison. One private captured in Italy in 1943 appears to have encountered this unit or one similar on its way to North Africa via Southern France: "It was a very queer outfit, some former foreign legionaries there too. One man had strangled a woman, and another had raped Jewish women in Poland, and there were others there who were just common thieves."[88]

Lieutenant Wessels, an interpreter captured in Tunisia in May 1943 complained that "[t]hey sent us men to Africa who couldn't speak any German… That was the sort of rabble they sent us in Africa – the criminal division and so on… Look at the 999th, they're all criminals." He believed "[t]hey have emptied the prisons and reformatories in Germany. The concentration camps have been emptied out..." Wessels argued that these people should have been employed in labor elsewhere, rather than sent to the front, "where they make trouble."[89]

A lieutenant from the Panzerjäger Division captured near El Duda in December 1941 made a similar complaint: "We've got a battalion of criminals in Halfaya – what a mob they are!" In an Allied attack on Tobruk, many surrendered readily and were consequently "set free straight away and used by the English in the attack. They mingled with our men and caused utter confusion." He believed that 80% of the division was killed or captured.[90] According to an artillery lieutenant captured at El Harouria in May 1943, discipline was very much on the

[87] TNA: WO 208/5507, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. North Africa MU/3/13 (GG) (387 (GG)), May 17, 1943, p. 3.
[88] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 74 (G) (518 (G)), October 22, 1942.
[89] TNA: WO 208/4137, C.S.D.I.C. (U.K.) S. R. Report: S.R.M. 253, October 19, 1943.
[90] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 379, December 24, 1942, p. 3.

decline: “Discipline has fallen off our troops these days… nobody salutes these days, only sergeants or CSMs. That Hermann Goering Division was” particularly bad.[91]

The Inhabitants of North Africa: Uncertainty and Expectations

The violence, chaos, and disorder Germans that experienced in North Africa influenced their behavior toward North Africans themselves, despite the fact that the region’s inhabitants were a central German political concern. Efforts to garner sympathy with the North Africa’s population and their political leadership, and to ultimately exploit anti-British sentiment and undermine the British Empire, were a fundamental component of the German war effort in the region. German forces organized aggressive diplomacy, espionage, and covert operations, as well as propaganda efforts aimed at building sympathy in the “Arab world.” Among other efforts, the handbook *Der Islam*, issued by the Wehrmacht high command in 1941, aimed at smooth relations between German soldiers and local Muslims.[92] In the pages of *Die Oase*, the Afrika Korps newspaper, Arab inhabitants of North Africa and the Middle East were frequently portrayed in what the authors likely believed to be a sympathetic light, often as potential allies and freedom fighters against British oppression.[93] These materials constituted part of the Afrika Korps’ “ethnographic reservoir,” and provided key buildings blocks for Germans’ interpretation of the North African colonial encounter.[94] Adapting Homi Bhabha’s concepts of colonial “mimicry” and “ambivalence,” Steinmetz argued that colonial subjects behavior was pragmatic and dynamic, characterized by mobility and change, alternating “fluidly between indigenous and

[91] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 18 (G) (497 (G)), June 23, 1943.
[92] Addressed in David Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany’s War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 123.; BArch, RW 6/696, Oberfeldarzt Prof. Dr. Ernst Rodenwaldt, *Der Islam* (Tornisterschrift des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht Abt. Inland, Heft 52, 1941).
[93] For example: BArch, RH 24-200/127, Nahas Pascha, “Wir Aegypter und England,” *Die Oase*, Folge 92, 1. Oktober 1942, p. 1.
[94] Steinmetz, *The Devil’s Handwriting*, xix.

European cultural codes," defying and challenging European expectations. In European eyes, this made non-Europeans appear "threateningly ambiguous," frequently provoking complaints about duplicity, deception, and secrecy.[95] Perceptions of North Africans' ambiguity, combined with difficult conditions, material and manpower shortages, and consequent low morale, contributed to violence against civilians, as German soldiers attempted to impose order and stability on fluid meaning.[96]

Concern over "Arab" or "Muslim opinion" and sympathies dominated captured Germans' discussions of the region's inhabitants, reflecting hopes that Muslims in North Africa or even worldwide would rise in rebellion against the British Empire. Perceptions of a broader "Arab opinion" varied wildly, with Germans reacting with hope to signals of North Africans' allegiances. Observing what have been an example of colonial "mimicry," one senior German officer captured in Tunisia in May 1943 claimed that "[i]n Tunis the population used to shout 'heil Hitler' and give the Fascist solute whenever they saw a German officer or a swastika flag. Especially the Arabs."[97] A corporal captured that month recalled, "I spoke to the Sheikh of Djerba once, and he said that ninety-nine percent of the Arabs were against the Allies, except for a few."[98] A pilot captured near Ben Gardan in February 1943 similarly claimed that there, "the Arabs are in sympathy with the German soldiers. When I went to Tunis we got on to friendly terms with the Arabs."[99]

Indigenous leadership was seen as particularly important, though duplicitous and untrustworthy. General Hans-Jürgen von Arnim, captured in Tunisia in May 1943, spoke of his

[95] Ibid., 42; Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28 (1984): 125–33, https://doi.org/10.2307/778467.
[96] Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting*, 41.
[97] TNA: WO 208/5507, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. North Africa MU/3/11 (GG) (375 (GG)), May 15, 1943.
[98] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 30 (G) (430 (G)), July 12, 1943, p. 2.
[99] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 709 (G), March 16, 1943, p. 2.

encounters with Habib Bourguiba, a future leader of Tunisia, as someone who "was falling between four stools, not two stools," meaning between the Italians, the French, the Germans, and the British. Bourguiba, whom Arnim went so far as to visit at "a big Mohammedan festival," was described as "national communist, not a national socialist."[100] Relationships with local leaders were understood as crucial for maintaining access to local materials and maintaining order, and Von Arnim claimed to have "made use of" Bourguiba "in a good many matters in order to bring pressure to bear on the Arab population." The example he provided was restoring order once French forces had departed and "the Arabs began robbing their French masters, killing people and so on."[101] In another conversation, Von Arnim recalled the utility of leadership when Tunis faced supply shortages because locals had stopped bringing goods to the market: "We had to get the Bey to induce the Arabs to bring their goods again, otherwise an epidemic would have broken out in Tunis, if the people had starved."[102]

Consequently, attempts were made to constrain military violence out of concern over "Arab opinion." A Luftwaffe corporal captured near Alexandria in March 1942 boasted "We could have bombed Cairo ages ago, that presents no difficulties, but by doing so we should lose the sympathy of the Arabs, and that is a consideration."[103] Indeed, another pilot captured near Amariya in September 1942 claimed to have "received orders that anyone who dropped bombs on Cairo would be shot."[104]

Responding to indigenous North Africans' pragmatic behavioral fluidity and ambiguous allegiances, as well as official political and racial interests, motivated German efforts to maintain

[100] TNA: WO 208/4165, S.R.G.G. 27, May 12, 1943, p. 3.
[101] Ibid., 4.
[102] TNA: WO 208/4167, C.S.D.I.C. (U.K.) S.R.G.G. 546, November 8, 1943.
[103] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 463 (G), March 15, 1942.
[104] TNA: WO 208 5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 696 (G), October 15, 1942, p. 2.

physical distance between from North Africans. In a conversation dated January 1942, Schmitt claimed "[t]here was a very good relationship between our troops and the Arabs, but it wasn't encouraged, because the women used to disappear into the tents." appear to have led Schmitt to suspect that the Arab interpreters were "probably spies."[105] An Italian intelligence officer captured in December 1941 complained that the locals "are more against us than against the English. Why, they even fired on our troops!" Beyond his disgust at all of "'the Arab should be respected and well treated'… Madness," the officer was particularly appalled by Italian soldiers' lackadaisical attitude toward Arabs: "We can't treat the Arabs as equals." He contrasted the Italians, who needed to send soldiers who "know how to keep their distance in the colonies, in other words, soldiers who don't go and mix with the Arabs" with "[t]he Germans [who] on the other hand come here properly instructed on how to behave in the colonies."[106]

At the same time, endemic material shortages and desperation could lead to the breakdown of the racial boundaries that were foundational to the Nazi vision of world order. Upon interrogation, Italian captain Colombo, who had been in command of an Arab company, recalled one such instance which occurred over Christmas of 1942. German soldiers were "so hungry that they ate with Colombo's Arabs in their tents, and as Colombo says: one needs courage to eat their food."[107] A German tank officer captured near Agedabia in January of 1942 remembered another one: "We had no water. I went to the Arabs. Such filthy water. One Arab said to me: 'The Germans are good, the Italians are not good.'"[108]

[105] TNA: WO 208/5518, S.R.M.E. 18, Special M.E. Report No. 414, January 17, 1942. p. 2.
[106] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 387, January 1, 1942, p. 3.
[107] TNA: WO 208/4179, G.R.I.G. 50, Report on a conversation between Capitano Colombo and a British Army Officer, July 11, 1943.
[108] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 428, January 29, 1942, p. 4.

German experiences with North Africa's inhabitants and leadership appeared to leave many perplexed, confused, and ambivalent. A senior officer captured in Tunisia in May 1943 recalled "there is not the slightest doubt that the Arabs of Tunisia were on our side… I was talking only recently to the leader of the Arab volunteers: a very decent, honest fellow…" Yet at the same time, he remarked, "It is difficult to know how to deal with Arabs. If you were too lenient, they think you are soft. If you are too harsh, you make martyrs of them. The same with the French and the Poles."[109]

A pilot captured in North Africa in December 1942 remarked "You never knew where you were with the Arabs, if you made a forced landing. One would be well-disposed towards the Germans, another towards the English."[110] Supposed duplicity, double-dealing, and mercenary behavior among North Africa's Arab population and leadership was accepted wisdom. Another Luftwaffe lieutenant captured near Tunis lamented that "the only trouble with us is that Germany hasn't sufficient money to buy the Arabs."[111] In a conversation discussing the use of Arabs as agents or spies, Lieutenant Wessels, who worked as an interpreter for the 21st Panzer Division and was captured in Tunisia in May 1943, explained that, "[m]oney is everything" when it came to working with North African Arabs.[112] On the topic of escape, a pilot captured near El Alamein in the summer of 1942 claimed, "[t]he chief thing is to be able to speak English. And then there are the Arabs – they're easily bribed. We'd certainly get help from the Arabs."[113] A lieutenant captured near Fuka in November 1942 remembered "[t]he Egyptians in Alexandria swore and spat at me. They were quite calm in Cairo. In fact, an Egyptian in the train tapped me on the arm

[109] TNA: WO 208/5507, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. North Africa MU/3/14 (GG) (385 (GG)), May 18, 1943, p. 3.
[110] TNA: WO 208/4162, S.R.X. 1663, December 12, 1942.
[111] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 66 (G), September 21, 1943, p. 3.
[112] TNA: WO 208/4137, C.S.D.I.C. (U.K.) S.R.M. 257, October 20, 1943, p. 2.
[113] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 546, July 14, 1942, p. 2.

and said to me in German: 'German – good!' They're probably like the Arabs in Libya". He predicted, "When Rommel advances again, they'll be yelling Heil Hitler!"[114]

Other Germans expressed dissatisfaction and disappointment with North Africa's population, believing them to be disloyal, duplicitous, dishonest, traitors, or saboteurs. They were resistant to conceding that most of the region's population did not conceive of the war in the same ideological terms as the main combatants. A lieutenant captured in Tunisia in May 1943 complained bitterly about "[t]hose Arabs! Many of those who were put to work behind the front lines did work very well, but they're a pretty awful lot, these wogs! The volunteer regiments were a failure, too."[115] A Luftwaffe captain captured in North Africa in January 1942 claimed, "[t]he Arabs were sabotaging our a/c, so certain Italian artillery men who had been left without guns were put on guard. But instead of guarding the a/c they used to get inside when no one was looking, and eat all the rations they could find in the rubber boats."[116] Upon hearing fanciful plans to escape potential captivity in India, a corporal captured near Derna in December 1942 replied: "We thought the Arabs would help us, and you know the facts about that."[117] Another pilot captured in Greece in September 1943 asserted that "[i]n Africa… the natives have the idea pumped into them – the word 'German' signifies bad. That's all they know about us. Even Italy is better off than we are."[118]

[114] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 630 (G), November 16, 1942, p. 2.
[115] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 1 (G), May 30, 1943, p. 4.
[116] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 443, February 4, 1942, p. 1.
[117] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 653 (G), December 19, 1942, p. 2.
[118] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 797 (G), November 7, 1943, p. 2.

Violence Against North Africans

Despite broader political aims and the top-down focus on building amicable relations with North Africa's Muslim population, it is clear that any efforts to contain violence against North African civilians failed, and violence was no occasional aberration.[119] According to an Italian officer captured in March 1942, some "Arab rebels" were only eager to kill Axis soldiers "because the Germans treated them badly. They want to be revenged, and woe betide you if you fall into their hands. They'll have your skin in a jiffy. They warned us of these Arab rebels."[120] Instances of retaliatory violence appear in the protocols as well. A lieutenant captured near Agedabia in January 1942 recalled how in December 1941 in Benghazi "the Arabs fired at us."[121]

Suspected spies, either identified as such or by their North African garb, were subjected to brutal interrogations and torture. *Generalmajor* Friedrich Freiherr von Broich, captured in Tunisia in May 1943 recalled needing "to have men shot. They were two men who were arrested as spies and active ones at that, according to statements of the inhabitants." The job of execution was "so hateful" that "the adjutant…was running about in circles and was almost crazy because it had got on his nerves so much."[122] A German Heavy Signals Company officer captured at Cape Bon in May 1943 told of an incident where a "spy, dressed as an Arab, was shot at our place." Germans "knocked him about a bit and bound him up," and an hour later "we heard pistol shots which finished him off… [Sergeant] Hantzke played a Czardas on his accordion to

[119] See, for example: Lia Brozgal, "The Ethics and Aesthetics of Restraint: Judeo-Tunisian Narratives of Occupation," in *The Holocaust and North Africa*, ed. Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019); Jens Hoppe, "The Persecution of Jews in Libya Between 1938 and 1945/ An Italian Affair?," in *The Holocaust and North Africa*, ed. Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, 2019.
[120] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 571 (I), March 25, 1942, p. 3.
[121] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 424, January 26, 1942, p. 4.
[122] TNA: WO 208/4167, C.S.D.I.C. (U.K.) S.R.G.G. 739.

drown the victim's whimpering… Thank Heaven, no Arabs were there to see."[123] British and German intelligence reports indicate that Germans executed considerable numbers of Arabs as alleged spies. For instance, on January 20, 1943, the Wehrmacht reported the shooting of one Arab for looting corpses and 5 for spying for the English.[124] In August or 1942, British intelligence reported seeing "sixteen Arabs strung up [in the] last two days for helping [the] British."[125]

Violence against civilians took all forms. A Waffen SS corporal captured in Sicily in August 1943 spoke of committing a massacre in Tunis: "In Tunis we shot twenty-five Communists who just wouldn't understand what they were trying to do was useless. But that was a mere trifle. If they had been strict from the start" he never would have been captured.[126] General Von Arnim discussed the execution of a German soldier in North Africa who had "left his sentry post, and broken into two houses one after the other, and raped the women at pistol point in the presence of their husbands and children." The perpetrator "was shot forty-eight hours later."[127] A German private in captured in Garet El Azida in April 1942 recalled robbing Arab merchants in Benghazi. He claimed he would negotiate from a car, and "[i]f the Arabs asked too much for their stuff, we just took hold of the goods, threw them the price we'd offered… then let out the clutch and made off, I with my pistol levelled at them."[128] A captured *Sonderführer* from the German-Arab Training Battalion recounted an incident when "[w]e had an Arab who told us the exact positions of the British. We shot him afterwards."[129] He noted, "There were a lot of

[123] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 21 (G), June 26, 1943.
[124] BArch RH 26-1020/10, I./Batl. Regt. Barenthim, 2. Kompanie, 24. January 1943.
[125] TNA: WO 208 5588, C.R. No. D.C.(N)27, Escapes – Libya, Minute Sheet No. 3 (Folder II), 27/77/42, approximately August 1942.
[126] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 63 (G), September 13, 1943.
[127] TNA: WO 208/4167, C.S.D.I.C. (U.K.) S.R.G.G. 555, November 12, 1943.
[128] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 498 (G), May 7, 1942.
[129] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 11 (G), June 10, 1943.

Jews in the Corps Franc d'Afrique. We didn't take any of them prisoner." A lieutenant in the Feld Gendarmerie captured in North Africa in May 1943 discussed the casual brutality with which he treated the local population. He "always went about with a long sort of truncheon, with which I lashed about." In one incident, he "came upon three dirty black Arabs standing near the rations lorry. One ran off, but the other two had the check to stay there, and try to make away slowly with the sacks. I gave them something to remember me by."[130]

In a January 1942 conversation with General Johann von Ravenstein, Schmitt recounted meting out punishment against alleged thieves: "We caught seven Arabs stealing things, and they were shot. It had to be done, I couldn't have them locked up or guarded." Ravenstein replied, "That will be spread round the Arab world." Schmitt asserted that he had little choice. He suggested that when necessary, significant dirty work was left to the Italians: "Under certain circumstances it is [necessary]… of course the Italians shoot them. They shot 2,000 Arabs, simply to exterminate them."[131] On the other hand, an Italian Lieutenant Colonel captured near Sidi Rezegh in December 1941 contrasted Italian with German warfare: "We say we are sentimental. Other people say we are fools. But it is the Germans who wage war seriously, with the inevitable shooting of hostages and so on."[132] Yet Italians appeared to have had fewer reservations about the political repercussions of committing colonial atrocities in North Africa. In one gruesome conversation, two Italian sergeants captured at El Alamein in July 1942 discussed how Arabs were known for stealing "quantities of supplies, cheese, flour, etc." One of the Italians remembered how "Once we had to execute ten of them. We made them dig their own

[130] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 747 (G), June 20, 1943.
[131] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 397, January 7, 1942.
[132] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 388, p. 3.

graves first, and then …. A couple of bursts." Another recalled how "Two of our men were killed by the Arabs at El Mekil."[133]

Violence was not contained to murder and execution: looting, plunder, and stealing appear in the protocols as well. Von Arnim described how in Tunisia, a German officer named Schrubbe "commandeered everything there was to be had in the country. He completely ransacked the farms. He took every mule" and provisioning efforts to supply soldiers in the mountains were largely successful.[134]An Italian officer captured in March 1943 west of El Hamma claimed, "The English are a civilized people whilst the Germans are still barbarians – they are still just Huns." He recalled an episode at Mareth, in which German looting was so thorough they "even took away the windows and doors of the houses – it's a wonder they didn't walk off with the walls themselves."[135]

The Jewish inhabitants of North Africa appear in the protocols as targets for robbery or exploitation.[136] A captured Kriegsmarine boatswain remembered robbing Tunis' Jewish inhabitants of wireless radios: "We had confiscated thousands and thousands from the Jews in Tunis – they were all there in the synagogue, and we simply selected what we wanted."[137] General Schnarrenberger spoke of the French Resident General of Tunis, who "used to give me tips about the Jewish houses, who owned which, and so on… I used to go there very often."[138] Officers were aware of German efforts to turn North African Muslims against North African Jews. A Luftwaffe corporal captured at Alexandria in April 1942 noted the "beastly part about German politics," was aiming "to send the Jews off to Palestine, but at the same time we work

[133] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 560 (I), July 28, 1942, p. 2.
[134] TNA: WO 208/4165, S.R.G.G. 27, May 12, 1943, p. 4.
[135] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 721 (I), p. 3.
[136] For multiple essays on the topic, see: Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, eds., *The Holocaust and North Africa* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019).
[137] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 3 (G), May 31, 1943, p. 4.
[138] TNA: WO 208/5507, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. North Africa Mu/3/13 (GG) (387 (GG)), May 17, 1943, p. 4.

the Arabs up to harass them and send them German machine guns to kill the Jews with."[139] Thoma argued that Nazi leadership was ignorant in its handling of the relationship between Arabs and Jews in the Middle East, arguing that Goebbels should not have even opened the possibility of Jewish settlement in Palestine. "The Arabs don't mind a few – they are very easy-going," he claimed, but Jews would soon take over: "The Arab is lazy and the Jew is unbelievably industrious."[140]

A North African Arab private in the German-Arab training battalion, on the other hand, saw things differently:

> I said to a Jewish officer in Tunis:… 'Jews and Arabs are from the same family. England is the enemy of both of us.' Till 1936 Jews and Arabs got on very well in Palestine before so many Jews came from Germany and Austria, so that there was no more room. However, after 1938 we were good friends again with the Jews.[141]

The German Arab Training Battalion

Statements from a captured German Sonderführer from the German-Arab Training Battalion may be particularly indicative of German attitudes and practices in North Africa.[142] Captured in Sfax in April 1943, the officer was employed as an instructor and interpreter owing to his ability to speak French, which he described as an unfortunate burden. In a lengthy conversation with an artillery lieutenant captured near El Harouria in May 1943, he complained about the "continual trouble with the Arabs and their claims for compensation." The German-Arab Training Battalion existed largely for propaganda purposes, and was consequently supplied with chocolate and wine, rarities for other units, as well as ample stores of coffee. Nevertheless, "we didn't allow them to draw their entitlement in rations and so forth. We saw no reason why a

[139] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 501, May 10, 1942.
[140] TNA: WO 208/4162, S.R.X. 1652, March 15, 1943.
[141] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 73 (G), October 14, 1943, p. 2.
[142] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 13 (G), June 15, 1943.

rabble of wogs should eat our chocolate, when children go hungry in Germany." Instead, the German officers "divided up their rations among ourselves, ate what we wanted, and sent the rest to Germany. It was the only good result of having Arabs in the unit." Arab soldiers "spent money like water," raising prices for local products, and allegedly behaved irresponsibly.[143]

Despite seizing their supplies, the German-Arab Training Battalion Sonderführer claimed "the Arabs had never been so well off in their lives as they were with us."[144] They received the same pay as German soldiers. "Pigs, I used to say to them: all you've come here for is to booze yourselves silly and disgrace the German uniform." Claiming to "know Arabs well," and that "there is only one way of handling them," the officer described an incident in which he faced four deserters, chasing them around the camp and firing his gun at them: "It was the only way to bring them to their senses." He drew a distinction between Arabs brought from Germany, who "had been spoiled there," and the Arabs recruited locally in Tunisia, who "were quite useful soldiers." The latter were generally "corrupted by the rest." He also drew a distinction between soldiers identified as Kabylos (Imazighen), who were "splendid," Moroccans, who were "absolutely reliable," and Algerians and Tunisians, who were "just unspeakable."[145] Few references to "Kabylos" or "Berbers" appear elsewhere in the protocols.

According to the German-Arab Training Battalion officer, Arab soldiers on leave would frequently go to Tunis, despite being forbidden from doing so: "they started hiding in the Arab brothel, where we weren't allowed in. We couldn't control the wretches at all." He observed that "in Tunisia the whole population wanted to join us. They volunteered to come with me."[146]

[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid., 2.
[145] Ibid., 3.
[146] Ibid.

Upon hearing all of this, the artillery lieutenant remarked "One simply can't treat them as Europeans." The British example might be best to follow. They "have a lot of colonial experience, and know how to treat them. They can make them jump on it. So the Arabs have tremendous respect for them… They want to have a master who can lead them."[147]

Remarkably, CSDIC protocols also include conversations held with a private in the German-Arab Training battalion, who was captured in Tunis in May 1943. He had initially fought for the British before being captured by the Germans and subsequently recruited.[148] While prisoner, he worked in a Wartha factory near Berlin, recalling "German soldiers used to say: 'Arabs are all right.' So did the German women. I worked with a German woman in the factory." When asked how Arabs were treated in Germany, he answered that some were well-off and others were not; "But for an African Arab it's fine there." The Nazi racial hierarchy situated North Africans higher than Black Africans, and this was reflected in their treatment. Other Axis soldiers of African origin, identified in protocols as Askaris, were less fortunate. A German lieutenant corporal captured at Alexandria in April 1942 recalled, "The Captain beat the Askaris himself. I've seen him strike a man across the face with a whip – five or six times."[149]

The British and Imperial Enemy

While some conversations and recollections conveyed by some soldiers did indeed mesh with the narrative of a "war without hate" that became dominant decades later, this perspective was far from usual. There was no single uniform opinion about the war or about the enemy. A few German officers and enlisted soldiers conveyed the narrative which came to dominate

[147] Ibid., 2.
[148] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 73 (G), October 14, 1943, p. 2.
[149] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 499 (G), May 8, 1942, p. 2.

popular memory of the war: something akin to a "knight's tourney" or a "boxing match."[150] Other Germans hated Britain intensely, and saw Britain and the British Empire as Germany's primary global enemy, locked in a total war in which defeat would mean Germany's own extermination.

One German lieutenant corporal captured in 1943 compared the English favorably to the Russians as foes, arguing that "the English are at least human."[151] Another colonel captured in Italy in September 1943 lamented choosing the Italians as allies when "we could have worked together with the Germanic British."[152] A German Luftwaffe lieutenant captured in Bir Gubbi in November 1941 claimed, "The English make better comrades than the Italians. They are quite humane people, but they don't want to lose the war and neither do we. They know very well that if we win, their mastery of the world is at an end."[153] He went on to blame the war on the Jews. A pilot captured in September 1942 claimed, "the only good thing here in Africa is that the tommy is a decent straight fellow." He had lost confidence in final victory: "we won't see the colonies anymore."[154]

However, the colonial context for total war in North Africa promoted not only "unlimited" violence against the indigenous population, but between European colonial powers as well. Far from a "small" conflict over local ambitions, the imperial contest over North Africa was waged with global, geopolitical aims. Imagining colonial possessions to be necessary for continued national survival, and envisioning a world divided by incommensurate, racially

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[150] Quoted in Hew Strachan, "Total War: The Conduct of War, 1939-1945," in *A World at Total War : Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1945*, ed. Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Bernd Greiner (Washington D.C.; Cambridge: German Historical Institutes; Cambridge University Press, 2005), 40.; See also: TNA: WO 208/5518, S.R.M.E. 18, Special M.E. Report No. 414, January 17, 1942, p. 3.
[151] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 44 (G), August 6, 1943.
[152] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 64 (G), September 16, 1943, p. 5.
[153] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 375, December 20, 1941, p. 1.
[154] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 588 (G), September 20, 1942.

defined rivals locked in zero-sum, existential competition, many German soldiers saw the British enemy as a "total" one.

It was a general consensus among prisoners that one of Germany's primary aims in North Africa was to regain the country's former colonial possessions. In a conversation between unnamed senior officers captured in Tunisia in May 1943, one proposed that access to Africa's rich resources could fulfill all of Europe's needs going forward: Africa ought to become "a raw material production zone for the whole of Europe… There is a wealth of raw materials in Africa which is still untapped," and would best be placed under "unified industrial planning… a common [European] directorate."[155] A sergeant major captured near Benghazi in February 1942 lamented how even though he was not "heart and soul in this war… but we must have colonies too."[156] A sergeant captured near El Alamein in July 1942 blamed German losses in North Africa on a German grab for colonies: "It's all on account of a few German big-wigs who think that Germany must have just as much as England. It's so utterly stupid – after all, we should have got our few colonies, but going on like this we shall never get anywhere."[157] A naval lieutenant captured in June 1941 was more specific about the resource being contested: "This is a war for oil. The whole war depends on oil. If they take the oil away from us down there [referring to Iran and Russia]… then we are done for."[158]

British officials summarized statements by an lieutenant captured in late 1941 on the topic of war aims, who stated, "German aims were expansion towards the East to provide for her surplus population, colonial exploitation in Africa with German garrisons, and German overseers

[155] TNA: WO 208/5507, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. North Africa Mu/3/14(GG) (385(GG)), May 18, 1943, p. 6.
[156] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 442, February 16, 1942.
[157] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 550 (G), July 18, 1942.
[158] TNA: WO 208/4159, S.R.X. 444, August 26, 1941.

for the native population," as well as concessions across Europe.[159] A survey of German naval and Luftwaffe prisoners captured in September 1941 found that all prisoners of war thought Germany "blameless," some claiming that Britain was to blame for the war by imposing perpetual "economic domination to the exclusion of Germany, others attributed it to the Jews and international financiers… There was a general agreement that the Colonial question was one of the main underlying causes."[160]

The immense size, wealth, and power of the British Empire was a cause for admiration and a source of jealousy for some captured Germans. A lieutenant captured near Gambut in December 1941 conceded, "One must admit that the Englishman is lord of creation he's lashed lain colonies into submission, they are devoted to him and won't let anyone lay hands on him."[161] The naval engineer with whom he was speaking proposed that, "the end of the war will see a United States of the White Races, another United States of the Yellow Races, with the Black Races as something apart, not fully organised."

Thoma criticized the strategy Hitler pursued in attacking Russia before finishing the war with Britain, particularly the contradiction posed by saying "as we have done at the very beginning of our propaganda: 'The war is against England, England is the chief enemy,'" yet invading Russia while that war still raged was madness.[162] In another conversation, Thoma emphasized Britain as Germany's primary geopolitical enemy: "I always say it was quite illogical, to attack Russia and thus leave the English in peace, when the whole war is centered on the arch-enemy Britain."[163] Broich claimed that his experience speaking with his British captors

[159] TNA: WO 208/4180, C.S.D.I.C. (U.K.) G.R.X. 9, December 1941, p. 3.
[160] TNA: WO 208/4180, C.S.D.I.C. (U.K.) G.R.X. 6, September 1941, p. 8.
[161] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 390, January 4, 1942, p. 2.
[162] TNA: WO 208/4136, S.R.M. 79, November 20, 1942.
[163] TNA: WO 208/4136, S.R.M. 118, November 24, 1942.

indicated the war was an ideological one. The English claimed "Communism doesn't worry us at all. But National Socialism – that must be destroyed; we hate that more than you hate communism."[164]

As the war progressed and combat intensified, particularly following the Second Battle of El Alamein in October and November of 1942, Germans increasingly expressed clear animosity and open hatred toward the enemy, attributing a variety of factors ranging from reciprocating British hatred, disgust at British hypocrisy, to the bombing of German cities. The themes in these conversations were strikingly similar to those published in *Die Oase*, evidence for its success in influencing Afrika Korps mentalities.[165] One Luftwaffe lieutenant captured south of El Gubbi in December 1941 said that "The people here hate us, and are always expressing their hatred for us too," despite the fact that Germans "feel no hatred for the English and have never questioned their honour."[166] Oberst Reimann, captured in Tunisia in May 1943, claimed, "The English hate us like the plague because deep down inside they have the feeling that Germans are dangerous to them. The Germans are the only people whom they inwardly regard as equals and especially dangerous."[167] In another conversation, Reimann stated, "I am absolutely convinced that the English are utterly cold and calculating" on account of their bombing of German cities.[168] A submarine lieutenant captured in July 1943 likewise spoke of growing animosity among German civilians attributed to relentless allied bombing. He claimed when he went on leave recently the sentiment in Germany was "bitter in the western districts… they'll kill every Englishman they can lay their hands on."[169]

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[164] TNA: WO 208/4165. S.R.G.G. 283, July 22, 1943, p. 3.
[165] See chapter 1
[166] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 381, December 26, 1941, p. 1.
[167] TNA: WO 208/4166, S.R.G.G. 321, August 4, 1942, p. 2.
[168] TNA: WO 208/4166, S.R.G.G. 284, July 26, 1943.
[169] TNA: WO 208/4163, S.R.X. 1845, July 16, 1941, p. 2.

An anti-aircraft major captured west of Daba in November 1942 mocked British "arrogance." He recounted how his captors "told me that I was so arrogant that I'd have been shot long before this if I'd been in a German camp. I don't think men are shot for arrogance in German camps. If they were, then every Englishman would have been shot by now, for anything more arrogant than an Englishman I have yet to see. It's a mystery to me how such a stupid race can hold an empire."[170] In a conversation dated February 1943, the major discussed supposed Jewish domination of Germany prior to 1933, adding, "There is one race that I really detest, and that is the Jewish, but the English are not far behind. I could strangle any Englishman in cold blood, here and now."[171]

Allegations of British hypocrisy centered in some cases on behavior during the Boer war. A panzer grenadier captain captured at El Alamein in October 1942 spoke of how during the Boer War, "The English used the most brutal methods in that war…" contrasted with "Germans don't use brutal methods, but we exert a uniform pressure, as for instance in the case of the Czechs."[172] Two soldiers captured in Corsica in September 1943, one a corporal in a construction battalion, another a lieutenant corporal in the Waffen SS who had previously been stationed in Buchenwald, criticized their captors' hypocrisy. The SS corporal sneered at the "outcry the Britisher makes about our Concentration Camps, and yet he started them, during the Boer War." The corporal predicted that, "We shall be exterminated – I mean it. If we lose the war, heaven help us."[173]

He was far from the only German to predict extermination in the event Germany were to lose the war. When asked what the British will do if they proved victorious, one Luftwaffe

[170] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 667 (G), January 11, 1941, p. 2.
[171] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 682 (G), February 2, 1943.
[172] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 607 (G), November 2, 1942, p. 2.
[173] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 76A(G), October 30, 1943.

lieutenant captured in Corfu in September 1943 replied, "The German people will be exterminated – they will be left to their own devices just the same as the Italians. They will be exterminated as we did the Poles, but with a people like the Germans this would be impossible."[174]

A conversation dated June 1943 between Sergeant Major Lakner of the 7th Tank Regiment and 2nd Lieutenant Weicheit of the 8th Tank Regiment suggested they believed the war had taken on a racialized hatred. Upon Lakner asking whether the Japanese were "as deceitful as they are made out to be," Weicheit replied, "Yes, they are just brute beasts, not human beings. The British and Americans think the same of us, and we think it about the Russians."[175]

Speaking of "the English," a German seaman captured in December 1941 off of Norway, claimed, "I wouldn't take any prisoners, I'd shoot them all." When asked why, he replied, "I hate them. The SS take no prisoners. Do you know what the S.S. did to the black troops?" The soldier recounted an incident in which SS members executed an entire detachment of Black soldiers in Germany after they allegedly attempted to escape a train carrying prisoners of war.[176]

Violence in Combat

Hatred and environmental challenges simultaneously amplified and were themselves intensified by the violence of warfare in North Africa. In transcribed conversations, German soldiers of all ranks revealed a combat experience in North Africa characterized by horrific violence and extreme trauma. In this sense, the Second World War in North Africa saw a "radicalization of warfare" not only in terms of eroding boundaries between civilians and

[174] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 80 (G), November 13, 1943, p. 5.
[175] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 9 (G), June 6, 1943, p. 4.
[176] TNA: WO 208/4160, S.R.X. 699, January 15, 1942.

combatants, but in the expansive violence directed at and between soldiers.[177] In many cases, the intensity of combat evoked the murderous horror of the Western Front of the First World War. In that conflict, total war entailed unprecedented state intervention in controlling, shaping, and ultimately destroying soldiers' bodies.[178] Developments in industrial military technology demolished soldiers mentally and physically, with artillery barrages in particular inflicting incalculable devastation.[179] Modris Eksteins has argued that the war of attrition, the tremendous stresses and countless deaths of the trenches imparted a "frontline experience" that broke down social mores and inculcated the unlimited logic of total warfare in its participants.[180] Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau has similarly argued that the immense and unprecedented destruction, violence, and death resulting from modern combat "loosened the constraints of civilian life and rapidly brutalized soldiers."[181]

In North Africa, the experience of aerial and artillery bombardment in particular drew the most direct comparisons to the prior conflict. As noted previously, during a conversation between generals Crüwell and Thoma, Thoma described an artillery barrage in the vicinity of El Daba as "the sort of thing you used to get in the last war." Crüwell replied, "in the desert it's far

[177] Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, "Are We There Yet? World War II and the Theory of Total War," in *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1945*, ed. Bernd Greiner, Roger Chickering, and Stig Förster (Washington D.C.; Cambridge: German Historical Institutes; Cambridge University Press, 2005), 15.
[178] Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain, and the Great War* (University of Chicago Press, 1996).
[179] Wolfgang U. Eckart, "'The Most Extensive Experiment That the Imagination Can Conceive': War, Emotional Stress, and German Medicine, 1914-1918," in *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1918*, ed. Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (Washington, D.C.; Cambridge, UK; New York: German Historical Institute ; Cambridge University Press, 2000), 139.
[180] Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 173.
[181] Cited in: John Horne and Alan Kramer, "War Between Soldiers and Enemy Civilians, 1914-1915," in *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1918*, ed. Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (Washington, D.C.; Cambridge, UK; New York: German Historical Institute ; Cambridge University Press, 2000), 161.

worse," and Thoma agreed.[182] A lieutenant captured at Bou Ficha in May 1943 spoke in similar terms about the Second Battle of El Alamein:

> When you think old field officers, who went through the last war, told me they'd never seen anything to beat the Alamein barrage, not even in the last war. And before that, the air force bombed us to hell for ten days. I've never been in anything like it before.[183]

A lieutenant captured at Tmimi in March 1942 described his experience on the front lines as marked by terror: "Well, I can tell you it was ghastly there in the trenches in our strongpoint… they fired at us with everything they'd got. I tell you I sweated blood in that trench, I was so scared."[184] A private in the 5th tank regiment captured near Agedabia in November 1942 spoke of how he was "terrified of all the bombardment and firing" with his morale further sapped by suffering "in the line for ten days without water" and infested with lice.[185] An officer captured in Tunisia in May 1943 recounted, "There is nothing worse than an artillery barrage. Concentrated artillery fire is hideous… In the World War, we had at least trenches and good dug-outs, and the calibres were much smaller." In North Africa, the British had significantly larger guns, and "the burst is much greater than in the last war." [186] A private in the 361 Infantry Regiment captured in December 1941 described fighting near Tobruk: "Many prayed… when the big bombs began to fall."[187]

Speaking to another private captured in mid-1942, one soldier conveyed the intensity of a British bombardment:

> When you're under bombing attacks all day long, it plays hell with your nerves. We were in front of El Alamein, and they came over every two hours, day and night. On top of that there were machine-gun bullets whistling round our ears the whole time. From 0200 to 0500 I was in a bomb crater full of water. The fighters flew over us at 40/50 metres up and dropped 5 kilo bombs only 6, 10 and 15 metres away. My

[182] TNA: WO 208/4136, S.R.M. 74, November 20, 1942, p. 2.
[183] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 18 (G), June 23, 1941, p. 2.
[184] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 478 (G), April 2, 1942, p. 2.
[185] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 653 (G), December 19, 1942, p. 2.
[186] TNA: WO 208/5507, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. North Africa MU/3/13(GG) (387 (GG)), May 17, 1943, p. 2.
[187] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 389, January 3, 1942, p. 8.

> god I was lucky to come out of it alive.[188]

An infantry lieutenant captured near El Alamein in October 1942 described defending against the British at El Alamein in similar terms: "The offensive started at 0300 hours. And how they fired! Other regiments were suffering from stomach troubles, and we were there under fire as far as the coast… What firing!... AA, artillery, MG in unison." In the end, "[o]ur regiment is completely wiped out."[189]

Another second lieutenant in an A.A. regiment captured during El Alamein recounted the attack:

> At 21 hours they started such an artillery fire in the North as I have never before experienced. All we could do was lie in the trenches and keep our heads down. The British must have fired 500,000 rounds from 21.00 hours until 0400 hours… The British broke through from the south. We had to run through MG fire. The attack was carried out in an utterly senseless manner, and there were terrific losses… the men could no longer stand on their feet. We were under terrible fire… We hurled a few hand grenades… by this time the men were incapable of thought.[190]

A second Lieutenant in the 200 Pioneer Battalion captured at El Alamein described his encounter with allied soldiers near Tobruk: "They came in six waves. The New Zealanders are brave chaps. We fired at them… whatever happens they carry" on. The New Zealanders, however "think nothing of stabbing you with the bayonet, they seem to take it for granted that that's quite a decent way of fighting. We fired on them with the 8.8, hundreds were killed."[191]

A Luftwaffe corporal captured in Catania in August 1943 linked his experience of bombardment to imposing retaliatory labor on allied prisoners, saying "The worst experience I had was the bombing of Tunis… there was one crater after the other all along the landing strip, but we soon dealt with that, we used the American and British P/W to fill them in."[192]

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[188] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 545 (G), July 13, 1942.
[189] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 611 (G), November 8, 1942.
[190] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 612 (G), p. 3.
[191] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 554 (G), July 22, 1942, p. 2.
[192] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 61 (G), September 6, 1943, p. 7.

A conversation between lieutenants Hoffmann and Boch, both captured in Tunisia in May 1943, conveyed the extraordinary intensity of combat. Boch described a nighttime hillside attack, when he:

> saw the wire in front of me, this wire in rolls, and the same moment hell broke loose and a whole row of our men fell and went rolling down the steep hillside, screaming. It was terrible… when the engagement was broken off… we had suffered the greatest amount of fatal casualties and accomplished absolutely nothing.[193]

Hoffman agreed, the war was "the most utter madness you can imagine."[194] Boch went on to describe the chaos and noise of an accidental bombing of the German lines by Stukas, and his company near destruction by British armor, and experiencing "the worst weather I've ever seen in Tunisia," a sudden thunderstorm that filled their trenches and craters with water and forced them to either "lie on the level ground or else in the puddles and filth."[195]

The experience in North Africa also elicited comparisons with the Eastern Front and Stalingrad. Many soldiers thought the two fronts were comparable. Thoma argued things "were very much better" in Russia, largely because of superior infrastructure and easier access to water.[196] However, in another conversation, he agreed, "To be at Stalingrad would be much more unpleasant than this whole miserable business in Africa. When you think of all the lives sacrificed there…"[197] Feldwebel Franke claimed he "preferred being in Africa to Russia," having fought and been injured in Russia.[198] An officer in a news unit captured in Tunisia in May 1943 placed Stalingrad and North Africa on the same level: "What happened at Stalingrad and in

[193] TNA: WO 208/4136, S.R.M. 199, May 31, 1943, p. 2.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid., 5.
[196] TNA: WO 208/4136, S.R.M. 115, November 24, 1942, p. 2.
[197] TNA: WO 208/4136, S.R.M. 108, November 23, 1942.
[198] TNA: WO 208/4163, S.R.X. 1821, July 8, 1943.

North Africa was a crime, a useless slaughter of human beings."[199] Others referenced the fighting at El Alamein and Stalingrad in the same breath, as comparable failures of leadership.[200]

However, some combatants believed that the particular harshness of the desert environment and the difficult conditions faced by Axis forces meant the experience of combat there was even worse in Tunisia than in Russia. One Luftwaffe lieutenant discussed the comparison with Russia, proposing "that Africa is the hardest (battle-ground). You can't compare it with Russia, although the Russian is a very unpleasant enemy. But here conditions are much harder." His fellow prisoner concurred: "we were bombed day and night. More than twenty or thirty bombers flew over us."[201] Another pilot captured in North Africa said "It was a better life in Russia" than in Africa, "we could have a decent mess there. The men had houses in the town where they could cook themselves something decent… Ah, that was the life, in Russia."[202]

Violence against Prisoners of War: Ill Treatment of Allied Prisoners

Indicative of the breakdown between combatants and non-combatants in total war, the treatment of prisoners of war was, understandably, a major concern for captured German and Italian soldiers, and was often the topic of conversation. Soldiers spoke of their British captors treating their compatriots poorly, as well as atrocities committed against British and Imperial soldiers.

In their telling, captured Germans frequently linked the shooting of prisoners to retaliation or revenge, or attempts to escape. A parachute sergeant captured in Catania in July

[199] TNA: WO 208/4136, S.R.M. 216, July 3, 1943.
[200] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 606 (G), October 31, 1942, p. 3.
[201] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 636 (G), November 23, 1942, p. 2.
[202] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 670 (G), January 16, 1943, p. 2.

1943 recounted a particularly brutal incident where he retaliated against allied prisoners for bombings in Tunis. When they took cover from British bombing, a British prisoner

> came up to me and asked if they could go and have a drink. We gave them permission and they crowded round the well. Some of them tried to take the opportunity of escaping. We shot thirty-six of them. We were astonished to see how cold-blooded they were under bombing. No one thought they had any ulterior motives. [203]

After this experience, "I became merciless and treated them as if they were communists. I've got no pity for Bolshevists."[204] A lieutenant captured near Gambut in December 1941 recounted how "[f]our English officers were shot whilst escaping" near Tripoli.[205] Another lieutenant captured in El Harouria in May 1943 discussed British retaliation against Germans who had previously mistreated prisoners: "They were very 'nice' to the English – they hung them up on trees and whipped them. A thoroughly disgusting crowd." In response, the "English are very severe" with the soldiers responsible.[206]

In some cases, robbing or shooting prisoners appears to have been common practice. The *Sonderführer* from the German-Arab Training Battalion recounted how "German troops in Tunisia behaved disgracefully. Louts – That's what they were! They looted and plundered everything that they could get their hands on, and ill-treated prisoners. I saw it happen in a P/W cage at Garza… where the camp commandant shot sixty Ps/W."[207] The officer whom he was speaking with agreed that the Italians were also "very cruel in their treatment of" prisoners. Some Italian officers also agreed that Allied prisoners were not well-treated. For example, an Italian lieutenant captured south of El Daba in June 1942 commented "to tell the truth, I've noticed that the Germans and our people treat British prisoners very badly."[208]

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[203] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 63 (G), September 13, 1943.
[204] Ibid.
[205] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 387, January 1, 1942, p. 5.
[206] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 18 (G), June 23, 1943, p. 2.
[207] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 11 (G), June 10, 1943.
[208] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 543 (I), July 11, 1942.

A Wehrmacht lieutenant captured in Bardia in January 1942 discussed a cavalry lieutenant named Trolli "who used to rob" Allied prisoners of war. "He is a prisoner now. He'd have a nasty time if they found out what he did."[209] Another officer captured at Bardia, a captain, told how a captured "English officer… spilled all the beans, but the Germans treated them abominably. They beat them."[210]

A German officer captured off Port Aid in October 1942 spoke of "cases where prisoners have been shot" in Tripoli: "On one occasion we had twenty-seven airmen, and we couldn't send than back. What else was there to do? I tell you, such things should not be allowed to happen. We Germans don't like that sort of thing, but what can wo do?" The major whom he was speaking with agreed: "Yes, there's nothing for it but to shoot them.[211]

This behavior continued or even intensified after combat left North Africa. In a conversation dated May 1943, a Wehrmacht general (either Crüwell or von Armen) spoke of a film being made in Italy that took place in a colonial setting and made use of Allied prisoners. According to the speaker, "it was necessary to make the Indian and negro P/W and those sorts of people make an attack somewhere near Rome, and the Italians couldn't make them do it, they just refused." However, "a German battalion arrived… and set up machine guns and immediately they – the negroes had to take off their clothes and play the part of wild negro tribes… I don't know whether it was the film "Ohm Krüger" but it was something like that."[212]

Atrocities might be blamed on racial Others. A corporal captured west of Bizerta in July 1943 claimed, "They [Arabs] were dreadful at our place; when the A.A. shot some Tommies down and killed them, up they came and cut the boy's throats, then proceeded to swipe their

[209] TNA: WO 208/5518, S.R.M.E. 25, Special Report Middle East No. 415, January 18, 1942, p. 6.
[210] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 425, January 27, 1942, p. 1.
[211] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 610 (G), November 5, 1942.
[212] TNA: WO 208/4165, S.R.G.G. 35, May 21, 1942, p. 2.

watches, rings, or anything else they could lay hands on."[213] According to a lieutenant captured at Tmimi in March 1942, regarding the burning of aircraft in Agedabia, "It was said to be the Arabs who had done it, but I know for a fact that it was the Italians themselves who did it, out of sheer funk."[214]

The British War in North Africa: Total War?

Unfortunately, there exists no corpus of material for British soldiers who fought in North Africa comparable to the thousands of transcribed German conversations in British and American protocols. Consequently, my conclusions about violent radicalization, and British warfare's trend toward "totality" in the region are forced to be speculative and tentative. It is important to acknowledge that there were fundamental differences between the logistical and material situation of the bulk of British forces and the Axis military in North Africa, as well as greatly divergent colonial experiences. The Afrika Korps operated at the very edge of the German military's ability to supply and command a functioning fighting force, with tenuous supply lines stretched to the limit from Germany through Italy and across the fiercely contested Mediterranean to besieged ports in North Africa. While conditions for British soldiers were certainly challenging, particularly during the siege of Tobruk and Rommel's early successes, German soldiers faced chronic shortages of nearly every war material, most notoriously fuel.[215] That said, there is compelling evidence pointing toward British soldiers' radicalization and brutalization indicative of total war. British forces experienced their own "morale crisis" during

[213] TNA: WO 208/5508, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. A.F.H.Q. No. 30 (G), July 12, 1943, p. 2.
[214] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 479 (G), April 3, 1942.
[215] Kitchen, *Rommel's Desert War*, 401.

the lengthy advances and retreats of the Western Desert Campaign.[216] For soldiers unfamiliar with the environment, even coming from an empire that had experience with a diverse array of environmental terrains and landscapes, "[l]iving and fighting in the desert pushed soldiers to the limits of human endurance," and British soldiers frequently complained about unappetizing food, poor quality equipment, and a lack of water.[217] However, unlike the Axis forces, the British military was in a logistical position to recognize and take measures to address these conditions over the course of the campaign.[218]

The evidence discussed below includes incidents of potential Allied brutality referenced in British protocols as they appear in conversations between German prisoners of war, a portion of which are almost certainly racist rumors or wild stories. Further examples come from soldiers' journals, published sources, Wehrmacht intelligence records, and British court martial records in North Africa and the Middle East. These instances, while far from conclusive, do suggest disorder, violence, and chaos may have also been a prevalent feature of the British campaign.

British protocols contain considerable discussions between German and other Axis soldiers of mistreatment by their captors. Rumors of German soldiers being tortured or subjected to brutal interrogation, reinforced by official propaganda, elicited fear as well as skepticism. A number of the incidents mentioned are almost certainly racist fantasies, for instance a major captured at El Alamein in November 1942 told another officer, "An officer told me that in another camp there were black troops, and when you were interrogated they made you dig a hole for yourself… They threatened to shoot him. They were all Jews there." At the same time, the more plausible allegations of cruelty and murder are suggestive of the back-and-forth atrocities

[216] Jonathan Fennell, *Combat and Morale in the North African Campaign: The Eighth Army and the Path to El Alamein* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 12.
[217] Ibid., 125.
[218] Ibid., 124–50.

and unrestrained violence that constitute total war. Italian officers spoke with bitterness about their encounters with Australians in particular. One officer captured at El Alamein in October 1942 recalled that "[t]he Australians behaved like brutes; they shot one Bobardello when he had put up his hands. And that's only one case. There were many other things."[219] A German officer captured nearby concurred: "Those Australians who took me prisoner were a wild lot; they wanted to chop my ring off together with my finger."[220] A pair of German officers captured in North Africa in October 1942 discussed the animosity between Italian and Australian soldiers: "What the Italians do to the Australians is not exactly pleasant," one commented. The other agreed "Yes, but after all the Australians started that sort of thing."[221] Rommel himself once complained to Brigadier General H. Clifton, commander of the 6th New Zealand Brigade, that "the New Zealand division had repeatedly broken international law by massacring wounded prisoners of war,"[222] approximately 500 at Mersah Matruh in July 1942.[223] A Luftwaffe *Fliegerfürer* captured in October 1942 observed "English are quite decent so long as they are in the majority and are doing the commanding, but when things go wrong they behave like savages."[224]

Nevertheless, a number of Axis prisoners were pleased with the conditions they found themselves in, which often contradicted official propaganda. In a May 1943 conversation, one senior officer blamed desertions from the German army in North Africa on the superior

[219] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 605 (I), October 30, 1942, p. 2.
[220] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 605 (G), October 30, 1942, p. 3.
[221] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 607 (G), November 2, 1942, p. 4.
[222] Erwin Rommel and Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *The Rommel Papers* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953), 281–82.
[223] Alexander H. Joffe, *Operation Crusader and the Desert War in British History and Memory: "What Is Failure? What Is Loyalty?"* (London ; New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), chap. 7, http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350132900.
[224] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 607 (G), November 2, 1942, p. 4.

conditions in British captivity: "why do we have deserters? They get to know that the enemy treats Ps/W well. And so England is able to buy everybody."[225]

When asked about instructions to be followed when taken prisoner, a German who fought in the 334th Infantry Division, and who was ultimately captured in Italy, replied "None, not at all. Up at the front they wanted to scare us: 'There are Indians and Canadians opposite us and if they catch a German they just kill him and that's that!' We fell into the hands of the English – hot cocoa and cakes etc!"[226] Two German privates captured in June 1942 near El Alamein discussed rumors that German prisoners were to be starved prior to interrogation. One said, "That was just Goebbels' propaganda," and the other noted how "within ten minutes of my capture I was given a good meal by the South Africans."[227]

Axis soldiers also spoke of British and Imperial violence against civilians. British bombardment of Bardia, Tripoli, and Benghazi deeply affected many of the soldiers who experienced them. According to an Italian corporal captured in Benghazi in January 1942, "The bombing of Benghazi was awful, who knows what kind of bombs they used. They must weigh at least 2,000 kgs. Not a thing was left."[228] In a conversation dated January 1942, Schmitt claimed, "No town can possibly have such a bombing as Bardia got…. It was the same in Tripoli. Tripoli used to be evacuated every night."[229] An Italian Sergeant/Major captured at Bardia in January 1942 recalled that the British naval bombardment of Tripoli was "dreadful: At least a thousand killed. It lasted 55 minutes. The population abandoned Tripoli for at least a week after that; there was no-one left except a few municipal guards. I can't give you any idea of the panic."[230] A

[225] TNA: WO 208/5507, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. North Africa MU/3/14(GG) (385(GG)), May 18, 1943, p. 3.
[226] TNA: WO 208/4137, C.S.D.I.C. (U.K.) S.R.M. 470, February 4, 1944, p. 3.
[227] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 546 (G), July 14, 1942, p. 2.
[228] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 436, February 7, 1942, p. 2.
[229] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 397 (G), January 7, 1942, p. 2.
[230] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 488 (I), April 13, 1942, p. 2.

corporal in a German propaganda united captured near Sidi Barrani in June 1943 claimed, "The damage in Benghasi is terrific, there's simply no town left… I was amazed when I was in Tobruk, there's so little town left."[231]

Internal Wehrmacht intelligence reports include accounts of retaliations, executions, and brutality against North Africa's population. According to a February 6, 1943 report, an Arab spy named Laifa ben Sassi informed German authorities that "English and Americans continue to set fire to Arab homes, steal livestock, abduct women, and carry out shootings."[232] On January 15, 1943, an unnamed spy reported on the execution of 6 Arabs near Bizerta by the French Foreign Legions, supposedly for looting. The French were reportedly "given the opportunity to shoot anyone as 'plunderer.'"[233] A February 21, 1943 report discussing Arabs with German sympathies highlighted the experience of Ali Ben Rabah, a 31-year-old Arab from Djebel Amara. In January of 1943, Ben Rabah entered German service. In retaliation, his family was arrested and transported to an internment camp near Beja, and his livestock was confiscated.[234] In April of 1943, the Wehrmacht apprehended four French officials accused of murdering an Arab in Mateur "only because he worked for the Germans."[235] On December 15, 1942, the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs announced that the "Bey of Tunis has demonstrated to Italian military officials lively dissatisfaction at the sharp procedure of the French Gendarmerie against Arabs friendly to the Axis. 11 Arabs are alleged to have been shot by the French without adequate cause."[236]

Like the Germans and Italians, British and French forces shot North Africans suspected of acting as spies. On March 9, 1943, Hlel ben Lakdir, an Arab agent, informed Wehrmacht

[231] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 538 (G), July 3, 1942.
[232] BArch, RH 26-1020/10, Meldung, 6.2.43.
[233] BArch, RH 26-1020/10, Sdf. Dr. Steinke, Feindliche Organisationen in Ferryville und Umgebung, 15.1.43, p. 2.
[234] BArch, RH 26-1020/10, Hofra, 21.2.43, p. 2-3.
[235] BArch, RH 26-1020/10, Div. von Manteuffel, Abt. 1C, Eilt, Div. Gef. Stand, 14.3.43.
[236] TNA: HW 1/1233, CX/MSS/1831/T13, December 18, 1942.

intelligence about French executions of alleged spies outside of Beja.[237] A memorandum date March 13, 1943 reported the discovery of four Arab corpses on the road outside Sidi Saad with a sign posted to prevent the population from removing them. The observer believed the men were likely spies.[238] The private papers of L. Stevenson, a gunner in the 76 (Gloucester) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment in the Royal Artillery, indicate he observed the execution of two alleged Arab spies on June 20, 1943 by French forces.[239]

British protocols contain references to Allied brutality and potential instances of retaliation against German prisoners. Examples include a corporal in an air news unit, captured in Bardia in January 1942, who claimed that when he was captured by Polish soldiers fighting in North Africa, "They shot half of us."[240] A number of incidents were interpreted as retaliatory. For instance, Broich spoke of German soldiers being locked in closed cattle trucks in the heat by a British officer who had previously been in German hands.[241] A pilot captured near El Gazala in December 1941 noted that he "heard that an Oberleutnant Schacht was shot for attempting to escape."[242] A German anti-aircraft officer captured in November 1941 in Tobruk recounted, "Two of our men deserted to the British. The British squeezed them dry and then sent them back," to face certain retaliation by their own countrymen.[243] In a discussion observed in May 1943, one German officer alleged that the British "compel our P/W to clear minefields." When another officer replied, "I should think that may have happened once or twice, but not as a general rule," the first one affirmed, "They compel our P/W to clear minefields… … they drive

[237] BArch, RH 26-1020/10, Arabervernehmung, 9.3.43.
[238] BArch, RH 26-1020/10, Div. von Manteuffel, Apt. 1C, Div. Gef. Stand., Meldung V6, 13.4.43.
[239] IWM Doc. 10528, Private Papers of L. Stevenson, Box No: P100, 'Diary', p. 26-27, June 20, 1943.
[240] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 430, February 1, 1942, p. 2.
[241] TNA: WO 208/5507, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. North Africa MU/3/10(GG) (378(GG)), May 15, 1943.
[242] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 394, January 6, 1942, p. 3.
[243] TNA: WO 208/5518, Special Report Middle East No. 452, March 2, 1942, p. 2.

them forward at the pistol-point after capture."[244] A German naval captain captured in March of 1944 confirmed the reality of "excesses" against captured Germans: "shootings – took place in Tunis." According to the captain, "Germans were shot" by Allied soldiers "because they were not accepted as soldiers."[245]

Violence and bloodshed reached its apex toward the conclusion of combat, when discipline and military organization broke down and ceased to function. In a conversation between Generals Crüwell and Hans Cramer, the latter captured in Tunisia in May 1943, Cramer described the conditions at the moment of surrender when "nothing more could be done." Cramer purported to "talk the matter over quite openly with you as it occurred, so that you have a picture of the crazy situation in which you can find yourself." He claimed that enemy soldiers "had started a great massacre of one of my regiments," and sent over an officer to communicate with the enemy in order to try to bring some order to the situation.[246] A flak lieutenant described the horrors of his "last hours in Tunis. What scenes there were! I would rather have killed myself than go back to Tunis"[247] as British and American forces entered the city, and Axis forces fled.

Further evidence suggestive of a British total war appears in disciplinary records and court martial proceedings pertaining to the North African front. The examples below, which include a trial for cowardice and multiple trials for murder, may point toward violence uncontained by the front lines, and a trend toward "totality" and "brutalization."

The trial of Gunner Eric John Painter for cowardice is indicative of the intensity of North African combat. The British Judge Advocate General (JAG) charged Gunner E. J. Painter with cowardice relating to an alleged incident on January 3, 1941. According to military court

[244] TNA: WO 208/5507, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. North Africa MU/3/8/(GG) (386(GG)), May 13, 1943, p. 3.
[245] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. (M.E.) No. 811, May 24, 1944.
[246] TNA: WO 208/4168, C.S.D.I.C. (U.K.) S.R.G.G. 844, February 20, 1944, p. 5.
[247] TNA: WO 208/5574, Special Report C.S.D.I.C. Middle East No. 745 (G), June 17, 1943.

records, Painter was posted as a lookout sentry in the Bardia region, and ordered to keep watch for enemy tanks. Prosecuting Sergeant H. Broad claimed that at around noon, "the enemy opened fire and some shells fell about 150 yards" from the location where Painter was posted. Approximately ten minutes later, "Gunner Painter came to me & said he was frightened & that shells were falling around him. I placed him under arrest & posted another sentry." Witnesses agreed that Painter had gone to Broad, saying "shells were dropping all around him & he had stood it as long as he could." Painter was sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment for cowardice.[248]

Court martial records include incidents of soldiers committing murder. The JAG charged J. Higgins a British soldier, a 22-year-old driver named with the murder of a fellow driver, J. A. Taylor, at Maadi in Cairo on September 19, 1941.[249] Higgins confessed to the crime under interrogation. He had already been under detention for insubordination and theft. On that September night, he snuck out of guard tent, escaping "on a sudden impulse," stole a pistol from a police tent, and shot a random man at point blank range while escaping.[250] Despite efforts by the defense to gain clemency due to plausible evidence of mental illness, Higgins was sentenced to death and executed on April 24, 1942.

Colonial soldiers were likewise subject to military trials for murder. The JAG charged H. Midlig, a 19-year-old identified as a Palestinian Arab soldier, with the murder of a civilian Arab named Abdulla El Gharbawi, on the night of March 31/April 1, 1943 in Ismailia, Egypt.[251] Prosecutors claimed Midlig, while in uniform, shot Gharbawi, over a disagreement involving a

[248] TNA: WO 71/700, Field General Court-Martial, 5106754 Gunner E. J. Palmer, 3rd R.H.A., General Headquarters, Middle East, April 10, 1941.
[249] TNA: WO 71/1068, Charge Sheet, General Court-Martial, 156711 Driver J. Higgins Royal Corps of Signals, GHQ, MEF, March 13, 1942.
[250] TNA: WO 71/1068, Military Police Report, General Court-Martial, 156711 Driver J. Higgins Royal Corps of Signals, October 10, 1941, p. 3-4.
[251] TNA: WO 71/1083, Charge Sheet, General Court-Martial, PAL/22359 Spr H. Midlig, May 22-24, 1943.

hashish transaction: First he fired in the air, then at Gharbawi as he fled. Midlig denied any hashish transaction, "painting the picture of an innocent soldier in British uniform returning to camp, enticed into the native quarter, threatened, molested, and in danger, who eventually draws a pistol in desperate self-defence."[252] The prosecutors' account was corroborated by several Egyptian witnesses from Ismailia. Midlig was found guilty of murder and sentenced to death by a military tribunal; the sentence was carried out on July 12, 1943.

The trial of two soldiers, Sapper T.R. Pascoe and Private W.L. McCulloch, reveals a particularly ghastly example of British soldiers engaged in violence against civilians. The men, both veterans of combat in the North Africa Campaign, were attached to the No. 1 Transit Camp near Algiers. They were charged with murdering two men in a drunken late-night crime spree the night of June 28, 1943: a local resident named Ali Ben Touati, and a British Lance Corporal Laycock.[253] The men first robbed, then shot Ben Touati in the stomach while his brother, Abderahmane Ben Touati slept nearby in a truck. After being awakened by gunshots, the brother came upon the grievously wounded Ali Ben Touati, who told him that "[t]here were two English soldiers, they searched me and took my cigarettes, cigarette lighter and my loose money and they then shot me."[254] Ali Ben Touati died not long after. Shortly before midnight, the two British soldiers then encountered a father and son in the docks area, Bendaoud and Cherchali Mohammed, assaulting them while demanding alcohol and money.[255] Bendaoud, the father, stated that one of the soldiers "pressed into his stomach the muzzle of a gun. He pushed it away" and then one of the men "struck him in the face with his fist." Bendaoud "fell back a few paces

[252] TNA: WO 71/1083, H. Scott Barrett, JAG 20 Jun 43, GHQ 585 Ext 16, General Court-Martial, PAL/22359 Spr. H. Midlig, June 20, 1943.
[253] TNA: WO 71/1089, General Court Martial, 2073452 Spr. T. R. Pascoe, Royal Engineers, and 3323083, Pte. W.L. McCulloch, Black Watch.
[254] TNA: WO 71/1089, Opening Address of Prosecutor, General Court-Martial, 2073452 Spr. T. R. Pascoe, and 3323083, Pte. W.L. McCulloch, August 26, 1943, p. 8.
[255] Ibid.

and whereupon the two soldiers went for the younger Arab, the taller taking hold of him while the shorter fired two or three shots at him." Cherchali, the boy, "fell, gravely injured, and the two soldiers ran away down the ramp."[256] At ten o'clock that night, it was alleged Pascoe also likely shot Lance Corporal Laycock of the Docks Provost Company, who was patrolling the area. The next morning, McCulloch was heard commented to friends "Did you hear about young Taffy [a nickname for Pascoe] last night? He stole a Tommy machine gun and shot a couple of wogs down by the docks."[257] McCulloch claimed that he fled after Pascoe had first fired the gun the previous evening: "when I heard the shot I fucked off."[258] Although the evidence pertaining to the shootings of Laycock and Mohammed was thrown out, Pascoe was executed in October 1943 for the killing of Ben Touati.[259]

Other examples of disordered violence against Middle Eastern and North African civilians and soldiers can be found in British court martial records. Private Mohamed Musallam Suleiman, was convicted of the murder of fellow Arab soldier, Private Abdel Ghaffar Mansour near Cairo on August 13, 1943, and executed for the crime on September 24 of that year.[260] Elsewhere in the Middle East, four British Cypriot drivers were charged with robbing and murdering a Lebanese Arab named Murchid Saliba near Tripoli, Lebanon. The soldiers had abandoned the military and were "likely living in the mountains behind Tripoli by begging and where necessary by obtaining money or goods by force." One of them, Driver A. Kyriacou, was executed on November 13, 1943.[261] In Palestine, Craftsman Thomas Henry Bell was tried and

[256] Ibid., 9.
[257] Ibid., 11.
[258] Ibid., 8.
[259] TNA: WO 71/1089, Judge Advocate General, 2/231/RF, General Court-Martial, 2073452 Spr. T. R. Pascoe, and 3323083, Pte. W.L. McCulloch, September 30, 1943, p. 2.
[260] TNA: WO 71/1087, General Court-Martial, 32094 Pte M. M Suleiman, Pnr Corps, October 12, 1943.
[261] TNA: WO 71/801, General Court-Martial, CY/17733 Dvr. A. Kyriacou, CY/17935 Dvr. P. Ioannou, CY/18241 Dvr. A. Elia, Dvr. I. Kyriacou, March 12, 1945.

convicted of murdering the Palestinian Lieutenant Sergeant Waisal Nadav, who had arrested him following an attempted robbery of a jewelers' shop in Haifa. During the altercation, Bell reportedly "being attacked by a crowd, first fired one round towards the ground to keep them at bay without success, and consequently in panic fired three more rounds indiscriminately" into the crowd.[262]

Conclusion

During the post-war period, the Second World War in North Africa was frequently represented as a "desert war" that occurred in an empty, featureless backdrop, a conflict fundamentally distinct from the total war on the Eastern Front. In the discourse and memory of subsequent decades, the desert environment transformed into an enemy in and of itself, a mutual foe for British and German forces locked in honorable combat. Focusing on wartime discourse surrounding the natural environment, the human context of North Africa, and perceptions of and violence toward enemy soldiers, this chapter has sought to show that the war was, by and large, not experienced that way. The challenges posed by the desert environment and the logistical problems it entailed made Germany's war more "total" rather than less. The desert was such a challenge for German soldiers because supplies were so scarce and so shoddy, manpower so limited, and ultimately, because they were so poorly prepared. At the same time, the post-war discourse of an empty "desert war" obscured the importance of North Africa's population to German war plans, their hopes to mobilize the region's populace against the British Empire, and atrocities committed against them. The discourse obfuscated North Africans' involvement in the war as political actors and participants, but primarily as victims of violence.

[262] TNA: WO 71/1076, H. Scott Barrett, General Court-Martial Proceedings for Submission to C.-in-C., 2003645 Cfn. T.H. Bell, REME, February 19, 1943.

German attitudes toward the British enemy were diverse and contradictory. While some Germans appeared to hold the perspective common after the war that North Africa was a "war without hate," this was merely one narrative out of multiple. Many German soldiers expressed unreserved hatred toward the British, and saw themselves waging existential combat, either to reclaim the colonies they believed they needed, or to preserve the nation's very existence. In an existential war, all potential measures were necessary. The horrors of combat in North Africa evoked memories and stories of the Western Front of the First World War and comparisons to Stalingrad and the Eastern Front. In particular, soldiers struggled to put their experiences under aerial and artillery bombardment into words.

In many cases, surrendering or surrendered soldiers were subjected to cruel treatment and murder indicative of the hatred directed at an enemy in a total war. British soldiers were robbed and massacred when it became impossible to transport them behind German lines, others were tortured or machine gunned while attempting to escape.

While no records analogous the CSDIC archives exist for British soldiers in captivity, Wehrmacht intelligence records and JAG court martial transcripts grant suggestive glimpses into what may have been the chaos and violence of total war. It is there that we find examples of soldiers breaking and running under the stresses of bombardment, killing fellow soldiers, and robbing and murdering North African and Middle Eastern civilians. The case of Pascoe and McCulloch is particularly compelling because the two men both fought in the North Africa Campaign, and may have been brutalized by their experiences before the fateful drunken night of robbery and murder. Violence and death appear to have reached a climax as discipline broke down and morale collapsed, and captivity or death became the only possibilities.

Subsequent chapters will examine the evolution of the post-war memory of the North Africa Campaign from both British and German perspectives, drawing particular attention to the perceptions of enemy soldiers, environmental discourses, and the human context of north Africa. The next chapter will show how the narrative of a "war without hate," instrumentalized by German veterans of North Africa, depended on one configuration of this environmental discourse, and concealing the violence of "total war" in the interests of German rehabilitation.

Chapter 3: *Verband Deutsches Afrika-Korps*

Introduction

Centered on the Afrika Korps Veterans' Association (*Verband Deutsches Afrika-Korps* or VDAK), this chapter shows how, following the conclusion of the Second World War's hostilities, a prominent group of Afrika Korps veterans worked to mold German and European memory surrounding the *Afrikafeldzug*. In doing so, they helped to enshrine a narrative of the campaign, which I have argued fits the criteria of "total war," as a much more circumscribed, sanitized struggle between supposedly "civilized" European opponents rather than mortal enemies. VDAK leaders, largely former senior Wehrmacht officers, as well as ordinary members, were active and underexamined participants not only in the construction of the "Rommel Myth,"[1] but also in the broader shaping of the conflict in public discourse, memory, and the commemoration of the Second World War in North Africa.

This chapter makes three interconnected arguments. First, I argue that despite pronouncements of political neutrality, the VDAK was, from the very beginning, a deliberately political project with specific political aims. VDAK leaders' earliest activities included agitating for the freeing of convicted German war criminals, Albert Kesselring in particular, and the rehabilitation of the Wehrmacht's reputation in the face of ongoing "defamation," (*Diffamierung*)[2] while making the efforts toward the Federal Republic's Cold War rearmament contingent on this rehabilitation.[3] VDAK leaders worked, on the one hand, to establish the

[1] Ralf Georg Reuth, *Rommel: The End of a Legend*, trans. Debra S. Marmor and Herbert A. Danner, 1st Edition (Haus Publishing, 2020); Mark Connelly, "Rommel as an Icon," in *Rommel: A Reappraisal*, ed. Ian F. W. Beckett (Pen & Sword Military, 2013).
[2] BArch, B 469/115, Ludwig Crüwell, Dank an die Stadt Iserlohn und ihren Oberbürgmeister, p. 8.
[3] Kerstin von Lingen, *Kesselring's Last Battle: War Crimes Trials and Cold War Politics, 1945-1960*, trans. Alexandra Klemm (University Press of Kansas, 2009), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv7n0bzv; Bert-Oliver Manig, *Die Politik der Ehre: die Rehabilitierung der Berufssoldaten in der frühen Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004); Alaric Searle, *Wehrmacht Generals, West Germany Society and the Debate on Rearmament, 1949-1959* (Westport

Afrikafeldzug as a distinct, separate war fought under unique environmental circumstances, and on the other, to exploit Erwin Rommel's and the Afrika Korps' wartime prestige and international reputation to establish themselves as proxy figures for the entire Wehrmacht, and even the German martial tradition itself entirely.[4] Notions of "chivalry," when introduced, were in service of these aims. The murderous Italian occupation under Kesselring, or brutal warfare on the Eastern Front, when discussed, were explained away by factors outside the military, such as flawed political leadership or the universal challenges posed by "partisan warfare."[5]

Second, I argue that surviving speeches, *Die Oase* articles, and other VDAK records reveal attitudes toward the former British enemy and memories of the war quite dissimilar to the "chivalric" narrative of a "war without hate" in North Africa.[6] Instead, the VDAK literature expressed widespread antipathy and skepticism toward the British victors and the Allies, evidence for the longevity of pre-war and wartime narratives and discourses, and suggestive of a *longue durée* for Anglo-German hostility.[7] Early discussions, stories, and memories of combat produced and reproduced by the VDAK buttress evidence for the destructive intensity of combat in total war. Embracing the North Africa campaign as a distinctly separate war, one that might

(Conn.): Praeger, 2003); Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), http://www.degruyter.com/doi/book/10.7312/frei11882.

[4] On the "Rommel Myth" and the Wehrmacht's "Clean Hands" see : Patrick Major, "'Our Friend Rommel': The Wehrmacht as 'Worthy Enemy' in Postwar British Popular Culture," *German History* 26, no. 4 (October 1, 2008): 520–35, https://doi.org/10.1093/gerhis/ghn049; Valerie Hébert, "From Clean Hands to Vernichtungskrieg," in *Reassessing the Nuremberg Military Tribunals: Transitional Justice, Trial Narratives, and Historiography*, ed. Kim Christian Priemel and Alexa Stiller (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012); Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: history, myth, reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[5] BArch, B 469/115, Festansprache des Verbandsvorsitzenden General a. D. Crüwell anläßlich der 2. Wiedersehensfeier des Verbandes der ehem. Angehörigen des Deutschen Afrika Korps, Stuttgart, den 14.9.1952.

[6] See, for example: John Bierman and Colin Smith, *Alamein: War without Hate* (London: Viking, 2002); Correlli Barnett, *The Desert Generals* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Erwin Rommel, Lucie-Maria Rommel, and Fritz Bayerlein, *Krieg ohne Hass* (Heidenheim an der Brenz: Heidenheimer Zeitung, 1950).

[7] See the discussion in Chapter 1, and: Matthew Stibbe, *German Anglophobia and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Gerwin Strobl, *The Germanic Isle: Nazi Perceptions of Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Jan Rüger, "Revisiting the Anglo-German Antagonism," *The Journal of Modern History* 83, no. 3 (2011): 579–617, https://doi.org/10.1086/660841.

lay the groundwork for European unity, as the VDAK did in the mid-1950s, required political concessions. By the 1960s, with many of the VDAK's early projects largely accomplished, and enjoying broad political endorsements and international approval across the Western bloc, the VDAK more firmly embraced an "apolitical" ethos centered on remembering a "common European tragedy," a faced few serious challenges until late that decade.

Third, North Africa's colonial, desert environment, where much of the war's combat took place, served multiple purposes in the discursive transformation of the Second World War in North Africa into a "war without hate." Initially, the desert's supposed "emptiness" allowed former Wehrmacht officers to argue that combat there was "clean" because there were no "partisans" to complicate warfare, as there had been on other fronts. Over the postwar period, the desert became firmly established as an "empty" arena for honorable, combat between sympathetic, European opponents, rather than mortal enemies, as the North African environment emerged as an alien, non-European enemy against which to struggle.[8] This transition accompanied a growing celebration of the former German Empire and European colonialism abroad. Inviting Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck and former imperial troops who fought in German South-West Africa to reunions and glamorizing their colonial adventures, the VDAK explicitly bound the Second World in North Africa to the Germany's history and a glorified interpretation of the German colonial empire.[9] Yet, paradoxically, just as *Die Oase* celebrated stories, articles, and commemorations addressing this earlier empire, North Africa's population began to

[8] See the discussion in Chapter 2 on emptiness: Diana K Davis and Edmund Burke, eds., *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011); Diana K. Davis, *The Arid Lands: History, Power, Knowledge*, Kindle Edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016); Priya Satia, "'A Rebellion of Technology'/ Development, Policing, and the British Arabian Imaginary," in *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Diana K Davis and Edmund Burke (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011).
[9] BArch, B 469/118, Chronik des Verbandes Deutsches Arika-Korps e.V. 1951-1962; BArch, B 469/131 Kameradschaft der Offiziere der ehem. Kaiserl. Schutztruppe für D.S.W. Afrika.

disappear in narratives of the war. The discourse of the desert's "emptiness" had always existed in uneasy tension with awareness of North Africa's indigenous inhabitants, central concerns for the Nazi political project in the region, who populated the background of many early narratives and recollections published in *Die Oase*, the VDAK newspaper. Their presence declined over the course of the 1950s and into the 1960s, linked not only to greater emphasis on an "empty" desert, but a growing focus on a celebrated European imperial heritage shared by Britain and Germany. As the Second World War in North Africa came to be understood as a war between European nations rather than empires, the myth of white, imperial solidarity discursively united Britain and Germany.[10] The VDAK thus played an unexamined role in shaping the memory of formal colonialism in postwar West Germany, and ultimately, European unification.

Methodological Strategy

In analyzing the VDAK's activities, I bring together multiple perspectives for understanding the memory of the Second World War. First, I utilize Harold Marcuse's model of the "memory group,"[11] formulated in *Legacies of Dachau* as a model for groups contesting, shaping, and negotiating perceptions of the North Africa war over time. Marcuse identified "three historical myths," following them through Germany's postwar history as they were challenged, negotiated, and accommodated by different "memory groups" (such as camp survivors, and Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic organizations), with the physical space of Dachau itself serving as a main battleground.[12] German veterans who fought in North Africa formed one

[10] Edward Ross Dickinson, "The German Empire: An Empire?," *History Workshop Journal* 66, no. 1 (October 1, 2008): 129–62, https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbn028; Martin Francis, "Remembering War, Forgetting Empire? Representations of the North African Campaign in 1950s British Cinema," in *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, ed. Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).
[11] Harold Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 12.
[12] Ibid.

(or more) "memory group," which engaged in "recollection," the "group process of collecting, creating, and propagating information about the past" in commemorations, reunions, in writing, and in political activity.[13] I adapt this perspective through Michael Rothberg's framework of "multidirectional memory," which entails understanding memory as "multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative." Public recollection is not simply a site for contestation between discrete, established narratives or zero-sum competition between them. Instead, memory is necessarily "dialogical": memory groups are themselves created and recreated through the act of public recollection, and this recollection is inextricable from communication and interaction with other narratives and discourses.[14] Multidirectional memory revealed that public emergence of the memory of the Holocaust over the 1950s and 1960s took "place in… dialogue with ongoing processes of decolonization and civil rights struggle and their modes of coming to terms with colonialism, slavery, and racism," rather than through separate, discrete, and isolated conversations.[15]

Next, I follow Jörg Echternkamp in utilizing Roger Chartier's concept of "collective representations,"[16] which establishes the production and reception of representations of the past as constitutive of their social and cultural context.[17] Based in Émile Durkheim,[18] the theory of collective representation requires a focus on "the symbolic strategies that determine positions

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[13] Ibid., 14.
[14] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009), sec. Introduction.
[15] Ibid.; See also: Rothberg Michael, "A Memory That Is Not One," in *The Holocaust and North Africa*, ed. Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019).
[16] Jorg Echternkamp, *Postwar Soldiers: Historical Controversies and West German Democratization, 1945-1955*, trans. Noah Harley (New York: Bergahn Books, 2020), sec. Introduction.
[17] Echternkamp, *Postwar Soldiers*, sec. Introduction: "représentations collectives"; Echternkamp cites Roger Chartier, "Die Welt als Repräsentation," in *Alles Gewordene hat Geschichte: die Schule der Annales in ihren Texten 1929-1992*, ed. Matthias Middell and Peter Schöttler (Leipzig: Reclam Verl., 1994), 326, 331, 337; See also Roger Chartier, *Cultural history: between practices and representations*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 6.
[18] Émile Durkheim, *The rules of sociological method*, trans. W. D Halls, 1982.

and relationships and that construct for each class, group, and milieu a form of perceived existence that is constitutive of their identities."[19] In this manner, Echternkamp proposed, "representations are not so much the expression of unconscious mental attitudes (i.e., militarism) as they are interpretations carried out in response to concrete claims and situations (here, the military past) by certain segments of society, who use them to classify the social order with consciously selected strategies and to derive a (prominent) position for their own group." German veterans in the VDAK formulated "collective representations" for their own differentiation, in response to challenges or conversations, and often with strategic goals in mind. That is not so say these representations tell us nothing about German mentalities or the war itself, but that they must be understood as mediated, socially and culturally situated, and should not be understood in isolation.

Verband Deutsches Afrika-Korps: a "Memory Group"

The *Verband Deutsches Afrika Korps* (also known as the *Verband der ehemaligen Angehörigen des Deutschen Afrika-Korps*, abbreviated here as VDAK) was founded in June 1951, not long after ex-servicemen *Traditionsverbände* were legalized by Konrad Adenauer's government. Aiming to marginalize tendencies and societal segments believed to have contributed to German "militarism" following the First World War, Allied occupation authorities had banned German veterans' associations early in the occupation. [20] Control Council Law 34, which officially dissolved the Wehrmacht on August 20, 1946, forbade ex-servicemen

[19] Cited in Echternkamp, *Postwar Soldiers*, sec. Introduction.
[20] See, for example: Jonathan Dunnage et al., "Understanding Militarism after the End of the Cold War: History, International Relations, and Media Studies Ask New Questions," *History Compass* 17, no. 12 (2019): e12600, https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12600; James M Diehl, *The Thanks of the Fatherland: German Veterans after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 3; Fred Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler: The Occupation and Denazification of Germany* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011), sec. Introduction.

associations, and also eliminated existing policies and administrations ensuring military pensions and war-disability benefits, combining these provisions with broader administrations for industrial accidents, for example.[21] The earliest organizations of former German career officers and disabled veterans centered their activities on opposing these policies, and were mobilized by advocates of greater independence against the occupiers. Control Council Law 34 was lifted in December of 1949, following the foundation of the *Bundesrepublik*. In May 1951, Konrad Adenauer's government replaced Control Council Law 34 with the less strict Allied High Commission Law 16. Article 131, which finally rescinded the ban on veterans' associations, as well as some other restrictions on ex-Nazis and former civil servants.[22] Soon after, in the spring and summer of 1951, an enormous number of veterans' associations formed across West Germany.

Founded by former career officers including, most important to the organization's development, Ludwig Crüwell and Siegfried Westphal, the VDAK can be understood as a "memory group" that came to engage in public forms of "recollection" in commemorations, reunions, in writing, and in political activity.[23] The narratives promulgated in *Die Oase*, the VDAK newspaper, in public pronouncements, and in group exercises, were forms of "collective representation."[24] They delineated and differentiated similarly aligned soldiers who fought in North Africa, identified as "*Afrikaner*," engaged with and contested narratives coming from outside this group, and worked to position *Afrikaner* socially, politically, economically, and culturally within West Germany and Europe more broadly.

[21] Diehl, *The Thanks of the Fatherland*, 60, 3.
[22] Ibid., 65.
[23] Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, 14.
[24] Echternkamp, *Postwar Soldiers*, sec. Introduction.

The leading members of the VDAK, and the Wehrmacht as a whole, largely came from military families, often with backgrounds in the nobility. The Wehrmacht officer corps was recruited disproportionately from Germany's social and economic elite. In the year 1937, 15.3% of the entire officer corps consisted of men with a background in the nobility, largely Prussian, and down from 21.5% in 1933 under the pressure of military expansion and recruitment. At the rank of general, this number rose to 32.6%.[25] Despite Hitler's October 1942 revision of officer recruitment policies toward battlefield accomplishment,[26] and despite battlefield casualties, the proportions of officers of noble backgrounds were still 21.5% and 19% in 1943 and 1945 respectively.[27] In 1930, the fathers of 54.4% of all Reichswehr officer candidates were officers,[28] though the proportion was down to 30% in 1939 and 29% in 1944.[29] This number remained highest at the upper echelons, with a third of *Generaloberste* and *Generalen der Infanteri*e could be counted as members of the German nobility either along patrilineal or matrilineal lines.[30] The most prominent influencers of *Die Oase* content, Siegfried Westphal and Ludwig Crüwell, were career soldiers steeped in German military culture and hierarchy. Crüwell was born in Dortmund in 1892, was commissioned as an officer before fighting in First World War, and was steadily promoted during the interwar period.[31] Siegfried Westphal, born in 1902, and the son of an army officer, entered the military at the age of 16 in 1918, and continued his career in the interwar

[25] Detlef Bald, "The German Officer Corps: Caste or Class?," *Armed Forces & Society* 5, no. 4 (July 1, 1979): 646, https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X7900500408.
[26] MacGregor Knox, "1 October 1942: Adolf Hitler, Wehrmacht Officer Policy, and Social Revolution," *The Historical Journal* 43, no. 3 (2000): 801–25, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3020979.
[27] Bald, "The German Officer Corps," 646.
[28] Ibid., 649.
[29] Ibid., 652.
[30] Derek R. Mallett, *Hitler's Generals in America: Nazi POWs and Allied Military Intelligence* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 7.
[31] Samuel W. Mitcham, *Rommel's Desert Commanders the Men Who Served the Desert Fox, North Africa, 1941 - 1942* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International, 2007), 44–46.

period.[32] Following the Second World War, both went on to successful careers in West German industry. Westphal worked in the steel industry, and was the director of the Rheinische Stahlwerke from 1960 to 1972, dying in 1982.[33] Crüwell managed an industrial representation agency in Bonn until his death in 1958, and was considered for senior roles in the Bundeswehr.[34] Consequently, the VDAK's representations and recollections were inextricable from the interests and attitudes of politically conservative members of the prewar military elite.

The VDAK's first meeting, in July 1951, was reportedly organized by Wilhelm Wessel, a professionally trained artist who once studied with Kandinsky and the author of the 1943 art and propaganda book *Mit Rommel in der Wüste*, apparently following multiple inquiries from ex-servicemen inquiring about the formation of an organization specifically for Afrika Korps veterans.[35] Wessel met with the imprisoned Field Marshall Albert Kesselring, then languishing "bitter weeks" in the English military hospital in Iserlohn, while prisoner in Werl,[36] who in turn "urged Wessel to consider the idea with General Westphal and General Crüwell."[37] Following a consultation, Wessel "considered it necessary" to organize a first meeting of former Afrika Korps soldiers in such a way that its "initiative… clearly lay with the nameless, unknown veterans of the desert" in order to discourage them from "misjudging" the association.[38]

In addition to celebrating "the personality and demeanor of our Field Marshal Rommel," the focus of the first meeting was to be the "the memory of the desert comrades in the desert

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[32] Ibid., 100–101.
[33] "Obituaries," *Boston Globe*, July 3, 1982, p. 34, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Reuters, "Siegfried Westphal: [Obituary]," *New York Times*, July 3, 1982, Late Edition (East Coast) edition, p. 1.19, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.
[34] C. L. Sulzberger, "Foreign Affairs: The New Look in German Generals," *New York Times*, 1954, p. 14.
[35] "Group of Three Original Artworks.," 3, accessed November 7, 2021, https://www.peterharrington.co.uk/group-of-three-original-artworks-136644.html.
[36] Dr. Wolfframm, "So entstand unser Verband," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 9, September 1953, p. 3, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[37] Ibid.
[38] "falsche Beurteilung… zu vermeiden"

sand" and initiating measures to identify and bury German remains. Without using his own name, Wessel issued a call to veterans in Iserlohn newspapers on June 30, 1951, stating that the German Afrika Korps "acquired an undisputed special position among all parts of the armed forces and almost all armies of the military powers of the last war." The Afrika Korps' "special position" was linked to its leadership: "Under the leadership of their Field Marshal Rommel, these German soldiers won the respect of the whole world through their courage and integrity." Wessel's note went on to claim that the graves of German soldiers who fought in the North Africa campaign were lost to sandstorms. However, he exhorted, "the memory of the dead soldiers of the war in the desert must not be forgotten." They planned to "renew the memory of the dead comrades" at a meeting of all former German North Africa soldiers, in the spirit of comradeship." The focus of the meeting was to "be a short slide show with pictures of the graves of comrades and previously unpublished pictures of Marshal Rommel in the desert."[39]

The former Afrika Korps officers' choice of Erwin Rommel as their collective emblem and the symbol of the organization was shrewd. In British and German popular memory, the North Africa campaign was and is inseparable from the figure of Erwin Rommel, one of the most celebrated military leaders of the Second World War. Rommel was a talented officer with a keen eye for public perception and a genius for self-promotion. With the aid of Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels and Adolf Hitler, Rommel used his military successes and leadership connections to build a cult of celebrity around himself. By the end of 1941, Rommel became the German general best known to the British public, one to whom they paid a certain respect.[40] Rommel's notoriety was amplified by American and British media, and Winston Churchill in

[39] Dr. Wolfframm, "So entstand unser Verband," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 9, September 1953, p. 3, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[40] Reuth, *Rommel*, chap. 3.

particular. A 1942 Gallup Poll found Rommel was "the best-known German in foreign countries in 1942 after Hitler."[41] Following his death and after the war, Rommel's prestige only grew, particularly in conjunction with pressure for German rearmament. Hans Speidel, Rommel's former Chief of Staff in the west, identified Rommel as a valuable symbol of German military tradition. Along with General Leo Geyr von Schweppenburg, who intended to ensure Rommel's place as a "national hero of the German people," Speidel was behind a new, dubious account of Rommel's participation in anti-Nazi resistance activities that emerged in *Christ und Welt* in September 1948.[42]

Wilhelm Wessel's anonymous posting was unexpectedly successful, despite apparent awareness by unsympathetic parties ("some German intelligence services spread the announcement outside of Germany without being asked"). The first meeting, which was held on July 18th, 1951 at the Deutsches Haus hotel in Iserlohn, was well-attended by veterans, former officers, and surviving family members. In sum, in language redolent of both the Wehrmacht and the VDAK's hierarchical military culture, "Wessel had carried out the recommendation of Field Marshal Kesselring." At the meeting, Generals Westphal, Crüwell, Seidemann, von Esebeck (a distant relation to the war correspondent), and von Ravenstein, "some of the well-known commanders from Africa," announced their participation in the organization. General Crüwell informed Rommel's widow, Lucie Maria Rommell, as well as Lieutenant General Bayerlein, both of whom expressed enthusiasm at future participation. The *Oase* article conceded, "It is true that the name of the person who was considering the first thoughts about a meeting with Wessel

[41] Ibid.,
[42] Ibid., chap. 5.,

had to remain anonymous: Field Marshal Kesselring," who kept abreast of new developments but was unable to participate.[43]

The second meeting of the association took place on July 29, 1951, led by General Hans-Karl Freiherr von Esebeck, and General Ludwig Crüwell was elected "the first successor to Field Marshal Rommel as the commanding officer of the D.A.K." Publicized by press and radio, the founders soon set to work organizing the first general reunion, to take place in September 1951 in Iserlohn.[44]

Intelligence services were indeed aware of the meeting. Acting High Commissioner J.G. Ward summarized intelligence on the matter for the British Foreign Office on September 14, 1951: "Little so far is known of an association of ex-members of the Afrikakorps which was founded at Iserlohn, on the 29th July." The veterans issued a press release emphasizing that the "association eschewed politics and any form of radicalism, and was to devote itself to purely social aims." The leaders of the meeting telegrammed the President of Nordrhein-Westfalen a message "in which it indicated its readiness to 'serve the German state and people in a spirit of loyalty and sacrifice.'" Ward also noted that the organization telegrammed greetings to the imprisoned Kesselring.[45]

The British government's main concern was with preventing the emergence of German veterans' organizations which might constitute a radical core for continuation of the "militarism," blamed in part for German aggression in the First and Second World Wars and the rise of fascism.[46] Investigators working for British authorities were aware of the VDAK's

[43] Dr. Wolfframm, "So entstand unser Verband," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 9, September 1953, p.3, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[44] Ibid.
[45] TNA: FO 1013/1346, 11F, Ward to K. G. Younger, September 14, 1951, Annex p. 1.
[46] See, for example: Diehl, *The Thanks of the Fatherland*, 55.

involvement with the convicted war criminal Kesselring, but believed that the VDAK's leaders' "moderation" made the organization preferable to some of the more radical alternatives. A Mr. Rahn, a German agent working for British authorities in Rendsburg, attended one of the very earliest VDAK meetings, on October 19, 1951.[47] According to Rahn, General Esebek spoke to about 20 members. Esebeck explained that the purpose of the organization included "the cultivation of tradition and comradeship, the cultivation and preservation of the knightly spirit," as well as the creation and maintenance of war graves, and caring for the relatives of survivors. Rahn reported that Esebeck stated "With regard to the political situation… the association was neutral in terms of party politics and had to show the greatest restraint in general politics. The association had no political demands to make, it was exclusively a friendly gathering." However, regarding the matter of German remilitarization, Esebeck "said that an affirmative answer was mandatory because it was a matter of defending European culture."

However, the VDAK "can only approve remilitarization if the only requirement is met: absolute equality and release of all prisoners of war, including former soldiers of all ranks who are still innocently imprisoned." The exchange being demanded was a clear one: the VDAK offered remilitarization in the defense of "European culture" in exchange for the liberation of convicted German war criminals. This was the "conditio sine qua non," or the condition necessary for an agreement.

Generals Crüwell and von Esebeck both served as leaders of the VDAK in its early days, and the two represented the VDAK in meetings with other veteran groups and in negotiations.[48] Crüwell was the VDAK's formal leader until his death in 1958, though Siegfried Westphal

[47] TNA: FO 1006/676, 1B, P6/7, 1B, Rahm, Bericht: die Versammlung der Ortsgruppe des Deutschen Afrika-Korps am 19.Oktober 1951 in Neumünster, October 19, 1951.
[48] TNA: FO 1014/620, Verband Deutsche Soldaten: Vol I, 1952.

appears to have assumed significant leadership responsibilities before then. British government reports on German veterans' associations generally noted VDAK as a "moderate" and broadly popular organization.[49] The VDAK appeared second on a list of 51 organizations invited to an unsuccessful February 1952[50] conference in Wiesbaden organized by Dr. Werner Noack's "Goslar Group"[51] aiming to create a Bonn-backed supra-organization for Veterans' associations. These efforts were part of a campaign to address concerns over the emergence of two large veteran associations in late 1951, the *Verband deutscher Soldaten* (VDS) and the *Bund versorgungsberechtigter ehemaliger Wehrmachtsangehöriger und deren Hinterbliebenen* (BVW), and their apparent merger in January 1952 under retired admiral Gottfried Hansen, which the British feared to be compromised by fervent nationalists and unrepentant Nazis.[52] Crüwell did not attend the Wiesbaden meeting, though the VDAK was represented by Esebeck. British Foreign Office official A.E. Grazebrook observed "the many refusals to attend the Wiesbaden meeting had occasioned no surprise, except that of CRUWELL (Afrika Corps), who had been believed sympathetic to the aims of the Goslarer Kreis."[53] These aims included the formation of a "moderate" umbrella ex-servicemen association outside the influence of neo-Nazis, ardent nationalists, and former members of the SS.[54]

British observers concluded that Crüwell and Westphal were adequately "moderate" alternatives to more radical or, at least, less careful Wehrmacht ideologues. A secret September 24, 1951 Foreign Office report observed Crüwell to be a "relatively moderate element" in ex-servicemen circles, in contrast with individuals like Heinz Guderian, Johannes Friessner,

[49] TNA: FO 371/109702, CW1561/4 C, F. R. Hoyer Millar to Anthony Eden, September 18, 1954, p. 3.
[50] TNA: FO 1013/1347, Subject: Ex-Servicemen's Associations, January 25, 1952.
[51] TNA: FO 1013/1347, Ex-Service Associations – Kyffhäuserbund, November 13, 1952.
[52] TNA: FO 1014/620, 42, Secret: No. 140, 5/3/71/52, June 9, 1952, p. 2.
[53] TNA: FO 1014/620, 19/2, Ex-Service Associations: Interview with Dr. Werner Noack, February 18, 1952, p. 1.
[54] TNA: FO 1014/620, 19/2, Ex-Service Associations: Interview with Dr. Werner Noack, February 18, 1952, p. 3.

Hermann-Bernhard Ramcke, and Paul Hausser.[55] However, "it would be a mistake… to regard such men… as politically moderate in the British sense, ie devoted to the ideals of Western democracy and the Bonn Constitution." Rather, "Their intense Conservatism, based on the Prussian military tradition, leads them to favour cooperation with the present Federal Government and the Western Allies in opposition to Russian Communism."[56] The moderates were "as insistent as the more extreme group… on complete German sovereignty and equality and the release of the 'so-called' war criminals as conditions for this cooperation."[57]

A report by F. R. Hoyer Millar for the United Kingdom High Commission in Bonn dated September 18, 1954 concurred with earlier assessments. Millar observed that the VDAK reunion in Heidelberg that month was attended by 15,000 former members, where they were addressed by General Crüwell, "who… is generally considered to be a moderate and Western-minded General."[58] Millar considered organizations like the VDAK and the *Traditionsgemeinschaft Grossdeutschland* to be far more "moderate" and politically neutral than the HIAG (*Hilfsgemeinschaft der ehemaligen Angehörigen der Waffen SS*) and especially, the radical *Stahlhelm* organization headed by Herbert Eckhardt. Nevertheless, it was not unusual for veterans to attend meetings held by one organization or another, including former Waffen SS. For instance, when a HIAG meeting could not take place in September 1952, members went instead to an Afrika Korps meeting in Stuttgart.[59]

Die Oase and VDAK records demonstrate that Crüwell, Westphal and the VDAK's "moderation," as the British understood it, was a deliberate political decision and, an ultimately

[55] TNA: FO 1014/620, 2A, The Coordination of German Ex-Servicemen's Activities (Second Paper), October 1951, p. 2.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 2-3.
[58] TNA: FO 371/109702, CW1561/4 C, F. R. Hoyer Millar to Anthony Eden, September 18, 1954, p. 1.
[59] TNA: FO 1014/622, 36, Political Report No. 125, Subject: HIAG, September 24, 1952.

quite successful strategic choice for collective self-representation. The VDAK and its leaders were willing to concede little, either to the new government in Bonn or to the former Western enemies, without concessions: the liberation of convicted war criminals, and the rehabilitation of the German military through the emerging interpretation of Erwin Rommel and the Second World War in North Africa as a "war without hate".

The VDAK was organized into dozens of small local chapters, which generally met monthly at local institutions. By March 1960, there were 112 individual chapters spread across West Germany, with one chapter in Rome.[60] Starting in 1952, the VDAK organized highly publicized annual reunions, *Bundestreffen*, where members of the regional chapters would reunite, meet, drink, and commemorate the war. By 1959, these reunions were regularly attended by between 12,000 and 15,000 former Afrika Korps soldiers, although a significantly larger number likely attended local chapter meetings at restaurants and beer gardens.[61]

This was a small number of the approximately 250,000 Germans in total who spent time in North Africa in some capacity over the course of the war, the survivors of whom were ultimately invited to join the organization.[62] However, that larger number includes Germans from service branches less likely to identify as "Afrika Korps" members, like those who fought in the Kriegsmarine and the Luftwaffe. For much of the campaign in North Africa, the number of Germans in the region fluctuated as soldiers were captured, injured, killed, or surrendered. Prior to El Alamein, for example, approximately 90,000 Germans were in North Africa. Of these, under 49,000 Germans were actually under Rommel's command, which, combined with slightly over 50,000 Italians, brought the size of the *Panzerarmee* to around 100,000 total soldiers. The

[60] "Wo Treffen Wir Uns?," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 10, No. 3, März 1960, p. 16, Harvard Library, KSG 2444.
[61] BArch, B 469/81 1/2, "1960 Bundestreffen des Afrika-Korps."
[62] Siegfried Westphal and Verband ehemaliger Angehöriger Deutsches Afrika-Korps e.V., *Schicksal Nordafrika* (Böblingen/Württemberg: Europa-Contact, 1954), 143.

remainder were in the Kriegsmarine or Luftwaffe.[63] 34,000 Germans were killed, wounded or captured, at Alamein.[64] A greatly reduced number ultimately retreated to Tunisia, where they were reinforced rapidly in the buildup to the final surrender in May 1943. Nearly 19,000 Germans died in battle in North Africa, approximately 3,400 went missing, thousands more were captured in combat, with 130,000 ultimately surrendering in Tunisia in May 1943.[65] It is unclear how many of these soldiers would later identify as members of the "Afrika Korps." If only 5% of veterans joined veteran associations in the early 1950s,[66] the VDAK exceeded this proportion, and greatly, if the organization's emphasis on soldiers who fought under Rommel during and prior to Alamein was reflected in its membership. Ultimately, along with the *Traditionsverband Grossdeutschland*, the VDAK became one of the most influential veterans' associations in West Germany.[67]

Die Oase: The Veband Deutsches Afrika Korps Newsletter

The VDAK newspaper, *Die Oase*, which began publication in December 1951 and was generally distributed by mail, is an invaluable source for the development of postwar discourses surrounding the Second World War in North Africa.[68] It is, moreover, quite revealing of continuity in terms of attitudes from the Nazi era into the postwar period. In 1958, the paper was mailed to approximately 4,750 paid subscribers, with an estimated total of 6,000 regular recipients.[69] *Die Oase*'s contributors and promotional material argued for direct continuity

[63] Horst Boog et al., *Germany and the Second World War, Vol. VI: The Global War*, 2015, 775.
[64] Micheal Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Encyclopedia of Casualty and Other Figures, 1494-2000.* (Jefferson N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), 477.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Diehl, *The Thanks of the Fatherland*, 206.
[67] von Lingen, *Kesselring's Last Battle*, chap. 4.
[68] BArch, B 469/130, "Offene Worte!", *Die Oase*, Jarg. 2, Nr. 5, Juli 1952, p. 6.
[69] BArch, B 469/42 2/2, Monatsabrechnung der Zeitschrift "Oase", Juli 1958; B 469/42 1/2, Bundesgeschäftsführer Akten-Notiz, 15.1.1960; B 469/42 2/2, Dr. P./S., 7. Mai 1958.

between the wartime newspaper *Die Oase*, distributed to Afrika Korps soldiers at the front, and the new VDAK newsletter. Advertisements and promotions for the newsletter, such as the one printed in the program for the 1954 VDAK *Bundestreffen* in Heidelberg, explicitly framed it as such. This promotion, which appeared in subsequent reunion material for multiple years, consisted of a wartime photograph of a German soldier reading the Wehrmacht-produced and distributed *Die Oase*, with the following accompanying text: "In the desert, *Die Oase* was often the only connection to the other fronts of the war, [and] especially to home. Today *Die Oase* is the only tie that binds 'old Africans' in their homeland and around the world."[70] The significance of presenting and promoting the postwar *Die Oase* as a continuation of the Nazi newspaper produced for soldiers' *geistige Betreuung* is twofold. First, there is little question as to the influence and popularity of the wartime *Die Oase*, the antisemitic (and racist, imperialist, and Anglophobic) *Feldzeitung* devoted to boosting soldiers' morale and promoting Nazi race theory discussed in the first chapter. Second, the VDAK's "apolitical" or non-partisan political position must not be taken at face value. Instead, *Die Oase* and VDAK records reveal a politically activist, right-wing organization guided by and for the interests of unrepentant Wehrmacht officers.

From the beginning, *Die Oase*'s editors emphasized the publication's non-partisan political position. The paper was emphatically apolitical: "No party politics."[71] Nevertheless, the articles published in *Die Oase* in large part reflected political editorial decisions of the prominent former Afrika Korps officers who managed and controlled the newspaper. *Die Oase*'s first three issues, through June 1952, were edited by Freiherr von Wechmar, a former *Oberst* who had

[70] BArch, B469/5 1/2, Festaufgabe Bundestreffen 1954 Heidelberg, p. 26.
[71] BArch, B 469/130, "Offene Worte!", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 5, Juli 1952, p. 6.

fought in North Africa.[72] Wechmar's pre-war employment as a journalist and his later military career likely suited him for the endeavor.[73] After leading a Panzer Reconnaissance Division in France, Poland, and North Africa, Wechmar returned to Germany for a position that made use of his journalistic experience: from 1941 through 1943, Wechmar was placed in charge of the OKW department overseeing Wehrmacht propaganda.[74] However, owing to apparent health issues, Wechmar was replaced as *Oase* editor by Dr. Peter Wolfframm beginning with the fourth issue, dated June 1952, who was soon joined by Dr. Fritz Lang. Wolfframm was another former war correspondent,[75] whose work had appeared in the *Illustrirte Zeitung Leipzig*, for example.[76] Lang, a former ace tank commander,[77] was elected chairman of the Iserlohn branch of the VDAK in October 1952.[78] By the start of 1957, editorial and publishing responsibilities had been taken over by Dr. J. Pöppinghaus, a publisher based in the city of Bochum, Westfalen.[79] Surviving letters from Pöppinghaus to VDAK leadership reveal that although Pöppinghaus was the newsletter's editor and publisher, control over *Die Oase*'s contents ultimately lay in the hands of Generals Westphal and Crüwell, a relationship that had likely continued from newsletter's first years of publication. Before and following Crüwell's death in 1958, Westphal was heavily involved in deciding which articles, advertisements, and other materials were to be

[72] BArch, B 469/130, "Neue Schriftleitung der 'Oase'", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 4., Juni 1952, p.6.
[73] "Ritterkreuzträger Irnfried Freiherr von Wechmar," accessed November 7, 2021, https://web.archive.org/web/20120919044137/http://ritterkreuztraeger-1939-45.de/Infanterie/W/Wechmar-Irnfired-Freiherr-von.htm.
[74] "Lexikon Der Wehrmacht - Wechmar," accessed November 7, 2021, https://www.lexikon-der-wehrmacht.de/Personenregister/W/WechmarIFv.htm.
[75] "Propagandaberichte: Bd. 10 - Archivportal-D," accessed November 7, 2021, https://www.archivportal-d.de/item/KKXABNEMIYHUCBBGSB7IZUZSJ6KFAZ7R?isThumbnailFiltered=false&rows=20&offset=200&viewType=list&hitNumber=215.
[76] "Illustrirte Zeitung Leipzig Nr.4991 / 25. Dezember 1941 von Weber, J. J. (Herausgeber):: (1941) | Galerie für gegenständliche Kunst," accessed November 7, 2021, https://www.zvab.com/erstausgabe/Illustrirte-Zeitung-Leipzig-Nr.4991-Dezember-1941/15514982752/bd.
[77] Jack Beckett, "Top 7 German Panzer Aces," *War History Online* (blog), July 9, 2015, https://www.warhistoryonline.com/war-articles/top-7-panzer-aces.html.
[78] "Kameradschaften berichten", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 8, Oktober 1952, p. 5, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[79] BArch, B 469/42 2/2, Pöppinghaus to Möller, 2.1.1957.

included in *Die Oase*.[80] As a consequence, *Die Oase*'s content centered the aims and perspectives of VDAK leadership, themselves former senior officers of the Afrika Korps.

Die Oase Periodization

The articles in *Die Oase* and VDAK leadership statements in public speeches and commemorations, reveal shifts in focus and public "recollection" over the 1950s and early 1960s that fall into roughly two periods. The first period stretched approximately from the founding of the association in June 1951 through a widely publicized September 1953 football match against survivors of the British "Desert Rats" at the third VDAK reunion, which took place in Hannover that year. During this period, narratives and public discourses surrounding the wartime experience, as well as German soldiers' relationship with Britain were more unsettled and in flux. While the interpretation of North Africa as "war without hate" existed from the very beginning, by the period of 1954 through the early 1960s, this narrative became firmly enshrined in VDAK discourse by the second period. The transition between the two periods was marked by two events: the freeing of VDAK founder Albert Kesselring, and the friendly football match between former "Desert Rats" and Afrika-Korps veterans.

The supposedly empty desert was central component of the public discourse surrounding the Afrika Korps and the North Africa Campaign during both the earlier and later 1950s periods discussed in this chapter.[81] The purported cleanliness of combat was, in part, allegedly determined by the flat and empty desert environment – a barren space devoid of life, partisans, and other obstacles that might inconveniently sully otherwise honorable warfare. Discursively emptying North Africa of its inhabitants sanitized the conflict, masking the war's imperial

[80] BArch, B 469/42 1/2 and B 469/42 2/2.
[81] See the discussion of "emptiness" and the environment in Chapter 2

context and violence. Such "emptying" has long been a core component of settler colonialism.[82] Here, however, the vision of North Africa as a barren wasteland devoid of life entailed the erasure of Nazi Germany's political project in the region, the political and social upheavals of colonialism and decolonization, as well as indigenous north African aspirations for independence. An "empty" campaign allowed for the creation of a clean, manly, and controlled "national" war fought between the white nations of Europe—all while Britain and Germany experienced post-colonial migration to former metropoles in an era which saw the collapse of formal imperialism.[83]

However, during both periods, the discourse of North Africa's "emptiness" coexisted uneasily with a clear recognition of a populated North Africa, and the existence of North Africans. Their gradual disappearance allowed for Africa's distant and, supposedly, former coloniality to become a locus for bonding by former German and, eventually, British soldiers. The growing emphasis on the desert's supposed emptiness and environmental particularity also came to obscure the violence and trauma of combat experienced by German and British soldiers. Features such as the exposed horror of aerial bombardment in desert warfare were more prominent in the earlier recollections and war stories published by *Die Oase*. In 1956, the VDAK invited First World War hero Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, and other fellow "old Africans' of all

[82] See, for example: Eve Vincent, "'Never Mind Our Country Is the Desert,'" in *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity*, ed. Tracey Banivanua-Mar and Penelope Edmonds (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Roslynn D Haynes, *Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film* (Cambridge, UK; New York, US: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Andrew Fitzmaurice, "The Genealogy of Terra Nullius," *Australian Historical Studies* 38, no. 129 (April 1, 2007): 1–15, https://doi.org/10.1080/10314610708601228; Tracey Banivanua-Mar and Penelope Edmonds, *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[83] Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain : Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997); Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Sonya Rose, *Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-1945* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

nations"[84] to build a sense of comradeship over a shared imperial heritage and enshrined whiteness.[85]

The letters and articles published by *Die Oase* during the earlier period revealed a lingering ambivalence over Germany's relationship with Britain. The discourse in speeches and publications during that time suggest a degree of continuity with wartime and pre-war Nazi discourses involving the United Kingdom and the British Empire, and at least partial recognition of the defeated Axis powers' frustrated imperial aims. It was only during this period that *Die Oase* published pieces expressing near-open hostility toward the Western Allies and Britain in particular. From 1951 through 1953, when VDAK leaders asserted no real "hatred" existed between German and British soldiers, and argued that the North African combat was waged in the knightly tradition of chivalry, they did so to make clear arguments about their own treatment at that point in time: to establish that imprisoning German officers and "defaming" the German war effort were violations of this soldierly chivalry. Following Kesselring's release and a highly publicized September 1953 football match against former members of the British "Desert Rats," most public qualms with the Western Allies were dropped and subsumed into the story of a common European tragedy and a common European conflict, and the need to unite against the Soviet threat.

[84] BArch, B 469/81 1/2, Sendung des Süddeutschen Rundfunks vom 22.7.56, 19.15 Uhr.
[85] Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, "Eurafrica Incognita: The Colonial Origins of the European Union," *History of the Present* 7, no. 1 (April 1, 2017): 1–32, https://doi.org/10.5406/historypresent.7.1.0001; Britta Schilling, "German Postcolonialism in Four Dimensions: A Historical Perspective," *Postcolonial Studies* 18, no. 4 (October 2, 2015): 429, https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2015.1191988.

The Issue of Kesselring: Rehabilitation and Rearmament

From the organization's founding in 1951 through Kesselring's release in 1953, VDAK leadership argued forcefully for the freeing of imprisoned German war criminals and the rehabilitation of the Wehrmacht's maligned reputation, and thus for their own prestige, power, and socio-economic status. Early on, the imprisonment of the VDAK's purported leader, Albert Kesselring, crystalized as the focus of *Die Oase*'s most polemical pieces, with authors linking efforts to overturn his conviction to West Germany's Cold War rearmament (the "sine qua non" referenced by British intelligence which appeared in VDAK publications and speeches). The issue of Kesselring lay at the center of two discursive phenomena: first, the prewar and wartime antisemitic (and Anglophobic) vision of shadowy conspiratorial forces orchestrating Germany's geopolitical encirclement by an imperially voracious and implacably anti-German Britain, remained a potent force after the Second World war in even "moderate" veteran circles. This pervasive and continuing vision complicated the easy narrative of a "war without hate." The issue of Kesselring's imprisonment in particular drew out some of the most powerful attacks on the Western Allies, juxtaposing a divided and occupied Germany with colonial possessions. Second, VDAK arguments for Kesselring's vindication required the interpretation of the war in North Africa as "clean" and "chivalrous" owing to its supposed emptiness and lack of partisans when compared with the Soviet Union or Italy. While erasing North Africa's inhabitants, the discourse of emptiness simultaneously papered over Anglo-German hostility.

From 1951 through 1953, VDAK leadership and *Die Oase* contributors challenged Allied allegations of German war guilt, denounced charges of Wehrmacht war crimes, and agitated for the release of convicted German war criminals, most emphatically Field Marshall Kesselring, the VDAK's unofficial founder. Kesselring, responsible for the brutal German occupation of Italy,

was tried in February 1947 by a British military tribunal held in Italy for the murder of 335 Italians at the Ardeatine Caves in Rome, dubbed the "Ardeatine massacre," as well as inciting German soldiers to murder Italian civilians at ratio of ten civilians for one German killed with his *Bandenbefehle* (partisan orders).[86] In Italy, Kesselring's defense counsel argued that the Wehrmacht's reprisals were legally permissible military actions. The British-led court found Kesselring guilty in May 1947, and sentenced him to death by firing squad. Winston Churchill and the British General Harold Alexander petitioned for leniency, and Kesselring's death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment in July of that year.[87] Kesselring was ultimately released from prison on health grounds in October 1952, despite protests in Italy.

Kesselring was released following the Berlin airlift, the formation of NATO, and while the Korea War raged, in a period of heightened Cold War tensions. With fear of the Soviet Union in mind, the Allies had already abandoned early, more aggressive postwar notions of denazification and collective German guilt, choosing instead to cordon off the SS and the most egregious offenders for punishment, "painting a picture of Nazism… shown to be an 'evil' with no connections to the great German cultural traditions to 'Europe' in general."[88] The ever-present Soviet threat was the primary motivator for British proponents of West German rearmament and Wehrmacht rehabilitation in the form of the "clean hands" mythology.[89]

The discourse surrounding Kesselring's imprisonment and release deeply informed the "clean hands" of the Wehrmacht mythology of the postwar period, contributing to the myth that wartime atrocities were committed by a small conspiratorial element, with culpability relegated

[86] von Lingen, *Kesselring's Last Battle*, chap. 2.
[87] Ibid., chap. 3.
[88] Dan Stone, *Goodbye to All That?: A History of Europe Since 1945*, 1st edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 53.
[89] Major, "'Our Friend Rommel.'"

almost entirely to Nazi leadership and the SS.[90] Kerstin von Lingen has argued that Kesselring's trial situated the field marshal as a "proxy for the entire Wehrmacht," making arguments in his defense advancing the "image of the 'decent German soldier in Italy.'" Kesselring's supporters continued to promote this image during the campaign for his pardon. Subsequently, Kesselring's image "flowed into the 'legend of the clean Wehrmacht,' according to which only SS troops or 'asocial elements' were responsible for shooting hostages and murdering Jews."[91]

In VDAK discourse, unjust German suffering and postwar national victimhood conflated imprisoned, convicted war criminals in the west with the many lower ranking prisoners indefinitely detained in the Soviet Union. The question "Where is Kesselring?" appeared at the top of *Die Oase*'s June 1952 issue.[92] The article dealing with the issue of Kesselring, "We are still waiting…," emphasized the plight of the relatives of the millions of prisoners still awaiting their loved ones' release: "the suffering for everyone who has been waiting for their release in prisons, penal houses and camps for years, this suffering is a tie binding across all borders and zones."[93] The focus of the article was "two men who, as old Africans, are particularly close to us: Field Marshal Kesselring and General Gause." Alfred Gause had been Rommel's Chief of Staff from 1941 to 1943, and was imprisoned by the Soviet Union following his capture in 1945. Kesselring and 28 other German soldiers were imprisoned in Werl "waiting for justice to be fulfilled."

The former Wehrmacht's ongoing, unjust imprisonment and humiliation were declared to be violations of "chivalry." Indeed, the earliest appearance of the term *Ritterlichkeit* (chivalry) in

[90] Stone, *Goodbye to All That?*, 51–52; Anna Wolff-Poweska, ed., *Memory as Burden and Liberation: Germans and Their Nazi Past* (Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2014), 121.
[91] von Lingen, *Kesselring's Last Battle*, chap. Introduction.
[92] BArch, B 469/130, "Wo bleibt Kesselring?", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 4, Juni 1952, p. 1.
[93] BArch, B 469/130, Ludwig Crüwell, "Noch immer warten wir…", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 4, Juni 1952, p. 3.

surviving issues of *Die Oase* was a June 1952 article by Ludwig Crüwell contrasting German soldiers' continued imprisonment and to the issue of German rearmament.[94] Kesselring's imprisonment represented a violation of the "chivalry" practiced both by the Afrika Korps and "our former opponents." The general undoubtedly continued the "fair way of fighting" practiced in North Africa in the Italian campaign, and "guaranteed the preservation of moral behavior in and outside of combat." The article emphasized that Kesselring's conduct was even confirmed by General Alexander, the former British commander in Italy. Yet, "Today Lord Alexander, as Minister of Defense, is bound by a political way of thinking in which the human fate of 30 German soldiers in Werl is drowned in the… tensions between East and West, between truth and political decision-making." Unfortunately, ominously referenced "external and domestic political" pressure prevented the Allied governments from releasing them. Kesselring's fate was tied directly to the question of German rearmament: "Without commenting on current political decisions, we openly admit that we are not shouting hurray, as we might be expected to do. We are silent." They intended to remain so until the "fate of all prisoners who are held without personal fault only because they acted and made decisions as German soldiers." Crüwell drew a clear distinction between soldiers who "violated the duty of the German soldier… morality or the principles of justified warfare," and those who were allegedly punished "only because they acted and made decisions as German soldiers."

The official British response to VDAK activism reveals a persistent reluctance to accept narratives promoted by the organization's leadership, and skepticism toward the chivalric interpretation of the war in North Africa. The June 1952 issue of *Die Oase* published a March 26, 1951 letter from Crüwell, Wetphal and Ravenstein, on behalf of the VDAK, addressed to

[94] Ibid.

British Defense Minister Alexander, acknowledging his "knightly disposition" (*ritterliche Einstellung*) as well known to former German soldiers, and to Afrika Korps veterans in particular. They requested the release of Field Marshalls Kesselring and Von Manstein, as well as Generals Mackensen and Falkenhorst "on account of age and sickness." The letter concluded with the promise that they were "convinced that such a measure would have a great effect on the German public, which in the opinion of many Germans still stands in the way of integration into the European Defense Community." On April 21, 1951, Alexander replied: "The question you raise is a matter for the Foreign Secretary rather than me. I have, therefore, passed your letter to him and he is arranging for a reply to be sent to you as soon as possible."[95]

The answer was published in the next issue of *Die Oase*, dated July 1952, which printed the question "Where and when will we see Kesselring again?" on its front page. The article "Is anything happening for the 'war criminals'?" indicated that, following a surgical procedure, Crüwell had visited Kesselring in prison, gifting him a bouquet of flowers, and "conveyed the most sincere wishes of all old Africans, to whom we also count the Field Marshal… for a speedy [and] full recovery."[96] Meanwhile, "efforts to free the 'war criminals,'" the term always placed in quotations, "and those German soldiers who are innocent behind bars have continued," citing efforts by Dr. Erich Mende, the spokesman of a group associated with the Free Democratic Party calling for a general amnesty for war criminals.[97] Mende, a member of the Bundestag, provided a list of 145 names to be prioritized for early release in efforts to "re-examine the work of the Joint

[95] BArch, B 469/130, "Lord Alexander antwortet. . .", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 4, Juni 1952, p. 4.
[96] BArch, B 469/130, "Geschieht etwas für die 'Kriegsverbrecher'?", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 5, Juli 1952, p. 3.
[97] R. S., "The West German Political Parties and Rearmament," *The World Today* 9, no. 2 (1953): 56, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40392601; Searle, *Wehrmacht Generals, West Germany Society and the Debate on Rearmament, 1949-1959*, 168.

Commission" and the "whole 'war criminals question'" following the ratification of the General Treaty to normalize relations between West Germany and the Allies.

Die Oase published the reply from British authorities stating that requests for clemency were still in process, and which observed "Your Committee is no doubt aware that the contractual arrangements now under discussion will deal with the question of war criminals."[98] Alongside the British reply, *Die Oase* published a retort expressing doubts that British and American authorities would easily agree to a "general amnesty." The reply argued "We must raise our voices again and again for each of our comrades who today still have to bitterly atone for duty, loyalty and obedience." They continued, asking "What does the question of 'war criminals' look like, and thus also the question of rearming on the side of those who sit behind the gray walls of Werl?" Below, *Die Oase* reprinted the portion of a letter by Herbert Köstlin, another war criminal imprisoned at Werl, first published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeutung* on June 21, 1952. Köstlin complained that negotiations between the Federal Republic and the Allied powers would likely ensure continued imprisonment for many soldiers owing to the German state's weakened position in negotiations, and "the speed and goodwill" of efforts and clemency "are probably tied to the fluctuations in the political weather." He doubted "the Western powers" would ever "give up our detention – unless it is stated as a condition sine qua non. Unfortunately… this has not been done."[99] Köstlin was imprisoned for executing Allied prisoners of war, and was ultimately freed by British authorities in November 9, 1952.[100]

The same July 1952 issue of *Die Oase* also announced that the members of the Münster Afrika Korps veterans' group held their own celebration to mark the tenth anniversary of the

[98] BArch, B 469/130, "Geschieht etwas für die 'Kriegsverbrecher'?", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 5, Juli 1952, p. 3-4.
[99] Ibid., 4.
[100] "British Free 2 Germans," *The New York Times*, November 9, 1952, p. 31.

capture of Tobruk. After commemorating the German dead of both world wars, the chairman, Otto Hoffmeister, "by a unanimous decision of all those present" had a transmitted a telegram to Chancellor Adenauer issuing an ultimatum.[101] On behalf of members of the former German Afrika Korps, and "acting in the interests of our immortalized Field Marshal" Rommel, Hoffmeister urgently requested the chancellor "finally obtain the release of our convicted comrades. Not a man and not a penny for the European Army as long as soldiers of all ranks languish innocently behind prison walls."[102] Kesselring was reportedly informed about the telegram, and sent his own greetings by the Münster circle.[103]

The VDAK was not the only German veteran association campaigning for Kesselring's release. In July 1952, ten veterans' organizations, including the VDAK and the *Grossdeutschland* association, signed a joint declaration calling for the solving of the "war criminal problem" and its related "issue of a German military contribution."[104] The associations argued that future German soldiers would be unable to fight on the same side as Allied militaries that continued to hold fellow Germans as prisoner. Moreover, doing so would drive a wedge between the German armed forces and the German people, who would see them more as mercenaries working for an occupying power.

The next issue of *Die Oase*, dated August 1952 continued to agitate for Kesselring and the imprisoned war criminals. In "Kesselring is waiting for justice," *Die Oase* argued that Kesselring was "one of our most deserving comrades" in North Africa, asking "Why was he and by whom was he convicted?"[105] VDAK contributor Kurt Neher reviewed the documents "which

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[101] BArch, B 469/130, "Geschieht etwas für die 'Kriegsverbrecher'?", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 5, Juli 1952, p. 4.
[102] This is a play on the much older SPD slogan "not a man and not a penny for this system": Peter Fritzsche, *Germans Into Nazis* (Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1998), 52.
[103] BArch, B 469/130, "Geschieht etwas für die 'Kriegsverbrecher'?", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 5, Juli 1952, p. 4.
[104] Searle, *Wehrmacht Generals, West Germany Society and the Debate on Rearmament, 1949-1959*, 167.
[105] "Kesselring wartet auf Gerechtigkeit," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 6, August 1952, p. 2, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.

finally forced" Kesselring to issue the partisan orders of 1944. According to Neher, "Although they were factual and both humanly and militarily flawless, they served as most essential pieces of evidence for the 'inhumanity' of the German warfare." This, despite Kesselring "saving" various Italian cities from destruction by abandoning their defense.

The conditions of Kesselring's trial, *Die Oase* argued, were dubious, and suggested British authorities were more interested in seeking revenge than justice. Yet, what actually occurred at Kesselring's trial "was a negotiation in the dark: a negotiation in the dark of political plans and feelings of revenge, a trial to the exclusion of law and justice."[106] The British authorities "had no confidence in their Italian allies," maintaining their own control over proceedings. This "unique situation under international law" meant "two years after the war a German was standing before an English court to answer for offenses allegedly committed against 1,087 Italians on Italian soil." The British allowed for no exceptions for "the issues of higher command." The presiding General Hackwell, and the other members of the court, were mostly "colonels and lieutenant colonels with an average age of 50 years, some of whom did not even have normal frontline experience."[107] Kesselring was sentenced to death, to be carried out by shooting rather than the more honorable method of hanging, by "officers in the khaki uniforms," who know little "about the hard and bitter compulsion of war."

Die Oase beat the drum for German military rehabilitation in multiple directions. On the same page as the defense of Kesselring, *Die Oase* printed a message from Hans Seidemann, former Luftwaffe General in North Africa, remarking that German veterans' thoughts were preoccupied by concerns over the future: "It is not the task of our association to pursue political

[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.

goals. But let's be vigilant and let's not be misled."[108] While the reconstruction of the country remained their primary commitment, "let us also stand up again and again for the comrades who remained in prisons and behind barbed wire in East and West," in the hopes that they will soon regain their freedom.

Die Oase's challenges to the legitimacy of Kesselring's trial included allegations of Allied hypocrisy, comparing German behavior in Italy to ongoing and prior Allied atrocities, particularly those of the Korean War and Malaya Emergency. These accusations of hypocrisy reflected a degree of continuation of earlier and wartime anti-British and anti-American discourses, with echoes the original *Die Oase*, and Nazi anti-colonial rhetoric.[109] During the war, anti-British propaganda had emphasized England's cruelty, hypocrisy, and arrogance through films such as *Ohm Krueger* and *Carl Peters*, which drew special attention to the British treatment of the Boers of South Africa.[110] Pieces in the wartime *Die Oase* repeatedly argued that the British Empire was being masterminded by the international Jewish conspiracy that controlled world events, and that it was dominated by rulers implacably hostile to Germany.[111] We can see echoes of these themes in *Die Oase*'s rebuttal of the allegations against Kesselring.

This is not to say that the Allies were not hypocritical.[112] The Geneva Conventions and notion of war crimes and were always selectively or conditionally applied, allowing for brutal warfare and cruelty in the service of colonial and neocolonial aims. In the interests of

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[108] "Luftwaffenangehörige des Fliegerführers Afrika!", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 6, August 1952, p. 2, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[109] See Strobl, *The Germanic Isle*; Stibbe, *German Anglophobia and the Great War, 1914-1918*; C. Müller, *West Germans Against The West: Anti-Americanism in Media and Public Opinion in the Federal Republic of Germany 1949–1968*, Palgrave Studies in the History of the Media (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230251410.
[110] For example: BArch, RH 24-200/126, "Arme Weise in Südafrika", *Die Oase*, Folge 30, 18. Mai 1941.
[111] See Chapter 1
[112] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (Monthly Review Press, 2001); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York; [Berkeley, Calif.]: Grove Press ; Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2008).

maintaining the colonial hierarchy, "tools of war" such as torture were not only permitted, but often required as methods of domination.[113] British atrocities during the counterinsurgency in Kenya and French ones in Algeria were largely legally sanctioned.[114] Arguments in defense of Kesselring attempted to draw attention to Allied hypocrisy, not in order to oppose colonial violence, but to argue for its necessity, to transfer responsibility that violence onto its victims, and to suggest its practice ought to build Western solidarity.

Die *Oase*'s lengthy defense of Kesselring concluded with a discussion of the "Lessons of Korea," which emphasized the harsh requirements of anti-partisan warfare and equated German conduct not only in Italy, but around Europe, to British and American practices. At Kesselring's trial:

> The word 'partisans' was used only rarely and then with respect, although Italian city administrations and bishops had called on the German commander-in-chief to protect them from them. Did these British even know which allies they were sparing in Venice? They couldn't have known. Not yet. But two years later in Malaya they were to find out in a terrible way; And a year on, the world was shocked when this headstrong ally in Korea took up arms against his old friends. In Venice people spoke of Italian "civilians" with preference…

The "allies" the British were wasting their efforts in helping were the communists, the ultimate Cold War enemy that now united the former belligerents in a common purpose, the threat that made Germany's rearmament an urgent matter. Kesselring's defense challenged the court with paragraph 358 of the United States' Rules of Land Warfare code of 1940, which allowed for reprisals against an occupied population, as did the Italian military code. The court was caught unaware, and "the astonished Italian lawyers only heard: 'The taking of hostages is inhuman; Retaliation is a crime.'" Just as the Germans resorted to reprisal measures against

[113] Lou Turner, "Fanon and the Biopolitics of Torture: Contextualizing Psychological Practices as Tools of War," in *Living Fanon: Global Perspectives*, ed. Nigel Gibson, 2011th edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
[114] Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*, 1st edition (London: Holt Paperbacks, 2005).

communists in Italy and elsewhere, the British needed to do so in Malaya, as did the Americans in Korea.

> Even today, five years after the pronouncement of the guilty verdict, neither the public nor Field Marshal Kesselring or his defense counsel know anything about the reasons that prompted a military court to pronounce its "guilty"… the much-cited British pioneering work in the field of European law-finding seems extremely questionable.
>
> On that summer day in 1947, the old, experienced soldier stood tall and upright in front of his judge. They knew too little about this war to suspect that they themselves were only tools in the hands of powers which through them put their 'most dangerous enemies out of the way.'
>
> 'Poor Europe,' wrote the death row inmate in a farewell note that night to a friend.

Kesselring's lament for Europe appears to demonstrate further continuity with Nazi anti-Bolshevik discourse and the late war fantasy of a "new order," a united Europe under German leadership facing against the enemy from the east, now accepted as common foe.[115] While Jews were not mentioned, the image of shadowy "powers" working through Allied courts to "put their 'most dangerous enemies out of the way'" is evocative of the antisemitic conspiracy theories that permeated Nazi discourse, of the global Jewish conspiracy that orchestrated both Soviet Bolshevism and plutocratic Anglo-American capitalism and pushed the world into war.

At the first VDAK *Bundestreffen*, held in Iserlohn in September 1951, Crüwell argued that he would only support the decision to rearm "if the Federal Republic can make a decision voluntarily, without external compulsion," and referenced Eisenhower's example of the Hessian mercenaries who fought under British pay during the American War for Independence.[116] Immediately after, he called for the release of Kesselring, who had been judged "at a time when hate dominates" when the principles of lawful warfare had been "partially broken by the harshness of modern ideological warfare… Our former opponents in other and distant theaters of war have recently made the same experiences."[117] Crüwell expanded on these arguments for

[115] Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Vintage, 2000).
[116] BArch, B 469/115, Ludwig Crüwell, Dank an die Stadt Iserlohn und ihren Oberbürgmeister, p. 7.
[117] Ibid., 8.

German rearmament and military rehabilitation at his address delivered at the second annual *Bundestreffen*, in Stuttgart in September 1952, "in the interests of securing the homeland and, beyond that, the western world."[118] Crüwell noted "One reads so often in foreign newspapers how urgently the war-tried German soldier is needed to secure the Western world." Equating the German and Allied experience of partisan warfare, Crüwell observed "The western powers have had experience fighting communist forces in Korea, Indochina, Malacca, etc. in recent years and in recent times, which will show you how cruel, difficult and merciless the fight there is." He continued:

> It must be stated that partisan warfare, which is forbidden under the Hague Land Warfare Regulations, was not an invention of the Germans. But it was this partisan struggle that provided the impetus for the incidents that our comrades are accused of. One hears and reads so often, insightful voices abroad that show understanding for our point of view. So let us hope that the contractually appointed commissions work very quickly and thoroughly.

Crüwell went on to praise the "noble disposition" and "high moral conception" of the imprisoned Kesselring, to whom a telegram was sent reassuring him of "our loyalty."

The supposed absence of partisans in North Africa was emphasized in speeches at VDAK reunions, evolving from arguments that equated Axis and Allied behavior toward the distinctiveness of desert warfare and the peculiarity of the desert environment. At the September 14, 1958 *Bundestreffen* in Karlsruhe, Siegfried Westphal claimed that North Africa was a theater of war "which allowed warfare to unfold." Unimpeded "by rivers or canals, vegetation or cultivation of the ground, almost without towns and villages and thus barely large numbers of inhabitants that could suffer damage," the desert was "also free of partisans!"[119] As combat was waged in a location devoid of inhabitants or other obstacles, "wherever we came into contact with the population in Libya, Egypt and Tunisia, this always happened in a friendly manner on

[118] BArch, B 469/115, Festansprache des Verbandsvorsitzenden General a. D. Crüwell anläßlich der 2. Wiedersehensfeier des Verbandes der ehem. Angehörigen des Deutschen Afrika Korps, Stuttgart, den 14.9.1952.
[119] BArch, B 469/115, General der Kavallerie a.D. Siegfried Westphal, Karlsruhe, 14. September 1958, p. 8.

both sides." In the September 9, 1962 speech at the 8th *Bundestreffen*, Westphal similarly argued that the desert was unique, or at least different from the war that was waged elsewhere: "The peculiarity of the landscape just outlined and the fact that the population of the affected areas was neutral towards the conflict between the belligerents eliminated the danger of partisan campaigns, this hideous degeneration of modern warfare."[120] The discourse of the North Africa's unique emptiness thus served the interests of European solidarity.

North Africa: A British Colony?

Just as the VDAK fervently campaigned for Kesselring's release and the exoneration of German War criminals overall, *Die Oase* presented an altogether unsympathetic portrait of the United Kingdom and British power, one sharing clear continuities with wartime and prewar anti-British rhetoric. *Die Oase* contributors used three strategies to criticize the British Empire. First, they inverted the discourse of Orientalism in the defense of a divided Germany, comparing Germans to a colonial territory. Second, *Die Oase* contributors alleged that postwar British colonialism in North Africa was of altogether the wrong kind, a predatory and selfish one that was an implicit violation of the "White Man's Burden." Third, this rapacious British colonialism was at odds with the ideals of European unity and racial solidarity, and would only serve the interests of the Cold War enemy. Following Kesselring's release, and a prominent Anglo-German soccer match, the abandonment of these arguments set the stage for Anglo-German reconciliation as (post- and neo-)colonial partners.

Prior to the Second World War, fear of foreign domination, of Germany being relegated to a subordinate status approaching that of a colony, had been a motivating factor behind German

[120] BArch, B 469/115, Ansprache des Vortsitzenden, General der Kavallerie a.D. Siegfried Westphal, 9. September 1962, Pirmasens, p. 2.

imperialism.[121] Nazis promised to liberate Germans from "foreign bondage"[122][123] Following the defeat in 1945 and prolonged military occupation, some Germans found similarities between their own predicament and that of colonial subjects in European empires.[124] In the Soviet occupation zone, the SED was quick to describe the zones occupied by the United States as America's "German colony."[125] A popular late 1940s song by Karl Burbuer, "Wir sind die Eingeborenen von Trizonesien" – "We are the Natives of Trizonia," likely a play on the name *Tunesien* (Tunisia), poked fun at the parallels between Germany and a European colony.[126]

This tendency reinforced strands of German Orientalist thinking, though ones that were never dominant, that inverted the Orientalist paradigm. Edward Said has demonstrated that the centuries-long predominant discourse of Orientalism entailed an understanding of the world with an "absolute demarcation between East and West,"[127] or more recently, the "developed and the developing countries,"[128] discursively producing both the Orient and the West, and enshrining the power and knowledge of West over its Other. The "Oriental" subject was primitive, religious, backwards, effeminate, and irrational, demanding intervention by a West which was the superior inverse of those things, and an object of Occidental desire. The Orient formed (and forms) Europe's "external reality," necessary for the existence of Europe and the non-European

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[121] Shelley Baranowski, *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism And Imperialism From Bismarck To Hitler*, Illustrated edition (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Jason Verber, "The Conundrum of Colonialism in Postwar Germany" (Dissertation, University of Iowa, 2010), 26–32, https://doi.org/10.17077/etd.aeqb62xd.
[122] Frank Biess, "Moral Panic in Postwar Germany: The Abduction of Young Germans into the Foreign Legion and French Colonialism in the 1950s," *The Journal of Modern History* 84, no. 4 (December 1, 2012): 18, https://doi.org/10.1086/667681.
[123] Christof Mauch and Kiran Klaus Patel, eds., *The United States and Germany during the Twentieth Century: Competition and Convergence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), chap. Empires: Might and Myopia.
[124] Verber, "The Conundrum of Colonialism in Postwar Germany," 34.
[125] Ibid., 36. (citing Zentral Zentralsekretariat der SED / Abteilung Werbung, Presse, Rundfunk, "USA bestimmen Wirtschaft der 'deutschen Kolonie'," SED Informationen, Weltpolitik 1948, no. 6 (May 20, 1948), p. 2.)
[126] Ibid., 39.
[127] Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 39.
[128] Ibid., 46.

world.[129] Allying Germany with the Orient, and redefining its attributes, differentiated the country form its British and French rivals.

During its heyday as a field of knowledge from the late 19th century through the 1920s, German Orientalist thinking expanded investigations into the origins of "Western Civilization" and Christianity beyond Greek and biblical studies. Distinct from their British and French counterparts with direct colonial interests in the region, German Orientalists found that studying ancient Sumer, Assyria, Babylonia, and Zoroastrian Persia made the ancient Greeks and Israelites "seem derivative, corrupt, and banal."[130] A number of German orientalists associated the Orient with vitality, youth, creativity, and authenticity rather than decay, decline, and stagnation. In particular, the interwar circle surrounding Hermann Graf Keyserling "sought to reconstruct Western self-formation not by reviving Greek and Christian norms, but by juxtaposing German and oriental Geist."[131] Nicholas Germana has argued that 19th century German Orientalism was particularly conducive to a phenomenon he labels "self-Othering," in which some German orientalists identified with (an image or imago of) the Oriental Other against their European rivals.[132] In the 18th century, Johann Gottfried Herder compared Germans to "the roasted Montezuma," "Hindus," and "quiet Ethiopians" as victims of foreign aggression.[133] In the 19th century, August Wilhelm Schlegel declared that "Germany must be considered the Orient of Europe." Germans might share further "Asiatic" attributes with

[129] Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 21, http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=224456.
[130] Suzanne Marchand, "German Orientalism and the Decline of the West," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 145, no. 4 (2001): 465–73, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1558185.
[131] Ibid., 472.
[132] Nicholas A. Germana, "Self-Othering in German Orientalism: The Case of Friedrich Schlegel," *The Comparatist* 34 (2010): 80, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26237236; Discussed also in George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
[133] Germana, "Self-Othering in German Orientalism," 83.

migrating peoples and fellow "Aryans."[134] This tendency continued into the twentieth century. In exile in 1928, Kaiser Wilhelm II wrote of a conversation with Oswald Spengler, claiming "we are *orientals* [*Morgenländer*], and not westerners [*Abendländer*]."[135]

As the VDAK campaigned for Kesselring, *Die Oase* published several articles drawing oblique parallels between occupied Germany and a divided European colony. The first of these, Kurt Neher's "Libya, Kingdom With Two Capitals," was published on the very page preceding the July 1952 piece "Is something happening for the 'war criminals'?" discussed above, with the secondary title "The world war of industries continues," suggesting continued hostility.[136] The piece drew clear but unstated comparisons between occupied Germany, divided between the Soviet and Allied zones, and Libya, then divided under British and French occupation. Much like Germany, Libya had two capitals: Benghazi and Tripoli, and both countries were at the mercy of foreign industrial concerns, dependent on the outside world. And foreign military power preponderated: "Today Libya is nothing more and nothing less, like a military base."

Die Oase representations of North Africa drew more importantly on traditional Orientalism as detailed by Said, colonial ethnography, and discourses on race and difference,[137] as well as contemporary arguments for continued colonialism under the guise of "development." Shortly after the Second World War, West German and French planners envisioned a pan-European "Eurafrican" project, a strategy for European integration and the constriction of the Common Market that required deep involvement in Africa both North and South of the

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[134] Ibid., 84.
[135] Marchand, "German Orientalism and the Decline of the West," 473.
[136] BArch, B 469/130, Kurt Neher, "Libyen, Königreich mit 2 Hauptstädten," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 5, Juli 1952, p. 2.
[137] Sophie Wagenhofer, *"Rassischer" Feind - politischer Freund?*, *"Rassischer" Feind - politischer Freund?* (De Gruyter, 2020), https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783112208700/html; Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship*, Reprint edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Sahara.[138] Supporters of the Eurafrican concept imagined a future in which Europe and Africa would be integrated into a single entity along economic and geopolitical lines. Eurafricanists adapted colonial notions of racial difference, arguing that it was Africans' intellectual and physical inferiority that had left the continent economically "underdeveloped" and requiring ongoing European efforts. These would ultimately take the form of a "global division of labor," with European technology supposedly benefitting both Europeans and Africans, while Europeans exploited African labor, agricultural resources, oil, and mineral wealth. Continued colonialism in Africa under the guise of "development," its architects hoped, would also help stave off Soviet influence, potentially allowing for the emergence of Europe as a third Great Power Bloc.[139]

Kurt Neher's comparison of Italian to British colonists drew on postwar concerns about European shortages in land and resources, comparing British greed to Italian (and implicitly German) responsible colonialism. Italian colonists "had cultivated the land before the war to the point that it began to become economically independent from the motherland, [but] it is now dependent for better or for worse on British money and British supplies."[140] British economic and political domination meant "English advisors, bosses and administrators are Libyan officials in all the key positions of the new state." Only British goods appeared to predominate: "from rolled oats to spark plugs." It was only after "overcoming considerable resistance," that the Libyan government was able to hire a German veterinarian to take over a neglected animal care facility. This German doctor had been toiling for months in efforts to garner approval to import Bayer medication from Germany, forced to rely on an ineffective "English remedy," leading to

[138] Young-sun Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime*, Human Rights in History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 223–25, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316155257.
[139] Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism*, 1st edition (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 161.
[140] BArch, B 469/130, Kurt Neher, "Libyen, Königreich mit 2 Hauptstädten," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 5, Juli 1952, p. 2.

many animals' needless deaths. The Libyan government was similarly struggling to import AEG Transformers from Germany, hindered by currency issues.

The wartime struggle between Britain and Germany continued through industrial competition: "You can see at every step how the battle of arms at the end of the Second World War was followed by the battle of industries," and one in which Germany and Britain were clear adversaries.[141] The article included a captioned photograph of English soldiers in Benghazi, reading "English troop parade in the capital No. 1, Benghazi. It was once an important supply point for Rommel. Today not a word of Italian is spoken there. The second language has become English." In another noteworthy observation, Neher sarcastically described British allotments for Libyans to attend British universities as "African 'denazification'" (*Entnazifiezierung*).

Incapable of self-government, Libyans were trapped in what Dipesh Chakrabarty labeled the "waiting room of history."[142] Thrusting it upon them in a predatory fashion, as the British had done, appears to have struck Neher as a violation of the "White Man's Burden." Detailing his experience in Libya that year, Neher recounted conversations with North Africans as the region moved toward political independence. He concluded that Libyans were unprepared for self-rule, that the country and the former Italian colonists were the victims of British and French greed, and that missteps there would only strengthen Bolshevism.

According to Neher, North Africans outside of Cairo asked him, "Why was Libya first given the freedom that was least prepared for this gift? Didn't the English know that the Italians kept the natives away from all administrative tasks so that there was no leadership at all?" [143] In

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[141] BArch, B 469/130, Kurt Neher, "Libyen, Königreich mit 2 Hauptstädten," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 5, Juli 1952, p. 2.
[142] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 20.
[143] BArch, B 469/130, Kurt Neher, "Libyen, Königreich mit 2 Hauptstädten," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 5, Juli 1952, p. 2.

contrast with Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, "where only the foreign divisions and regiments needed to be withdrawn in order to turn the peoples who had been waiting for their liberation for decades into enthusiastic fighters against Bolshevism?" Unprepared for self-rule, North Africans required perpetual European involvement, though only of the appropriate type. Predicting campaigns of developmental colonialism, Neher "couldn't answer these questions. But I saw that European colonial imperialism in the form of pure military rule is long out of date and only represents a threat to the white world." Here, Neher on racial discourses that united the Cold War Soviet enemy with a racial threat from the non-European world.[144]

Europe, as Neher discussed it, was inescapably colonial, and unimaginable without colonial involvement in Africa. Ongoing colonial domination under a postcolonial guise was, after all, enshrined in the movement toward European unification from its very onset.[145] Neher touched on the colonial "European idea."[146] More so than North African inhabitants poorly served and ill-prepared for independence, the Italians settlers were perhaps the most grievously wronged victims of Libyan "independence": "They have been driven out of all fertile Cyrenaica, a land… [where] Italians accomplished one of the great achievements of our century… In just under two decades you have transformed the steppe and the desert of Cyrenaica into a garden." Libya provided homes for the tens of thousands of Italian "farming families;" "If there was one country in Europe that needed this soil as much as its daily bread, it was Italy. To break this area out of the European responsibility was a sin against the European idea." Britain's betrayal of the "European idea" was a betrayal of the European project's colonial solidarity.

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[144] Matthew Connelly, "Taking Off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War for Independence," *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (2000): 739–69, https://doi.org/10.2307/2651808.
[145] Hansen and Jonsson, "Eurafrica Incognita," 6.
[146] BArch, B 469/130, Kurt Neher, "Libyen, Königreich mit 2 Hauptstädten," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 5, Juli 1952, p. 2.

Neher published a follow-up piece in October 1952: "One king, three currencies" critiquing the Allied occupation of the Libya, highlighting the country's internal border and multiple currency regimes, not altogether indistinguishable from Germany's.[147] Neher wrote that "In spite of the fact that the young state tries to appear as a single entity, one had to pass a passport control on the border between Cyrenaica and Libya," and the two regions required distinct entry and residence permits, and even utilized different currencies. In the southern region under French control, Francs were used. "It can be said that there are currently around 15,000 British people there." In the end, "The new gift of freedom is just a beautiful facade."

The specific problems Neher identified in British rule in Libya most importantly centered wasted resources, resources that could (and should) have been used for Europeans' benefit. The upheaval of British rule and quasi-independence meant, "Whole villages have become pointless… The remainder of the Jewish population, who were also expelled from Cyrenaica after the war, have been sitting on packed suitcases in Tripolitania for years. Around 10,000 Jews are still working in Tripoli after around 28,000 of them were forced to emigrate in 1948 after bloody unrest." However, the "Italians aren't that much luckier. At one point in Cyrenaica they lost all of their positions. Thousands of houses are empty." Neher again expounded the glories and achievements of Italian colonists, contrasting the horror at seeing disused fertile North African land with the plight of Italian peasants who should be settling it. Above all, the British were to blame. "The whole thing is a mockery of the too many in Europe, of the displaced and the homeless. The declaration by the English that they must keep their promises made during the war is a farce. Great Britain has 'forgotten' the commitments it once made for much less of a benefit."

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[147] Kurt Neher, "Ein König, drei Währungen," *Die Oase*, Jahrg 2., Nr. 8, Oktober 1952, p. 2, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.

Neher's concerns were similar both to those of pre-war German colonialists and to the postwar Eurafrican project: Europe required land, space, and raw materials that only Africa could provide, and that only there could it solve the problem of overpopulation.[148] Neher saw Allied injustices as making the West vulnerable in the fight against Bolshevism: "If one had left this country to the Italians after the Second World War, which was in better hands than any other European nation, then a real contribution would have been made to the fight against Bolshevism." Neher proposed that those responsible visit the "overpopulated" quarters of Naples, suggesting they would be lucky to escape with their lives. In the end, he asked "Whose interests could such a development serve?" Evoking a shadowy communist threat with antisemitic undertones, these concerns over adequate food and living space for Italians echoed German wartime and prewar discourses over the need for empire and living space.[149]

Die Oase's colonial critiques were not isolated to the British, including also the former French enemy as well, similarly levying the accusation of improper colonialism. The April 1953 *Die Oase* included a lengthy excerpt titled "Algiers 1952" by Gerhard Nebel, from the book *Die Reise nach Tuggurt*. [150] Nebel criticized French rule in Algeria: "What is disgusting about French rule is not the fact as such, but the appearance of freedom, equality and fraternity that it gives itself." Nebel mocked the hypocrisy behind the French civilizing mission, which masked harsher measures against indigenous peoples than in British or Italian colonies.

Die Oase's attitude toward the former British enemy showed a marked shift following several interlinked developments in 1953: the well-received visit of General Hans Speidel to the United Kingdom, a September 12, 1953 football match between former British and German

[148] Hansen and Jonsson, "Eurafrica Incognita," 5.
[149] Hansen and Jonsson, *Eurafrica*, 12.
[150] Gerhard Nebel, "Algier 1952", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 4, April 1953, p. 7, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.

soldiers at the third *Bundestreffen* in Hanover, and the release of Kesselring from prison. This conditional Anglo-German rapprochement motivated the abandonment of the critiques outlined above, and prepared the way for Anglo-German bonding as colonial Europeans.

Winston Churchill's well-known appreciation of Erwin Rommel offered VDAK leaders an opening. In May 1953, Crüwell and Westphal issued a statement applauding General Hans Speidel's visit to the United Kingdom, along with other former Wehrmacht officers, for an armament inspection as members of the European Defense Community.[151] Emmanuel Shinwell, a Jewish MP from the Labour Party, objected to the former Wehrmacht soldier' presence at such an inspection. Churchill defended Speidel's presence on the grounds that he was "the intimate friend and support of General Rommel," one of the many Germans who "did not associate themselves with the crimes of the Nazi regime," and went on to praise Rommel's personal bravery and skill as a military commander.[152] In *Die Oase*, Crüwell and Westphal saw "in this recognition… the honest will to recognize the great achievements of a brave and chivalrous soldier and to let the opposition to a war end where it has to end: with the end of hostilities." They dispatched a telegram to Churchill thanking him for his words about Rommel, and asking to draw his attention "again to those former German soldiers who are still in Allied custody and who, in our opinion, are not criminals."[153]

Die Oase's May 1953 issue announced the scheduling of a football match at the Hannover *Bundestreffen* between former "Desert Rats" and Afrika-Korps soldiers, which was "intended to prove that the very soldiers who once faced each other as enemies are the ones who

[151] Crüwell and Westphal, "Höchste Anerkennung für Feldmarschall Rommel", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 5, Mai 1953, p. 1, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[152] Connelly, "Rommel as an Icon."
[153] Crüwell and Westphal, "Höchste Anerkennung für Feldmarschall Rommel", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 5, p. 1, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.

advance the idea of the reconciliation of nations and the peaceful sporting struggle."[154] Surviving VDAK correspondence reveal that Liddell Hart, who, assisted by Frau Rommel, published the English-language edition of the Rommel Papers that year, was instrumental in organizing the match.[155]

The September 1953 issue of *Die Oase* described widespread anticipation for the game: "the first sporting competition between former opponents from the Second World War."[156] The game had "hit the sports circles in Hanover like a bomb," and thousands of spectators were expected, including the president of the German Football Association. The October 1953 issue went into detail about the game's planning. In inviting the former Desert Rats to compete "we for the first time stretched out our hand beyond the boundaries drawn by the war and its consequences." They were glad to find the British agreed, and military and political authorities signed off on the affair, and the British "were just as enthusiastic about the idea of a football competition." With the motto of "football instead of tanks," the game was a tremendous success, resulting in a tie of 2 to 2, accompanied by an elaborate performance of reconciliation. The ceremony accompanying the match included a joint singing of "Old Comrades" and "Lili Marlene." German and British military bands played their respective national anthems. Both British and German teams "received the same heartfelt ovation."

Hinrich Kopf, the Minister-President of Lower Saxon, Robert Lehr, the Federal Minister of the Interior, the mayor of Hanover, Frau Rommel, and British Lt. General Jons attended the game. Both Lehr and Kopf spoke, emphasizing the value of "military tradition" while "wanting

[154] "Das große Fußballspiel in Hannover," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 5, Mai 1953, p. 3, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[155] BArch, B 469/81 2/2, Willy Bielka to Liddell Hart, 20. August 1953.
[156] "Fußballspiel gegen die 'Wüstenratten'", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 9, September 1953, p. 9, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.

peace." Kopf took the opportunity to defend the Wehrmacht's reputation: "The last two wars are not the fault of the German soldier but were caused by failure of political leadership. After the surrender in 1945, the German soldier received treatment that he did not deserve. The Wehrmacht was not affected by the breakdown of the political leadership."[157]

Most important to Crüwell and Westphal was the guest of honor: Alfred Kesselring, just released from imprisonment at Werl, the *conditio sine qua non* for reconciliation. *Die Oase* applauded how, "For the first time the Field Marshal was able to speak to us Africans. For the first time he could take over the honorary chairmanship of our association, to exercise this office." Kesselring "vowed to do everything, that our association, the soldiery and our beloved fatherland demand."[158] With Kesselring's release, VDAK leadership's demands had been met almost entirely. Widely reported and well-received by the international press, ("not a single voice apart from left-wing radicalism disapproved") Crüwell and Westphal believed the third *Bundestreffen* enabled them "to prove again to the German people and abroad that we 'old Africans' neither glorify militarism, nor long for a new uniform." VDAK veterans knew nothing of "hereditary enmity" and embraced the democratic state. The November 1953 *Die Oase* could describe the former enemies "united in common sorrow" at the El Alamein anniversary that year.[159]

The shift away from relative hostility toward the Western Allies began as early as the August 1953 issue of *Die Oase*. The transformation accompanied a discursive emptying of North Africa.[160] *Die Oase* published an excerpt from Kurt Neher's book, *Afrika findet keinen Frieden*,

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[157] "Zehntausend feierten mit uns", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 10, Oktober 1953, p. 7, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[158] "Hannover – alter und neuer Geist", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 10, Oktober 1953, p. 2, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[159] "In gemeinsamer Trauer verbunden," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 11, November 1953, p. 1, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[160] Kurt Neher, "Nordafrika findet keinen Frieden," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 8, August 1953, p. 6, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.

containing none of the political commentary or anti-British invective of the articles from 1952. The North Africa in question, rather, was empty. In "Between mines on the Halfaya Pass," Neher detailed a journey, accompanied by an Egyptian guide, through the abandoned battlefields of the North Africa campaign, the supply roads constructed for Axis forces, the desolate equipment and relics of the campaign.[161] With sadness, he described destroyed British tanks, burrowed into a creek, and the "grave agony" their drivers experienced as German forces repelled them. The soldiers' hasty graves remained: "No one has yet disturbed the dead in their loneliness… forgotten to the world." North Africa was an empty, abandoned, and foreign land: "Beneath the lookouts is the road carved into the rock by workers of bygone cultures." The empty desert remained.

By later 1950s, any open antipathy toward the Western Allies was transformed to little more than a mild degree skepticism regarding Western neocolonial interests in North Africa. The February 1957 issue's "On the Edge of the Sahara" by Otto Karl Düpow, described the political and military situation in Libya.[162] In that country, "Clever Anglo-American policy" had "fulfilled indigenous people's ardent desire for freedom" in 1951. Since then, the British and Americans had maintained peaceful relations "in exchange for twenty-year contracts" to establish and supply military bases at all strategic points in the country. Düpow recognized that this arrangement, the "end of the colonial era," was creating many opportunities for Germans. The Libyan king employed a German personal physician, a former Wehrmacht physician supervised Libyan school meals, and the Libyan military was looking for German military experts.

[161] Kurt Neher, "Zwischen Minen am Halfayapaß", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3., Nr. 8, August 1953, p. 8, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[162] Otto Karl Düpow, "Am Rande der Sahara", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 7, Nr. 2, Februar 1957, p. 4, Harvard Library, KSG 2444.

As United States took the place of the British Empire as the dominant colonial power in the region, it became the target of skepticism. In April 1958, *Die Oase* republished the story "Desert Kingdom in the Dollar Stream" by Günther Engelmann, which appeared in *Welt am Sonntag*. Engelmann recounted a journey to Libya, now hosting an American military installation. 12,000 American soldiers with their families resided in a small "American town" in the former Italian colony, the Wheelus air base. The American base, "a weapons testing and firing training center for US Air Force units based in England, the European continent and other parts of North Africa" was suspected to host nuclear missiles and nuclear-armed aircraft.[163] According to Engelmann, "Optimistic Americans don't think they need to worry about Libyan politics" because of their financial dominance: "the flow of dollars and English pounds" supported the Libyan government and economy, as did oil extraction benefiting the Libyan king alongside American, British, and French corporations. The United States was delivering $15 million in weaponry to cement the good will.

Published in March 1960, *Die Oase*'s "Where Are We Today" by Dr. Egbert von Schivizhoffen expressed unease with Germany's political situation, divided between American and Soviet "spheres of influence," and with little hope for reunification in the near or medium term.[164] The economic boom in West Germany, however, was more important to maintain and continue, than any change to the status quo. Germans had it better than ever before, and now was no time for experiments. The benefits of West Germany's unexpected prosperity, and the demand for vigilance against the Soviet Union, outweighed remaining reticence toward embracing the Allies.

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[163] Günther Engelmann,"Wüstenreich im Dollarstrom", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 8, Nr. 4, April 1958, p. 8, Harvard Library, KSG 2444.
[164] Dr. Egbert v. Schivizhoffen, "Wo stehen wir heute?", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 10, Nr. 3, März 1960, p. 5-6, Harvard Library, KSG 2444.

"Zick and Zack in the Desert": Memory and Violence

During its early years, *Die Oase* published short selections of German soldiers' recollections, war stories, and accounts of their experiences. Most of these were highly sanitized accounts that emphasize comradeship, mutual respect with the enemy, and the experience of the desert. Typical memories recounted in *Die Oase* include "Then – a pan in the desert," which details the rapturous appreciation German soldiers had for a cook, able to produce a pancake in the shape of a woman, and their amazement at supplies looted from British positions.[165] Another recalled the discovery of a chameleon, and its subsequent capture by the British.[166] Following the release of Kesselring and VDAK-Desert Rats soccer match, there were more stories that centered mutual respect with the enemy, such as September 1953's "Knights of the Air," which painted a picture of honorable, knightly combat in the sky observed from the ground. A wounded English pilot bails out and is captured by Germans. They show him utmost respect, transport him to the lazaret of his choice, and he thanks them for "rescuing" him.[167]

Vivid, personal accounts of the violence of combat, the horrors of artillery barrages, gun battles, killing, injury, death and destruction, did not form a large portion of these published recollections, despite their omnipresence in surveilled wartime conservations.[168] Never large in number, these narratives conveying the experience of violence in North Africa declined in frequency over the 1950s, In the late 1950s and into the 1960s, the most graphically violent

[165] Ernst Pröbstl, "Damals — eine Pfanne in der Wüste", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 10, Dezember 1952, p. 6, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[166] Herbert Hofmeister, "Das 'Trupp' -Chamälon", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 1, January 1953, p. 6, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[167] Burkhardt Hering, "Ritter der Luft", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 9, September 1953, p. 14, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[168] See Chapter 2

narratives in *Die Oase* were no longer situated in North Africa at all, and were removed in time and space to the German colonial empire.

Some more compelling accounts from the early 1950s provide windows into the ways the former German soldiers of the VDAK remembered the violence of the war in North Africa. These early "collective representations" found solidarity in recalling the shared exercise and experience of violence. In one example, Bruno Reith from Werdohl recalled a violent moonlight encounter with an English minelaying crew when "Evasion was not possible. We took advantage of the surprise. The English got it. We only had the wounded with hand grenade fragments in the right shoulder." [169] After the grenade obliterated the English crew, the Germans "captured four Englishmen. Some of the others were seriously wounded." In Reith's telling, the Germans departed, bringing two prisoners back to the German lines.

Paul Nummert wrote of his experience taking a desert ridge near Sidi Nsir in February 1943. He recalled coming upon six hidden British soldiers:

> The first seems to be a corporal. I scream: 'Hands up' At that same moment, the corporal pulls out a hand grenade to throw, the next two pull up their rifles. It all happens very quickly. We have to shoot because we don't know if more Englishmen will come. The three died instantly.[170]

The others managed to surrender to the Germans. Nummert observed "One is a very young fellow. He asks me: 'Are we going to die now?' I reassure him and explain that they have nothing to fear." According to Nummert, he and his companions got along well with the captured British soldiers, exchanging chocolate and cigarettes. They also shared cakes equally, purchased from an Arab trade who soon came by, and who appeared to favor the Germans to the British.

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[169] Bruno Reith, "Hinter der englischen HKL", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 3, März 1953, p. 6, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[170] Paul Nummert, "Sechs auf einem Felsgrat," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 3, März 1953, p. 6, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.

In a piece dedicated to his departed friend, the anti-tank gunner Bruno Hoffmann, Ernst Graf from Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen described his experiences during the advances against the Allies in 1941 and then again in 1942 leading up to El Alamein.[171] Hiding from British artillery, he found himself crouching in an abandoned Italian shelter for hours until dusk. There, "dazed and without clear thinking I looked for a long time at a black something that lay in front of me in the sand, until I finally realized that it was a human hand protruding from a meager grave." Graf recalled capturing wounded English soldiers after a subsequent battle, and a time when "English trucks loaded with mines... showed up fifty meters from the position, [and] as they were caught by the machine gun, flew one after the other into the air, and the two surviving New Zealanders passed straight through the machine gun fire into our arms." Later at El Alamein, following a heavy English barrage and attack by the Eighth Army, "Our gun was shredded by splinters." Graf's close friend Bruno Hoffmann "fell on his gun" and his compatriots were captured.

However, the most compelling collection of creative recollection came in the form of a serialized fictional story, "Zick and Zack in the Desert," by the pseudonymous Max Pumpe. Published from June 1952 through the spring of 1953, "Zick und Zack in the Desert" was copyrighted to *Die Oase*, and does not appear to have been reproduced anywhere else. The titular names are a play on the word *Zickzack*, meaning zigzag, evoking meandering journeys through the desert landscape. Mr. Zick, an educated German "Orientalist" who speaks multiple languages, a book-smart man who had been promoted above his ability to the rank of lieutenant and the role of tank commander in the East, and Zack, his ill-behaved dachshund.[172] In spring of 1942, Zick is transferred to Panzer Army Africa from the Eastern Front to serve as an interpreter.

[171] Ernst Graf, "Pakschütze Bruno Hoffmann", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 9, September 1953, p. 15-16, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[172] BArch, B 469/130, Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 4, Juni 1952, p. 7.

The serialized story is initially lighthearted, for instance, containing a scene in which a senior officer accuses the dog Zack of attacking him.[173] By the conclusion of the series, however, the tone shifts to become much darker.

The environment, both human and natural, are an integral part of the series. The Orient is represented as mysterious and profoundly different, timeless, and reminiscent of fairy tales. Here, "Pumpe" was drawing on a long tradition of Oriental fantasy from 19th century Romantic literature and beyond, which associated the "desert" with feminine, mystical, eternal, unchanging, otherness.[174] The desert was Europe's environmental Other, the opposite of its forested "Edenic ideal."[175] The desert's "emptiness" made it an appropriate place for Europeans to imagine the mystic and the spiritual, for the projection of qualities, ideas, and behaviors not permitted within Europe.[176] It served as location licensed for sensual fantasies, identified with barbarism and deviant sexuality.[177]

"Pumpe" describes the desert as a fantastic Other. Arriving at Tripoli, Zick saw a hotel "which lay by the sea like a fairy tale castle."[178] The bustle of Arab streets struck him after his experience in the East: "What a difference to the silent Russians!" Descriptions of the desert tend in two general directions: on the one hand, it is spiritual, beautiful and otherworldly, and the

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[173] Ibid., 8.
[174] Christoph Schmitt-Maaß, "Ursprünglichkeit, Offenheit, Leere? Zur romantischen Genealogie einer (neo-)orientalistischen Metapher in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur (Raoul Schrott, Wolfgang Herrndorf, Michael Roes)," in *Orientalismus heute: Perspektiven arabisch-deutscher Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft* (De Gruyter, 2021), 83–108, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110669428-006; Said, *Orientalism*, chap. 2.
[175] Michael Egan, "Foreword," in *The Arid Lands: History, Power, Knowledge*, by Diana K Davis, Kindle Edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016).
[176] Hsu-Ming Teo, *Desert Passions Orientalism and Romance Novels* (Austin, Texas: University of TexasPress, 2012), 67, https://utpress.utexas.edu/books/teodes.
[177] Evelyn Bach, "Sheik Fantasies: Orientalism and Feminine Desire in the Desert Romance," *Hecate* 23, no. 1 (May 1997): 9, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=9709122763&site=ehost-live; Malek Alloula, *The colonial harem* (Minneapolis, MN; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Matthew H. Bernstein, Matthew Bernstein, and Gaylyn Studlar, *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* (Rutgers University Press, 1997), 54.
[178] BArch, B 469/130, Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 4, Juni 1952, p. 8.

other, it poses enormous practical military difficulties. Zick finds that "Here in the desert only the present lives… Here in the desert… dream and reality mix."[179] In the desert, "Reality and dream penetrate one another without limits, they turn into their opposite… The unbelievable becomes truth."[180] Zick sees intimate connections between the desert, the sky, and the sea: beautiful, open, flat, vast, and primally powerful. At one point looking out from a hill, Zick thinks "the panoramic view over the table-smooth desert was like that from the deck of a ship over the ocean."[181] He finds Spitfires' path in the skies resemble Arabic characters, and compares desert sands to the dramatic color of twilight skies.[182] The desert's flatness, however, and its sandiness prove incredibly dangerous. The first time Zick arrives at the German military encampments, however, he is struck by the "Dust, trampled feet, rattling of equipment and dust everywhere, clouds of sand with no view."[183]

The comparison between the desert and the sea appeared elsewhere in VDAK discourse on the war. Siegfried Westphal argued that the desert's characteristics made it similar to the ocean in more ways than one. In his September 9, 1962 *Bundestreffen* speech, Westphal equated the desert with ocean warfare to establish the distinctiveness of the war in North Africa: in the desert, "[t]he almost unrestricted navigability of the ground and the lack of terrain gave tank warfare a great resemblance to the fighting and tactics of fleets operating on the high seas."[184] The comparison to naval warfare furthers the argument for the North Africa campaign's

[179] Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste, 8. Fortsetzung", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 1, Januar 1953, p. 7, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste, 5. Fortsetzung", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 8, Oktober 1952, p. 8, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[182] Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste, 10. Fortsetzung", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 3, März 1953, p. 8, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[183] BArch, B 469/130, Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste 1. Fortsetzung", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 5, Juli 1952, p. 8.
[184] BArch, B 469/115, Ansprache des Vortsitzenden, General der Kavallerie a. D. Siegfried Westphal, 9. September 1962, Pirmasens, p. 1.

distinctive cleanliness: there were few civilian victims to naval combat between warships isolated on the ocean.

In "Zick and Zack," the desert's flatness in particular proves most problematic, leaving German soldiers highly exposed to attacks from the sky. The story includes several harrowing accounts of aerial bombardment, and describes the results of such an attack the human body. Traveling with a small group of soldiers in a truck between German encampments in the flat, open landscape, the soldiers find themselves utterly vulnerable to British aerial attack. A sudden alarm leaves the men scrambling: Spitfires. "The men run while clouds of explosions are rising from the [nearby] base. Soon bangs are booming" and the Spitfires turn to target them, shaking them with the noise of the attack. As the hunters turned and flew toward the base again "The men lie flat. Here and there one had jumped up and sped farther from the vehicle into the desert. Lying down, they press their heels close to the sandy ground," a short distance away from the expected attack radius.[185] After destroying their truck, the planes return, looping around the hiding soldiers to their horror: none of them "suspects how long it has been buzzing, howling and circling above them. When the engine swells up, they press their faces with gritted teeth and their hands cramped into the sand." Their sense of time is distorted: "Everyone already felt it in those waiting minutes, which were the same for hours: these hard, fatal blows from the 2cm bullets in the head and neck. They race through images of the future and the past. Foolish images, but also quick prayers that are drowned in the noise of the nearby engines."[186]

To the soldiers' surprise, the English pilot drops a bottle with a piece of paper attached to it right in the middle of the group. The bottle turns out to be empty, but the note says, in English,

[185] Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste, 7. Fortsetzung", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 10, Dezember 1952, p. 7, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[186] Ibid., 8.

"Be careful with your puppy!" One of the soldiers pauses and realizes: "That is really Tommy! They only spared the dog, otherwise they would have made a mess of us!"[187]

Not long after arriving at the base, the men are subjected to yet another aerial attack, this time focusing on the base's flak guns. The dog Zack, scared by the first wave of bombing, runs out into desert, and Zick chases after him, missing a round of strafing by machine-gun fire. When he returns, he finds a friend in a gruesome condition.

> [T]he blood pours from a terribly gaping wound between the neck and upper jaw. Gottlieb Ezechiel Liersch has no lower jaw. To the side of the nose, sharp splinters of bones come from swelling blood. His face has taken on a pitiful, horrifying expression. It is gentle, as if the boy was laughing with his mouth wide open, silently. The senior physician tries to tie off the right artery at the neck. A medical soldier lowers dismantled bandage packs into the gorge of the wound, from which foamy breath gushes. Ezekiel's eyes are tightly shut, but Zick sees the eyeballs in constant motion. Then Liersch opens his left eye. It stares up. Zick has known this last look for almost two years. Zick behaves as if frozen, his memory sticking a picture next to the group: one of the boulders in the south of the base, on one of the last evenings. Liersch stands on the top of the rock with the dog in his arms and sings.[188]

Watching the doctor work, Zick feels helpless.

> Here he is just a spectator, superfluous and silly. Viewers with a dachshund in their arms. - He stops and can still see the blood from the wound in the neck of the young Liersch running over the hands of the senior doctor. He sees it seep into the sandy bottom. At the edges of the dark pool, the sandy soil is crumbling into fine cracks. as if the earth were now opening tiny channels and veins in order to immediately absorb the blood of the dying person."[189]

Zick discovers Liersch had been shot after a bomb dislodged a flak gun, and he had left his hole to try to save it. Revisiting his own hiding hole, the one he had left to chase after his dog, Zick discovers this was the second time he had survived an attack thanks to his dog. The Spitfires had fired into his hole, not far from a flak gun, and a shirt he had left had been torn to ribbons.

"Zick and Zack" firmly establishes both connections to and distinctions from the Eastern Front. Zick had fought in Russia, and apparently had experience with "partisans" there. On the

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[187] Ibid.
[188] Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste, 8. Fortsetzung", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 1, Januar 1953, p. 7-8, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[189] Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste, 9. Fortsetzung", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 2, Februar 1953, p. 7, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.

road to El Agheila, Zick's driver informs him that the Germans had previously enjoyed a pleasant rest area along the way. However, "But Tommy's desert spies had mined it... Now we are always far from the rest areas and take more water with us. Now there is guard duty at night." Zick contemplates, "So there are partisans here too [like Russia.]"[190]

Later, Zick travels with Lieutenant Stöcker, a German who brags about his knowledge and experience fighting the "cunning Ivan" during his eight months on the eastern front in the 6th panzer division. However, when exposed under Spitfire attack in the desert, he "thinks longingly of the Russian forest, of the ditches between the meadows, of the bushes and shelters."[191]

Discovering a purported Arab is actually an English soldier in disguise (the dachshund Zack recognizes the Englishman's smell), another soldier with Eastern Front experience eagerly explains what he would like to do with him. "In Russia, there would have been a little interrogation, a consultation in the bushes, and then the man would be shot. Where are they then? The mines you planted?" He exclaims "Allow my comrade be killed? Hano! We wouldn't have that."[192] Another German soldier shouts for him to pipe down, arguing that Russia is different: "Remember: Not here! Here in the desert, that doesn't happen! Tommy doesn't do that either? Maybe you'll notice that when you end up with the Tommys."

By the later 1950s, published stories and recollections that highlighted the violence of warfare became few and far between, though they did not disappear entirely. In general, in the later 1950s and into the 1960s, writing about combat in North Africa became more clinical and

[190] BArch, B 469/130, Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste 1. Fortsetzung", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 5, Juli 1952, p. 8.
[191] Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste, 7. Fortsetzung", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 10, Dezember 1952, p. 7, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[192] Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste, 3. Fortsetzung", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 6, August 1952, p. 11-12, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.

distant.[193] In April 1958, Paul Carell described the combat in the Halfaya pass: the English were served with "bloody rebuffs." In March 1957, Von Armin discussed how on March 16, 1943, a German force advanced uphill "on the edge of the mountain, which flanked the future main attack, and was turned away with considerable casualties, including prisoners."[194] In December 1957, Karl von Herm recalled an encounter with British soldiers near Sidi Omar in 1941: "Suddenly we were shot at!... we jumped out to take cover… The sweat made the clothes stick to the body while the heart beat up to the neck." Though under fire, Herm's company made it back to their positions.[195] In February 1963, Max Walter Clauss described combat in the Halfaya pass as "soaked for two years with the best Italian, English, German soldiers' blood."[196] The most graphic accounts of violence in the later 1950s and into 1960s published in *Die Oase* pertained to colonial warfare from before the First World War, as the newspaper resituated the North Africa Campaign's in the history of Germany's colonial empire.

North Africans in Die Oase

Die Oase's representations of North Africa's population shifted over the 1950s and into the early 1960s, with North Africans gradually declining in prominence, linked to discourse of the region's "emptiness." *Die Oase*'s representation of North Africa's indigenous inhabitants, largely identified as Arabs, Berbers, and Jews, emerged from the long history of German Orientalism, imperialism, and more recently, Nazi racial theory and imperial geopolitics. Following their seizure of power, Nazi "racial orientalism," which denied Christianity's

[193] Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste, 9. Fortsetzung", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 2, Februar 1953, p. 7, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[194] Generaloberst von Arnim, "Tunesien vor 14 Jahren", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 7, Nr. 3, März 1957, p. 4, Harvard Library, KSG 2444.
[195] Von Herm, "Sidi Omar 1941", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 7, Nr. 12, Dezember 1957, p. 9, Harvard Library, KSG 2444.
[196] Max Walter Clauss, "Vor zwanzig Jahren: Rommels letzter Angriff", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 13, Nr. 2, February 1963, p.4, Harvard Library, KSG 2444.

"Semitic" and Jewish roots, came to be dominant over alternative and more humanistic Orientalist traditions.[197] Nazi Aryanism and Nazi Germany's concern with "Islam" was largely a geopolitical one.[198] Over the 1930s, Nazi foreign policy for the region came to focus on North African and Middle Eastern Muslims as potential allies against first the British Empire and then the Soviet Union.[199] During the war, the German leadership organized intense propaganda campaigns to build support for German plans in the region with North African and Middle Eastern leadership. This project existed in tension with Nazi racial theory that saw North Africans and Middle Easterners as "racially inferior" Semites who were ethnically related to Jews.[200] Prior to the war, Arab and other North-African soldiers in the Rhineland occupation were demonized as racial threats, and Arab students in Berlin were physically attacked.[201] During the war, Nazi propaganda differentiated captured French colonial soldiers into North African and Middle Eastern "Arabs" and Maghreb "Black natives" or "negroes." North Africans "were presented on the one hand as 'brutal natives' and a 'racial danger', [but] there were also leaflets in which these very men were wooed as 'political friends.'"[202] Hitler distinguished between an interpretation of Islam as a religion and the race of its practitioners – Islam was an impressive and worthy religion, but Muslims were members of an inferior race.[203]

As a consequence of these contradictory influences, the recollections and representations of North Africa's inhabitants in postwar *Die Oase* were marked by ambivalence: North Africans

[197] Marchand, "German Orientalism and the Decline of the West," 493.
[198] David Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).
[199] Wagenhofer, *"Rassischer" Feind - politischer Freund?*, 19.
[200] Ibid., 21.
[201] Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire*, 484.
[202] Wagenhofer, *"Rassischer" Feind - politischer Freund?*, 30.
[203] Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War*, 65.

were foreign and familiar, knowable and unknowable, threats and opportunities.[204] Their presence, however, was inescapable.

In "Zick and Zack in the Desert," Zick is identified as an "Orientalist" with expertise in the Arab language (he "spoke Arabic like an old sheik").[205] In an early chapter, he is asked to assist an unhelpful superior officer purchase a carpet at a Tripolitan bazaar. There, North African Arabs appear to him untrustworthy and deceptive. The officer tells Zick "If I go alone, the Arabs will screw me up to my ears."[206] North African and European racial difference is reflected by scent: the dachshund Zack found Arabs' scent "abhorrent," barking at them and driving them across the street.[207] A disguised British soldiers' distinct and more appealing smell is how Zack is able to identify the man.[208] The noise of the Arab city contrasted with the "silent Russians."[209] Visiting North Africa was "like a travel novel or the Bible."[210]

Interactions between Germans and North Africans could be violent, such as when Germans become suspicious of unusual behavior, an uncharacteristic friendliness to the dog Zick. An early encounter with Arab traders nearly becomes violent and a "sergeant and some armed men came back and… held the muzzle of carbines and machine pistols to the Arabs' chests. There was loud shouting. The sergeant fired half a magazine from his gun in the air. The Arabs immediately raised their hands."[211] Upon inspection, the Arabs' clothing and equipment

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[204] On the topic of colonial ambivalence, see the discussion in Chapter 2, and Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28 (1984): 125–33, https://doi.org/10.2307/778467.
[205] Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste, 3. Fortsetzung", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 6, August 1952, p. 11, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[206] BArch, B 469/130, Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 4, Juni 1952, p. 8.
[207] BArch, B 469/130, Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste 1. Fortsetzung", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 5, Juli 1952, p. 8.
[208] Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste, 3. Fortsetzung", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 6, August 1952, p. 11, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[209] BArch, B 469/130, Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 4, Juni 1952, p. 8.
[210] BArch, B 469/130, Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste 1. Fortsetzung", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 5, Juli 1952, p. 8.
[211] Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste, 3. Fortsetzung", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 6, August 1952, p. 11, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.

are a varied assortment: "Italian wrap gaiters, German waistbands, English troop shirts, cigarettes of all origins and… a lot of black tea." North Africans' ability to "mimic" Europeans,[212] to move between the warring powers, shifting between allegiances and physical positions, made them profoundly unsettling, and a military concern as well.[213]

North Africans are consistently shown revering the figure of Rommel. The interrogated "Arabs laughed blankly. Again and again several people shouted at one another that they were 'good friends', and the word 'Rommel' was always used as a testimony to their innocence."[214] At another point, the author emphasizes, "Even for the Arabs, Rommel had become a symbol and a keyword." For instance, an "old, bearded trader had raised his hand in front of his chest, mouth and forehead in Arabic greetings without the word 'Saide' (greetings) and only said the one word 'Rommel.'"[215]

In *Die Oase* recollections outside of "Zick and Zack," North Africans were omnipresent as background figures and subjects of concerns. In Paul Nummert's "Six on a Rock Ridge," an Arab peddler appeared after combat, showing preference to German soldiers over British ones.[216] Werner Hundt remembered peaceful encounters with Arab scouts in the early days of the war.[217] In "The Germans Fell Out of the Sky," the author recalled help from "local Arabs" in an aerial attack on French positions.[218] Arabs assisted German soldiers, helping disguise them as one of

[212] See the discussion in Chapter 2 and Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man."
[213] Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste, 5. Fortsetzung", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 8, Oktober 1952, p. 8, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[214] Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste, 3. Fortsetzung", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 6, August 1952, p. 11, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[215] BArch, B 469/130, Max Pumpe, "Zick und Zack in der Wüste 1. Fortsetzung", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 2, Nr. 5, Juli 1952, p. 8.
[216] Paul Nummert, "Sechs auf einem Felsgrat," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 3, März 1953, p. 6, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[217] Werner Hundt, "So begann für mich der Afrika-Feldzug", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 9, September 1953, p. 13, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[218] "Die Deutschen fielen aus der Luft," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 4, Nr. 2, Februar 1954, p. 7, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.

their own and assisting them in efforts to spy on Allied positions.[219] Early on, the desert was far from "empty."

In "The Courage to be Truthful" (*Der Mut zur Wahrheit*), a short story published in the March 1954 *Die Oase*, Burkhard Hering describes the experience of a North African city as alluring, exotic, and disturbingly foreign. The protagonist, a German "Major Hartwig" arriving in Morocco in the summer of 1941 is accosted by "filthy brown urchins" in mazelike, chaotic cities.[220] The "medina of Meknés" is "teeming with Arabs, Negroes, Berbers and their women,"[221] a disordered and disorienting Oriental street scene.[222] Major Hartwig observes wide and colorful varieties of "oriental clothing," mixed groups of old and young, wealthy and poor, and "a horse-drawn carriage with young Arab women… They are three ladies of the harem of a rich Arab merchant." He finds these women titillating: "The vehicle is upholstered and a large, white umbrella is stretched over it. The thin, transparent veil is more concession than concealment. Above it are their fiery eyes. Veils and white silk burnoos suggest a lot, but there is nothing to see."

Die Oase thanked contemporary North Africans for their helpfulness and their knowledge of the region's battlefields and geography. The April 1953 issue expressed appreciation of Arab governments and populations for their assistance in finding graves and handling minefields.[223] A February 1954 article, originally published by the *Freie Presse*, applauded Arabs' "Sixth Sense," in finding graves.[224] Yet, by the late 1950s and into the 1960s, the presence of North Africans

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[219] Ibid., 8.
[220] Burkhard Hering, "Der Mut zur Wahrheit," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 4, Nr. 3, März 1954, p. 7, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[221] Ibid.
[222] This phenomenon is discussed in Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 21.
[223] "Würdige Ruhestätten für unsere gefallenen Kameraden," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 4, April 1953, p. 5, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[224] "Der sechste Sinn der Araber half," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 4, Nr. 2, February 1954, p. 7, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.

diminished greatly in representations of the war.

The German Empire and the "Uralten Afrikaner"

The decline of violence in discussions of the North Africa campaign, as well as the presence of North Africans themselves over the course of the 1950s, occurred alongside a greater emphasis on the German colonial empire of decades past. Articles, stories, and narratives in *Die Oase* drew increasing connections between Afrika Korps veterans' experiences of the Second World War in North Africa and those of earlier colonial soldiers elsewhere on the continent, particularly German Southwest Africa. The increasing prominence of explicitly colonial experiences, particularly in what is now Namibia, operated in several interconnected ways. On the one hand, colonial narratives normalize the extraordinarily brutal and demoralizing combat waged in North Africa during the Second World War, subsuming the experience instead into a type of post-colonial nostalgia,[225] and white, European, colonial solidarity.[226] On the other, they obfuscated the murderous violence of German colonial warfare, which involved mass murder in both Southwest and Southeast Africa.[227] The violence in these narratives, as it appeared, served to discursively unite the new European allies over a shared British and German colonial past.

[225] Schilling, "German Postcolonialism in Four Dimensions," 428; Britta Schilling, *Postcolonial Germany: Memories of Empire in a Decolonized Nation*, Illustrated edition (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2014), 197.
[226] Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime*, 231; Connelly, "Taking Off the Cold War Lens"; Hansen and Jonsson, "Eurafrica Incognita"; Ulrike Lindner, "'An Inclination toward a Policy of Extermination'? German and British Discourse on Colonial Wars during High Imperialism," in *The Discourse of British and German Colonialism Convergence and Competition*, ed. Felicity Rash and Geraldine Horan (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2021).
[227] Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller, *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika: der Kolonialkrieg (1904-1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2003); Dominik J. Schaller, "From Conquest to Genocide: Colonial Rule in German Southwest Africa and German East Africa," in *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History*, ed. A. Dirk Moses (Berghahn Books, 2008).

Far from an era of "postcolonial amnesia," in the 1950s and 60s, West Germany was inundated with discussions of the imperial past.[228] *Der Spiegel*, for example, printed weekly subsections on "Colonies or "Colonial Politics" and regular uncritical narratives of German colonial history. German popular culture was inundated with colonial imagery in books, television programs, and "Heimat Films."[229] Adenauer's Germany was, as discussed above, actively engaged in neocolonial *Afrikapolitik* and the Eurafrican project, grounded in Cold War "development," the distribution of financial assistance in the interest of exercising influence, in many cases guided by pre-war colonial experts or advocates.[230]

It was in this context that the VDAK announced former colonial soldiers' suitability for membership at its founding in 1951, and *Die Oase* dubbed them "*Uralten*" *Afrikaner* in its October 1952 issue. The *Uralten Afrikaner*, the "ancient Africans," were welcomed join to the "old Africans" who fought during the Second World War. By 1953 and 1954, increasing numbers of these former colonial soldiers regularly attending meetings held by the VDAK branches in Neumunster, Stuttgart, and Hanover. The February 1954 issue of *Die Oase* published a call by one of them directed at all surviving imperial soldiers to join, specifically naming their experiences during the "Herero Uprising," the "Hottentot Uprising," and the First World War.[231] The August 1953 issue of *Die Oase* presented a "Symbolic Community" on its cover: the images

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[228] Monika Albrecht, "(Post-) Colonial Amnesia? German Debates on Colonialism and Decolonization in the Post-War Era," in *German Colonialism and National Identity*, ed. Michael Perraudin and Jürgen Zimmerer (New York: Routledge, 2011), 187.
[229] Verber, "The Conundrum of Colonialism in Postwar Germany," 165; Birthe Kundrus, review of *Review of "Der Held von Deutsch-Ostafrika": Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, Ein preußischer Kolonialoffizier*, by Eckard Michels, *The International History Review* 32, no. 1 (2010): 152–55, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25703916; Wolfgang Struck, "The Persistence of Fantasies: Colonialism as Melodrama on German Television," in *German Colonialism and National Identity*, ed. Michael Perraudin and Jürgen Zimmerer (New York: Routledge, 2011).
[230] Schilling, *Postcolonial Germany*, 92; Katherine Pence, "Showcasing Cold War Germany in Cairo: 1954 and 1957 Industrial Exhibitions and the Competition for Arab Partners," *Journal of Contemporary History* 47, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 69–95, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009411422361; Hansen and Jonsson, *Eurafrica*.
[231] "Die 'Uralten' mit den 'Alten Afrikanern' vereinen!", *Die Oase*, Jahrg 4, Nr. 2, Februar 1954, p. 4, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.

of Kesselring, Ludwig Crüwell and Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck.[232] Lettow-Vorbeck, "the undefeated defender of German East Africa," was declared an honorary member in September of 1952,[233] and spoke at the Hannover reunion.[234] A VDAK membership list dated 1958 listed 67 active members who were former officers for the imperial defense troops from German Southwest Africa.[235]

Colonial veterans' discussions and descriptions of hardships in the South-West African desert greatly resembled those of those of North Africa: dominated by dust, heat, sand, and confusion. The September 1953 *Oase* included recollections by Willy Schmidt, an "*Uralt-Afrikaner*" who had served in German Southwest Afrika, taking part in the construction of the railroad from in 1906.[236] Schmidt detailed his recollections constructing a railroad in the German colony during the "Herero and Hottentot Uprising," in order to supply colonial troops. The heat was horrendous: "45 degrees above zero in the shade," in an experience dominated by the "hot African sun." German Southwest Africa "was a real wild west." There was inadequate drinking water, unfamiliar conditions, and "there was sand. Sand and again sand" with desert cliffs. While German soldiers suffered from typhus and dysentery, the worst problem was the experience of "waterlessness" and thirst. The second biggest challenge was the dust and the "shifting dunes," which led to sandstorms that blinded and confused German troops, making navigation impossible.

Taking their accounts at face value, one would hardly suspect that German Southwest Africa was likely the site of the twentieth century's first genocide. After decades of German

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[232] "Symbolhafte Gemeinschaft", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 8, August 1953, p. 1, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[233] BArch, B 469/118, Chronik des Verbandes Deutsches Arika-Korps e.V. 1951-1962
[234] "Das Festprogramm für Hanover", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 9, September 1953, p. 2, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[235] B 469/131
[236] Willy Schmidt, "Wir bauten eine Bahn in Deutsch-Südwest", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 9, September 1953, p. 19, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.

brutality, exploitation, and murder, groups of Namibian Ovaherero and Nama peoples revolted against German colonists, killing over 100 during uprising of 1904. When German soldiers arrived in force, they faced logistical and environmental conditions described in similar terms to North Africa during the Second World War: distant supply lines, heat, and an unfamiliar desert that made navigation challenging. Following a campaign marked by massacres and unrestrained violence that culminated in a decisive battle against the Ovaherero at the Waterberg, German General Lothar von Trotha drove most surviving Ovaherero men, women, and children into the desert to die of exposure. Some largely Nama survivors were transported to concentration camps such as Shark Island, which Benjamin Madley calls an "extermination camp," where they were enslaved, murdered, and worked to death. [237] Estimates of the total number of indigenous dead are between 70 and 80% of a prewar population between 100,000 and 200,000.[238]

Nor would one suspect that the Ovaherero genocide was extraordinarily controversial and divisive to contemporary German opinion. The brutal suppression, as well as its entailing financial costs, featured prominently in the so-called "Hottentot Elections" of December 1906 to January 1907.[239] During the contentious election campaign, the SPD campaigned heavily against the brutal suppression of the revolt. The left-wing *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, for example, condemned the "barbaric war of extermination" by German settlers against Herero.[240] After the First World War, moreover, the Allies used the Ovaherero genocide as evidence that the

[237] Benjamin Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe," *European History Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (July 1, 2005): 429–64, https://doi.org/10.1177/0265691405054218; Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting*, 173.
[238] Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting*, 196.
[239] Schilling, *Postcolonial Germany*, 4; John Phillip Short, "Colonialism, War, and the German Working Class: Popular Mobilization in the 1907 Reichstag Elections," in *German Colonialism in a Global Age*, ed. Bradley Naranch and Geoff Eley (Duke University Press, 2015), 211, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822376392.
[240] Cited in: Short, "Colonialism, War, and the German Working Class: Popular Mobilization in the 1907 Reichstag Elections," 217.

Germans were unfit colonialists, and the massacres were later emphatically defended in Nazi-era textbooks.[241]

Remarkably, in *Die Oase*, Willy Schmidt referenced this "Shark Island," identifying it as a barracks for the sick and wounded. He recalled how in the work of constructing the railroad, "24 oxen or mules, with Boers as trek leaders and Hottentots or Hereros as drivers, pulled heavy wagons" with enormous payloads of materials. "Huge clouds of dust enveloped the columns from which the piercing screams and clicking sounds could be heard." He proudly concluded with the words of former South African President Herzog at the country's 300-anniversary celebration in Capetown, how their colonial railroad "played our part in demonstrating German hard work and German entrepreneurship to the world."

Die Oase's March 1954 issue makes it clear that the desert, a hostile, non-European environment, connected the *Uralten* and the *Afrikaner*. *Die Oase* argued that *Uralten Afrikaner* who had fought against the Ovaherero shared a great deal of similarities with the Afrika Korps because they "just like Rommel's soldiers," faced a "tropical climate," fought in the "African desert in thirst and heat," and waged combat under challenging circumstances. The *Oase* emphasized that "It is precisely these reports that connect Rommel's soldiers with the veterans of the colonial wars because of the same hardships and experiences."[242]

The April 1954 issue lead with an account of the 50-year celebration of the "Liberation of Omaruru" during the Ovaherero uprising, attended by Heinz-Justis Walbaum in what is now Namibia.[243] This February 1954 ceremony commemorated the 50th anniversary of Captain Victor

[241] Schilling, *Postcolonial Germany*, 55, 88.
[242] "Kameradschaften berichten: Die 'Uralten Afrikaner' erzählen uns", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 4, Nr. 3, März 1954, p. 5, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[243] "Mit Waffe und Spaten - eine Heimat geschaffen," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 4, Nr. 4, April 1954, p.1, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.

Franke over the Ovaherero, during which the town marked the occasion with memorabilia displays, uniforms and artifacts, and a large picture of Captain Franke at the town center. At 9am on February 4, a memorial ceremony was held at the "heroes' graves" which were decorated with wreaths and flowers. Subsequent ceremonies saw representatives from Germany and South Africa, and soldiers who fought there. Walbaum emphasized the need to also "commemorate the brave South Africans and their families, who were torn from their hard struggle for existence, surprised by the enemy." They like the Germans "became warriors overnight and defended Omaruru and the rest of the country against a cruel enemy side by side with the German soldiers and civilians." Their sacrifice, duty, and loyalty, should be an example to younger generations, so often taken up by "personal selfishness and materialism." At the 1958 *Bundestreffen* at Karlsruhe, Westphal declared that "we Africans of World War II as well as our older comrades from the Imperial Protection Force… under the leadership of our honorary member Lettow-Vorbeck [are] the guardians of a proud one soldierly tradition."[244]

In several issues in 1961, *Die Oase* published a lengthy exploration of the experiences of one German colonial soldier, Friedrich von Erckert, a German officer who died during the final stage of the Herero and Nama genocide in 1908.[245] Erckert's story was popularized by Hans Grimm, first in the 1926 *Volk ohne Raum*,[246] and then in then in the 1932 *Der Zug des Hauptmann von Erckert*. Erckert was tasked with brutally suppressing threats German settlements in the Kalahari from surviving Herero and Nama, for which purpose he helped

[244] BArch, B 469/115, Festansprache von General der Kavallerie a.D. Siegfried Westphal, Karlsruhe, 14. September 1958, p. 9.
[245] Freiherr von Zedlitz, "Friedrich von Erckert: Ein deutscher Schutztruppenoffizier," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 11, Nr. 5, Mai 1961, p. 4, Harvard Library, KSG 2444.
[246] Volker Langbehn, ed., *German Colonialism, Visual Culture, and Modern Memory*, 1st edition (New York: Routledge, 2010), 170. (Oliver Simons: "Hans Grimm's Volk ohne Raum and German Cartography in Southwest Africa")

develop the colonial camel corps. He died in a March 1908 battle against the Nama.[247] Erckert's story was taught in schools in some places into the 1950s.[248]

Die Oase introduced Erckert's story, including apparent selections from his diary, in terms celebrating the German colonial action: "Erckert wrote down these sentences on his bold march into the Kalahari against the leader of the rebellious Hottentots… where he died on March 16, 1908 in a victorious battle." In terms similar to Rommel, Erckert was a "bold and energetic young captain." He "created the conditions for the responsible operation in the desert against the devious, stubborn enemy, accompanied by a sublime morality." The selections emphasized Erckert's leadership skills, his personal morality and bravery, and his ferocity in the "Hottentot War." Erckert was known for his "chivalrous, energetic and confident demeanor."[249] And when pitted against the enemy, "in such days there was nothing for him but the enemy and his annihilation."

The December 1957 issue of *Die Oase* published a fictional story removed even further in time from the war in North Africa that explicitly united British and Germans in a colonial struggle, "The Germans to the front!"[250] The story expressed a sentiment towards the British Empire far removed from the mistrustful and accusatory pieces published in the early issues of *Die Oase*. Instead, "The Germans to the front!" invokes a colonial myth of white solidarity against "murderous savages."[251] This tale luridly narrates heavy combat in Sub-Saharan Africa in

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[247] Horst Drechsler, *Let Us Die Fighting : The Struggle of the Herero and Nama against German Imperialism (1884-1915)* (Zed Press (London), 1980), 203, https://jstor.org/stable/10.2307/al.sff.document.crp3b10018.
[248] Schilling, *Postcolonial Germany*, 79; Daniel Berndt, "Folk Dance and Safari – Some Thoughts on Hans Grimm's Photographs from South West Africa," Billet, *TRAFO – Blog for Transregional Research* (blog), accessed November 8, 2021, https://trafo.hypotheses.org/7996.
[249] Freiherr von Zedlitz, "Friedrich von Erckert: Ein deutscher Schutztruppenoffizier," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 11, Nr. 5, Mai 1961, p. 6, Harvard Library, KSG 2444.
[250] Oberst a. D. Schultze-Dewitz, "The Germans to the front!", *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 7, Nr. 12, Dezember 1957, p. 11, Harvard Library, KSG 2444.
[251] David Ciarlo, "Picturing Genocide in German Consumer Culture, 1904-10," in *German Colonialism and National Identity*, ed. Michael Perraudin and Jürgen Zimmerer (New York: Routledge, 2011), 71; Lindner, "'An

the late nineteenth century, including graphic descriptions of machine gun fire and injury. Set in the period before the First World War, the subject of the story, the title of which was printed in English, is an occasion when "Britons and Germans worked together" in colonial Africa to violently suppress indigenous Africans. Written from the perspective of a German colonial officer in Cameroon, the narrator proudly announces that the British had reached out to German colonial authorities for assistance: "The colonel and leader of the British border expedition asked for support, asked for German arms help!" The Germans, detached from Cameroon, are "are under English command. The British lead. But we will soon part with our new brothers in arms." The European forces are separated by an ambush attack by Africans with "Greedy-cruel-wild-looking faces. Built with sinews, they jump bouncy over low jam hills. Their long hair is braided in strands, decorated with shells and weighted down. Completely naked! Rubbed with palm oil, their bodies shine." Assisted by an English Captain, a Scott, and a Liberian, the Germans attempt to fend off the assault with machine-gun fire, because "These Bush negroes do not yet know the terrible weapon used by whites." John Meier, the protagonist's Liberian ally, is killed while firing the gun into the crowd of attackers. His "hand was stuck in the feeder… He has a small hole in his skull. The African's lazily hot red blood oozes from his frizzy woolen head. Even in death the brave would not let go of his belt!" Fully unleashed and reloaded, "The machine gun barrel now spreads death and ruin among the clumped flood of black, snarling beasts" rushing toward them. The Europeans are victorious, and the Germans are reunited with the main British contingent. They story concludes with a Christmas Eve celebration hosted by the grateful British.

Inclination toward a Policy of Extermination'? German and British Discourse on Colonial Wars during High Imperialism," 178.

Conclusion

This chapter makes three arguments. First, it argues that the VDAK was an explicitly political organization from its very inception, aiming not only to rehabilitate Albert Kesselring, but to use Erwin Rommel's and the VDAK's reputation and popularity to defend the Wehrmacht. They did so through a specific argument that depended on an interpretation of North Africa's environment: North Africa was a clean war because it was a desert war fought in an empty environment. North Africa's supposed desert emptiness, in turn, allowed the VDAK to establish North Africa as a separate war, one untainted by the atrocities, while simultaneously pushing for the Wehrmacht's rehabilitation.

Second, this chapter argues that attitudes toward the British enemy shifted over the course of the 1950s. In *Die Oase*'s earliest publications, the newspaper revealed lingering skepticism, mistrust, and hostility toward the Western Allies and Britain in particular, at odds with the straightforward narrative of a "chivalric" war. Early stories, recollections, and "collective representations" were more likely to highlight the intensity, violence, and horror of what I have argued was a "total war" in North Africa. Two international developments contributed to significant changes in attitudes towards the VDAK's former enemy: the release of Kesselring, and a 1953 soccer match between former soldiers from the VDAK and "Desert Rats."

The chapter's third argument is that discourses surrounding the North African desert played a crucial role in transforming North Africa into a "war without hate." First, the discourse of an "empty" desert assisted in the argument that North Africa's lack of partisans made combat in North Africa unique in the war. Then, as the desert's emptiness became enshrined in *Die Oase* narratives, North Africa's inhabitants gradually disappeared in published recollections and

narratives of the Second World War in North Africa. Visceral portrayals or descriptions of violence and death also became less frequent over the 1950s. This transition accompanied the discursive unification of North Africa and the earlier German colonial empire: linking the German war in North Africa to romanticized but often grisly accounts of German colonial warfare elsewhere in Africa, often (but not always) set in the desert. These explicitly colonial narratives, such as the "Germans to the Front!" united the British and Germans as white Europeans finding solidarity in a shared imperial history.

The next chapter moves forward chronologically to the 1950s and early 1960s, examining how German and British veterans, state actors, politicians, and the British popular media contest and negotiated the meaning of the Second World War in North Africa. Their efforts helped cement a particular vision of the "desert war" in popular memory in both Britain and Germany: the "war without hate," a common European tragedy, a joint sacrifice in a desert emptied of North Africa's inhabitants. This process ultimately culminated in an uneasy consensus where a "war without hate" could be toasted by British and German veterans at the Nordrhein-Westfalen "Rommel Barracks" in 1999.[252]

[252] Bierman and Smith, *Alamein*, 6.

Chapter 4: Transnational Memory and Commemoration

Introduction

British popular memory of the Second World War remains inextricable from the story of "the people's war" followed by the "people's peace."[1] In this popular narrative, from the heroic rescue of British soldiers from the beaches of Dunkirk through the "finest hour" of the Blitz, the British people fought "alone" against an overwhelming German war machine aiming to bomb them into submission. Starting with Dunkirk, and on through the victories that began with El Alamein and continued through V-E Day, the British people, tested by fire, drew together in unity across class divisions, building what amounted to a new national identity.[2] This straightforward narrative, however, obscured a great deal of the way the war was fought, experienced, and ultimately won, all while privileging certain perspectives and suppressing others.[3] Scholars have long challenged this account from multiple directions.[4] Sonya Rose, for example, has argued that that discourse of wartime unity entailed papering over Britain's class hierarchy and ethnic diversity, while demanding specific and exclusionary performances of gender.[5] Others have shown how the image of a "national" war came to hide the centrality of empire to the British war effort and the conflict as a whole.[6]

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[1] Geoff Eley, "Finding the People's War: Film, British Collective Memory, and World War II," *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 3 (2001): 828, https://doi.org/10.2307/2692326.
[2] Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-1945* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2.
[3] Penny Summerfield, "Dunkirk and the Popular Memory of Britain at War, 1940–58," *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 4 (2010): 788–811, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25764582; Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It!: Britain and the Memory of the Second World War*, 1st ed (Harlow, England ; New York: Pearson Longman, 2004), 90.
[4] Angus Calder, *The People's War; Britain, 1939-1945.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969); Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: J. Cape, 1991); John Ramsden, "Myths and Realities of the 'People's War' in Britain," in *Experience and Memory: The Second World War in Europe*, ed. Jörg Echternkamp and Stefan Martens (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).
[5] Rose, *Which People's War?*, 2003.
[6] For example, see: Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (London; New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2006); David Edgerton, *Britain's War Machine: Weapons, Resources, and Experts in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

The role of the North Africa front specifically in British popular memory is underexamined, though there are signs that this is now changing. Mark Connelly has highlighted the importance of the North Africa campaign to the British public and to home-front morale during and after the war. Connelly argued that the North Africa Campaign maintained its popularity after V-E day because of the understanding that "it was… a clean war, involving soldiers who respected each other in a… struggle that appealed to the sporting side of the British people." The North African environment tied into a "deep-rooted British cultural romance" with the desert, associated with masculine, imperial adventure.[7] Examining postwar British films set during the Second World War in North Africa, Martin Francis has argued that efforts to represent the conflict as a "British" or "German" one, rather than an imperial conflict, showed the "erasure of empire" in British cultural memory of the war. The Empire was replaced with a "struggle against the pitiless forces of nature," a battle which enabled "the assertion of (white) colonial settler virility" in what came to be constructed as "a white man's war."[8]

In the popular version of the "people's war," the Second Battle of El Alamein was the "climax and turning point" in the war for North Africa and even the Second World War as whole.[9] Winston Churchill famously claimed: "[i]t may almost be said that before Alamein we never had a victory. After Alamein we never had a defeat."[10] The narrative of a decisive, pivotal triumph at El Alamein has also been repeatedly challenged. Correlli Barnett, for instance, denounced it as a "myth" in 1977.[11] Bernard Montgomery's celebrated command, his and

[7] Connelly, *We Can Take It!*, 207.
[8] Martin Francis, "Remembering War, Forgetting Empire? Representations of the North African Campaign in 1950s British Cinema," in *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, ed. Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 114, 120.
[9] "Second Battle of El Alamein | National Army Museum," accessed November 5, 2021, https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/battle-alamein.
[10] Connelly, *We Can Take It!*, 212.
[11] Ibid.

Churchill's political maneuvers, and the Eighth Army's performance have long been questioned.[12] Most recently, Alexander Joffe has examined how postwar narratives of the triumph at El Alamein came at the expense of other accounts and explanations for the extensive failures of the first years of the war in North Africa.[13]

The preceding chapter established that over the course of the 1950s and beyond, the influential German veterans' association of former Afrika Korps soldiers, the VDAK, worked purposefully to promote a sanitized narrative of a "war without hate," and of common sacrifice. Led by former Wehrmacht generals working toward their own professional and national rehabilitation, the German veterans of North Africa came to promote a chivalric version of the Second World War in North Africa as common European tragedy, and joint struggle against the inhospitable desert environment. The discourse of a limited war between "civilized" opponents entailed the discursive "emptying" of North Africa of its inhabitants and a concomitant emphasis of the desert environment, a process that obfuscated the war's imperial context and warfare that I have argued fits the model of "total war."[14] The narrative of the "desert war," which privileges the desert environment as a common, environmental enemy spanning both sides, enabled the predominance of a clean, manly, and controlled "national" war fought between the white nations of Europe, now partners in the Cold War.[15]

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[12] R. W. Thompson, *Churchill and the Montgomery Myth* (New York: M. Evans; distributed in association with Lippincott, Philadelphia, 1968); Jonathan Fennell, *Combat and Morale in the North African Campaign: The Eighth Army and the Path to El Alamein* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[13] Alexander H. Joffe, *Operation Crusader and the Desert War in British History and Memory: "What Is Failure? What Is Loyalty?"* (London ; New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350132900.

[14] Francis, "Remembering War, Forgetting Empire? Representations of the North African Campaign in 1950s British Cinema," 114, 120.

[15] Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain : Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997); Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Sonya Rose, *Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-1945* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Over the course of the 1950s and early 1960s, German and British veterans, state actors, politicians, and the popular media contested the meaning of the Second World War in North Africa. This chapter examines how these actors shaped the ways that war was remembered, commemorated, and discussed. Their efforts helped cement a particular vision of the "desert war" in popular memory in both Britain and Germany: the war without hate, a common European tragedy, a joint sacrifice in an "empty" desert purged of North Africa's inhabitants. I argue that disputes over the VDAK's emergence and its early political demands, and later disagreements over highly symbolic ceremonies and commemorations, reveal shifts in British narratives and discourses surrounding the Second World War in North Africa, shaped by the dynamics of the Cold War, imperial resurgence and retreat, geopolitical weakness, and emerging American hegemony. This chapter traces British interpretations of the Second World War in North Africa through three contested Anglo-German encounters in the 1950s and 1960s: the VDAK's formation, its early demands, and reunions; the unveiling of the German memorial at Tobruk; and British commemorations at El Alamein.

During the early 1950s, British reception of the VDAK's political efforts was embedded in the popular legend of Erwin Rommel, as well as debates over German rearmament and war guilt in the context of the early Cold War. British attitudes, as suggested by the media and political reception, ranged initially from open hostility to apathy. Yet, as the "Rommel myth" picked up steam over the decade, and Cold War tensions heightened, the VDAK became increasingly accepted in the popular media, outside of the Marxist left and nationalist/imperialist political right.

Nevertheless, circumstances surrounding British and German commemorations of the war in North Africa demonstrated ongoing conflicts between interpretations and narratives of the

Second World War in North Africa. The German war monument at Tobruk, a *Totenburg* following the model of inter-war Nazi commemorative practices unveiled in 1955, faced a chilly critical reception both officially and in the British media. British commemoration and memorialization of the North Africa campaign, particularly the Battle of El Alamein, emphasized power and unity of the Commonwealth in a moment of triumph, one only reluctantly shared with former enemies or even allies like the United States. El Alamein was to be understood as a tremendous victory, a pivotal "turning point" that decided the Second World War. Proposals to hold a joint memorial ceremony near El Alamein, with Cold War interests in mind, only gained real traction after the Suez Crisis, as Britain gravitated away from the Commonwealth and toward Europe. Resisted by British and Commonwealth veteran organizations, it nevertheless took decades before the VDAK leadership's preferred memorial framework, the narrative of the Second World War in North Africa as a chivalric "war without hate," unifying European tragedy and "common sacrifice," was officially enshrined in the form of a joint ceremony of commemoration with Italy and Germany.

British Reception of the Verband Deutsches Afrika Korps

The 1951 formation and early public activities of the VDAK, the *Traditionsverband* established by and for the veterans of the German war in North Africa, was the subject of widespread and largely critical journalism in the United Kingdom. The previous chapter identified a broad shift in the attitudes and public "remembering" expressed by VDAK leadership and published in the VDAK newspaper between two periods: from the VDAK's foundation in 1951 through late 1953, and from approximately 1954 through the early 1960s. In the earlier period, open demands for German military rehabilitation and the release of convicted

war criminals expressed sentiment approaching open hostility toward the Western Allies and Britain in particular, reproducing discourses with clear wartime and pre-war Nazi genealogies. Following the release of the war criminal Albert Kesselring in October 1952, and a September 1953 soccer game between the "Desert Rats" and Afrika Korps veterans at the Hanover reunion, the narrative of a "war without hate" or "common European tragedy" became increasingly enshrined in VDAK discourse, linked to the need for European unity against the Soviet Union. Shifts in British attitudes followed a different trajectory than German ones.

British attitudes toward the VDAK, as suggested by reporting in the popular press over the course of the 1950s, were mixed. A far cry from the "war without hate," at the start of the decade, the British press treated of the emergence of the VDAK and similar *Traditionsverbände* in 1951 with near unanimous hostility and alarm regardless of political position. It was only later, influenced by the "Rommel myth" and the demands of the Cold War alliance, that most mainstream newspapers dropped their opposition to Anglo-German reconciliation by the end of the decade. Meanwhile, stridently anti-German positions continued to be taken by papers representing the opposite ends of the political spectrum: the *Daily Express* and *Daily Worker*.

In British wartime perception and postwar popular memory, the North Africa campaign was inseparable from the myth of Erwin Rommel. By the end of 1941, Rommel had become the German general best known to the British public.[16] Initially a product of shrewd self-promotion and Nazi propaganda, Rommel's notoriety was amplified by American and British media, and Winston Churchill in particular. It was Churchill who, in January 1942, declared before the House of Commons that Rommel was "a very daring and skillful opponent against us, and may I

[16] Ralf Georg Reuth, *Rommel: The End of a Legend*, trans. Debra S. Marmor and Herbert A. Danner, 1st Edition (Haus Publishing, 2020), chap. 3.

say across the havoc of war, a great general."[17] The wartime success of the "Rommel myth" owed also to face-saving measures by British military leaders facing costly defeats in the North African theater of war; promoting the legend of Rommel's military genius excused the failures of the British officer corps. Following Rommel's and the Afrika Korps' ultimate defeat, the legend of Rommel's brilliance proved useful in raising the stature of Bernard Montgomery as Rommel's counterpart in British propaganda in publications and films like the 1943 *Desert Victory,* which situate Montgomery as Rommel's intellectual and strategic match.[18]

Rommel's post-war rehabilitation was aided immensely by the popularity of two English-language texts: Desmond Young's best-selling 1950 biography, *Rommel: The Desert Fox*, and Basil Liddell Hart's 1953 publication of the *Rommel Papers*.[19] Mark Connelly identified three key themes in the majority of subsequent interpretations of Rommel that followed: "Rommel's lukewarm commitment to Nazism, his genius as a military leader, and the lack of animosity shown by all combatants in the North African campaign." These three themes were at the heart of West German rehabilitation. The field marshal "was to become the expression of the real Germany, hidden, hijacked and perverted by the Nazis."[20]

Young's biography was soon made into a film, the 1951 *Desert Fox* starring British actor James Mason, for which Liddell Hart was a technical advisor.[21] British, German, and American films of the 1950s largely presented Rommel as an honorable, brilliant leader admired both by his subordinates and his enemies. Some of these films bore brazen Cold War agendas. The 1953 West German documentary film *Das war unser Rommel*, produced for German war graves

[17] Mark Connelly, "Rommel as an Icon," in *Rommel: A Reappraisal*, ed. Ian F. W. Beckett (Pen & Sword Military, 2013).
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Joffe, *Operation Crusader and the Desert War in British History and Memory*, chap. 7.

commission and also contributed to by Liddell Hart, endowed Rommel with "superhuman foresight" of the Cold War alliance. In the film, Rommel is even purported to have proclaimed "[w]e must come to an understanding with the West… Only a political, economic and military union can guarantee the existence of Europe in the future."[22]

However, the "Rommel myth" did face scrutiny, and was never uncontested. During November 29, 1951 debates in the House of Commons, Labour MP David Weitzman attacked *The Desert Fox* as movie "which glorifies a general who upheld the Nazi creed."[23] The Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen condemned the film as applauding a "ruthless enemy of Britain," and the military and political system that had bombed East London to rubble. The Stepney Peace Council denounced the film as "the most bitter and humiliating insult which could be offered to the people of Stepney." The Communist newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, meanwhile, urged veterans to protest the film, which it linked to efforts toward West German rearmament.[24]

An examination of references to the VDAK in the British popular press over the 1950s reveals a gradual transition from ongoing hostility and mistrust, a trajectory toward either the begrudging acceptance of Anglo-German reconciliation or, potentially, the suppression of opposition to it. Here, I am building on the work of Daniel Cowling, who has found evidence for the *longue durée* of anti-German sentiment in early 1950s mass-market newspapers, such as the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Express*, and the *Daily Mail*. Cowling observed that British press attitudes toward Erich von Manstein's 1949 trial and 1953 release indicated widespread opposition to German rehabilitation, particularly in the mass-market newspapers more popular with lower middle and working class readers, complicating simple narratives of a widespread

[22] Major, "'Our Friend Rommel,'" 526, referring to Horst Wiganko, *That Was Our Rommel*, Documentary, War, (1954); See also Albert Baumeister, *So War Der Deutsche Landser*, Documentary, (1955).
[23] Connelly, "Rommel as an Icon."
[24] Ibid.

"desire to 'move on'" after the war, or of broadly popular Anglo-German sympathy.[25] Instead, the image of Anglo-German reconciliation that emerged from Manstein's trial, Cowling argued, was a result of deliberate manipulation by influential intellectuals and conservative politicians, spearheaded by the likes of Liddell Hart, Maurice Hankey, and Reginald Paget. In the case of Manstein, this "faction" worked "in tandem with changes to official policy regarding Germany and Europe,"[26] helping to build the "clean hands" mythology and obscuring public awareness of the Holocaust. British press responses to the VDAK reveal a related phenomenon: while broadsheets such as *The Times* came into agreement with the British Cold War policy toward reconciliation and rearmament, mass market newspapers like the *Express* continued to attack the VDAK into the 1950s.

For the most part, British newspapers addressed the formation of the VDAK and other German veterans' associations in 1951 in the context of ongoing debates about German rearmament, trials for war crimes, and the politics of rearmament considerably shaped their responses. In 1951, newspapers on the political left and right both expressed alarm at the VDAK's rise as possibly indicating a new and threatening form of German "militarism."[27] Interpretations on the political left and right, however, differed according to their interpretation of Nazism.

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[25] Daniel Cowling, "Anglo–German Relations After 1945," *Journal of Contemporary History* 54, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 85, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009417697808; John Ramsden, *Don't Mention the War: The British and the Germans Since 1890* (Little, Brown, 2006); Kerstin von Lingen, *Kesselring's Last Battle: War Crimes Trials and Cold War Politics, 1945-1960*, trans. Alexandra Klemm (University Press of Kansas, 2009), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv7n0bzv.

[26] Cowling, "Anglo–German Relations After 1945," 106.

[27] Jonathan Dunnage et al., "Understanding Militarism after the End of the Cold War: History, International Relations, and Media Studies Ask New Questions," *History Compass* 17, no. 12 (2019): e12600, https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12600; James M Diehl, *The Thanks of the Fatherland: German Veterans after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

Coverage in the left-leaning broadsheet *Manchester Guardian* interpreted the rise of the VDAK and similar organizations as indicative of militarism and nationalism at odds with democratic politics. For instance, on September 12, 1951, the *Manchester Guardian* listed the VDAK among the "Old Comrades" organizations forming in West Germany. The VDAK's "political aims" included the strengthening of support of all types for veterans, an end to "defamation" and vilification, and the integration of veteran organizations with the West German state.[28] A subsequent November 1, 1951 article in the *Guardian* alerted readers to the growing "strength" of German ex-soldiers' organizations.[29] The *Guardian* correspondent claimed the flourishing of these associations, which included the VDAK, was "the most significant internal development in Western Germany since the birth of the Federal Republic." Following its founding in September 1951, "[t]he League of German Soldiers," (the *Verband deutscher Soldaten* (VDS)), had "stretched its tentacles into every parish in Western Germany," noting the support of right-wing German politicians. The *Guardian* correspondent argued that "it has been left to men of greater independence of mind to say what they really think." In this regard, the most important group was "the trade unions – still the only guardian of democratic belief as opposed to democratic forms," which "issued a strong statement rejecting the need for the new league of 'restorationist military and nationalist inspiration.'"

Conservative newspapers skeptical of the VDAK's formation and German rearmament in general saw its formation as a continuation of Germany's wartime national threat, and a betrayal of Britain's hard-fought victory. Reporting on the first VDAK reunion at Iserlohn in September of 1951 under the heading "Rommel's men state the terms," the conservative *Journal & North*

[28] Our Bonn Correspondent, "The German Ex-Soldiers: A New Faith or an Old Legend?," *The Manchester Guardian*, September 12, 1951, p. 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.
[29] Our Own Correspondent, "The German Ex-Soldiers: A Movement Gathers Strength," *The Manchester Guardian*, November 1, 1951, p. 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Mail detailed the events in threatening terms reminiscent of the inter-war rise of Nazism: "[f]our thousand lusty ex-Africa Corps veterans stood up… and swore never to join a European army until German war criminals were released… and Britain and the United States guaranteed 'full equality' of command to a German General Staff."[30] The veterans of North Africa "rose to their feet shouting 'shame,' 'disgraceful,' and 'we speak for all German soldiers'" at the first Afrika Korps reunion. The *Journal* described a "spontaneous outburst" when Ludwig Crüwell spoke, "in a voice shaking with emotion," criticizing Eisenhower's call for "German mercenary troops" and demanding "full equality," as well as the release of Kesselring and other unjustly jailed soldiers. Following his speech, "pairs of heels clicked and his audience stood rigidly to attention to sing" the wartime national anthem, including the stanza Deutschland Über Alles. Publishing an article by the same reporter, the conservative *Western Mail* reported that the VDAK had invited Bernard Montgomery to join their organization, as well as nearby British soldiers of the 10th Hussars to attend the meeting, all of whom declined.[31]

The illustrated weekly newspaper *The Sphere* drew a similar trajectory from the wartime experience to the meeting at Iserlohn. On September 29, 1951, the newspaper published a series of photographs from the first Afrika Korps reunion under the heading "Germany Calling!", a reference to the infamous war-time broadcasts by "Lord Haw Haw."[32] The conservative *Daily Mail* reported that the "Rommel men" at Iserlohn announced the conditions for their participation in German rearmament and contribution to Western defense: "all German war criminals should be freed, and the Allies should guarantee full equality to the German General

[30] Antony Terry, "Rommel's Men State the Terms," *Journal & North Mail*, September 17, 1951, p. 3, The British Newspaper Archive.
[31] Antony Terry, "Rommel Men Say 'Free War Criminals before We Join European Army,'" *Western Mail*, September 17, 1951, p. 1, The British Newspaper Archive.
[32] "Germany Calling," *The Sphere*, September 29, 1951, p. 455, The British Newspaper Archive.

Staff in a European Army. Later they sang 'Deutschland Uber Alles' the old imperialist German anthem." The *Mail* report highlighted "a gigantic back-cloth" behind the stage "bearing a huge picture of a palm tree." Against this backdrop and "[o]ver the thunder of wild cheering and stamping, General Cruwell shouted" his opposition to becoming "mercenary troops of the Allies."[33]

Critical British press coverage of German veteran reunions even drew condemnation from Bonn. On July 30, 1951 the conservative *Daily Telegraph* reported that at a recent reunion in Düsseldorf by former paratroopers, headed by General Ramcke, the general had demanded the "immediate cessation and removal of slanders and discrimination against those who risked their lives for their country," as well as the release of "so-called German war criminals." More controversially, according to the *Telegraph*, Ramcke added, "Whether we want to or not, we shall not be able to avoid taking up arms for the defence of our living space (Lebensraum) against enemy hordes."[34] The West German newspaper *Mittag* condemned British reporting on this speech, describing the reunions as "harmless and understandable demonstrations." The *Telegraph* unapologetically suggested, "So far as can be ascertained here, the General's reference to 'Lebensraum' was suppressed by the entire German Press."[35]

Unusual for the post-war British press, the right-wing nationalist and imperialist *Daily Express* maintained a largely consistent position of anti-Germanism throughout much of the post-war period, and the paper's reporting in the early 1950s on German rearmament and rehabilitation was stridently hostile. The 1951 VDAK meeting in Iserlohn received front page

[33] Daily Mail Reporter, "Rommel Men Say 'Free Prisoners,'" *Daily Mail*, September 17, 1951, p. 4, Daily Mail Historical Archive (Gale).
[34] Our Own Correspondent, "5,000 German Ex-Air Troops at Reunion," *The Daily Telegraph*, July 30, 1951, p. 8, The Telegraph Historical Archive (Gale).
[35] Our Own Correspondent, "Germans Attack British Press," *The Daily Telegraph*, August 1, 1951, p. 8, The Telegraph Historical Archive (Gale).

coverage, which described an alarming scene described as clearly reminiscent of a Nazi rally. The *Express* correspondent saw four thousand Afrika Korps veterans "roaring 'Deutschland Uber Alles,' at a vast 'Rommel Old Boys'" reunion, where they "demanded that top German generals must be given high commands in Eisenhower's European Army."[36] These requirements were issued a mere "56 hours after the big Three Foreign Ministers announced the imminent end of the Allied occupation." The *Express* listed three "demands": complete equality for the German army, voluntary participation in a European military, and the "end of the allied defamation of the German Army and the restoration of the honour of the German soldier."

The *Express*' continued to identify Germany as an international threat to Britain in 1952. In January of that year the *Express* raised hackles over King Farouk of Egypt's "plans to replace the British military mission… with Hitler generals from West Germany," particularly those who fought under Rommel.[37] On June 11, 1952, the paper announced "Hitler's Generals are chosen to lead Adenauer's Army," referring to the "seven iron cross generals of Hitler's army," including Crüwell, who were on "the Bonn Government's short list to command the four Army Corps of the new 250,000-strong West German Army."[38]

The second VDAK reunion in Stuttgart drew even more feverish front-page coverage from the *Daily Express* on September 15, 1952.[39] Under the heading "Rommel men 'warn' allies," the *Express* reported that "[e]ight thousand officers and men of Rommel's Afrika Korps roared a warning to Britain and the West tonight." Ludwig Crüwell, "a Prussian, black-suited

[36] Express Staff Reporter, "Germans Demand Boss in Europe's Army," *Daily Express*, September 17, 1951, p. 1, UK Press Online.
[37] Express Staff Reporter, "Farouk Invites Rommel Men," *Daily Express*, January 1, 1952, p. 1, UK Press Online.
[38] Denis Martin, "Hitler's Generals Are Chosen to Lead Adenauer's Army," *Daily Express*, June 11, 1952, p. 2, UK Press Online.
[39] Denis Martin, "Rommel Men 'warn' Allies," *Daily Express*, September 15, 1952, p. 1, UK Press Online.

figure with a domed, sunburned head" stood at the stage and "shouted" denials that Germans would serve as "mercenaries for a new German army." Crüwell barked:

> "Not a man will fight again until Britain and her allies set the so-called German war criminals free.'"
> "Never, never" came the massed response, rumbling like drums through Stuttgart, capital city of Rommel's native province. Boisterous veterans of Alamein, Tunis, and Tobruk streamed in to rally in special trains ("half-price for the Afrika Korps"), coaches, cars, motor-scooters, cycles, and on foot… The Korps' wartime symbol of a palm tree with its golden fronds glittered on all sides.
> Over the jubilant mob, looking down from 12ft-high posts was the statue of the revered Rommel standing against an Eighth Army background of sand dunes and desert shrub. It was the Old Guard without a doubt.

Crüwell's remarks made the gathered soldiers' "eyes glint and their minds go back to the singing, stinging sand" when he lashed out at the Allies:

> "You know now," he cried, "what fighting Communism means in Korea, Indo-China, and Malaya. You know how hard, gruesome, and merciless the battle is… You know now that partisan war is no German invention. And yet you keep men who have committed no crime behind barbed wire and in deep dungeons."
> "Ja wohl, ja wohl," shouted the veterans as a telegram of greetings was sent off to Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, serving a life sentence in Werl Prison, British zone, for war crimes.
> "Bravo, bravo," they cheered as Cruewell called to the allies "Set Kesselring and all our guiltless comrades free – now."
> Then as the brass bands blared 'Deutschland Uber Alles', thousands of voices finally dispelled any allied illusions that the innocuous third verse is the "official" national anthem.
> Loud and clear came vintage verse 1, with its "Germany above all, Germany above everything."

The paper's account of the meeting concluded that "[t]he boys are at it again tonight. In the smoke filled beer halls and cellars they are singing the guardroom songs of men who tasted victory over the British." One might expect another war to be imminent: "Occasionally in the uproar there is the strumming of a guitar and a voice singing Lili Marlene, who, it seems, is still under the lamplight at the barrack gates waiting for her man." *The Express* highlighted the presence of Rommel's widow, Frau Rommel, singing the anthem with the gathered men. She was later the subject of further negative coverage by the *Express*.

A month later, the *Express*'s front-page report on Kesselring's release from prison struck a similarly alarming tone. On October 25, 1952, attended by generals Crüwell and Siegfried Westphal,[40] the *Express* detailed how with "clenched" fingers, the field marshal "barked his

[40] Denis Martin, "Russians 'Still Afraid of Germans,'" *Daily Express*, October 25, 1952, p. 1, UK Press Online.

message" and "ranted at the allies," to demanding ratification of the European defense treaty and rearm the German military. After all, "[t]he Russians are still scared of German soldiers." His facial muscles "twitching," Kesselring continued: "Two lost wars… have not broken the spirit and backbone of German soldiers." He moved on to "agitation to free all of the war crimes convicts from allied jails." The *Express* concluded "[t]he General Staff was back at work."

In contrast with right-wing papers like the *Daily Express*, which saw the VDAK as representing a potential challenge the British Empire, left-wing papers such the *Daily Worker* and the *Daily Herald* expressed opposition to VDAK activities in tune with their broader hostility toward Western rearmament and Cold War mobilization against the Soviet Union, of which Anglo-German reconciliation was one component. This owed, in part, to the Marxian understanding of fascism to which they subscribed.[41] Interpreting fascism as the logical and inevitable outcome of capitalism in crisis, fascism needed to be opposed by proletarian mobilization as well as emphatic support for the Soviet Union.

The Marxist *Daily Worker* explicitly tied efforts toward German rearmament and British coordination with the BRD to the threat of fascism. On September 15, 1951, the *Worker* reported that "[t]he Nazis of Western Germany are jubilant" about the decision of British, French, and American ministers to proceed with German rearmament.[42] German remilitarization was to be organized by the "Nazi old comrades' association, the German Union of Ex-Servicemen" headed by former Wehrmacht General Hans Friesner. Veteran organizations participating in the plotting of German rearmament included "Rommel's Afrika Corps." On September 17, 1951, directly below an article opposing German rearmament, the *Worker*'s reported on the VDAK Iserlohn

[41] Dan Stone, *Goodbye to All That?: A History of Europe Since 1945*, 1st edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 38, 83.
[42] Derek Kartun, "They Rejoice at Big Three Decision for Pact," *Daily Worker*, September 15, 1951, p. 1, UK Press Online.

reunion with the heading "Release of Nazis is Demanded."[43] Crüwell demanded "the release of German soldiers in war crimes prisons, complete equality in a European Army." The following month, on the paper condemned what it termed "Hollywood's Operation Whitewash," referring to the film "Rommel – Desert Fox" starring James Mason.[44] The film expressed "no remorse" for Nazi atrocities and imagined "[c]hivalry in men who made the whole of Europe and part of Africa a slaughteryard! Churchill easily forgets the British dead. So does Hollywood."

The left-wing *Daily Herald* reported on the 1954 Afrika Korps reunion in Heidelberg, emphasizing the attendance of Kesselring as guest of honor as the "climax" of the two-day reunion.[45] Kesselring, "president of the ex-Servicemen's 'Stahlheim… was surrounded by autograph-hunters while a uniformed band played military marches.'" Crüwell, meanwhile indicated "The idea of a united Europe is not dead… We all hope that future young German soldiers can write 'Europe' on their flags beside 'Germany,'" evoking the specter of a Europe united under German control.

While early responses in 1951 and 1952 were, overall, vehemently negative, the early 1950s saw a remarkable transformation in perceptions of German veterans' activities in the British press. With notable exceptions, such as the unveiling of the German Tobruk memorial, discussed below, by the mid-to-late 1950s, the hostility of most British newspapers' coverage of German veterans' associations, including the VDAK, declined. The presence of British soldiers at VDAK reunions, both veterans and active members of the military, appears to have played some role. Even the relentlessly anti-German *Express* applauded the 1953 soccer match between veterans of the "Desert Rats" and the Afrika Korps at Hanover, at what was described as "the

[43] "Release of Nazis Is Demanded," *Daily Worker*, September 17, 1951, p. 1, UK Press Online.
[44] F. W. Deards, "Whitewash For Rommel," *Daily Worker*, October 10, 1951, p. 1, UK Press Online.
[45] "Rommel's Men Remember the Lost 25,000," *Daily Herald*, September 13, 1954, p. 2, The British Newspaper Archive.

quietest, soberest German old soldiers' reunion on record."[46] According to the *Express*, this time there were "No jackboots, no violent speeches, no rollicking Wehrmacht songs, and the only flags put were those marking the comers of the Hindenburg stadium." In Hanover, "[e]verybody behaved in exemplary fashion." The British soldiers in attendance and the German counterparts cheered politely. Yet the *Express* remained skeptical, noting the presence of "widow Lucie Rommel… [sitting] in the front row, flanked by a double row of former German generals" at the reception following the game.

The *Express* was pleased in 1954 when Frau Rommel visited the British cemetery at El Alamein with "[n]ot a Briton there to meet her."[47] After weeping at the German and Italian cemetery, Rommel's widow paid a visit to the Allied cemetery nearby "to show that, as she put it, 'there's no bitterness.'" There she "stood silent a few moments Then quietly she said 'They, too, were soldiers with wives and mothers.'" However, "No Britons were present when Frau Rommel arrived with escorting Egyptian officers – whether by chance or design, I do not know."

On, September 13, 1954, the *Express* juxtaposed two headlines out of Germany: "German widows defy song ban" and "Rommel's men salute his widow."[48] The first referred to a meeting in Dortmund to revive the "Queen Louise League – the women's branch of the Stahlhelm German Veterans' Club." At the league's first rally since the war, the uniformed German widows called for "German rearmament 'because of threats from the East.'" Immediately below, the *Express* reported on the VDAK's Heidelberg reunion, where VDAK veterans saluted Frau Rommel. At the reunion, children reportedly recited the following verse:

[46] William Hamsher, "Desert Rats Draw with Rommel XI," *Daily Express*, September 14, 1953, p. 2, UK Press Online.
[47] David Burk, "Rommel's Wife Visits British Cemetery," *Daily Express*, May 22, 1954, p. 1, UK Press Online.
[48] William Hamsher, "German Widows Defy Song Ban," *Daily Express*, September 13, 1954, p. 2, UK Press Online.

"Our fathers died in the desert/ But their consciences were clean/ They stood firm by one another/ Firm as you stand by us/ And of this we are glad." By this point, in comparison, the conservative *Journal & North Mail* was far more sympathetic, applauding both Crüwell's and Kesselring's rhetoric on European unity. Crüwell "denied that any preparations were being made to establish the Afrika Korps as the nucleus of the new German Army, as had been alleged in British press reports."[49]

Over the mid-1950s and into the early 1960s, the *Express*' coverage of the VDAK gradually came to align with the more elite broadsheet press, which accepted and defended German rehabilitation and rearmament in the service of the Cold War alliance. Even so, authorities in Bonn (and their British counterparts) remained quite familiar with the "'Daily Express' brand of anti-Germanism" in 1962.[50] On the other hand, the British broadsheet press became, in many cases, unreservedly enthusiastic for the VDAK. For example, on October 1, 1956, the *Guardian* reported on the attendance of nearly 20,000 Afrika Korps veterans at the Düsseldorf reunion, celebrating the presence of "25 officers of the British 77th Armoured Division which opposed them in the desert."[51] The *Guardian* was pleased the German veterans were defeated in a soccer match, and claimed that "[t]he friendly and happy spirit of this rally has been exemplified by British and German officers drinking toasts to each other's armies, and by the storm of applause given to-day to a British Army band and to the British football team." British General Hackett, who attended the reunion, claimed "the war in the desert had left no bitter feelings." The *Guardian* celebrated the reunion as "the first time that a British general had

[49] "Afrika Corps Ask: Let Our Soldiers Owe Allegiance to Europe," *Journal & North Mail*, September 13, 1954, p. 3, The British Newspaper Archive.
[50] FO 371/165429, VG 1851/5 E. M. Rose to P. H. Laurence, March 16, 1962.
[51] Our own Correspondent, "All Friends Together: British and Germans Toast Armies," *The Manchester Guardian*, October 1, 1956, p. 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

addressed the Afrika Korps. It was also the first time that British and German military bands had played together." If there were any concerns about large numbers of German soldiers gathering together, the *Guardian* concluded: "The lesson of the past two days is that the Afrika Korps is probably the last part of the old German Army which is likely to indulge in loose or provocative talk and behaviour."

On November 14, 1961, the *Guardian* lamented a "rebuff" to Afrika Korps veterans by four British generals who declined to send friendly messages to the VDAK reunion.[52] The *Guardian* reported that "of the four, Field-Marshal Lord Harding and General Sir Brian Horrocks refused for political reasons." Of the other two, "Montgomery said he had to deal with too much correspondence. General Lord Freyberg gave no reason whatsoever." According to the *Guardian*,

> Reunions since the war have contained no political overtone and have been the most normal kind of old comrades' meetings…
>
> The years of war in the desert and later in British prisoner-of-war camps left no ill feeling against Britain among the men of the Afrika Korps. They pride themselves on having taken part in a 'clean' war, fought against an enemy for whom they profess a high regard. It would be true to say that they are the most pro-British among all German soldiers who fought in the Second World War.

By the early 1960s, even the *Daily Express* was decidedly less hostile. Reporting on the return of a captured Afrika Korps tank to the German army, and even while noting "the Nazi swastika is being carefully repainted," the *Express* reluctantly concluded an article with a quote from Brigadier R. N. Harding-Newman: "They are, after all, now our allies."[53] This transformation suggests several possible developments. First, continued anti-German hostility in 1950s discussions of the VDAK press provides evidence for the longue durée of Anti-German

[52] Terence Prittie, "Rebuff for Rommel's Men: Desert Generals' Decision," *The Guardian*, November 14, 1961, p. 9, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.
[53] Cyril Aynsley, "Rommel's Tank Goes Home without Swastikas," *Daily Express*, November 19, 1960, p. 7, UK Press Online.

sentiment, which Crowling has argued was suppressed by elite governmental and intellectual actors in service of the Cold War. Its gradual disappearance by the end of the 1950s might indicate the success of that project in the face of the continued threat from the Soviet Union. The humiliation at Suez in 1956, followed by the formation of the Common Market in 1957 also likely played a role. The Suez Crisis demonstrated both British and French inability to maintain the foreign policy of an independent great power,[54] and proved to be one enormous impetus toward European integration. (In its aftermath, Konrad Adenauer famously reassured French Prime Minister Guy Mollet that "Europe will be your revenge."[55]) For British elites, the failure forced a rethinking of British foreign and colonial policy, and Britain's relationship to Europe, which gradually came to be reflected in film, literature, and elsewhere.[56] With Britain's reorientation toward Europe after Suez, West Germany proved not only an ally against the Soviet Union but against French intransigence.[57]

The German Ehrenmal at Tobruk

As the *Daily Worker* denounced German rearmament and the *Daily Express* published sensational accounts of Nazi-like Afrika Korps reunions, the West German government planned and constructed two memorials to the German soldiers of the North Africa campaign. The Anglo-

[54] Tony Judt, *Postwar* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2006), chap. 9.
[55] Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism*, 1st edition (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 163.
[56] Jodi Burkett, *Constructing Post-Imperial Britain: Britishness, "race" and the Radical Left in the 1960s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 19; Penny Summerfield, "Film and the Popular Memory of the Second World War in Britain 1950-1958," in *Gender, Labour, War and Empire: Essays on Modern Britain.*, ed. Philippa Levine and Susan R. Grayzel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 169; Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965* (Oxford ;;New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 196; Marzia Maccaferri, "British Intellectuals and the European Idea after the Suez Crisis (1956): Narrating Europe between History and Politics," *The Journal of British Identities* 1, no. 1 (September 13, 2017): 1–18, https://jbi.scholasticahq.com/article/2469-british-intellectuals-and-the-european-idea-after-the-suez-crisis-1956-narrating-europe-between-history-and-politics.
[57] Judt, *Postwar*, chap. 9.

German discourse surrounding the earliest of these, completed at Tobruk in 1955, provides a window into the memory of the Second World War in North Africa during a period of flux, tension, and ambivalence. The brazenly national, heroic, and even triumphant posture of the Tobruk and the later El Alamein monuments was at odds with the conciliatory, internationalist diplomacy pursued by the VDAK leadership that collaborated with their construction. The *Ehrenmal* undoubtedly made British observers uncomfortable. Reconciliation in the shadow of such unapologetic monumentality may have evoked friendship less with the new democratic Federal Republic than with Nazi Germany itself.

The German monument at Tobruk, constructed between 1954 and 1955, and its counterpart near El Alamein, built between 1956 and 1959, were designed and constructed by the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge* (VDK — as distinct from the VDAK), under the guidance of chief architect Robert Tischler, who led the VDK's construction department from 1926 until his death in 1959.[58] The VDK was formed in 1919 with the purpose of maintaining German war cemeteries and memorials in the aftermath of the First World War.[59] The organization emerged, however, as an influential right-wing entity, a "powerful nationalist pressure group" that succeeded in lobbying the Weimar government to establish the *Volkstrauertag*, a holiday which, Benjamin Ziemann has observed, was merely a "pretence to indulge in right-wing nationalism and revanchism."[60] Opposed by Social Democrats and mocked by left-leaning newspapers, defenders of the Republic focused on alternative days for mourning and commemoration. Robert Tischler joined the Nazi Party in 1932, and was himself an

[58] Kai Kappel, "Die Totenburgen von Tobruk und El Alamein – strategische Memorialarchitektur für die Bundesrepublik," *RIHA Journal*, June 27, 2017, https://doi.org/10.11588/riha.2017.1.70296.
[59] Zoë Rose Buonaiuto, "A Grave Reconciliation: The Establishment of German War Cemeteries in Normandy, 1944–1964," *International Journal of Military History and Historiography* 38, no. 2 (October 20, 2018): 187, https://doi.org/10.1163/24683302-03802003.
[60] Benjamin Ziemann Cambridge University Press, *Contested Commemorations: Republican War Veterans and Weimar Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 145.

influential figure in the design and construction of Nazi war memorials. In design and conception, these monuments were a continuation of the Nazi era memorial *Totenburgen*, fortresses of the dead: large, imposing, and castle-like military cemeteries that stressed the power and unity of the nation rather than commemorating individuals.[61] The *Totenburg* concept is attributed to Wilhelm Kreis, who was placed in charge of German war memorial design by Adolf Hitler in 1941, and who planned the construction of enormous *Totenburgen* monuments across Europe following German victory.[62] While they had pre-Nazi antecedents, monuments of this type were associated with Nazi Germany specifically. Nazi publications emphasized that these monuments' "protruding stone speaks of struggle, sacrifice and victory for all time."[63] The North African memorials were replete with architectural references to the Hohenstaufen castles celebrated during the Nazi era, Romanesque architecture, and architectural references to crusader fortresses. Drawing on George Mosse, who observed that *Totenburgen* emphasized the "dominance of the nation over the individual," [64] David Livingstone has argued that VDK monuments promoted the Nazi *Weltanschauung*.[65]

Kai Kappel has argued these memorials deployed references to classical and medieval architecture "to achieve an ennobling of the German Africa Corps through their structural form and the associated historical memory." Much as in their Nazi antecedents, in the monuments built at Tobruk and El Alamein, communal crypts and sarcophagi served to "de-individualize

[61] David Livingstone, "Remembering on Foreign Soil: The Activities of the German War Graves Commission," in *Memorialization in Germany since 1945*, ed. Bill Niven and Chloe Paver (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), 69, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230248502_7.
[62] Kappel, "Die Totenburgen von Tobruk und El Alamein – strategische Memorialarchitektur für die Bundesrepublik"; Sabine Schäbitz, "Bismarckturm Und Totenburg : Machtsymbole Im Schaffen von Wilhelm Kreis," January 7, 2008, https://doi.org/10.25643/bauhaus-universitaet.1130.
[63] Kappel, "Die Totenburgen von Tobruk und El Alamein – strategische Memorialarchitektur für die Bundesrepublik."
[64] George L Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 86.
[65] Livingstone, "Remembering on Foreign Soil," 69.

remembrance of the dead" and emphasize the triumphant national collective.[66] Building materials were transported from Germany for the monuments' construction.

The circumstances surrounding the Tobruk monument's 1955 unveiling reveals two interlocking phenomena. First, the VDAK and its supporters in the West German government remained unapologetic about the wartime performance of the German military. As argued in the previous chapter, VDAK leadership embraced the international legend of Erwin Rommel, deploying it to simultaneously magnify their own prestige and rehabilitate the German military as a whole. Second, British observers and the British political establishment were, at least in the mid-1950s, still reluctant partners in this process. Internal government documents and contemporary press reports reveal a profound ambivalence around German framing and commemoration of the war, a tension between the remnants of wartime hostility and Cold War necessities.

Personal and official ambivalence surrounded British participation in the dedication of the new German war memorial at Tobruk on November 20, 1955. Attending the ceremony, T. Peters, representing the United Kingdom's embassy in Libya, noted the monument "has been the subject of much controversy."[67] The British Ambassador to Libya, Walter Graham, had described the *Ehrenmal* as "a large square fortress-like building on the high land overlooking Tobruk harbour." The monument, a "tactlessly large and pompous erection" entombed the remains of approximately six thousand German soldiers.[68] Peters believed approximately six hundred and fifty Germans attended the dedication ceremony that November morning, including two hundred German employees of the War Department in Cyrenaica. Lamenting that "the

[66] Kappel, "Die Totenburgen von Tobruk und El Alamein – strategische Memorialarchitektur für die Bundesrepublik."
[67] TNA: FO 371/113945, JT 1851/7, T. Peters to W. G. C. Graham, November 22, 1955, p. 2.
[68] TNA: FO 371/113945, JT 1851/2, L. G. Graham to C.O.I. Ramsden, September 12, 1955.

German pilgrims behaved more like a bank holiday crowd than persons attending a solemn occasion," Peters was nonetheless impressed by Rommel's widow, Luca Maria Rommel, who attended the ceremony and the diplomatic receptions that followed.[69]

Following the initial request for assistance and participation by Hermann Schulze-Dewitz representing the German War Graves Commission in Libya, British diplomats in Libya were hesitant. While the Foreign Office declined the German request for a British military band, dressed in mufti, as not appropriate, C.O.I. Ramsden reluctantly agreed to participated in the monument's dedication with diplomatic and military representation, and to arrange military transportation and support for the German pilgrims to and from the memorial, the latter to be compensated by the government in Bonn.[70] Ramsden accepted that while the British representatives ought to attend the ceremony, "we hope that it will be possible to ensure that French, United States and other allied representatives will also be present. It might be unfortunate if we were the only people to be represented other than the Germans."[71] British participation was to be circumscribed: the British ambassador to Libya, Walter Graham, would be replaced by a lower ranking official.[72] Ambassador Graham observed that "the local British Military authorities are unsympathetic to the German request, and will need firm instructions if they are not to drag their feet."[73] The Foreign Office proposed the British military send a representative ranked no higher than Lieutenant Colonel.[74] Following the monument's

[69] TNA: FO 371/113945, JT 1851/7, T. Peters to W.G.C. Graham, November 22, 1955.
[70] TNA: FO 371/113945, JT 1851/2, C.O.I. Ramsden to W.G.C. Graham, September 20, 1955.
[71] TNA: FO 371/113945, JT 1851/2, C.O.I. Ramsden to W.G.C. Graham, September 20, 1955.
[72] TNA: FO 371/113945, JT 1851/3, Troopers to Mideast Main Cyrendist, Subject: unveiling German Memorial Tobruk.
[73] TNA: FO 371/113945, JT 1851/2, L. G. Graham to C.O.I. Ramsden, September 12, 1955.
[74] TNA: FO 371/113945, JT 1851/3, Troopers to Mideast Main, Subject: Unveiling German Memorial Tobruk.

dedication, Frau Rommel expressed her personal gratitude for British assistance in making the ceremony possible.[75]

However, the British were not the Germans' first choice in arranging transportation to and from the monument at Tobruk. British diplomats were aware that the *Bundesrepublik* had first contacted the United States Embassy in Bonn to request assistance in flying over a *Bundesgrenzschutz* military band to Tobruk for the unveiling, a request which, to the dismay of British diplomats, the American diplomats had passed on to the United States Air Force without consultation with their British counterparts.[76] The British Embassy urged "the Americans not to press their Air Force to accede to this request because from the German point of view we feel that this is not a very good precedent." The diplomats emphasized that "although our objections are not very concrete, we think it rather undesirable to have a German military band on an occasion of this kind."[77] The Foreign Office's African Department concurred that the presence of a German military band would be undesirable, but did not "however feel sufficiently strongly on the subject to try and persuade the United States Embassy here to ask their Air Force to refuse the request."[78] In the end, a Libyan military band played at the ceremony.

Perhaps unknown to British diplomats, VDAK Managing Director Willi Bielka, following consultation with Federal State Secretary for Transportation Dr. Günther Bergemann had proposed not only American help in transporting a military band, but also the air transportation to and from the monument that was ultimately provided by the Royal Air Force, and even considered approaching them for the sea transportation that the *Bundesrepublik* later purchased from independent providers. Following Bielka's proposal to request an American

[75] TNA: FO 371/113945, JT 1851/7, T. Peters to W.G.C Graham, November 22, 1955.
[76] TNA: FO 371/113945, JT 1851/5, British Embassy, Bonn to African Department, November 5, 1955.
[77] TNA: FO 371/113945, JT 1851/5, British Embassy, Bonn to African Department, November 5, 1955.
[78] TNA: FO 371/113945, JT 1851/5, African Department to Chancery, November 18, 1955.

troop transport in a July 1954 meeting in Bonn attended by Bergemann and VDAK chairman Ludwig Crüwell, the Transportation Minister suggested "it might be more advisable to contact the American Air Force," because, citing the Berlin Airlift, the American Air Force was "much more open to such plans than the army and navy."[79] Bielka and the VDAK proceeded to contact American authorities to request assistance in transportation around the Mediterranean, though negotiations never achieved fruition.

The 1955 unveiling was not the first official German commemorative visit to the North African battlefield. In November 1953, former Wehrmacht generals and current VDAK chairmen Crüwell and Siegfried Westphal marked the second official *Volkstrauertag* and eleventh anniversary of the Battle of El Alamein at the combined German-Italian cemetery in El Alamein in their first formal visit to the battlefield since the end of the Second World War.[80] Accompanied by Professor Ing. Othmar Pauer, chairman of the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfursorge* (VDK), who had requested their presence, Crüwell and Westphal laid wreaths at a memorial stone erected to commemorate Erwin Rommel and his soldiers, and a ruined tank in the Italian portion of that cemetery. There followed an official memorial ceremony, attended by representatives of the Italian, German, and Egyptian governments.

Crüwell spoke, acknowledging the solemnity of the occasion and expressing gratitude to the Egyptian government for facilitating the ceremony. He emphasized the tragedy of the war's loss of life, and the need for broader European peace going forward. Crüwell remained nevertheless unapologetic about the Afrika Korps' performance and behavior in North Africa: on this day to "remember our fallen comrades," Crüwell emphasized "They died in pursuit of old

[79] BArch, B 469/110 2/2, Bielka, Aktenvermerk, 14. Juli 1954.
[80] "In gemeinsamer Trauer verbunden," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 11, November 1953, p. 1, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.

soldierly virtues, the fulfillment of duties great and small, comradeship in which each wanted to surpass the other, discipline and bravery to the point of death."[81]

Erwin Rommel played an important role in Crüwell's speech. Crüwell emphasized that even in death, Rommel's fame inside and outside Germany, and especially in North Africa "helps his hard-tested fatherland." As a symbol of martial values and virtue, "the respect for his death and his comportment has helped to restore our reputation in the world. Likewise… respect for the achievements of our fallen comrades also helped us to return to the concert of powers."

Crüwell's redemptive narrative of the war in North Africa carefully avoided references to Nazi war aims, while celebrating the Afrika Korps' military achievements in terms reminiscent of a colonial adventure: "From the beginning of the landing in Tripoli, the raid of a small armed force over thousands of kilometers, through the Cyrenaica, past Tobruk to the Egyptian border" was nothing to be ashamed of. The victories of 1941 and 42, "the conquest of Tobruk and the triumphant advance to El Alamein… kept the world in suspense."[82] El Alamein was the turning point in the war. "We had come here in a bold, unstoppable rush forward," and the long, difficult retreat that followed tested them sorely. Nevertheless, Rommel "tried to save what could be saved." Rommel's exemplary memory represented a shining role model of leadership, bravery, and camaraderie. VDAK veterans will be "proud to the end of our days that he was our general."

The best way to serve their departed comrades, Crüwell argued, was to look to the future, and to do everything possible to prevent another war. In order to "win the peace," it is necessary to "exercise a prudent attitude," and "slogans and cheap political agitation must not find any echo in our thinking." Political life must instead be marked by "balance and unity." Ultimately, it

[81] BArch, B 469/115 Ludwid Crüwell, Ansprache anläßlich der Gedenkfeier zum Volkstrauertag in Alamein- Tell-el-Eyssa, 15. November 1953, p. 2.
[82] Ibid., 4.

meant the "union of all peoples of good will" across international lines. A peaceful future entailed recognizing that loving one's country knew no borders: "He is the most loyal son of a homeland, and his people, who knows that there are other peoples who love their fatherland and their homeland as much as we do." Addressing the suffering and bloodshed of the war experienced by former allies and enemies, their parents, and their children, Crüwell proposed the "common sacrifices, common grief and the common love of peace" should lead to a common "pledge for a better future," of doing everything possible to prevent future war.[83]

In its coverage of the ceremony under the heading "United in common sorrow", *Die Oase* observed that this occasion was "the first time since the end of the war we were able to commemorate our dead comrades on this day where they found their last resting place." Crüwell and Westphal also visited the German colony in Cairo, strengthening "the links between the German colony in Cairo and its homeland." The VDAK chairmen also paid a polite visit to the British military cemetery nearby. *Die Oase* noted "Mourning for fallen soldiers does not stop at national borders and does not distinguish between nationalities. The path taken by comrades Crüwell and Westphal therefore also led to the British military cemetery." There, they "remembered the dead of the former enemy and laid a wreath."[84]

Over the course of 1954 and 1955, the VDAK chairmen, along with the organization's federal managing director Willi Bielka organized a much larger trip to Egypt be held at the *Volkstrauertag* in November 1955, to unveil the new memorial at Tobruk with a large contingent of German veterans.[85] Representatives of Konrad Adenauer's government were heavily involved

[83] BArch, B 469/115 Ludwid Crüwell, Ansprache anläßlich der Gedenkfeier zum Volkstrauertag in Alamein- Tell-el-Eyssa, 15. November 1953, p. 5.
[84] "In gemeinsamer Trauer verbunden," *Die Oase*, Jahrg. 3, Nr. 11, November 1953, p. 1, Microfilm, NYPL, *ZAN-1590.
[85] BArch, B 469/110 2/2 Vorschlag für eine Reise nach Ägypten mit Besuch von El Alamein.

in the planning. Notes from a May 28, 1954 meeting with a Mr. Stoltenhoff, senior advisor to State Secretary for Transportation Dr. Günther Bergemann indicate the Federal Ministry of Transportation "promised every possible support for the intended war grave trip to North Africa in 1955". While the American assistance proposed in the July 1954 meeting between Bergemann, Crüwell, and Bielka never materialized, the German expedition proved a success.[86] The pilgrimage to "honor the memory of our fallen comrades," would depart Frankfurt by special train to Genoa and go from there by sea to Tunis, Tobruk, and Alexandria,[87] before returning to Europe, taking 21 days in all.[88]

In visiting North Africa, the VDAK was participating in an older tradition of war cemetery and battlefield pilgrimage that was not unique in the postwar era.[89] After organizing pilgrimages to First World War cemeteries in the inter-war period, the VDK resumed this practice after the Second World War. In accordance with the 1949 Geneva Conventions' agreement on war grave maintenance, the VDK collected German remains and organized official war cemeteries across Northern, Western, and Southern Europe, and several in North Africa.[90] The VDK's first pilgrimage took place in 1950, to Sandweiler in Luxembourg, Lommel in Belgium, and to several cemeteries in Italy.[91] The Soviet Union declined to allow the VDK to organize either cemeteries or pilgrimages, permitting limited visitation to Russian cemeteries for

[86] BArch, B 469/110 2/2, Bielka, Aktennotiz über die Besuchsreise General Crüwell, 28. Mai 1954.; BArch, B 469/110 2/2, Bielka, Aktenvermerk, 14. Juli 1954.
[87] BArch, B 469/115 Ludwig Crüwell, Ansprache, 1954/1955, p. 6-10.
[88] BArch, B 469/110 2/2 Letter to Reisebüro J. Hartmann, 20. February 1954.
[89] Arnd Bauerkämper, "Reisen in die Vergangenheit: Westdeutsche Soldaten, Kriegsgräberfürsorge und »Schlachtfeldtourismus« von 1945 bis 1990 in transnationaler Perspektive," *Militaergeschichtliche Zeitschrift* 76, no. 1 (May 24, 2017): 104–31, https://doi.org/10.1515/mgzs-2017-0004; Jay Winter, *Sites of memory, sites of mourning: the Great War in European cultural history* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
[90] Wiebke Kolbe, "Trauer und Tourismus. Reisen des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge 1950–2010," *Zeithistorische Forschungen - Studies in Contemporary History* 14, no. 1 (March 29, 2017): 73, https://doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok.4.762.
[91] Ibid., 74.

the first time in 1983.[92] The DDR and other members of the Eastern Bloc were similarly closed off, though at least one official visit was tolerated in the late 1960s. The first formal agreement on war grave maintenance and access between Russia and Germany was signed in 1992.[93] The numbers of travelers in VDK pilgrimages peaked in 1962 at 5,600, and in terms of the number of trips in 1965, at 97.[94]

In addition to Peters, representing the British ambassador to Libya, the Tobruk ceremony, held at 10:30 in the morning on November 20, 1955, was attended by representatives from the U.S., French and Italian diplomatic centers in Libya, by a British lieutenant colonel from the local military presence, and by representatives of the Libyan monarch and military forces. A Cyrenaica Defense Force band played at the ceremony and "a guard of honour was provided by the Striking Force of the Cyrenaica Defence Force."[95] In addition to representatives of the VDK and VDAK, German pilgrims included *Bundestag* President Ludwig Schneider, a member of the FDP, though Peters observed that Rommel's widow drew the most attention.

According to Peters, the ceremony itself "consisted of four long speeches by the senior German representatives, which lasted much longer than had been planned."[96] Following the ceremony's conclusion, Peters, "in company with the other members of the Diplomatic Corps present, laid a wreath in the entrance-way to the monument and the monument was then opened to the pilgrims." There were some minor hiccups: German representatives laid wreaths at the British and French cemeteries before the Allied diplomats could arrive there. Individual Germans pilgrims, he observed, placed wreaths at British and French cemeteries as well. Following an

[92] Ibid., 76.
[93] Ibid., 75.
[94] Ibid., 78.
[95] TNA: FO 371/113945, JT 1851/7, T. Peters to W.G.C. Graham, November 22, 1955.
[96] Ibid.

eight-course lunch shared by British and German army representatives, senior German officials paid a visit to King Idris, arranged "not by the German Chargé d'Affaires who considered the time inopportune for such a visit," but instead by Schulze-Dewitz of the German War Graves Commission. The final event of the day was a religious service at the memorial attended only by the Germans. Peters left with a favorable impression of Frau Rommel: "She is a simple and unpretentious German lady who was bewildered by the amount of fuss and attention paid to her. Much of this attention was in very bad taste and she was surrounded and jostled in the style of a film celebrity."[97]

Crüwell's speech was a degree more conciliatory than the one he gave in 1953 at the combined German-Italian cemetery in El Alamein on eleventh anniversary of the battle. He recalled the "particularly bitter" combat that had been waged on the "blood soaked ground" on which attendees stood.[98] Rommel's 1942 seizure of Tobruk was a "bold coup… one of the most brilliant feats of arms by him and his brave soldiers," one that brought "immortal honor" to them both. The combat in North Africa, "was characterized by an exemplary camaraderie, not only within the individual troops and the armed forces, but also between the leaders and members of the army, the navy and the air force." In addition to unique camaraderie, the war in North Africa was marked by unforgettable "chivalrous combat" (*ritterliche Kampffuehrung*). For this, he turned to "think of the man who, as a knight without fear and blame, was and always will be a shining example to us, our unforgettable Field Marshal Rommel."

Crüwell directed his speech to the former enemy, turned the "opponent" (*Gegner)*: "We also think of our opponents at the time, especially the soldiers of the British international

[97] TNA: FO 371/113945, JT 1851/7, T. Peters to W.G.C. Graham, November 22, 1955.
[98] BArch, B 469/110 1/2, Ludwig Crüwell, Ansprache vor dem deutschen Gefallenenmal in Tobruk, 20. November 1955, p. 1.

community. They fought hard, but always fair and chivalrous, until they were victorious in the end."

The German war dead at Tobruk "quietly, selflessly, bravely and faithfully fulfilled their oath of the flag and made the greatest sacrifice that man can make." Comparing individuals to grains of sand, the Germans died as an iron model of the "fulfillment of duty." In the name of those who were interred at the Tobruk memorial "on which the names are written in iron letters, and in memory of the comrades who were not found in the vastness of the desert and those who rest at the bottom of the sea," Crüwell vowed never to forget the dead. Finally, Crüwell concluded that "it is in the interests of our dead comrades when we think today of the brave fallen of our allies and former opponents."[99]

Reception of the German memorial at Tobruk was mixed in the British popular press. *The Guardian*'s reporting on the ceremony took an ambivalent tone in an article titled "The 'Nobility' of the Afrika Korps." *The Guardian* emphasized how "Dr. Schneider, a deputy Speaker of the Bundestag, said to-day that the 'chivalrious example' of the men of Rommel's Afrika Korps was nowadays 'praised in the Parliaments of their opponents, when nobility in war was mentioned.'"[100] The *Telegraph*'s reporting was largely matter-of-fact, observing that the memorial was "in the shape of a Norman fortress."[101] The normally virulently anti-German *Daily Express* only marked the occasion and Frau Rommel's presence.[102]

[99] BArch, B 469/110 1/2 Ludwig Crüwell, Ansprache vor dem deutschen Gefallenenmal in Tobruk, 20. November 1955, p. 3.
[100] "'Nobility' of the Afrika Korps: Memorial Dedicated," *The Manchester Guardian*, November 21, 1955, p. 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.
[101] Our Own Correspondent, "Afrika Korps Ex-Chief to Visit Libya," *The Daily Telegraph*, November 4, 1955, p. 14, The Telegraph Historical Archive (Gale).
[102] "Desert Salute — by Frau Rommel," *Daily Express*, November 21, 1955, p. 1, UK Press Online.

G. M. Price of the *Western Mail & South Wales News* described the monument as "ponderous," creating a place "which is forever Germany."[103] Price saw clear parallels between the "kolossal" memorial at Tobruk and inter-war monuments at Tannenberg, Grotenburg, Kyffhäuser, and Leipzig. He found at Tobruk an "echo" of the pre-war militarism that led the Axis powers to "defeat and misery." At Tobruk, "there was an echo, rivalling that of Leipzig." But he saw a distinction: "knowing something of the Germans," Price trusted "at Tobruk yesterday they were paying homage to the Warrior, and not to War itself."

The *Daily Worker* took the most exception to the monument, describing the ceremony as "a typically Nazi tribute" paid by "Dr. Heinrich Schneider, vice-president of the West German Lower House." In the *Daily Worker*'s translation, Schneider proclaimed: "These dead were not responsible for the fate they met. As brave soldiers they fulfilled the duty to their people which forbids the hesitating doubt and demands the deed." The paper expressed alarm at celebrations of a "chivalrous" Rommel, doubting the narrative that he "never offended against the nobility of humanity in the most severe battles." The *Worker* reported that "Other tributes to the hero of the German militarists were made by former general Ludwig Cruewell, who succeeded Rommel, and former general Siegfried Westphal, once Rommel's Chief of Staff."[104]

British Commemoration at El Alamein: "The Turning of the Tide"

The British government, in contrast to the left-wing press, initially had few concerns about German or Italian perceptions of Allied war commemorations surrounding the Battle of El Alamein. Unlike in Germany, where the wartime and postwar significance of the North Africa

[103] G. M. Price, "Germany Remembers," *Western Mail & South Wales News*, November 21, 1955, p. 4, The British Newspaper Archive.
[104] Daily Worker Reporter, "Bonn Chief Pays Tribute Nazi Style," *Daily Worker*, November 21, 1955, 1st edition, p. 3, UK Press Online.

campaign paled in comparison to the Eastern Front, for many British people who lived through the Second World War, North Africa dominated public memory.[105] It was, after all, the largest front where British and German soldiers faced one another in the field between the retreat from Dunkirk in 1940 and the invasion of Italy in 1943. With the catastrophic fall of Singapore to Japanese forces fresh in the public's minds, Churchill exploited the 8th Army's "remarkable and definite victory" over Rommel at El Alamein in October of 1942 to the utmost.[106] Myriad publications, speeches, and the March 1943 propaganda film *Desert Victory*, enshrined one narrative of Alamein in British popular memory: the turning of the tide, a decisive victory in battle to be celebrated as an achievement of British imperial unity and masculine heroism. In the mythologizing words of Churchill, Alamein was the turning point, the battle before which "we never had a victory. After Alamein we never had a defeat."[107] While never universally accepted, the potent narrative of a decisive victory shaped early post-war British commemorations staged both in the United Kingdom and near the North African battlefield.

Yet in commemorations in North Africa, the narrative of Alamein as a "victory that was also the turning of the tide," a decisive moment of British and Commonwealth greatness, was challenged by proponents of an alternative interpretation, one promoted by the VDAK, as well as some British, German, and Italian diplomats: Alamein as "a symbol of the sacrifices of all who took part in the conflict."[108] This latter discourse, of a "war without hate" celebrating chivalry, masculinity, and common valor, (often against the desert environment), was repeatedly opposed by some British officials, and denounced as unpopular with the ex-servicemen who fought the war. Moreover, the gradual decline of the first discourse and the slow ascent of the second one

[105] Connelly, *We Can Take It!*, 206.
[106] Ibid., 210.
[107] Ibid., 212.
[108] TNA: WO 32/19186, VG 1851/7, Undersecretary of State to Sir Harold Beeley, June 28, 1963, p. 2.

followed the rise and fall of the postwar discourse of the Commonwealth or "people's empire," and the contraction of understandings of what it meant to be "British" that ultimately reformulated into the of United Kingdom as not an empire, but a white European nation.[109] Wendy Webster argued that the discourse of the "people's empire," linked to wartime propaganda of the "people's war," emerged as a powerful force in post-war Britain. In the form of the "people's empire," the "ideal of a multiracial community of equal nations… would maintain Britishness as a global identity through transforming and modernizing its imperial dimension."[110] Destabilized by colonial warfare, postcolonial migration, and geopolitical eclipse, Webster argued that this vision of the British Empire, best expressed in the 1953 Coronation, declined over the later 1950s, replaced by racially exclusive, imperial narratives of national greatness. The discourse surrounding Alamein Commemorations reveals how international diplomacy, particularly the NATO alliance with a rearmed and powerful Germany, came into conflict with ideal of the Commonwealth as an imperial "family" and global power.[111] Over time, the understanding that El Alamein was a triumph for the British Empire (in the form of the Commonwealth) gave way, in part, to the notion, promoted by the VDAK, that the North Africa front was a tragic, but important event in the history of a more circumscribed British nation.

Shortly after the war, Bernard Montgomery organized annual Alamein reunion dinners to celebrate the decisive British and Commonwealth military victory at the Royal Albert Hall in London, the first of which was held in October of 1946.[112] The 1946 reunion featured speeches by both Montgomery and Churchill, and was attended by approximately 5,000 8th Army

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[109] Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge ;;New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 258; Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*; Paul Gilroy, *"There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack" : The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).
[110] Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965*, 8.
[111] Ibid., 25.
[112] See for example: IWM LBY S. 96/10-1.

veterans.[113] The second reunion, held in 1947, extended the invitation to Royal Air Force veterans of North Africa, and attendance soared to 7,000. In his speech that year, Montgomery boasted that the men of the 8th Army "fought at Alamein and in the Desert for the standards of honesty, team work, hard work, and a high sense of duty," qualities that made them invaluable figures "on the side of true democracy." Churchill regularly attended and spoke at these reunions, which saw attendance reach 8,000 in 1953, though numbers appear to have declined over the 1960s. Nevertheless, annual Alamein reunions continued to be held at Albert Hall until Montgomery's death in 1976, and reunions organized by the Eighth Army Veterans Association, which formed that year, continued until the 2000s.[114]

British commemorations organized in North Africa followed a different trajectory than those held in London. Close to the El Alamein battlefield, an alternative ceremony of victory, commemoration, and remembrance took shape. From 1947 and until the Suez Crisis of 1956, ceremonies organized by British and Commonwealth diplomats, veteran associations, and British authorities took place every year at the Allied El Alamein War Cemetery, at or around the date of October 23, the date of Allied victory.[115] The British government chose this Egyptian site, nearly 70 miles west from Alexandria, for the construction of a large memorial, to be inaugurated on twelfth anniversary of the El Alamein in 1954. The monument was unveiled as the "British and Commonwealth Alamein Memorial" on October 24, 1954, approximately one year before the German memorial at Tobruk.[116] Victory, power, and unity were the symbolic foci of the monument's widely publicized unveiling ceremony, which, in the form of commemoration,

[113] Joffe, *Operation Crusader and the Desert War in British History and Memory*, chap. 7.
[114] Tameside Local Studies and Archives Centre, DD382/2/1/1, DD382/2/1/2, DD382/2/1/3, DD382/2/1/4, DD382/2/1/5, and DD382/2/2/1, *The New Crusader*; and "Manchester Eighth Army Veterans Association," January 2, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20090102135447/http://www.eavm.co.uk/Links.htm.
[115] TNA: WO 32/19186, El Alamein, Egypt: proposals for a combined annual memorial service, 1959-1966.
[116] TNA: AIR 2/12482, C58769/54, 49C, Order of Ceremony at the Unveiling of the Alamein Memorial, October 24, 1954.

aimed to strengthen the ties that bound the post-war British Empire together as the Commonwealth of Nations.

The Telegraph described the memorial as a "white cloistered memorial containing the names of 11,945 men who died for the desert victory of 12 years ago."[117] Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) records indicate the men whose names were recorded on the memorial, having no known grave, divided along the following national lines: 7,018 from the United Kingdom; 215 from Canada; 655 from Australia, 867 from New Zealand; 1,255 from South Africa; 1,788 from India and Pakistan; and 147 from the "Colonial and other Forces."[118] Designed by Hubert Worthington, the structure was constructed behind what had been the front lines of the Battle of El Alamein.[119] It stood adjacent to the remainder of the Allied cemetery "where rows of white headstones mark the graves of another 7,335 men who fell in the desert campaigns."[120]

The unveiling was a meticulously planned and carefully negotiated event. Increasing its reach, the ceremony was filmed and broadcast live by the BBC and its Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, and South African counterparts.[121] *The Times* reported that in preparation for the unveiling, a large convoy of military and civilian participants traveled the 70 miles from Alexandria, and relatives of the dead from Britain and Commonwealth countries were flown in and given prominent seats at the ceremony.[122] The *Telegraph* estimated 5,000 participants in all.

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[117] TNA: AIR 2/12482, C58769/54, Guy Rais, "F.-M. Montgomery Unveils Alamein Memorial," *The Daily Telegraph*, October 25, 1954, p. 1.
[118] TNA: AIR 2/12482, C58769/54, 24D "The Alamein Memorial, Egypt."
[119] Ibid.
[120] TNA: AIR 2/12482, C58769/54, Guy Rais, "F.-M. Montgomery Unveils Alamein Memorial," *The Daily Telegraph*, October 25, 1954, p. 1.
[121] TNA: AIR 2/12482, C58769/54, 32B, "Meeting Held on 13th September, 1954," p. 2.
[122] From Our Special Correspondent, "Memorial At Alamein," *The Times*, October 25, 1954, p. 6, The Times Digital Archive (Gale).

[123] Featuring a uniformed military parade and a multi-faith religious ceremony, the unveiling projected a vision of global British prestige and power. Befitting the event's Commonwealth focus, representation from the dominions of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa, and from independent India and Pakistan, were central concerns. A show of strength to Nasser's government during a period of tension over the Suez Canal was also likely also an aim.[124]

The official ceremony began with the arrival of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery. Following a military salute and a series of short Anglican prayers offered by ranking military chaplains, Montgomery addressed the audience.[125] His speech celebrated the battle of El Alamein as "a decisive moment in history," a moment of victory and unity that bound the British Empire together. Montgomery's speech emphasized three familiar wartime "themes": "forward," "together," and "victory." He argued that in North Africa, "We went forward together. Many of us were isolated, but we never felt alone. We were a great alliance and a united family party." With faith in a just cause, "[w]e went forward together to victory." The key lesson to be learned from the victory at Alamein, twelve years on, was "What was done here at Alamein, and elsewhere in the Middle East, can be done again, if we go the same way about it." [126] Montgomery concluded his speech, linking the memory of the victorious dead to the faith in God, freedom, the British flag, and a victorious future[127]:

> My friends, we have travelled far since Alamein. But the journey is not ended nor is the long march complete; freedom and our country have not reached their goal. Times and scenes have changed. But to-day, in the names of those who lie here, let us affirm that we will carry on in the same spirit that animated them,
>
> In the power of that spirit we crossed deserts and seas. And under God, the one continuing Captain of all

[123] TNA: AIR 2/12482, C58769/54, Guy Rais, "F.-M. Montgomery Unveils Alamein Memorial," *The Daily Telegraph*, October 25, 1954, p. 1.
[124] Robert L Tignor, *Egypt: a Short History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), chap. 11, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400839827.
[125] TNA: AIR 2/12482, C58769/54, 49C, "Order of Ceremony at the Unveiling of the Alamein Memorial," October 24, 1954.
[126] From Our Special Correspondent, "Memorial At Alamein."
[127] On "freedom," see: Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965*, chap. 2.

> fighting men, let us dedicate the comradeship of the desert to serve the British flag and carry it across whatever barriers still bar the way to the broad lands of friendship among men.

Following Montgomery's words, the Anglican Bishop in Egypt, F. F. Johnston dedicated the memorial "in memory of those of the land and air forces of the Commonwealth who died in the cause of freedom." Following Protestant, Catholic, and Muslim prayers came the laying of wreaths. First Montgomery, then a representative of the Egyptian government, the British ambassador, representatives of the British armed forces, representatives from the seven Commonwealth countries, and finally the vice-chairman of the Imperial War Graves Commission placed wreathes at the memorial. The ceremony concluded with the singing of the British national anthem and a military procession.

The display of British and Commonwealth strength and unity at the Alamein unveiling was, however, a façade. Tensions between the British government and that of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel meant contingencies needed to be planned for multiple ceremony components. These included efforts to limit the number of guests out of fears that too many would "touch of a repetition of the Cairo riots," referring to the January 1952 Egyptian uprising precipitated by British violence in the occupied Suez Canal zone. On January 25, British soldiers killed approximately 40 to 50 Egyptians, injuring many more, in an attack on an Egyptian barracks in Ismailia, capturing nearly one thousand Egyptian soldiers in an effort to reassert control in the face of ongoing anticolonial unrest. In Cairo, widespread popular outrage at the coalesced into anti-British and anti-government riots, which ultimately precipitated the fall of the Egyptian monarchy and the rise of Nasser.[128] The IWGC formulated plans for an alternative, ununiformed civil ceremony, should "the political situation" deteriorate and Nasser's government refuse

[128] Nancy Reynolds, *A City Consumed: Urban Commerce, the Cairo Fire, and the Politics of Decolonization in Egypt* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2020), chap. 6, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804782661.

permission for a formal, military occasion,[129] which the British ambassador to Egypt believed to be likely.[130] Ongoing negotiations to remove British soldiers from the canal zone in 1956, signed on October 19, 1954,[131] may have convinced Nasser's government to allow the ceremony to be held in uniform.[132] It was out of concern "to avoid possible offence to the Egyptians which might lead to difficulty in their representatives attending the Ceremony" that there was no Jewish representation at the multi-faith religious memorial ceremony,[133] which ultimately featured Anglican, Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Muslim prayers.[134]

The 147 dead from the "Colonial and other Forces" recorded on the memorial proved to be another challenge behind the scenes, complicating the promise of the Commonwealth as a "free and equal" partnership of nations.[135] An August 1954 Colonial Office memorandum dismissed the contribution of colonial forces to the battle: the "memorial is to members of the Commonwealth Land and Air Forces… A very few of these were members of Colonial forces."[136] The IWGC recognized the memorial named soldiers from across the British Empire: from British Guiana, British West Indies, Cyprus, Gold Coast, Kenya, Malta, Mauritius, Nigeria, Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Seychelles, Southern Rhodesia, Tanganyika, and Uganda.[137] At the time of the unveiling, none of these overwhelmingly non-white colonies were politically independent, and British authorities were unsure how or whether to appropriately represent their contribution. Their choice came close to erasure entirely. A July 14th 1954 memorandum from

[129] TNA: AIR 2/12482, P.S. to P.U.S., No.7, June 25, 1954.
[130] TNA: AIR 2/11280, A197436/54, 14D Minutes of a meeting held at 32 Grosvenor Gardens, July 20th, 1954.
[131] Charles B. Selak, "The Suez Canal Base Agreement of 1954," *American Journal of International Law* 49, no. 4 (October 1955): 494, https://doi.org/10.2307/2194417.
[132] TNA: AIR 2/12482, C58769/54, 27B A.S. Laing to J.B. Harvey, September 8, 1954.
[133] TNA: AIR 2/12482, C58769/54, 37A Ref: A/52/2A/11, September 27, 1954, p. 2.
[134] TNA: AIR 2/12482, C58769/54, 49C Order of Ceremony at the Unveiling of the Alamein Memorial, p. 7.
[135] "London Declaration," The Commonwealth, April 22, 1949, https://thecommonwealth.org/london-declaration.
[136] TNA: CO 1032/77, 57, J.S. Bennett to Johnston, August 4, 1954.
[137] TNA: CO 1032/77, 3, Ref: A/52/24/11, July 30, 1954.

the IWGC indicated it was the Commission's "hope that… the Colonial Office may be represented on this occasion so that a wreath may be laid on behalf of the Colonial Empire."[138] In awkward tension with a celebration of "freedom" and unity, colonial forces were an inconvenient signifier of the imperial system the "Commonwealth of Nations" attempted to mask. Ultimately, the British government agreed to send invitations to a number of the respective colonial governments, though ones that emphasized that attendance would be at their own expense: "should you decide to be represented such expense as may be incurred would be a charge on your territory's funds."[139] The compromise solution was for the Colonial Office to send a representative, one who took no part in the ceremony, and for further individual wreaths to be laid on behalf of colonial governments at their choosing and at their expense.[140] Only Cyprus sent a representative, and only the government of Uganda requested the placement of a separate wreath.[141] Uganda's colonial government was billed five pounds for the wreath.[142]

The governments of Commonwealth members India and Pakistan proved less enthusiastic about participating in the British ceremony than its organizers anticipated. The Indian government declined to send an official military contingent at all,[143] and rejected requests to provide a "Hindu Priest" to participate in the religious component of the ceremony,[144] though a representative of the Indian government did participate. Though planners were uncertain, the government of Pakistan ultimately provided a small party consisting of four officers for the

[138] TNA: CO 1032/77, 1, Ref: A/52/24/11, July 14, 1954.
[139] TNA: CO 1032/77, 7, Alan Lennox Boyd to Sir Edward Twining, August 4, 1954.
[140] TNA: CO 1032/77, 11, Alan Lennox Boyd to B.P. Armitage, August 4, 1954.
[141] TNA: CO 1032/77, 25, D. K. Malone, September 17, 1954.
[142] TNA: CO 1032/77, 26, D. K. Malone, September 17, 1954.
[143] TNA: AIR 2/11280, A197436/54, 116A, Air Ministry London to H.Q. M.E.A.F. Abu Sueir, October 13, 1954.
[144] TNA: AIR 2/12482, C58769/54, 32B, A. S. Laing, "The Alamein Memorial," September 17, 1954.

military parade.[145] The "white dominions" of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand sent the most robust parties, followed by South Africa.

While the El Alamein unveiling ceremony was well-received in Britain, with approving coverage printed in the *Telegraph*, *The Times*, the *Express*, and the *Guardian*, the left-wing press expressed reservations. On October 25, 1954, the left-wing *Daily Herald* published an evocative war-time recollection by Alan Clarke, who was disdainful of the event's "whitewashing":[146]

> I remembered the night they were killed by the same German bomb- the first men in my battery to die… I remembered, too, that moonlit night 12 years ago when, after the tense waiting, the barrage from hundreds of guns began at twenty minutes to ten as though on the downbeat of some conductor's baton. Twenty minutes rapid to smash enemy batteries…
>
> It all came back as I watched Field-Marshal Viscount Montgomery unveil the Alamein Memorial today… they would have hated all the 'Bull.' Diplomats in frock-coats, shiny top hats, brass hats in gabardine – 'the Gabardine Swine' they called them.
>
> And, above all, they would have hated the whitewashing of desert stones and the military policeman guarding them.

Clarke noted his particular distaste for the nearby cemetery where "thousands of Germans and Italians are entrenched for eternity under memorials with tank turret and field-gun motifs."

On October 25, 1954, the *Daily Worker* situated its coverage of the Alamein unveiling with demands from the Young Communist League to "end the Nine-Power Agreement to rearm the Germans."[147] Protests organized against German rearmament ("Nazi arms") included "an ex-Eighth Army man who carries the scars of 29 wounds."[148] The man, a Mr. Jock Madden, "spoke to a meeting in Enfield after a poster parade." The *Daily Worker* applauded "five marches… putting the case against arms for Germans." The next day, the paper again used the memorial to criticize the German rearmament, asking what the dead "would . . . say if they saw statesmen of

[145] TNA: AIR 2/12482, C58769/54, 38C, A. S. Laing, "The Alamein Memoria," September 30, 1954.
[146] Alan Clarke, "I Remembered the Night Two Men Died," *Daily Herald*, October 25, 1954, p. 1–2, The British Newspaper Archive.
[147] Daily Worker Reporter, "Halt German Army Call to Youth," *Daily Worker*, October 25, 1954, p. 3, UK Press Online; "Memorial at Alamein," *Daily Worker*, October 25, 1954, p. 3, UK Press Online.
[148] Daily Worker Reporters, "'No Nazi Arms' Call Seen by Thousands," *Daily Worker*, October 25, 1954, p. 1, 3, UK Press Online.

Britain and France signing a pact to rearm the enemy they defeated so dearly only 12 years ago."[149] Condemning Prime Minister Anthony Eden's agreement "to commit British conscripts to years of servitude in Europe– it is a pity that the dead of El Alamein cannot speak."

While local representatives of the German and Italian war graves commissions were invited to attend the 1954 unveiling, in symbolism, planning, and execution, the ceremony's unambiguous focus was the Commonwealth.[150] No participation from the French or American governments was requested, though they had been welcome at prior annual commemorations held at the El Alamein cemetery.[151]

As the memorial transitioned to a site for annual commemoration and wreath-laying ceremonies over subsequent years, invitation policies loosened. Representatives from Malta, Greece, and the United States attended the 13th anniversary of El Alamein in 1955, alongside representatives from the United Kingdom, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, India, and Pakistan.[152] The fourteenth anniversary ceremony, held in 1956 as tensions exploded over the Suez Canal following Nasser's nationalization, and just weeks before the Israeli invasion, was a smaller affair, though it saw more than 150 workers bussed in from the Suez Canal Zone.[153] After the failure of the Anglo-French and Israeli campaign and the collapse of British diplomatic relations with Egypt, the annual ceremonies shrank to a tiny shadow of the display of strength and unity broadcast in 1954.

Organizing commemorations following the Suez Crisis proved more challenging, and British weakness in Egypt was inescapable. An account of the 1957 ceremony by Ambassador R.

[149] "El Alamein and the Nazis: A Worker's Notebook," *Daily Worker*, October 26, 1954, p. 2, UK Press Online.
[150] TNA: AIR 2/12482, C58769/54, 37A, Ref: A/52/2A/11, p. 2.
[151] TNA: DO 35/9106, 2, Confidential Cypher/OTP from Cairo to Foreign Office, October 5, 1954.
[152] AIR 2/12482, C58769/54, 46A "13th Anniversary of El Alamein," October 23, 1955.
[153] AIR 2/12482, C58769/54, 48A ""Battle of Alamein Commemorated," *Times*, October 22, 1956.

M. MacDonald celebrated the participation of all (now) ten Commonwealth countries in Alamein commemorations that year. This was achieved, however, by dint of second-degree representation: "through the representation of another Commonwealth country." That meant that, lacking diplomatic relations with Egypt, the United Kingdom was represented by Indian diplomats at the ceremony, as was the newly independent Ghana. Pakistani diplomats agreed to represent Malaya, and Canada represented New Zealand. The Australia government sent its own special delegation to participate in the commemoration. Even in its weakened form, MacDonald apparently believed the ceremony served as a valuable display of Commonwealth unity. It served as a useful reminder of Britain's multiracial Commonwealth: "Egyptians and other Arabs, possessed by a nationalism that is often strident and suspicious, that countries like India and Ceylon have no difficulty in associating whole-heartedly with the older members of the Commonwealth in projects of common interest."[154] This vision of a multiracial, multinational Commonwealth became increasingly difficult to project.

With Egypt no longer hosting a British Legion presence, and the ceremony arranged exclusively by Commonwealth diplomatic missions, the 1957 ceremony "was short and simple."[155] The question of a religious element was resolved with the decision to arrange no official religious element at all and the agreement that individuals were at liberty to offer prayers. The only volunteer in 1957 was a Scottish minister who, for uncertain reasons, had not been expelled at the time of the Suez crisis. The laying of wreaths was the "main feature of the ceremony." The Egyptian military representative placed the first wreath, followed by representatives acting on behalf of Australia, Canada, Ceylon, India, Pakistan, and South Africa,

[154] TNA: DO 35/9106, 14, Canadian Ambassador, Cairo, Egypt, Subject: Alamein Day- Commonwealth Ceremony, October 25, 1956, p. 2.
[155] TNA: DO 35/9106, 14, Canadian Ambassador, Cairo, Egypt, Subject: Alamein Day- Commonwealth Ceremony, October 25, 1956, p. 3.

and then representatives from Greece and the United States.[156] Commonwealth representatives acting on behalf of the absent members New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Ghana, and Pakistan, came last.

The display of imperial strength and Commonwealth unity, of the British Empire as a global power in the postwar world, projected at the El Alamein memorial's unveiling and through the commemorations arranged there from 1954 through 1956, proved to be fragile façade, at least in Egypt proper. While defeat in the Suez Crisis did not spell the end of the postwar British Empire, nor did British leaders abandon aspirations to intervene worldwide as a great power, Suez provided a compelling case for a geopolitical turn toward Europe.[157] Not long after the crisis, discussions began for joint commemorations with the former Italian and German enemy, emblematic of this turn, though the vision of the "people's empire" proved enduring.[158]

"A symbol of the sacrifices of all who took part in the conflict"

Less than two years later, in 1959, the Italian Ambassador to Egypt approached Arnold Smith, the Canadian Ambassador to Egypt, about coordinating the former Axis and Allied commemorative ceremonies at Alamein. Claiming the proposal was an "informal feeler" originating in Italian veterans' associations, the proposed coordination meant there would still be ceremonies at the separate cemeteries, but they would take place on the same day. Smith was himself sympathetic to the idea "of coordinating ceremonies between former enemies who are now allies."[159] In an informal conversation with Commonwealth diplomats, he found the

[156] TNA: DO 35/9106, 14, Canadian Ambassador, Cairo, Egypt, Subject: Alamein Day- Commonwealth Ceremony, October 25, 1956, p. 4.
[157] Judt, *Postwar*, chap. 9.
[158] Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965*, chap. 3.
[159] DO 35/9106, 18 From: Cairo May 20/59 ConfId To: External 435 Deferred FM Ldn, May 20, 1959.

representatives of Ceylon, India, and Pakistan to be the most sympathetic, and the Australian, British, and South African ones the most opposed and concerned about public opinion.[160] Those supportive of the proposed change believed that "a shift from commemorating a particular victory of the World War II Allies to a joint commemoration of all [war] dead in Egypt… would be welcome, not… only to their governments but to U.A.R. authorities." The United Arab Republic had declined to send representatives to the El Alamein ceremony in 1958, nor did they participate in the small Allied ceremony in 1959.[161] To British observers' consternation, the Republic did provide an honor guard at the inauguration of the German Alamein memorial two weeks later, though circumstances were somewhat different: this was the German memorial's unveiling.[162]

The arguments in favor of coordinating Alamein commemorations as "a symbol of the burial of past difference and the vitality of the N.A.T.O. Alliance" proved inadequate.[163] On May 29, 1959, John Beith of the British Foreign Office responded firmly: "We do not like the idea at all."[164] Coordination "could easily have the opposite effect from that which it intends. It would probably provoke in the popular press here the sort of comment which the Germans and Italians find particularly wounding."

A July 2, 1959 letter from H.A.F. Hohler at the British Embassy in Rome also expressed skepticism about arrangements for joint commemoration. Hohler was concerned that working with Italian ex-servicemen organizations "might easily become a subject of controversy," as they "contain many persons with Fascist and with anti-British sympathies."[165] He also believed "a

[160] See also: FO 371/142080, VG 1851/1(A) From: Cairo May 20/59 ConfId To: External 435 Deferred FM Ldn, May 20, 1959.
[161] The United Arab Republic, encompassing both Egypt and Syria, existed from 1958 to 1961. Tignor, *Egypt*, 272.
[162] DO 35/9106, 38 C. T. Crowe to Selwyn Lloyd, November 16, 1959.
[163] DO 35/9106, 16 C. T. Crowe to J. G. S. Beith, May 11, 1959.
[164] DO 35/9106, 17 J. G. S. Beith to C. T. Crowe, May 2, 1959.
[165] FO 371/142080, VG1851/3 Henry Hohler to J. G. S. Beith, July 2, 1959.

joint ceremony at Alamein would be very unwelcome to the widows and parents of our Commonwealth soldiers who lost their lives there." Hohler revealed that some planners saw further stakes in moving from a Commonwealth celebration to a joint commemoration. Colonel Griffin, the IWGC Commission representative in Rome, "felt very strongly" opposed to the proposal for joint commemoration. In Hohler's telling, Griffin "said that the Canadian Ambassador in Cairo was a thoroughly bad man who did not believe in the Commonwealth."

In addition to anticipating opposition from the British Legion, one British official at the War Office writing in July 1959 voiced his opposition on three grounds:

> (a) It is a private ceremony for relatives and Old Comrades in commemoration of the dead. It would he most inappropriate to give the impression, such as a lunch afterwards might do, that it was becoming a celebration with our former enemies."
> (b) It is bound to lead to adverse press comment from relatives of those killed at El Alamein
> (c) The date of the ceremony, 23 Oct, was chosen to commemorate the battle, a turning point in the War To alter the date would make it lose its special significance.[166]

In a letter dated July 23, 1959, Beith outlined additional points of contention to coordinating commemorations with the Germans and Italians.[167] The Minister of Defense had discussed the proposal with the service ministers, who believed not only would "any change in the present procedure would be premature and would at present be unpopular with both the ex-service organisations and the families concerned," but would also provide "ammunition to the popular press." They believed that the choice of October 23, marking the anniversary of the victory at El Alamein, should not be disturbed, as it enshrines and "preserves the atmosphere of the celebration of victory and of the turning of the tide." This celebratory atmosphere "would be lost if either the date were changed or the Germans and Italians were associated with the

[166] WO 32/19186, Ref: 129/CS/828 "The Commemoration at El Alamein," July 3, 1959.
[167] DO 35/9106, 23/17 J. G. S. Beith to J. C. B. Richmond, July 23, 1959.

ceremony." In the interests of diplomacy, the Defense Ministry proposed putting off any changes into the future, hoping the matter would "die a natural death."

The matter, however, would not die. Italian and German diplomats "raised the idea again" in 1962, the twentieth anniversary of El Alamein.[168] The memorial ceremony held in October 1962 was "simple but moving", attended by approximately 200 visitors, some from the region, some from Commonwealth countries, and some affiliated with the United Nations.[169] H. Beeley, representing the British Embassy in Cairo, noted "[t]he ceremony did not depart from last year's pattern, except that no flags were flown, this having been agreed to meet the wishes of the Commission War Graves Commission."[170] The decision by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC)[171] to fly no flags at the ceremony originated with participants' objections to the South African flag.[172] South Africa left the Commonwealth in 1961, but remained a participant in the CWGC that organized commemorations.[173] With representatives in attendance from newly independent countries both within and without the Commonwealth, as well as French, Greek, and American representatives, a decision was made to avoid potential offense. Rather than risking antagonizing attendees by flying some flags and not others, and to avoid offending the host U.A.R., the IWGC resolved to fly no flags at all.[174] This was a far cry from Montgomery's 1954 call to "to serve the British flag and carry it across whatever barriers still bar the way to the broad lands of friendship among men." Colonel Griffin, the regional CWGC

[168] FO 371/165429, VG1851/13 D. A. Hamley, November 6, 1962.
[169] FO 371/165429, VG1851/13 H. Beeley, October 30, 1962, p. 2.
[170] FO 371/165429, VG1851/13 H. Beeley, October 30, 1962, p. 1.
[171] The Imperial War Graves Commission became the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in 1960
[172] FO 371/165429, VG 1851/7 D. F. Hawley to Peter Laurence, May 24, 1962.
[173] FO 371/165429, VG 1851/2 Peter Laurence to D. F. Hawley, February 23, 1962, p. 3.
[174] FO 371/165429, VG 1851/8 W. J. Chalmers to M. A. Hussin, July 9, 1962.

director, was displeased with this decision, fearing the ceremony would "lose some of its colour."[175]

Beeley believed that the twentieth anniversary was "an appropriate time to consider the future of the annual ceremony."[176] While he believed the existing ceremony served as "one of the rare occasions of visible Commonwealth cooperation in Egypt… there is much to be said for the initiation of joint ceremonies." In particular, "as it becomes increasingly appropriate to reflect the present state of relations between the peoples concerned rather than to call to mind their past divisions." The pressure toward joint commemoration was stronger in 1962 than in 1959, following Britain's failed application to join the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1961, vetoed by Charles de Gaulle.[177]

On March 16, 1962, Michael Rose at the British Embassy in Bonn made a forceful case for acceding to German and Italian requests for a joint commemoration.[178] Rose warned "that with the passage of time the prospects of the Germans meekly accepting a refusal to agree to a joint ceremony on the grounds that it might give rise to adverse comment in the United Kingdom will grow less and less." According to Rose, German authorities were starting "to regard the 'Daily Express' brand of anti-Germanism as artificial and unrepresentative of real British feeling." Moreover, "in the future a refusal to have a joint ceremony is likely to cause increasing bitterness." It was now matter of reckoning with German military and economic power in NATO:

> [t]he Germans have now, in their own estimation, reached a status of equality in the Western alliance. They feel they have served their novitiate and are now less inclined to understand that other members of the Alliance may wish to perpetuate the distinction between friend and foe of the last war. In any case they find

[175] FO 371/165429, VG 1851/6 W. Wynne Mason to P. H. Laurence, April 25, 1962.
[176] FO 371/165429, VG 1851/13 H. Beeley to Earl of Home [Alec Douglas-Home], October 30, 1962.
[177] Judt, *Postwar*, chap. 9.
[178] FO 371/165429, VG 1851/5 E. M. Rose to P. H. Laurence, March 16, 1962.

> it hard to understand that there should be objection to what they regard as a dignified gesture of respect to the dead of the last war and of sympathy to their relatives.[179]

Writing in March of 1963 to the Ministry of Defence, Foreign Secretary and future Prime Minister Alec Douglas-Home agreed that moving forward with arrangements for a joint ceremony was not only in the interest of strengthening NATO, but an expression of gratitude for German and Italian diplomacy with regard to the Common Market:

> The Germans and Italians are our allies in NATO; both of them play an important role in Western Europe and in the Western Alliance. Moreover, they have shown themselves particularly helpful over Common Market matters and both did what they felt was in their power to prevent the French from upsetting the applecart in Brussels [a reference to de Gaulle's veto]. I think that a joint ceremony at El Alamein in future would better express the spirit of European reconciliation which is so badly needed. Now that 20 years have passed since the battle a change might be more reasonably considered, and it is, of course, suggested that the date of the joint ceremony should not be the anniversary of the battle.[180]

Douglas-Home concurred with Ambassador Harold Beeley that the ceremony should remain at El Alamein, arguing "the very remoteness" of El Alamein "lends it a special significance."

The service branches presented fewer objections than they had four years prior. The First Lord of the Admiralty, anticipating the proposed joint ceremony to be a largely diplomatic affair, argued "there appears no need to consult ex-Service organisations," whose opposition was nevertheless anticipated.[181] His counterpart in the Air Ministry proposed that "the British and Commonwealth ex-Service organisations should be told in advance," even if they would not be consulted.[182]

Defence Minister Peter Thorneycroft concurred with the proposal. Writing to Bernard Montgomery and Harold Alexander on May 14, 1963 about organizing joint commemoration, Thorneycroft observed "[t]here are obvious political advantages in the proposal. It would be in

[179] FO 371/165429, VG 1851/5 E. M. Rose to P. H. Laurence, March 16, 1962.
[180] WO 32/19186, A/129/CS/828, Ref: R17/11 Douglas-Home to Peter Thorneycroft, March 22, 1963, p. 2.
[181] WO 32/19186, A129/CS/828, 19A Carrington to Minister of Defence, April 24, 1963.
[182] WO 32/19186, A129/CS/828, 20A H.F. to Minister of Defene, April 29, 1963.

accordance with the spirit of the times. The Germans and Italians are our allies in NATO and they have shown themselves friends in other contexts," clearly a veiled reference to German assistance with EEC membership. As a consequence, "the joint ceremony at El Alamein in future might better express the spirit of European reconciliation which is so badly needed."[183] Alexander replied on May 16th, agreeing that the proposal of a joint ceremony was "a very good one. It cannot possibly do any harm but can do a lot of good."[184]

Montgomery, however, was "entirely opposed" to the proposal. The 8th Army, he argued, was a "great Imperial family," with participants from all around the world, naming the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, India, Pakistan, South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, and Canada.[185] The imperial dead "are buried in the great cemetery at Alamein and all were represented when I unveiled the superb memorial some years ago." Montgomery questioned whether the governments of the countries had been consulted. More important, however, was the matter of British prestige, which he believed would be threatened by such an arrangement:

> As you say, the Germans and Italians are now our Allies in NATO. But do not let us forget the line-up of the nations on two occasions for the fight for freedom in which many of us took part… And do not let us forget what the Germans, Italians, and Japanese did to our men who were taken prisoner in Hitler's war! I am all in favor of letting bygones be bygones. But I am also in favor of reaching some 'accommodation' with Russia and China, because only in that way can a lasting and durable peace be obtained. It will not help us to reach any such accommodation if they see us bowing down at the cemeteries of nations who have so gravely disturbed the peace of the world even if they are now our allies, and some only in name.
>
> Do not let us be led astray by the view of the British Ambassador in Cairo: the Egyptians attend the ceremony at our cemetery at Alamein, and that should satisfy him. He might as well suggest that I should ask Germans and Italians to the Alamein Reunion in London, which is held in October every year. I would not dream of doing so; the veterans in Alamein would never approve.
>
> Let each nation continue to honour its dead in its own way. Do not let us now change the satisfactory arrangements which have been going on for nearly 20 years, and replace them by other plans which could possibly prove embarrassing, and indeed would be cancelled, if a third World War should ever burst upon us.

[183] WO 32/19186, A129/CS/828, 24A Peter Thorneycroft to Field Marshal Alexander of Tunis, May 14, 1963.
[184] WO 32/19186, A129/CS/828, 26A Alexander to Thorneycroft, May 16, 1963.
[185] WO 32/19186, A129/CS/828, 27A Montgomery to Thorneycroft, May 1963.

Writing in May of 1963, the CWGC chairman W. J. Chalmers also voiced his opposition. He believed "considerable exception will be taken by the ex-service organisations to such a change for which, as far as I know, we have no precedent either in Europe or the Far East."[186] Cold War political concerns were another factor: openly linking war commemorations so closely to NATO might disturb relations across the Iron Curtain. Careful consideration was warranted, and the benefits of such a change "could well be more than offset if a change in the present arrangements led to strong protests from the ex-service organisations or embarrassed the War Graves Commission's work behind the Iron Curtain."

On June 10, 1963, Thorneycroft replied to Douglas-Home, agreeing with his arguments in favor of organizing a joint commemoration. However, he wrote, "I very much doubt... whether there is sufficient agreement in this country on this issue for us to suggest to our Commonwealth allies that such a change ought to be considered now." He had "reason to believe, for instance, that our own ex-Service organisations… would be likely to take considerable exception to the change." Montgomery, he noted, "is also strongly opposed to the idea."[187] The Foreign Office agreed to shelve the idea for the time being.

A "modified proposal" was forthcoming the following year, 1964, originating in the British embassies in Cairo, Bonn, and Rome. This new proposal left the ceremony largely unchanged outside of one key element: rather than representatives of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission placing wreaths and their German and Italian counterparts placing wreaths at memorials constructed for former enemies, "the British Ambassador should also lay a wreath at each of the German and Italian memorials" and the German and Italian ambassadors would be

[186] WO 32-19186, A129/CS/828, 28A Chalmers to Minister of Defence, May 22, 1963.
[187] WO 32/19186, A129/CS/828, 30 Thorneycroft to Ear of Home, June 10, 1963.

invited to do the same at the Commonwealth Cemetery.[188] W. J. Chalmers of the CWGC believed this served merely as "the thin end of a wedge" aiming to gradually, through diplomatic reciprocity, "build itself into a joint ceremony." Chalmers maintained his opposition: "firstly, that many relatives of the dead, whose feelings we have a duty to consider, would be upset about it; secondly, that ex-Service organizations would resent it" and thirdly, it would be a kind of slippery slope to joint ceremonies of commemoration. Inviting former enemies "for political reasons would be wholly false in sentiment." Deploying the metaphor of the imperial Commonwealth "family," Chalmers wrote that commemorating the dead

> is essentially a private, family matter. After the first great Unveiling Ceremony, to which all and sundry were invited, it is right that the Commonwealth family should gather once a year at the cemetery, to remember the men individually commemorated there and their individual sacrifices. [189]

At the Foreign Office, Ronald Scrivener believed Chalmer's opposition was unwarranted. That both Germany and Italy "are our intimate allies in NATO and have both achieved commendably democratic forms of government are considerations of some moment in this context."[190] On August 31, 1964, however, P. D. Martyn at the Ministry of Defence still believed that the involvement of ambassadors "would introduce a political element" that was undesired, and that arrangements should continue as they had.[191]

In 1965, following Queen Elizabeth II's well-received visit to Germany in May of that year, British authorities went forward with proposals for ambassadors to place wreaths, and the Germans and Italians reciprocated the gesture.[192] This decision was soon followed by a decline in interest in the commemoration by the diplomatic missions of predominantly non-white Commonwealth countries. A 1966, Foreign Office memorandum by D. J. Speares identified a

[188] WO 32/19186, A129/CS/828, 34A W. J. Chalmers to J. L. L. Imrie, August 5, 1964, p. 2.
[189] WO 32/19186, A129/CS/828, 34A W. J. Chalmers to J. L. L. Imrie, August 5, 1964, p. 3.
[190] WO 32/19186, A129/CS/828, 44A R. S. Scrivener to J. L. L. Imrie, August 25, 1964, p. 2.
[191] WO 32/19186, A129/CS/828, 45A P. D. Martyn to R. S. Scrivener, August 31, 1964.
[192] WO 32/19186, A129/CS/828, 63A W. Wynne Mason to D. J. Speares, February 1, 1966, p. 2.

"new and… fairly simple problem. Our people in Cairo report that they have encountered difficulties in trying to arrange the participation of Commonwealth Ambassadors in the ceremony this year."[193] The Nigerian Ambassador showed "little interest," the Indian ambassador was reluctant, and the Pakistani ambassador "suggested reversion to the practice whereby the CWGC representative laid a CWGC wreath." Speares forwarded the request to the relevant diplomatic officials, believing it would be unlikely to gather together the necessary Commonwealth ambassadors for the ceremony. British, German, and Italian joint commemorations in North Africa did not fully begin until the 1970s, however, and the transition was gradual.

What began as an occasion for the celebration of the British Empire, of a specifically British victory, gradually transformed into an international occasion grounded in a new understanding of the Second Word War in North Africa: a chivalrous war fought by white European nations in the hostile North African desert. By the time Britain joined the EEC in 1972, the line between British and international commemorations at Alamein had begun to blur, with annual ceremonies marked by the laying of wreaths. The 1972 commemoration, held near the 30th anniversary of the battle, appears to have been a watershed. Days after Parliament ratified Britain's membership in the EEC on October 17, 1972,[194] *The Globe and Mail* reported that a commemoration ceremony was held in El Alamein with "German, Italian and Commonwealth Embassy officials from Cairo and any veterans that happened to show up traveled to this bleak place."[195] British, German, and Italian representatives agreed to a rotating schedule for an annual

[193] WO 32/19186, A129/CS/828, 69 D. J. Speares to W. Wynne Mason, September 26, 1966.
[194] "European Communities Act 1972," accessed November 5, 2021, https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/legislativescrutiny/parliament-and-europe/collections/parliament-and-europe/european-act-1972/.
[195] Barry Came, "El Alamein Remembered: The Sands Have Buried the Glory," *The Globe and Mail*, October 30, 1972, p. 12, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

international memorial service at El Alamein, alternating between the British Commonwealth War Cemetery and the German and Italian mausoleums.[196]

In 1976, the *Times* described the anniversary ceremony that year as "an international, friendly gathering that avoids both the coy chumminess of battlefield reunions and the stiffness of political gestures," as surviving veterans faced the "storm of dust and sand" in the desert "wasteland."[197] In October 1977, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that on the 35th anniversary of the battle, "the former warring nations gathered shoulder-to-shoulder at El Alamein to honor not only their own, but also one another's dead."[198] Representatives from the VDAK were invited to the formal 40th anniversary of the battle in October 1982, organized by the British government.[199] Veterans from the VDK laid wreaths toward the end of the ceremony alongside former soldiers from Britain and the Commonwealth: following the South African Veterans' Association, but before the Eighth Army Veterans' Association.

Conclusion

The narrative of a distinctly chivalrous "war without hate," a common European tragedy and sacrifice fought in the "empty" North African desert, was an inescapable component of *Verband Deutsches Afrika-Korps* leadership's political project. Rather than emerging from soldiers' wartime experience, it was instead forcefully argued: through VDAK activism, in German commemorations, and ultimately, in joint Anglo-German ceremonies of

[196] Judith Miller, "The Dead of El Alamein Turn Foes Into Friends," *The New York Times*, October 26, 1984, p. A2.; Tameside, DD 382/2/1/1, "International Memorial Service At El Alamein," *The New Crusader*, No. 18, March 1982, p. 3.
[197] Robert Fisk, "The Unchanging Battlefield," *The Times*, October 25, 1976, p. 4, The Times Digital Archive.
[198] Don A. Schanche, "Dead Still Honored at El Alamein," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 22, 1977, p. 1, Newspapers.com.
[199] BArch, B 469/110 1/2, Service of Commemoration at El Alamein on 24 October 1982, Order of Wreath Laying, 24. Oktober 1982.

commemoration. Following three broad Anglo-German encounters over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, this chapter has shown how both proponents and opponents of the "war without hate" and Anglo-German reconciliation contested, disputed, and negotiated the meaning the Second World War in North Africa.

The early reception of the VDAK by the British popular press suggests the continuation of war-time hostility and mistrust, a legacy of total war and longer term anti-German sentiment.[200] VDAK reunions and VDAK leadership's demands for German military rehabilitation provoked widespread alarm, evoking comparisons the rise of Nazism and German militarism. However, as the transnational "Rommel myth" built up steam over the 1950s in the midst of Cold War tensions, opposition to the VDAK relaxed outside of the Marxist political left and nationalist, imperialist political right. Similarly, British diplomats and observers in the popular press found the nationalistic, triumphant German *Totenburgen* at Tobruk and El Alamein distasteful or unsettling. The colossal monuments, with symbolism and design rooted in the Nazi era, conveyed the VDAK's demand for unapologetic military rehabilitation. Complicated by the Cold War and geopolitical competition with the United States, the British government was a reluctant supporter of the German unveiling.

Over the 1950s and 1960s, British commemorations of the Battle of El Alamein staged near that battlefield emerged as the site for competition between distinct interpretations of the Second World War in North Africa: El Alamein as a tremendous and decisive British victory, or as a common sacrifice, a joint European experience in a "war without hate." Celebrating El Alamein as "the turning of the tide," the 1954 British memorial's unveiling served as a display of British strength and Commonwealth unity, one projecting a vision of Britain as a global power.

[200] See also: Wendy Webster, "The Empire Comes Home," in *Britain's Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Andrew S Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 129.

With that power in ruins after the Suez Crisis, at least in Egypt, British commemorations amounted to little more than fragile exercises in Commonwealth diplomacy. Even in the face inescapable American dominance, a splintering Commonwealth, and the pull of NATO and European economic integration, many on the British side continued to oppose reinterpreting El Alamein in the form of a joint commemoration between former enemies. In the end, they were unsuccessful.

Conclusion

This dissertation has argued that the Anglo-German battle for North Africa during the Second World War was fought and experienced as "total war." Bearing little resemblance to the popular image of a "war without hate" waged in an "empty" desert, the preceding chapters established that the Second World War in North Africa was a "total" one in terms of war's goals, methods, and the violence. It was only after the war's conclusion, and in the service of Cold War politics, that the North Africa Campaign came to be understood as the chivalric "war without hate" of popular memory. Advanced by the veterans of the VDAK and their British allies, this discursive transformation in the perception and memory of the conflict — away from total war and toward a clean, or even romantic contestation — was accompanied by changes in three discursive components central to the postwar perception and memory of the conflict: the natural desert environment, the human context of North Africa (such as the built environment and the region's inhabitants), and enemy soldiers. The findings examined here revealed that the wartime experience of North Africa's environmental "harshness" deepened instead of attenuating the murderous intensity of combat. Over the postwar period, however, the role and meaning of desert environment transformed, emerging as a mutual enemy in a unique and isolated "desert war." North Africa's built environment and its indigenous population, inescapable in wartime accounts and central political and military concerns, faded, supplanted by the discourse of desert "emptiness." Accompanying this transition, enemy soldiers, once demonized and dehumanized adversaries in a "total" conflict, emerged instead as sympathetic opponents, fellow participants in a much more circumscribed contest, facilitating postwar Anglo-German reconciliation and Cold War mobilization against the Soviet Union. Refashioning the war in North Africa from a total war into a unifying encounter between European brothers in arms involved careful political,

diplomatic, and cultural negotiation on the part of VDAK leaders, British and German veterans of North Africa, and political actors in both countries. These negotiations ultimately served to reinforce and solidify the Cold War alliance, fostered German remilitarization and rearmament, and helped enshrine the pervasive Cold War mythology surrounding the Wehrmacht's "clean hands" and Erwin Rommel's martial genius, unsullied by Nazism.

Drawing on the Afrika Korps newspaper, *Die Oase*, Wehrmacht records, political pedagogical materials and propaganda, and British investigations into the German treatment of prisoners of war, the first chapter argued that the North Africa front of the Second World War fit the criteria for "total war" outlined by Roger Chickering and Stig Förster. That is, the war was "total" in terms of unlimited aims, ideological radicalization, and essentially "unlimited" violence. German goals in North Africa were fantastical, with its architects envisioning the creation of an "oil empire" beyond the Suez Canal, and enormous armored pincer movement against the Soviet Union along a front thousands of miles in length. I proposed that the demonizing and dehumanizing propaganda that German soldiers were subjected to vis-à-vis their British counterparts was not fundamentally dissimilar to the anti-Slavic and antisemitic propaganda that abounded both at and away from the Eastern Front. In North Africa, the front newspaper *Die Oase* blended the global British foe with the ultimate enemy operating from the shadows, world Jewry, and framed the conflict as a struggle for Germany's survival. Archival findings detailing racialized violence against civilians, women in particular, as well as colonial and British prisoners of war, pointed toward the unlimited, unrestricted violence of total warfare. While prisoner of war records records did not reveal systematized murder of captured soldiers to a similar extent to that which took place at the Eastern Front, they did clearly indicate widespread, racialized abuse and murder.

The second chapter expounded findings from the enormous archive of wartime conversations between captured German officers under British control, surreptitiously recorded and transcribed during the Second World War, and argued that German soldiers and, potentially, their British counterpart as well, fought and experienced the North Africa Campaign as a "total war." German colonial, environmental discourses of the "desert" showed remarkable similarities to those surrounding Eastern Europe and the Eurasian steppe: these too were understood to be landscapes characterized by flatness and emptiness, places that fostered feelings of exposure and vulnerability, and which made navigation disorienting and challenging. Rather than serving as a playing field for a knightly contest between British and German forces or diminishing the ferocity of the war's combat, the experience of the North African environment as harsh intensified the practice and experience of violence, and contributed to the trend toward "totality" in its exercise both against the British military adversary and North Africa's population. Confounded by North Africans' ambiguous "duplicity" and perceived shifting loyalties, the Afrika Korps' colonial encounter with North Africans was permeated by an unsettled uncertainty, which in multiple cases motivated violent responses. Widespread violence against North Africans, despite political concerns over "Arab opinion" and the dream of a broader Muslim uprising against the British Empire, suggested the further collapse of distinctions between civilian and military targets of violence. I supported these findings with a discussion of disturbing instances of violence, mayhem, and murder from British court martial records, evidence suggestive (though not conclusively) of the trend toward brutalization and totalization on the part of British soldiers in North Africa as well.

The third chapter advanced chronologically to the memory of the war in the postwar period, analyzing internal records and documentation produced by the Afrika Korps veterans of

VDAK. The chapter argued that this organization was instrumental in shaping the postwar discourse of the Second World War in North Africa as a "desert war" fought in an "empty" landscape, a chivalric "war without hate" resembling a "knight's tourney." VDAK leadership first used the rhetoric of chivalry in the service of a clearly articulated political project: they sought the release of convicted war criminals, most notably Albert Kesselring; and they demanded a restoration of their own professional, social, and cultural standing, then under fire from revelations of wartime massacres and genocide ("defamation"). In the service of these goals, VDAK leaders promulgated an argument that reinterpreted the Second World War in North Africa as environmentally determined: it was a separate, clean, and chivalric war *because* it was a desert war fought in an "empty" desert. This emptiness was a key component to this argument: North Africa's supposed lack of partisans enabled the unimpeded and honorable practice of European warfare, and emptiness allowed VDAK leaders to transfer blame for the indiscriminate violence and chaos of warfare on the Eastern Front (and elsewhere) onto the war's victims. In exchange for the acceptance of this argument, and acceding to their demands, VDAK leadership embraced German remilitarization and the Anglo-German reconciliation necessitated by the Cold War.

In conjunction with VDAK leadership accomplishing its political goals, discourses on the war in the new *Die Oase*, the VDAK newsletter, transformed over the 1950s, shifting from ongoing skepticism and hostility toward Britain and the Western Allies toward embracing the former enemy as a Cold War and fellow European ally. Accompanying this move, the immediacy of violence and combat in stories, narratives, and other accounts of the war published in the newsletter declined. As the VDAK welcomed and celebrated veterans of earlier German colonial wars, labeling them the *Uralten Afrikaner* to the Afrika Korps' *Afrikaner*, VDAK

veterans reinterpreted the experience of North Africa as one piece of a shared European colonial heritage. The North Afrika campaign emerged as a focal point for bonding between German soldiers and, subsequently, British ones, as victims of a common European tragedy centered around soldiers locked in a joint struggle against a hostile environment. This narrative of the "desert war," emphasizing the environment as a common enemy, assisted in the discursive construction of a "national" war fought by white, European nations, now Cold War allies.

The dissertation's final chapter followed British interpretations of the North Africa Campaign across three postwar Anglo-German encounters marked by disagreements, contestations, and reinterpretations of the meaning and memory of the Second World War in North Africa: the VDAK's formation and its early activities; the unveiling of the German memorial at Tobruk; and British memorialization and commemoration of the Battle of El Alamein. Popular British attitudes of the VDAK's early activities, as suggested by their reception in the British media and by political actors, ranged from apathy to unequivocal hostility. The unveiling of the German *Ehrenmal* at Tobruk provoked widespread distaste, indicative of continued, popular anti-German sentiment, one legacy of two bitterly fought "total" world wars. Multiple British officials jealously guarded the interpretation of the North Africa Campaign that emphasized the Battle El Alamein as a distinctly British and imperial triumph, a "turning of the tide," and a tremendous (and exclusive) victory. Italian and German proposals to organize a joint memorial ceremony near the El Alamein battlefield, negotiated in the interest of Cold War reconciliation between NATO allies, only picked up steam long after the Suez Crisis, as Britain drew away from the Commonwealth and toward deeper economic integration with Europe. Initially opposed by military officials and British and Commonwealth veteran organizations, it was not until the 1970s that the VDAK leadership's chosen interpretation, the

narrative of the North Africa campaign as a chivalric “war without hate,” a unifying European tragedy and a “common sacrifice,” was officially enshrined in the form of a joint ceremony of commemoration across former enemy lines.

Abbreviations

BVW	Bund versorgungsberechtigter ehemaliger Wehrmachtsangehöriger und deren Hinterbliebenen
CSDIC	Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre
CWGC	Commonwealth War Graves Commission
EEC	European Economic Community
IWGC	Imperial War Graves Commission
VDAK	Verband deutsches Afrika Korps or Verband der ehemaligen Angehörigen des deutschen Afrika-Korps
VDK	Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge
VDS	Verband deutscher Soldaten

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