

Government Issue:
The Material Culture of the Red Army 1941-1945

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation uses everyday objects to explore the meaning of the changes in Soviet society during the Great Patriotic War. The war was a fundamental shift in relations between citizen-soldiers and the state. It was also the greatest threat to the survival of the Stalinist state and Soviet people. The state survived by providing soldiers with the necessities and motivation to defend it. The former included rifles, boots, spoons and shovels, while the later encompassed harsh discipline, concern for well-being, and a shift to celebrating the accomplishments of the Russian Empire. All of this played out in objects, from underwear kept lice free, newspapers and books to occupy soldiers' time and lamps to light their bunkers, to the introduction of medals depicting Russian Imperial heroes.

Focusing on *things* (e.g. uniforms, weapons, tools, personal possessions) allows us to see the intersection of ideology and everyday life, of prescription and practice. Every chapter presents a different object or series of objects and uses them to both provide an ethnography of life in the Red Army and to highlight an aspect of the changes that took place in Soviet society during the war. In every chapter, we see how common experiences based on using the same objects – eating from the same pot, sleeping in the same bunker, receiving the same medal, crewing the same gun – brought people of different ages, ethnicities, classes, creeds, and sexes together. The first three chapters focus on the soldier's body and identity. Starting with the body itself, discussing how a diverse group of people became state property and how both the state and the soldiers managed this new relationship. Chapter 2 shows how uniforms refashioned soldiers' biographies and made them readable texts consisting of medals and insignia, while allowing the state to present itself as having ancient roots. Chapter 3 focuses on how the state provided and soldiers used rations. The next section is devoted to violence. Chapter 4 examines the uses of the soldier's spade and attempts by individuals to stay alive and craft something like normal life in the trenches. Chapter 5 is dedicated to weapons: both the act of killing and social hierarchy associated with different arms. A third section focuses on possessions, presenting a final chapter (6) on trophies, covering a sea change from a state that claimed a monopoly over everything on the battlefield to one that encouraging soldiers to take what they wanted from the defeated Third Reich. The dissertation concludes with a brief discussion of the subjects fostered by these objects.

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Introduction: Government Issue

“The things they carried were largely determined by necessity.”

– Tim O’Brien, *The Things They Carried*¹

On June 27, 1941, Nikolai Chekhovich, a young Muscovite, wrote his mother telling her that she would soon receive his civilian clothing and not to consider him dead when she got them. He informed her that now “all of our things are government issue [*kazennye*].”² Over the next four years he would write his mother and fiancée many letters, describing his hopes, aspirations and day to day life. He sometimes wrote about his clothing, what he ate and the trenches he and his comrades inhabited. Chekhovich was fatally wounded in action liberating an anonymous village (“P”) from the enemy early in 1944. His letters were collected in 1945 and published, with Chekhovich described as an “authentic hero of our times.”³ His story was typical of his age. Chekhovich was one of over 30 million men and women to serve in the Red Army between 1941-1945, trading their disparate civilian worlds for one in which virtually everything was government issue.

Objects were the tools that turned yesterday’s civilians into soldiers, as they first learned to wear their uniforms, care for and use their weapons, pack their knapsacks and dig shelter. At the beginning of their service, these objects—the weapons they carried, the uniforms they wore, the dugouts they lived in, and the heartier army rations they ate were all that made soldiers like Chekhovich distinguishable from civilians. For “non-Russian” soldiers, the first words of Russian they learned could well be “rifle,” “grenade” and “spade.”⁴ Objects were so essential to the acculturation of soldiers that even the password at a military position was always drawn from army goods.⁵ These objects were the quotidian material that made the epic event of the war possible.

The Red Army was the largest army the world has ever known. The front on which it fought stretched from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea, the Caucasus Mountains to Bøkfjorden in Norway, from the Volga to the Oder. The juxtaposition of the massive scale of the war and the contribution of each individual fighting it troubled contemporary propagandists. An article for agitators (low-level propagandists) from June 1942 (when it looked like the war would be lost) complained that “[t]he single soldier occupies some one three-millionth part of this huge front”, and that despite his (or her) tiny stature, the fate of the Motherland on all fronts depended on what *he* (or *she*) did.⁶ The massive scale of events was belied by the strange mixture of the extremely quotidian with the epic. One soldier reflected in his diary after years at the front: “A person in a lambskin coat with a pistol on

¹ Tim O’Brien, *The Things They Carried* (Boston: Mariner, 2009), p. 2.

² Nikolai Chekhovich, *Dnevnik ofitsera* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1945), p. 5.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 96.

⁴ The term “non-Russian” was a catch-all used to describe non-Slavic cadres in the Red Army. Brandon Schechter, “‘The People’s Instructions’: Indigenizing the Great Patriotic War Among ‘Non-Russians’”. *Ab Imperio*. 2012:3. pp. 109-133. On learning Russian in the Red Army see S. A. Amanzholov, *Iz opyta politiko-vospitatel’noi raboty sredi boitsov nerusskoi natsional’nosti v dni Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny* (Moscow, 1945). <http://orkeniet.vkgu.kz/rus/elib001.shtm> (last consulted 31 March 2015).

⁵ *Posobie dlia boitsa-tankista* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1941), p. 39. The system of passwords was standardized so the challenge would be a piece of military equipment, and the answer a geographical feature, both starting with the same letter (e.g. “Tank-Tiumen”).

⁶ N. Rubinshtein, “Zametki ob agitatsii,” *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1942:14, pp. 43-48; p. 43.

his belt, who sleeps on louse-ridden straw in a clay hut, – is it really true that I am also making history?”⁷ While Soviet citizens, particularly during the war, were encouraged to see themselves as part of a historic process, the Marxist narratives they were supposed to conform to had little room for such messy details as lice, dirt and clothing. And yet soldiers’ letters home, diaries, war time interviews and later autobiographical fiction and memoirs are filled with references to the everyday, particularly to the ordinary objects they used. Millions of soldiers at war were accompanied by even larger numbers of objects, yet each soldier developed bonds with the standard issue items they were allotted – they could tell their spoon, rifle, tunic and spade from scores of others.

This dissertation examines the central event in Soviet history, the Great Patriotic War, from the perspective of material objects. It explores how soldiers used and the state provided a plethora of things from underwear to tanks, tracing major changes in Soviet society via government-issue objects. The standardized world of uniforms, rations, weapons and trenches render explicit many aspects of the meaning of the war for the Soviet state and its citizens. It can be seen as the embodiment of obligations shared by state and soldier, as the milieu in which members of a largely segregated society became acquainted with each other, or, finally, as the medium in which the state and soldiers worked out a variety of pragmatic and symbolic problems – from how to survive bombardment to which aspects of the past were usable. This work provides both an ethnographic sketch of life in the Red Army and a narrative of how the war changed the meaning of the Soviet project and the content of Soviet citizenship.

As Bruno Latour has argued in his Actor-Network-Theory: “It is always things – and I now mean this last word literally – which, in practice, lend their ‘steely’ quality to the hapless ‘society’.”⁸ Objects constrain and make possible human action on both an individual and societal scale. From Prometheus to the present, the ability to make and use tools is what has set humans apart from beasts and allowed man and woman to survive. The objects that humans forge are also imbued with meaning. They are often what connect a network of humans and carry associations that have either consciously been crafted by the object’s creators (e.g. the faces on coins or t-shirts) or are an accident of history (e.g. how blue jeans transformed from specialized worker’s clothing to worldwide fashion).⁹ This project inventories the material culture of the Red Army, treating items both as tools and as bearers of meaning.¹⁰

The Soviet Union defined itself in contradiction to the property relations existing in the rest of the world. Marx famously declared that “existence determines consciousness” (“*bytie opredeliaet soznaniie*” in Russian) and from the very beginning of the Soviet project

⁷ Boris Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik: dnevnik, rasskazy* (Moscow: Tsentspoligraf, 2010), p. 215.

⁸ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 68.

⁹ See e.g. Leora Auslander, *Cultural Revolutions: Everyday Life and Politics in Britain, North America, and France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 20; Graham Marsh, Paul Trynka, and June Marsh, *Denim: From Cowboys to Catwalk: A Visual History of the World's Most Legendary Fabric* (London: Aurum, 2002).

¹⁰ Another goal is more prosaic. The Red Army is often portrayed as either a faceless Asiatic horde or flatly heroic collection of square-jawed people that could only be cast in bronze. This work, by focusing on the quotidian, highlights these historical actors were very human; they ate and slept and went to the bathroom. They were neither monsters, nor saints, but a reflection of their society and humanity as a whole with all of the accompanying flaws and glories.

there was an intense interest in the capacity of everyday items (*predmety byta*) and practices to transform Soviet people.¹¹ Conceptions of property were also distinct from those in capitalist societies. All major forms of production were controlled by the state (including agriculture), and personal property was a weak institution: most living space was state owned, and many things people used were technically state-owned. All forms of property could be confiscated if one ran afoul of socialist justice, which sometimes could be as simple as being born into the wrong class or ethnicity. Shortages were common due to the vicissitudes of a planned economy staffed largely with people learning on the job; and a society that was in a constant state of mobilization placed emphasis on sacrifices today for a brighter future tomorrow. Access to goods was closely tied to status within a framework of categories based on class, party membership and state service, in which connections were key. In this system of shortages and strong government intervention, the acquisition of commodities worked very differently from capitalist economies, relying much more on special access and connections than cash.¹²

In Soviet society in general, and in the Red Army in particular, objects were the embodiment of the relationship between the state and citizens. Certain items, such as tsarist officers' shoulder boards (*pogony*), the bowler hat and spats of bourgeois fat cats, the vest or rich printed tunic of kulaks and priest's vestments all became markers of the enemy to be destroyed. The state unleashed citizens on various categories of people (the bourgeoisie in 1918, "kulaks" in 1929), allowing them to participate in the expropriation of the enemy's wealth while punishing those who attempted to enrich themselves in the process. Other items, such as tractors, radios, books and urban (as opposed to peasant) forms of dress served as indicators of the Soviet enlightenment. Before the war, everything from new apartment buildings and the Moscow Metro to sausages were lauded as signs of the new regime's ability to provide for the people. That access to many of the fruits of Bolshevik plenty was available only to those who lived in the cities, in which the right to reside was controlled by a passport regime, and more particularly to Party members, could be alienating to many. Then the war came, and the Soviet Union found itself functioning under conditions that were much less forgiving and reacting to the universal problems of a state at war.

During the war, the army, as the body defending the state and the people, was given top priority in the allocation of increasingly scarce resources, as territory fell to the Germans and was devastated as the Wehrmacht retreated. Even given the dramatic shortages that the war forced on the Soviet Union, the investment of symbolism into objects could be so important to the state that it outweighed immediate pragmatic concerns, such as the decision to fundamentally refashion the army's uniforms at a moment when the war looked lost. The state needed to invest every object with meaning and convince soldiers that they should defend the state and could win the war.

Soldiers did not formally own the wide variety of objects they were issued, yet they were responsible for and could use them with an autonomy that often bordered on

¹¹ Karl Marks, *K kritike politicheskoi ekonomii* (Moscow: Goslitizdat, 1949), p. 7. I am translating from the Russian, because the standard Russian rendering would have been read by my subjects and highlights the relationship between object and consciousness.

¹² Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 10-13.

ownership. A soldier could be executed for loss of a weapon or be sent to prison or a penal unit for destroying or stealing state property. However, soldiers were also armed individuals who could make choices about how to dispose of what the state had given them, trading rations or articles of clothing among themselves or with civilians or discarding things that they felt were useless, such as gasmasks, helmets and bayonets. The state gave millions of people the tools to wage war, though not always the skills and energy needed to use them. Soldiers were increasingly encouraged to become frugal masters of what the state provided, learning how to repair and maintain their equipment and other supplies and to improvise in order to improve their conditions. They might, for example, create new dishes at field kitchens, organize barbershops in the trenches or recycle ration cans or artillery shells to make lamps.

This is the story of how a host of people from what was still a largely peasant society (in a state that was deeply hostile towards the peasantry) came together around a set of objects, mastered their use and defeated the Third Reich.¹³ This is also the story of how that process changed the way that soldiers thought about their state, each other and how the state positioned itself in regards to the past and its citizens. In order to understand the importance of objects to this story, we have to grasp the centrality of the war in the Soviet experience.

Soviet citizens, whether they had been raised in the Soviet Union, Russian Empire or republics formed in the wake of the Great War, embarked on one of the most epic, tragic and paradoxical wars in human history. The Great Patriotic War was one of the most expected wars of all time but began with a surprise attack. The Bolsheviks had been waiting for the contradictions of capitalism to lead to a world war and worldwide Revolution since they had taken power in the Fall of 1917, but were shocked when the Third Reich, a country that had signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union in order to start the Second World War, invaded Soviet territory. The war almost destroyed the Soviet Union, but became the basis of its legitimacy. A party of Marxist internationalists that had planned for global revolution waged a patriotic war, consciously echoing the epic of 1812, the key legitimizing victory of the Old Regime. The victory secured Bolshevik rule, while bringing heroes of the Russian Imperial past into the pantheon of progressive humanity. It muddled the difference between “Russian” and “Soviet”, while integrating millions of “non-Russians” into the Soviet project as never before. Millions of people who had been outcasts in 1941 found themselves accepted in 1945 and vice versa. Increasingly, in an institution that dubbed itself the Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Army, ethnicity overtook class background as a key factor in determining reliability. An army of amateurs, composed mostly of peasants, defeated the most professional, modern and terrifying army of the Twentieth Century, one that had already conquered Europe.

The war was also paradoxical in that it both highlighted what made the Soviet Union different and rendered Bolshevik practices “normal.” Liberal states expanded the power and reach of the government during the war in unprecedented ways. Mobilization for war led to rationing and the reorientation of business, film and education to the state’s needs in the United States and Britain. Extensive propaganda, censorship and the evocation of self-

¹³ For a discussion of the centrality of the peasantry to the Soviet experience, posited as “the rural nexus”, see Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York: Pantheon, 1985).

sacrifice were utilized by all of the states engaged in the war. The war also led to the redrawing of boundaries of citizenship, as both the US and Soviet Union deported people based on ethno-racial categories but also integrated people who had previously been largely peripheral during the war. The war fundamentally shifted the place of each of the victors in the world and also how they saw their citizenry, but no state had lost such numbers or suffered damage on the same scale.¹⁴ In much of the space of the former Soviet Union, the war has remained at the center of how people interpret the state and Soviet legacy until this very day.

All roads in Soviet history lead to and from the war. If one considers that the Soviet Union lasted for about as long as a human lifespan, the war coincided with adulthood, and was fundamental to how events before and after were perceived. Before the war happened, millions of people had already lost their lives for victory. Crash industrialization and Collectivization (which led to millions of deaths and the destruction of the peasant way of life) were justified by the need to modernize the country in order to avoid defeat in the upcoming war. The Terror of the late 1930s was seen as a necessary purge of potentially traitorous elements before the next war. Once the war began, propaganda shifted to draw parallels between the current war and all past conflicts between Russia and various foreign invaders, positing the current conflict as a repetition of an age-old battle between good and evil. After victory was secured, the war retroactively justified everything that had come before and stood as a testament to the power of the Soviet system.¹⁵ The Victory would become a major holiday, and Soviet culture was imbued with a respect for veterans and a fear of future war up until the regime began to collapse. Even in modern Russia and pockets of the post-Soviet space, the Victory of 1945 is seen as the one indisputable accomplishment of the Soviet regime, celebrated to this day. How much of this victory is attributed to Stalin, Communism, the friendship of the peoples, or a timeless Russian character varies on who you ask, but wartime propaganda supported all of these theses.

The war was the first true test of the Soviet people who had been subject to the policies of the Soviet Party-State for nearly a quarter century. From the very beginning, the Soviet state had sought to recreate mankind in its own, progressive, Bolshevik image. Who the new Soviet person should be was subject to change, but certain aspects remained constant: the Soviet person was urban as opposed to rural, sought out educational opportunities and displayed political consciousness. Consciousness implied a certain familiarity with the texts of Stalin, Lenin, Marx and Engels, accompanied by an obsessive work ethic, but more than anything else a fanatical loyalty to the state and merciless hatred toward its enemies. History was understood to have objective laws with inexorable results that Marxism made clear and which made the destruction of those who would obstruct the path of history a necessity. The Bolsheviks were faced with the fact that they lived in an overwhelmingly rural society with a low level of education and that from 1924 on, almost all enemies were internal and loosely defined, making Bolshevik attempts at mobilization against enemies risky and highly divisive. Soviet people were constantly preparing or mobilizing for campaigns of various scales, from the liquidation of enemy classes to higher

¹⁴ Speaking here in terms of pure numbers, not proportion, though few states (e.g. Poland) could make claims to similar proportional losses as well.

¹⁵ As one liberal-oriented veteran put it after the war “we cured the Germans of Hitler and tied ourselves to Stalin.” Grigorii Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka* (Moscow: Tsentr gumanitarnykh initsiativ, 2012), p. 126.

levels of culture in retail. The state was often disappointed in its ability to penetrate into Soviet society and create a new type of person.

The war offered new opportunities to influence citizens and changed what the state saw as a Soviet person. In the army millions of men and women lived under state surveillance, with political officers appointed to explain the world and party policies. The state would do its best to organize a soldier's free time in a way that maximized the dissemination of its propaganda. However, the idiom of this propaganda was increasingly patriotic and easy to explain. Rather than a loosely defined internal enemy, Red Army soldiers fought a national enemy that was very clear and also an obvious existential threat. The state needed soldiers to become proficient at warfare, to master the proper use of all the things that soldiers had been issued. What the state needed was something much more functional and universal than earlier iterations of the Soviet person – it needed soldiers. Whether they were killing out of personal vengeance, a sense of national pride, because they thought Hitler was the Anti-Christ or to defend what the Bolsheviks built was not as important as that they killed the enemy. To inspire soldiers, the state increasingly showcased atrocities committed by the Nazis and mobilized the romantic national past of the Russian Empire. If the Soviet person could have spoken Esperanto in the 1920s, he or she clearly needed to speak Russian by 1943.¹⁶ Medals, tanks and newspapers would all display the names of noblemen who had distinguished themselves in battle for the old regime more often than not along a backdrop of the destruction that German occupation had wrought. This would all merge with Bolshevik revolutionary traditions to create a new sense of what it meant to be Soviet.

Both the Soviet State and citizens were keen to note their reforging in the fires of Mars. Soviet modernity was located in the city, where schools, universities, museums and factories (all places of dramatic refashioning) were concentrated. War became the new space of legitimizing oneself by service to the state, but also a new space of enlightenment.¹⁷ The urban-rural divide remained important in popular consciousness throughout the Soviet period. Soldiers who attempted to explain to the uninitiated the difference between a person who had been to the front and those who had not might do so in terms of the transformation from a rural to an urban being. Hero of the Soviet Union Guards Major Malik Gabdullin wrote in September of 1942 to the Head of the Literature Department at the Kazakhstan Filial of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union:

The front changes a person's character... If you liken the ideas that we had back when we lived in the aul [Central Asian village] to one mountain, the ideas that we developed after we moved to the city – after studying, when we learned to tell black from white, have our own opinions and views, when we joined the ranks of conscious people – could be likened to a second mountain, and we see a huge difference. When we learn to gradually understand this difference, then we understand something else; that the front, where life battles death, dramatically changes a person's character.¹⁸

¹⁶ The national past of “non-Russian” nationalities was also mobilized, but was a secondary concern aimed mostly at inspiring members of a specific nationality, rather than Russian heroes from the past who were held up as a model for all.

¹⁷ Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹⁸ *Pis'ma s fronta* (Alma-Ata: Kazogiz, 1944), p. 84.

For those who survived, service in the military was a testament to their loyalty to the state and a common experience that connected millions of people. All things Soviet came to be seen as the force of life and light against Germano-Fascist death and darkness.

However, what soldiers saw at war could also undermine the State's claims. That the Nazis had penetrated so deeply into Soviet territory in a war that was supposed to be waged on enemy territory was deeply disturbing and led to the death of millions. That the Red Army was incapable of defending the borders created an existential crisis for many. However, according to some, these challenges "gave the system what it had heretofore lacked, competition – something like a market, on which its products (regiments and divisions) collided with foreign ones." This caused the "whole Soviet system to unexpectedly work better."¹⁹ After the Red Army proved a match for the Wehrmacht, the exposure to foreign contagion became a major issue. Millions of people had lived under occupation and the war ended with millions of soldiers leaving Soviet territory. Coming from a state that had nearly hermetically sealed itself from the outside world in the decade before the war, the trip abroad was a revelation. Soviet citizens were exposed to the wealth of the bourgeois world, a world of undeniable material affluence as compared to the everyday life of Soviet citizens. This was something that would both attract and repulse, and to a great extent played out through objects. The war was the greatest challenge that the Soviet Union and Soviet people would face, ending in a victory that was snatched from the clutches of defeat and in many ways defining the Soviet Union even beyond the its disappearance.

This work builds on existing scholarship of the Soviet Union and imports some approaches from the historiography of the US and Europe. Much of the most important work on Soviet history ends just before the war, in part because of archival access. The scholarship of the 1990s and early 2000s focused primarily on the rise of various aspects of Stalinism and their establishment prior to its great trial. In the wake of the "archival revolution" – arising from the declassification of many materials in the 1990s – and the collapse of the Soviet Union, a variety of subfields emerged within Soviet history, many of which are formative to this dissertation. Historians have revealed the complexities of nationalities policy in a country whose rhetoric emphasized class but whose government was organized as a union of federated republics formed around ethnic groups, reifying the national in important ways.²⁰ At least one scholar has explicated the deployment of a usable past by a revolutionary regime that was becoming increasingly national.²¹ Others have studied everyday practices, demonstrating the importance of everyday acts and how they demonstrate the relationship between the state and individuals.²² Scholars have shed considerable light on the processes of social engineering, as well as the effects of these

¹⁹ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, p. 126.

²⁰ Yuri Slezkine. "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism". *Slavic Review* 53. (1994), pp. 414-452; Terry Martin. *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

²¹ David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

²² Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); P. Charles Hachten, *Property Relations and the Economic Organization of Soviet Russia, 1941-1948* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2005); Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*.

policies, such as Collectivization or the Great Terror, on Soviet society.²³ Finally two major tropes of this period, the meaning of a particular soviet modernity, and the subjectivities it created, are of particular importance to this study.²⁴ The process of forming a particular Soviet person was clearly a goal of the Bolsheviks, and increasingly historians are examining how this process felt, taking seriously the subjective experiences of those living through the various upheavals of the Soviet experience. The differences in experiences of a variety of groups – peasants, workers, women, ethnic minorities and déclassé elements – in the prewar period have been explored, providing a multidimensional view of Soviet society.²⁵ Following these threads of examination into the period of the Bolshevik's greatest test, this work will examine the fates of people who were shaped by Bolshevik policies and the realities or life in the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union was a country born of war in which the army played a central role. Historians demonstrated the power of the army as a means of social transformation, as either a nationalizing project or a way of inculcating a certain sense of modernity in what was still a largely peasant society.²⁶ They have also shown the transformative effect that the previous global conflict and Civil War had on soviet society and how war has impacted governance.²⁷ More recently, numerous scholars have turned their attention to the Great Patriotic War, despite the fact that some of the most desirable sources, the Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense, are still largely off limits.²⁸ David M. Glantz, Roger Reese and Walter Dunn have set an impressive foundation, despite these limitations and their operational histories have made further studies, including mine, possible.²⁹ They have described in excellent detail how the army functioned from the perspective of military science. A growing body of work examines the social history of the war. Yelena Seniavskaia

²³ E.g. Peter Holquist, "Information Is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work': Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context," *Journal of Modern History*, 1997:69(3), pp. 415-450; Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

²⁴ On modernity, see Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*; Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); David Hoffman, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003). On subjectivity see Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Anna Krylova, "The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 2000:1, pp. 119-146.

²⁵ E.g. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); S. Chuikina, *Dvorianskaia pamiat': "byvshie" v sovetskom gorode (Leningrad, 1920-30-e gody)* (St. Petersburg: Izd-vo Evropeiskogo universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, 2006).

²⁶ E.g. Joshua A. Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics 1905-1925* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003); Mark von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

²⁷ Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System*.

²⁸ Although a wealth of documents have been published from this archive, most notably in the *Russkii Arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia* series.

²⁹ David M. Glantz, *Stumbling Colossus: The Red Army on the Eve of World War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998); David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995); David M. Glantz, *Colossus Reborn: The Red Army at War 1941-1943* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005); Roger R. Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers: A Social History of the Red Army 1925-1941* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1996); Roger R. Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought: The Red Army's Military Effectiveness in World War II* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2011); Walter S. Dunn, jr., *Hitler's Nemesis: The Red Army, 1930-1945* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2009).

has developed a sub-field she calls “military anthropology”, heavily focused on folklore and the lived experience of soldiers.³⁰ Amir Weiner has produced groundbreaking work on how war service became a new form of legitimization, one that could wipe away past sins or cast the formerly praised into infamy, taking a key border region as his case study.³¹ Anna Krylova has investigated the experience of women in combat, opening up discussion about how the war impacted gender and highlighting the special relationships between human and machine at war.³² Finally, Oleg Budnitsky has written some excellent and provocative work detailing reactions to the Third Reich and positing a sexual revolution during the war on par with the 1960s in America.³³

But thus far, very little attention has been paid to material culture and the everyday practices surrounding it. Here, it is useful for the scholar of material culture to turn to fiction for inspiration. One such inspiration was Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*, which structures stories of soldiers’ experiences in Vietnam around various objects in their kit.³⁴ Another source is often referred to as *leitenantskaia literatura*, or the largely autobiographical fiction written by veterans, most of whom were low-level commanders during the war. These works not only provided ethnographic information but also keyed me in to how important objects could be, as many pay very careful attention to the relationship to items of material culture around which I have built this work.

American and European historiography has also led me to this project.³⁵ The potentially transformative nature of objects and the role of objects in social processes has been vividly explicated in studies of the American Revolution, French Revolution, New Deal and Cold War. For example T.H. Breen, Leora Auslander, Elizabeth Cohen and Adam Rome, have utilized objects to tell of pivotal changes in American or European history—notably the role of conscious market choices in shaping “imagined communities,” the growing penetration and nationalization of markets, the rise of consumerism and the rise of the suburbs—all with their accompanying accouterments, from tea, to clothing, to radios, to malls and electric stoves.³⁶ Other American historians have focused on what chairs,

³⁰ Ye. S. Seniavskaiia, 1941—1945. *Frontovoe pokolenie. Istoriko-psikhologicheskoe issledovanie* (Moscow: IRI RAN, 1995); Ye. S. Seniavskaiia, *Psikhologiiia voiny v XX veke: istoricheskii opyt Rossii*. (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1999).

³¹ Weiner, *Making Sense of War*.

³² Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); There has been one recent attempt to write an over-arching social history of life in the Red Army, but the resulting book was not particularly instructive and in my opinion its tone was often condescending to the subjects of study. See Catherine Merridale, *Ivan’s War: Life and Death in the Red Army 1939-1945* (New York: Metropolitan, 2006).

³³ Oleg Budnitsky, “The Intelligentsia Meets the Enemy: Educated Officers in Defeated Germany”, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 10,3 (Summer 2009), pp. 629-682; O.V. Budnitskii “Muzhchiny i zhenshchiny v Krasnoi Armii (1941-1945),” *Le Cahiers du Monde Russe*. 2011:2-3, pp. 405-422. He has also been instrumental in bringing to light and publishing several diaries.

³⁴ O’Brien, *The Things They Carried*.

³⁵ On the uses of material culture in general, see Leora Auslander, “Beyond Words,” *The American Historical Review*, 110.4 (2005).

³⁶ T. H. Breen, *Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2004); Auslander, *Cultural Revolutions*; Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic* (New York: Knopf, 2003); Adam Rome, *Bulldozer in the Countryside* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1991).

underwear, pottery and various detritus can tell us about the societies that used them.³⁷ While it is not surprising that historians working in the country most associated with markets and liberalism should investigate the role of commodities in historical processes, it is strange that among historians of the Soviet Union, where markets were limited, scarcity a norm and distribution of goods depended largely on state-conferred status, that material culture itself has received little attention.³⁸

This work also draws on a number of texts outside of history, particularly anthropology and sociology.³⁹ In particular the findings of post-Socialist anthropological investigations, concerned with the deconstruction of all things Soviet, in order to see what they can tell us about the construction and reconstruction of the Soviet Union during the war.⁴⁰

This dissertation is based on a variety of officially and personally produced sources. Officially produced documents, such as the minutes of meetings from the Political Department of the Red Army, reports from the front, orders, speeches, newspapers, and army journals and manuals provide information about the production and use of objects as well as rhetoric surrounding them. Manuals in particular provide a wealth of information on the use of items, their purpose and the kinds of communities built around them.⁴¹ Personal sources such as memoirs, fiction written by veterans, letters, diaries and interviews, especially when used in combination with reports and corrective orders, provide valuable information about how rhetoric played out in everyday situations and how soldiers understood and interpreted events, whether in concert or contradiction to the official version. Interviews and diaries, whether published or in archives, are particularly elucidating. Diaries, which were very dangerous and difficult to keep under conditions at the front – are full of surprises, providing us with a wealth of personal reflections on the war and references to the material culture of soldiers. The interviews that I draw upon

³⁷ James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archeology of Early American Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996); Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992); Kathleen M. Brown, *Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

³⁸ Two notable exceptions of course would be Jukka Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Berg, 2003) and V.V. Lapin, *Peterburg. Zapakhi i zvuki* (St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii dom, 2007).. Anthropologists of Post-Socialism have utilized material objects in their investigations, but not in regard to this period.

³⁹ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process. Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (New York: Urizen Books, 1978); Marcel Mauss, *Techniques, Technology and Civilization* (New York: Durkheim Press/Berghahn Books, 2006); Appadurai, Arjun. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods* (Basic Books: New York, 1979); Nicholas J. Saunders, *Trench Art: Materialities and Memories of War* (Berg: New York/Oxford, 2003). I make note of the relevant theoretical texts on a chapter by chapter basis, but would like to single out Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *Distinction*, Zygmunt Bauman's conception of modernity, Norbert Elias' *Civilizing Process* and Marcel Mauss's guide to ethnography as key to this project.

⁴⁰ E.g. Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Olga Shevchenko, *Crisis and Everyday Life in Postsocialist Moscow* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 2009); Sergei Oushakine, *Patriotism of Despair: Nation, War, and Loss in Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

⁴¹ It would have been impossible to write about weapons and in particular trenches without referencing the necessary manuals.

include some of the work of *Ia pomniu*, an oral history website centered in Russia and Israel, but are more heavily weighted in the recently opened fond 2 of the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Russian History. This collection houses the Commission on the History of the Great Patriotic War, popularly known as the Mints Commission (as I will refer to it throughout the text), after the academic who headed it. This wide-ranging interview project took place during and immediately after the war. Many of the interviews took place on the battlefield, just after or even in between battles. There is a surprising lack of self censorship in these texts. The interviewees often speak in a Stalinist idiom, but describe events before they have been woven into a foundational myth. As a result, they provide details that would later be written out of the narrative of the war (e.g. the killing of prisoners, desertion, fear and the special problems faced by women soldiers). One reason for this wealth of sources is of course because the war was clearly exceptional, understood as a great historical event of unprecedented magnitude, inspiring millions of people who otherwise saw themselves as ordinary to chronicle what they had witnessed.⁴²

I have taken these texts and read them with attention to how soldiers and the state describe the army's material culture and everyday life – how they used things, what they spoke of with affection, what they cursed and how soldiers used, made or destroyed things together. I have paid special attention to the plight of “non-Russians” and women in the army, as both of these categories were outsiders to this institution whose experiences can sometimes be seen as a distillation of the issues faced by all soldiers. Throughout this work, the variability of experience is highlighted; being a Red Army soldier in 1941 was a fundamentally different experience than serving in 1944; the competence of one's commander and which front one ended up on could lead to vastly different fates.

In crafting this narrative, I have made it a point to give roughly equal billing to the ethnographic and argumentative. The details of every day life are described with great attention detail throughout this text as something worth recording in and of itself. It is in everyday life that politics are worked out, something the Soviet state became increasingly aware of as the war continued. It became obvious that keeping soldiers reasonably comfortable in their trenches, well fed, well armed and more or less lice free were all necessary to achieve victory. Given that service in the army was the experience of so many people, knowing the details of daily life is also useful in order to understand what Soviet people had lived through and how they came to see the world after the war.

This work is organized thematically in roughly the order a soldier might be expected to encounter various aspects of service and material objects associated with them. Every chapter more or less covers the period 1941-1945. Each chapter is organized around a group of related objects (e.g. weapons, uniforms), which form the lens through which the experience of the war is examined. Some chapters tell a story of change over time that is directly linked to the overall arc of the war, others concentrate more on transformations that could be experienced by individuals or groups of soldiers whether they entered the army in 1941 or 1945, while most are in between these two poles.⁴³ The dissertation is divided into three sections, and each chapter fulfills multiple functions.

⁴² Jochen Hellbeck, "Galaxy of Black Stars: the Power of Soviet Biography," *American Historical Review* 2009:3, pp. 620-621.

⁴³ The repetition of the arc of the war, alongside the distinctly different themes of every chapter means that each chapter could be taken separately by readers interested only in one or another aspect of this experience

The first section focuses on the body and bodily processes, engaging the body itself, the soldier's "second skin" –the uniform– and what soldiers ate. Chapter 1 "The Soldier's Body" does three things. First, it uses soldiers' bodies to discuss the diversity of cadres entering the Red Army, the particular challenges this presented to both the state and soldiers and the demography of the Soviet Union on the eve of the war. Second, it argues that soldiers' bodies became state property via a harsh disciplinary regime, while also exploring how soldiers subverted this claim on their persons via desertion or self-mutilation. Third, it provides a brief "life cycle" of soldiers in service, from induction through training to the front and eventual wounding into the system of hospitals and back again. This chapter leaves the soldier naked and shivering before the state.

Chapter 2 "A Personal Banner: Life in Red Army Uniforms" dresses the soldier. This chapter provides an ethnography of soldiers' clothing, rich in folklore, and explores the meaning of the uniform's iconography. It shows how soldiers' biographies and the state's self-presentation were changed by the awarding and wearing of medals alongside the introduction of uniforms with a distinctly Russian-Imperial flair, one of the most noticeable and significant changes to take place during the war. It also discusses how the soldier's uniform was a readable text with information about wounds, rank, specialization, and feats that helped redefine his or her biography and relationship to the State.

Chapter 3 "The State's Pot and the Soldier's Spoon" focuses on provisioning in the Red Army, tracing how soldiers were fed, the ways the state positioned itself as provider, the terminology used to describe rations and the logic of who deserved more or less food, including luxury items. Failures forced soldiers to improvise and the state to react or lose legitimacy, ultimately improving the system of provisioning. This chapter has a heavily ethnographic component and poses the sticky question of what belongs to whom in the army.

The second section of this dissertation is dedicated to violence. Put bluntly, Chapter 4 is about not getting killed, while Chapter 5 is about killing. Both focus on how the state used evidence of what the Germans had done to incite hatred and help remove the taboo of killing. Chapter 4 "Cities of Earth, Cities of Rubble: The Spade and Red Army Landscaping" foregrounds the vulnerability of soldiers on the modern battlefield in which all features of the landscape served as orienteers to direct fire or topography that granted some measure of protection, which led to constant labor in order to survive. It takes us through the destroyed landscape of war and the cities of earth that soldiers built to survive, crafting a semi-urban space using standard issue spades and attempting to recreate aspects of civilian life. Finally, this chapter discusses the intimacy among the living, forced into close association in the trenches, and how the dead became part of the landscape.

Chapter 5 "A Weapon is your honor and conscience': Killing in the Red Army" tells the story of how Red Army soldiers learned to kill. This chapter begins with the problem of how the State motivated under-trained soldiers to pull the trigger, as well as how the State dealt with issues of a lack of professional cadres and modern weaponry. It explores the arsenal of the Red Army, treating weapons as tools for specific tasks and highlighting the soldiers' symbiotic relationship with weaponry. The chapter concludes with a discussion of

(e.g. a student of the history of fashion could read Chapter 2 by itself, those interested in urbanism could just read Chapter 4), but I believe that the sum of the chapters read together is greater than the whole.

social differentiation among different branches of service alongside a brief examination of changing tactics as the army became a professional fighting force.

Section 3 focuses on possessions, bringing the theme of property to the fore by examining the question of whether people or the state owns things. Chapter 6 “Trophies of War: The Red Army Confronts an Alien World of Goods” focuses on all manner of trophies, from POWs themselves to objects looted from houses in Berlin and East Prussia. This chapter argues that a Soviet understanding of jurisprudence and a particular perception of the bourgeois world combined with a desire for vengeance to both justify looting and frame Soviet understandings of the Third Reich. Key to this chapter is the shift from the state claiming total control over everything on the battlefield to encouraging soldiers to loot the enemy by allowing them to send parcels home.

This is the story of personal and political transformation through objects. These objects were both standard and personal, and carriers of meaning that was both prescribed by the state and inscribed by soldiers. One such object was the simple spoon carried by a soldier during the Battle of Moscow. While recovering from wounds in a hospital near Moscow in the Fall of 1941, Starshina Nikolai Pavlovich Donia had a rare opportunity to see his wife. He gave her a spoon into which he had carved “In memory of the days: 1.1.38; 22.5.39; 10.7.41; 17.8.41; 19.10.41; 5.11.41.” Each day was a milestone in their life together – their wedding day, the birthdays of their son and daughter, the day he was drafted and the day of their meeting in the hospital. A month later Donia would die in combat, one of over 8.5 million Red Army soldiers to perish in the war.⁴⁴ That he gave her a spoon – one of the very few objects that Red Army soldiers owned and one of the most intimate items a soldier had, is telling. It was indeed during moments of eating that soldiers took stock of their situation and realized that they were alive. The spoon would remain as a reliquary in his family’s house, an intimate connection with a man that his children barely knew. This spoon was one of millions of objects that did not merely bear silent witness to the war, but made the waging of war possible.

⁴⁴ P.R. Kotenok, et al., *Poslednie pis'ma s fronta. 1941. T. 1* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1991) p. 336.

Chapter 1

The Soldier's Body

Introduction

In 1943 Lieutenant Mikhail Loginov walked the ranks of his platoon and was struck by the sight of such diverse men in line:

There are thirty-seven men under my command. They are all dressed in the same uniform. To the outside observer they all look the same, but these are different people. Even from afar you can recognize each one by his gait. They wear their helmets, carry their pack and rifle each in their own way. Each has his own personality. Every soldier is a particular, separate world, and every one deserves respect.⁴⁵

His sergeant was a middle aged Russian veterinary assistant, his corporal an Uzbek textile worker, his machine gunner a giant man who had been a collective farm mid-level manager. His other soldiers included a Moscow worker, a boy who graduated high school on the eve of the war and two shepherds – a Ukrainian and an aged Uzbek. This last soldier, the Uzbek shepherd Dzhuma, caught Loginov's attention, as he was his worst soldier (a sectarian pacifist) and it seemed that he had travelled the longest distance, both literally and figuratively, to be in the army. Loginov imagined the naked, shaken Dzhuma standing before a medical commission, shamed by the presence of a woman, and then stepping onto a train (likely the first he had ridden) that would take him and other recruits to central Russia. Dzhuma's body and fate had ceased to belong to him. Loginov imagined the shepherd's experience in terms that could describe peasants from any remote region:

Other than the bazaar and the *kolkhoz* fields, he had never seen anything, never been anywhere. He never thought that he could live life any other way. And suddenly his quiet life was ruptured. A draft notice called Dzhuma to the military commission... he saw through the window his beloved mountain and the tiny *kishlaki* [settlements] at its feet. There he knew every footpath. And what will happen now?⁴⁶

Dzhuma and his comrades – men and women, urban workers, students, farmers, and shepherds – would all become indistinguishable to outside observers, cogs in a giant military machine. Their bodies would become state property, subject to a new disciplinary regime and way of life as numbered, largely interchangeable components in the Red Army.

The state laid claim to the bodies of these men and women, handing them over to the commanders who had been deputized to use these human resources. Both the state and its deputies were forced to reckon not only with the physical bodies of soldiers, but also with the minds or even souls that animated them. The army drafted a document, the *Red Army Booklet*, which turned these diverse citizens into readable mechanisms of a military machine. Past experiences could be negated or key to the fate of a soldier, as whole ethnicities were banned from the service and formerly déclassé elements entered the ranks. Skills such as being a cook, tailor or poet could allow one to escape the firing line or be ignored completely. This was a military machine, but like all armies, one made of human beings.

⁴⁵ Mikhail Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte* (Kazan': Tatknigizdat', 1984), p. 9.

⁴⁶ Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, pp. 6-7.

“Military Organisms [*voiskovye organizmy*]” and Machines

The diversity observed by Loginov was in part by design, but much more the result of massive losses in the first months of the war. The casualties suffered by the army in 1941 and 1942 were catastrophic – from June 22 through December 31, 1941 3,137,673 were killed, missing or captured.⁴⁷ Between January 1st 1942 and January 1st 1943, 11,245,740 men and women were sent to the front, over 4 million of whom had recovered from wounds and returned to the ranks. By January 1st 1943, the army had suffered 5,639,782 permanent losses (killed, missing, POWs or those who died in non-combat situations), 7,543,004 recoverable casualties, 2 million men went undrafted on enemy territory and there were 10,000,942 people in the ranks of the army. In that year alone the average Rifle Division had gone through 234% of its combatants (*boevoi sostav*). It was estimated that there were only 3.7 million men left to be drafted into the army.⁴⁸ By war’s end, 11,273,026 were permanently lost and 34,476,700 had been drafted (on average there were about 11,000,000 men in uniform every year, about half of which were serving in the active army at any one time).⁴⁹ In the active army at the front, there was an average of 5,778,500 men in ranks during any one month.⁵⁰ The army had gone through 488% of its average monthly strength from 1941-1945.⁵¹ In other words, the entire army had been rebuilt five times.

Staffing officers occasionally referred to units as “military organisms”, but perhaps Stalin’s famous line about soldiers as “the little cogs of history” is more accurate.⁵² An organism that loses its heart dies. Most living things can never fully recover from the loss of a limb, while a machine can have its motor, tracks or turret replaced often without noticeable change. A military unit, when provided with either well-trained troops or given time to train them, could recover from massive losses in much the same way as a machine. However, unlike the components of a machine, soldiers are living, breathing organisms, all of whom had longer and more complicated histories than a lathed or stamped piece of metal. These details could have an effect on when the state drafted and how it used what were supposed to become interchangeable parts in the machinery of war.

Most military units came off of the battlefield as a shadow of their former selves after suffering heavy losses in personnel and equipment.⁵³ With such dramatic turnover rates, the Red Army was concerned primarily with providing a stable foundation for a unit via a “*kostiak*,” or backbone of unchanging commanders and rear-area personnel who kept alive a unit’s traditions. As Mikhail Kalinin told agitators, “a regiment or division can reconstitute itself after any battle as long as their backbone, embodying in itself the highly

⁴⁷ G.F. Krivosheev, ed. *Grif sekretnosti sniat: Poteri Vooruzhenykh Sil SSSR v voynakh, boevykh deistviakh i voennykh konfliktakh: Statisticheskoe izdaniie* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1993), p. 143.

⁴⁸ APRF f. 3, op. 50, d. 270, ll. 146-156, in Sergei Kudriashov, red. *Voyna: 1941-1945. Vestnik Arkhiva Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii*. (Moscow: Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 2010), pp. 216-221.

⁴⁹ Krivosheev, *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, pp. 144, 139.

⁵⁰ Krivosheev, *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, p. 153.

⁵¹ Krivosheev, *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, p. 154

⁵² See the famous toast Stalin gave in June of 1945, praising the “little screws” of history. Nikolai Tikhonov, “O prostykh sovetskikh liudakh,” *Krasnarmeets*, 1945:14, p.1.

⁵³ APRF f. 3, op. 50, d. 270, ll. 146-156, in Sergei Kudriashov, red. *Voyna: 1941-1945*, p. 217: most divisions were reduced to 2,500 soldiers or less when they brought to the rear for reformation in 1942. That is out of a of a projected strength of over 10,000. RGASPI f. 644, op. 1, d. 48, l. 25.

developed battle traditions of the unit, has survived.”⁵⁴ Some of those making up the battle traditions were ghosts, deceased men and women who were permanently added to the roles of a unit for an extreme act of bravery, with their names called at reveille and inspection.⁵⁵ The surviving officers and veteran soldiers were to teach new, often undertrained soldiers how to fight, while the feats of the current and previous members of a unit were to serve as inspiration and create a sense of continuity and responsibility.⁵⁶ That many of the heroes were mentioned posthumously could have a disquieting effect on soldiers.

From the standpoint of frontline soldiers, this process could be perceived as a sort of “natural selection” of rear-area personnel – people who found relatively safe positions who were sending frontline soldiers to their death.⁵⁷ As a rule, units were chronically understrength; it was not uncommon for a platoon, which would normally have 30-40 soldiers, to have 10-12 soldiers or even 5, and not unheard of for a battalion, which should number over 700, to have only a few dozen men in the ranks.⁵⁸ The dramatic changes in the number of soldiers in any given unit was typical throughout the war, and the need to constantly replenish the ranks of a unit, even one directly at the front, led to Red Army units becoming very dynamic social bodies.

The circulation of cadres in the Red Army created a different corporate culture than in other armies. The career of front-line soldiers tended to be very short in any army during the Second World War. Mechanized combat ensured that people directly at the front would be killed or wounded in a short period of time. Aleksandr Lesin recalled in his diary how one officer criticized a soldier: “You really think that you are a good soldier? A good soldier doesn’t spend a long time in a company: he either gets wounded, or – he softened – or he dies heroically.”⁵⁹ While short lifespans at the front were not specific to the Red Army, the experience of wounded Red Army soldiers was very different from those of other armies.

⁵⁴ I. Mints, “O traditsiakh Krasnoi armii,” *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1944:13, 6-18; 7. The “kostiak” of one elite unit towards the war’s end was 260 men left of the original 18,000. Nauchnyi arkhiv Instituta Rossiiskoi istorii Akademii nauk Rossiiskoi Federatsii [NA IRI RAN] f. 2 r. 1 op. 230, d. 6 l. 10b. See also F. Gorokhov, “Komandir – dusha boevoi spaiki i sokhraneniia boevykh traditsii chasti,” *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1943:3-4, pp. 33-39; N. Markovich, “Ofitserstvo – kostiak armii,” *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1943:9-10, pp. 9-16; K. Kulik, “Vospitaniie na boevykh traditsiakh,” *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1943:15, pp. 14-22.

⁵⁵ Kulik, “Vospitaniie na boevykh traditsiakh,” p. 17.

⁵⁶ Grigorii Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, p. 141.

⁵⁷ N.N. Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Gos. Ermitazha, 2008), pp. 39, 47-48, 99. Nikulin was certain that those who found these positions were themselves corrupt, capable of bending to the needs of an inhuman system.

⁵⁸ NA IRI RAN f. 2 r. III op. 5 d. 16 l. 7; Tat'iana Reutova, *Gvardeets. Uchenyi. Diplomat. Frotnovye dnevniki akademika Reutova* (Moscow: Zvonitsa-MG, 2011), p. 98; N.F. Belov, *Frontovoi dnevnik N.F. Belova 1941-1944 gg.*, entry from 15.07.42, <http://www.booksite.ru/fulltext/vol/ogd/atwo/19.htm#27> (last consulted 07 May 2015); A.I. Yerëmenko, *Dnevniki, zapiski, vospominaniia* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2013), p. 298.

⁵⁹ Aleksandr Lesin, *Byla voina: Kniga-dnevnik* (Simferopol': Tavriia, 1990), p. 241. Goldbraikht, who commanded a platoon and later a penal company, mentioned that he held a record for longevity at the front (several months). Efim Abelevich Gol'braikh. Interview by Grigorii Koifman. Otdel “Pekhotentsy,” www.itremember.ru. <http://www.iremember.ru/pekhotintsi/golbraykh-efim-abelevich/stranitsa-3.html> (12 December 2011).

In the US Army or Wehrmacht, soldiers would generally be sent back to the units they had previously fought with, but Red Army soldiers were usually sent first to training units then to marching companies to be assigned to new units. As Valentina Chudakova remembered: “You’re not a specialist. You’ll go where they send you. Does it really matter where they send you?” No, its not all the same, not at all the same!... Frontoviks in the hospital say “We want to go home!”⁶⁰ Lightly wounded soldiers would go to the Medical Sanitary Battalion within their own unit, but a more serious wound would send one to an evacuation hospital farther to the rear, and only those with specializations such as translators would stand a good chance of returning.⁶¹ Soldiers from elite Guards Units and cadets were supposed to be returned to their own units after hospital, but practice showed that this was not always the case.⁶² Even on a relatively static front, one was likely to move around⁶³ and some soldiers forged documents or even deserted from other units to return “home”.⁶⁴

This circulation of cadres meant that soldiers were constantly in flux, much like labor at Soviet construction sites. Soldiers would be forced to establish relationships every time they found themselves in a new unit. Letters of commendation, criticism or even identity papers could be lost as they disappeared into the army’s bureaucratic apparatus. Some took advantage of this situation to reinvent themselves, claiming rank and awards that the state had not given them.⁶⁵ A soldier’s military unit was also their address, so wounded soldiers moving around would often lose correspondences from loved ones. For many, going to the hospital was a loss of identity, often accompanied by the theft of personal property.⁶⁶ In a marching company and then a regular unit, among strangers, a soldier’s medals would be the first and often most important part of their biography presented to their new comrades and commanders (see Chapter 2 for more on this). Even

⁶⁰ Valentina Chudakova, *Ratnoe schastiie* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1980), p. 9; for those whose documents were destroyed, a bureaucratic nightmare awaited, see e.g. Evgenii D. Moniushko, *From Leningrad to Hungary: Notes of a Red Army Soldier, 1941-1946* trans. by Oleg Sheremet, edited by David M. Glantz (Frank Cass: London/New York, 2005), pp. 122-125.

⁶¹ Dunaevskaia, a translator, returned to the same unit every time she was wounded.

⁶² RGVA f. 4, op.126, d. 99, l. 341-342, in A. I. Barsukov, et. al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 i iunia 1941 g. —1942 g.: Dokumenty i materialy. T. 13 (2—2). Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia* (Moscow: TERRA, 1997), pp. 128-129.

⁶³ A.B. Priadekhin, “Frontovye dorogi,” *Veteran* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1977), pp. 16-32. The author moved to a new unit every time he was wounded in the blockaded city of Leningrad.

⁶⁴ Ivan Yakushin, *On the Roads of War*. Translated and edited by Bair Irincheev (South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword, 2005), p. 151. NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 226, d. 2, l. 13. The Deputy Commander of the 36th Guards Corps, General Maslov, described how his soldiers would desert from the hospital to go back to their own soldiers: “We had some scandals there. Soldiers, who were recuperating in the hospitals, to get them to serve in a different unit... He would without fail desert from there and run to away to his own unit. He arrives, announces: ‘I was in such-and-such unit, I have come to serve.’ You write the commander of that unit: don’t worry, and don’t look for him, don’t count him as a deserter, he is serving with us.”

⁶⁵ RGVA, f. 4, op.12, d. 105, l. 677, in A. I. Barsukov, et. al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 i iunia 1941 g. —1942 g.*, pp. 310-311.

⁶⁶ Irina Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kënigsberga: Dnevnik voennoi perevodchitsy (1942-1945)* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2010), p. 307.

as the army was attempting to foster unit pride via the “strengthening of combat traditions,” it was clear to soldiers that they were interchangeable parts in the army.⁶⁷

The soldier’s unit was supposed to serve as a surrogate family, with commanders serving as father figures to their subordinates and comrades being like siblings.⁶⁸ In practice this varied dramatically. One platoon commander lamented:

You become a different person – a platoon commander [vzvodnii]. It is bad when you stop seeing a living person and only see an unbuttoned collar. But under these conditions, with such a massive turnover in people, any other way is almost impossible.⁶⁹

Commanders often failed to learn the names of their subordinates and soldiers of their comrades.⁷⁰ Conversely, other soldiers, particularly in elite units, truly felt a sense of community, some even stating that after the war they spent time primarily with their frontline friends.⁷¹ As the war progressed, more and more units gained Guards status and more soldiers found a stable home.⁷²

The flow of cadres could lead to a certain amount of horse-trading, as soldiers who had recovered from wounds were mixed with new recruits either to be sent as reinforcements to a unit or to collection points (*sbornye punkty*), where specialists were selected by commanders for their units. Mansur Abdulin, a veteran of Stalingrad and Kursk, described the informal arrangements at play when sergeants chose men for their squads and weapons’ crews:

The fact of the matter is that homeboys [*zemliaki*] were allowed to serve in the same crew or squad – there was no argument about this. And I was lucky, because I am a Tatar, Siberian, Urals local, Central Asian and Muslim – all in one! All my comrades in arms were my homeboys, and I “got” them on “legal” grounds. Our guys always made fun of me: “Even a negro is Mansur’s countryman.”

This principle led old sergeants to listen carefully when the *Starshina* filled out the soldier’s *Red Army Booklet* in order to hear who they could claim as a “homeboy”. Abdulin described the joy of these meetings (which often involved scattered co-ethnics finding each other) leading to “such happiness! Noise! the Starshina gets mad: “Shut down your market fair [*Prekratit’ iarmaku!*]”⁷³ While some common past could help soldiers adapt to their new milieu, the military was unconcerned with and at times even hostile to, keeping “homeboys” together, particularly former prisoners or cadres from the Western borderlands and occupied territories.⁷⁴ The army as a whole wavered on whether units should be raised from one locale or purposefully mixed places and as a result the assortment of people coming into a unit was often random and unpredictable. Informal structures could soften

⁶⁷ Litvinov, “Vvod v boi novogo popolneniia”; RGVA, f. 4, op.11, d. 62, l. 310-311, in A. I. Barsukov, *et al.*, *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iunia 1941 g. —1942 g.*, p. 70. Whether a unit would be disbanded depended on the presence or absence of “combat traditions,” i.e. combat record, even if the personnel would be entirely new.

⁶⁸ M. Garussiko, S. Gliazer, “Moi polk – moia sem’ia,” *Bloknot agitatora Krasnoĭ Armii*, 1943:10, pp. 1, 5.

⁶⁹ Boris Komsĭii, “Dnevnik 1943–1945 gg.,” in *Arkhiv evreiskoi istorii*, vol. 6. (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2011), p. 59.

⁷⁰ E.g. Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 175. Genadii Tokarev, *Vesti dnevnik na fronte zapreshchalos’* (Novosibirsk, Svin’in i synov’ia, 2005); p. 185;

⁷¹ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. II, op. 28, d. 35, l. 8.

⁷² Anna Krylova has also pointed out that casualties became much lighter in the second half of the war. Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, p. 211.

⁷³ Mansur Abdulin, *Iz vospominanii soldata. Rasskazy* (St. Petersburg.: Del’fa R.A., 1995), pp. 44-46.

⁷⁴ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 116, l. 58.

the blow of entering a massive, impersonal institution, as people sought out any sort of common ground with their comrades in arms. It was, after all, with these strangers that one would face the dangers of combat.

Soldier's Bodies as Currency

Harsh discipline and the expectation of total commitment to the cause were in no way exclusive to the Red Army, and severity of discipline alongside chaos in its ranks were variations on a universal theme. In any army, generals gamble with their soldiers' lives and accept losses as inevitable. In training Red Army soldiers were to "be prepared for self-sacrifice," and propaganda frequently stipulated that a soldier's duty was "To kill the enemy and stay alive yourself, and if you die, than to sell your life at a high price."⁷⁵ The soldier's body really did become a form of currency with which commanders gambled, trying to buy or maintain territory, destroy or protect machinery and other resources.⁷⁶ Some soldiers expressed bitterness about this, making statements such as "Soldiers have always been manure,"⁷⁷ while others accepted high casualties as an inevitability:

There is no other way. Only sacrifices here at the front can bring us peace. These sacrifices should be sacrificed for the sake of the happiness of our people. The happiness of the next generation, our children, our wives and mothers, our fathers, brothers and sisters. That's the only way. There is not and cannot be any other solution.⁷⁸

Soldiers were just another type of resource for military planners. Losses were tallied in such a way that mortars, tanks, machine guns and men were simply categories of resources that the enemy had lost or taken.⁷⁹ Soldiers were given numbers and regarded as almost entirely interchangeable.⁸⁰ Gigorii Baklanov explored in his autobiographical fiction the tension between the army's commodification of the soldier's body and the family ties of the individual inhabiting that uniform:

...even in advance, before the operation has begun, it is known – approximately of course, not down to the exact number, – how many will be killed, how many sent to the hospital and how many of those will return to the ranks. And I am part of this, like any other unit, but me and no one else. Lt. Motovilov, a graduate of some year of the Second Leningrad Artillery School, can be replaced by another graduate of that school, and that won't be a problem. But to you, mother, I am irreplaceable.⁸¹

Despite the need to plan and use people as a resource, people presented a particular set of problems – they had volition, personalities and families that would mourn them (and require pensions).

Soldiers became the property of the state, and their immediate superiors were tasked with both keeping track of them and properly exploiting them, receiving almost

⁷⁵ Programmy uskorennoi boevoi podgotovki strelkovykh podrazdelenii (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1941), p. 5; "Zakony sovetskoi gvardii," *Bloknot agitatora Krasnoi Armii*: 1942:8, pp. 21-22.

⁷⁶ See Sella for a discussion of this. Amnon Sella, *The Value of Life in Soviet Warfare* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 31. See also Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 76.

⁷⁷ Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, p. 100.

⁷⁸ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 2, d. 3, ll. 28ob.-29.

⁷⁹ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 230, d. 1, l. 12; See also Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 21.

⁸⁰ Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 92. The soldier was assigned a number in the Red Army Booklet, and also within his or her squad or crew. In order to quickly assess if everyone was present, commanders would count soldiers off and have them recite their number.

⁸¹ Grigorii Baklanov, "Piad zemli," *Voennye povesti* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1981), p. 341.

total control over their subordinates' bodies. A good commander was supposed to be able to turn anyone into a soldier, a skill that would be tested as the cadres comprising the army came to encompass groups previously ignored or even considered "un-Soviet."

The Draftee's Body

After begging to be allowed to join the army several times, Grigorii Baklanov finally found an officer who was willing to accept him, stating: "A person is such material that you can sculpt anything from him. All the more so if it is what he himself wants."⁸² The bodies of new recruits were raw material to the state and army, but the Red Army was confronted with a need for warm bodies that shifted its priorities and forced it to accept a much wider range of cadres. The state wanted either to negate or utilize prior identities and could not ignore the prewar experience that was often imprinted on the soldiers' bodies and recorded in their personal documents.

Mass, conscription-based armies cannot help but reflect the societies from which they are drawn, and the Red Army was unusually expansive in the categories it accepted. According to the 1939 Census, roughly 170,000,000 people lived in the USSR. Peasants outnumbered urbanites about 2 to 1.⁸³ Russians were the largest single ethnic group, comprising almost 60% of the population (99.5M people), followed by Ukrainians (almost 16.5% and about 28M people) and Byelorussians (a little over 5M and just over 3%). Other major ethnic groups included Uzbeks (4.8M, almost 3%), Tatars (4.3M, a little over 2.5%), Kazakhs (3.1M, 1.8%), Jews (3M, 1.78%), Azeris (2.3M, 1.3%), Georgians (2.2M, 1.3%), Armenians (2.1M, 1.3%).⁸⁴ More than 50 officially recognized languages were spoken in the Soviet Union.⁸⁵ There were 37 million men aged 20-39 (the usual age of mobilized soldiers).⁸⁶ 90% of men were literate (this could vary dramatically by ethnic group and age), although only around 1,092,221 people had a higher education and 13,272,968 had received a full secondary education.⁸⁷ These figures shifted slightly with the annexation of Bessarabia and the Baltic Republics on the eve of the war, but the Slavic core continued to be the basis of the military.

The ideal soldier of the RKKa was young, well trained, highly literate, Russian, Ukrainian or Byelorussian and a member of the Communist Party or Komsomol. By the war's second year the number of these cadres fell far short of demand.⁸⁸ The decimation of the regular army in 1941, alongside the grueling realities of mechanized warfare meant that the Soviet state had to significantly widen its scope of potential cadres. Some of the cadre policy was an acceleration of prewar trends, while others were wholly unpredictable.

⁸² Grigorii Baklanov, *Zhizn', podarenaia dvazhdy* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1999), p. 40. See also Foucault, using identical language, on the modern concept of being able to turn anyone into a soldier. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York; Pantheon, 1977), p. 135.

⁸³ Iu. A. Poliakov, ed., *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' nasileniia 1939 goda: Osnovnye itogi* (Moscow: Nauka, 1992), p. 20; 56,125,139 Urban 114,431,954 rural.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57-58.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁸⁸ APRF f. 2, op. 50, d. 266, ll. 27-34, in Kudriashov, *Voina*, p. 124. Although official planning still attempted to ensure 20-30% of all soldiers in units were Komosomol or Party members and 25% were veterans returning from hospitals.

The prewar categorization of soldiers' bodies included three basic categories: suitable for combat positions, suitable for non-combat tasks, unsuitable as well as a note on whether these men had received training or not. Exemptions existed for specialists and men could receive a deferment (*otsrochka*) for study, illness or work.⁸⁹ Accounting for the war saw a variety of new categories added. Sex, age, criminal convictions and nationality all became important categories.

Wide swaths of the population that had been excluded from the honor of military service before the war became included as the war dragged on. "Former people" or *déclassé* elements left over from the old regime found their way into the army, including those who had served in the White Army.⁹⁰ Criminals, with the exception of bandits or "anti-Soviet" prisoners, i.e. political prisoners, also became subject to the draft, freed from their sentences and immediately sent to the front.⁹¹ In 1943 there was a further reexamination of cadres, as more petty criminals and even the children of political criminals were taken into account.⁹² Prominent commanders, including General Rokossovskii, had been imprisoned before the war. The growing numbers of criminals in the army and later veterans in the Gulag, would impact Soviet culture in significant ways. The need to fill the ranks was allowing people a chance to escape from their pasts.⁹³

Prisoners of war, who were officially considered traitors, factored into the army's plans as early as the Winter of 1941, when significant numbers were recaptured. 939,700 soldiers who had been POWs or missing were called back into the ranks of the RKKA between 1942-1945.⁹⁴ All soldiers escaping encirclement or liberated from POW camps were subjected to filtration in special camps from December of 1941 on.⁹⁵ As the war dragged on and units needed men more quickly, the right to screen POWs and *okruzhentsy* was given to front commanders to speed up the process.⁹⁶ This could be a harrowing experience, as those who had just undergone life in POW camps (in which a shocking number of people starved to death⁹⁷) were submitted to interrogations similar to those of prisoners. Food was often poor, conditions crowded and lice rampant. However, it seems that these operations were concerned with actually finding spies and collaborators, as well as supplying the army with as many soldiers as possible. This is implied by the estimates of

⁸⁹ See e.g. APRF f. 3, op. 50, d. 266, ll. 110-111, in Kudriashov, *Voina*, p. 144. (An order ending many deferments.)

⁹⁰ Lev Slezkin, *Do voini i na voine* (Moscow: Parad, 2009), pp. 420-421; David Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnoe otnosheniie, 1995), pp. 206-210.

⁹¹ RGVA f. 4, op. 12, d. 107, ll. 651-653, in A. I. Barsukov, et. al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943-1945gg.: Dokumenty i materialy. T. 13 (2—3). Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia*, (Moscow: TERRA, 1997), pp. 109-111. The only category of political/anti-soviet allowed to be drafted were those who refused to testify against other (*nedonositel'stvo*).

⁹² APRF f. 3, op. 50, d. 272, ll. 83-86, 91-95, in Kudriashov, *Voina*, p. 306.

⁹³ Amir Weiner has also pointed this out. See Amir Weiner, "Something to Die For, A Lot to Kill For," in George Kassimeris, *The Barbarization of Warfare* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 109-110.

⁹⁴ Krivosheev, *Grif sekretnosit sniat*, p. 129.

⁹⁵ APRF f. 3, op. 50, d. 265, ll. 112-112ob, in Kudriashov, *Voina*, p. 99-100; These soldiers were sometimes referred to as "trophy soldiers". Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, p. 70.

⁹⁶ See e.g. APRF f. 3, op. 50, d. 270, l. 106, in Kudriashov, *Voina*, pp. 214-215.

⁹⁷ Nicholas Ganson, "Food Supply, Rationing and Living Standards" in David R. Stone, ed. *The Soviet Union at War, 1941-1945*. (Pen & Sword: Barnsley, UK, 2010), p. 75, Before a shift in policy in February 1942, 2.8 million Soviet POWs died in German captivity, and only 400,000 of those left alive were capable of working. By the end of the war 57.5% of all Soviet POWs had died.

numbers of soldiers to come out of filtration that were common in the reports of Red Army officers in charge of staffing and some reports by soldiers who went through the process.⁹⁸

POW's and petty criminals were not the only group invited back into the fold. The Soviet Union remained an overwhelmingly rural place. Peasants had been viewed with distrust and forced onto collective farms a decade before the war and the traumatic memories of Collectivization were still fresh. The "kulaks", a category that crystalized the state's suspicion and enmity towards the peasantry as a whole, were not allowed to serve in the army in 1941.⁹⁹ These were people from whom the state had taken all property and most civil rights, so the state's reticence in arming them is understandable. However, by May of 1942, "dekulakized" peasants became subject to the draft, and their family members were to be freed from the restrictions that had forced them to live in special settlements in some of the least desirable areas of the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁰ The reception that this category of soldiers received was not always cordial, as one political officer recalled:

So you have a grudge against Soviet power? I see that you are resentful... Once I broke a window with a slingshot. My father hit me with a stirrup and my mother too. Do you think I held a grudge? Who are you angry at – the Motherland?¹⁰¹

While this introduction was extremely condescending to people who had suffered materially and morally at the hands of the state, the invocation of the Motherland was significant and carried an increasing weight as the war progressed.

The identification of Soviet power and Russian patriotic traditions was one of the most significant shifts of the prewar period that had intensified in the war's first months. The very name of the war harkened back to the era of Napoleon. As the war continued, the state took major efforts to identify itself with traditional Russian ways in an attempt to secure the loyalty of soldiers. Restrictions against religious practices were significantly loosened. While religion had not been a category of the census, the state was confronted by the fact that huge numbers of people were believers. Churches and mosques were reopened during the war, the governing bodies of religious institutions reconstituted and religious leaders recruited to help propagandize the war. The Holy Synod and Congress of Muslims (*S'ezd musul'manov*) wrote appeals to soldiers reminding them that faithfulness to their country was one of the duties of a true believer and condemning the idea of

⁹⁸ Gabriel Temkin, *My Just War: The Memoir of a Jewish Red Army Soldier in World War II* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio, 1998), pp. 87-90; APRF f. 2, op. 50, d. 266, ll. 27-34, in Kudriashov, *Voina*, p. 126, APRF f. 3, op. 50, d. 270, ll. 146-156, in *Ibid.*, p. 218, APRF f. 3, op. 50, d. 272, ll. 83-86, 91-95, in *Ibid.*, p. 306.. The latter includes the reexamination of cadres left in these filtration camps after being rejected. Of over 46,000 soldiers and civilians held by NKVD of the South-West Front between November 20, 1942 and January 20, 1943, only 1,946 were "unmasked" as spies, traitors, deserters and marauders. Since 31, 563 of these people were soldiers filtered after escaping encirclement or being liberated from German captivity, the vast majority were sent back to serve in the ranks of the Red Army. TsAMO f. 232, op. 590, d. 147, ll. 32-39, in A.M. Sokolov et al. *Preliudiia Kurskoi bitvy: Dokumenty i materialy 6 dekabria 1942 g.-25 apreliia 1943 g. T. 15 (4-3) Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia* (Moscow: TERRA, 1997), pp. 334-338

⁹⁹ Defined by their supposed wealth and backwardness, this catchall term could be deployed against anyone who local officials perceived as dangerous or resisting collectivization. Initially heavily taxed, this category of people was eventually repressed, with some being executed but most being sent to resettlement in remote regions of the USSR.

¹⁰⁰ See Lynne Viola, *The Unknown Gulag: The Lost World of Stalin's Special Settlements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 170.

¹⁰¹ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'noi i politicheskoi istorii [RGASPI] f. 88, op. 1, d. 953, l. 6.

conscientious objection based on faith.¹⁰² While there were many believers in the ranks, outward expressions of faith were sometimes condemned as signs of backwardness or simply ignored, and the rituals of the Red Army included no references to religion.¹⁰³ Some soldiers, such as Old Believers from Siberia or Orthodox Jews from the Baltics had their identities challenged in fundamental ways as their beards were shorn to meet army regulations.¹⁰⁴

The reification of tradition and Motherland could be used to define groups as alien and unusable. At the beginning of the war, Germans, Finns and other peoples belonging to ethnic groups whose countries of ethnic origin were at war with the Soviet Union (estimated at 250,000 men in 1942) were exempted from service in the active army and sent to the labor army, a much worse-supplied organization that performed menial labor. As the Wehrmacht occupied large portions of the Soviet Union, the categories of those who would not be accepted into the ranks expanded and several “traitor nations” emerged.¹⁰⁵ Ethnic groups that had been perceived as collaborators (e.g. Crimean Tatars, Chechens and Kalmyks) were deported in mass from their homelands, and soldiers from these nationalities were taken from the ranks to join their co-nationals in exile. But even before the emergence of “traitor nations”, nationality was a complicated subject in the army as the state negotiated who was alien.

The Great Patriotic War was the first major conflict in which large numbers of “non-Russians” served in the army. The Russian language became a mandatory subject in schools throughout the Soviet Union only in 1938 and millions of soldiers had little to no knowledge of the language of command. Before the war, men drafted from non-Russian regions would have months to integrate into the army or serve in special territorial units. However, territorial units were officially abandoned on the eve of the war, only to be revived again in 1941-1942, largely as a stop gap measure. Even so, the lack of experience, training and supplies led many of these units to disaster at the front. In 1942, some staffers initially refused to use cadres from the Caucasus or Central Asia. Then an array of extraordinary events forced the army to recognize these cadres as needing special attention, and in internal memos circulating among staffing officers, “non-Russians” and more specifically “potential inductees from Central Asia and the Caucasus” appeared as a new category.¹⁰⁶ Some commanders were so frustrated with these alien cadres that they eagerly awaited the heavy casualties that they hoped would lead to a new batch of Slavic soldiers.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² E.g. RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 188, ll. 22-30, 31, 46-49. «So then, does the Commandment “Thou shall not kill,” forbid the use of weapons and killing in general? Did you know, brothers and sisters, that in the Bible the sword is mentioned 351 times, and if we follows this sword closely and look at all the places where it is mentioned, then God not only does not forbid the use of weapons, but in a number of cases even demands their use.”

¹⁰³ Amnon Sella, *The Value of Human Life in Soviet Warfare*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁴ Viktor Astaf'ev, *Prokliaty i ubity* (Moscow: TERRA, 1999), p. 19; Efraim Sevela, *Monia Tsatskes – znamenosets* (St. Petersburg: Kristall, 2000), p. 49

¹⁰⁵ Pavel Polian, *Ne po svoei voli* (Moscow, O.G.I. Memorial, 2001), <http://www.memo.ru/history/deport/> (16 December 2014).

¹⁰⁶ See e.g. APRF f. 2, op. 50, d. 266, l. 27-34, in Kudriashov, *Voyna*, p. 124; APRF f. 3, op. 50, d. 272, ll. 83-86, 91-95, in *Ibid.*, p. 306.

¹⁰⁷ RGASPI f.17, op. 125, d. 85, l. 64.; NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 28, d. 30, l. 10. After complaining that every night Kyrgyz and Kazakh reinforcements systematically went over to the enemy, the respondent confessed “These

The army eventually created a support network for these soldiers that included special propagandists and translators, political officers and a print network dedicated to providing “non-Russians” with information in their native languages. Some commanders and soldiers believed that it was better to keep co-ethnics together so that they could help each other, while others believed that they fought better when separated from one another.¹⁰⁸ Either way, people were supposed eventually to melt into an organization where nationality was muted, and soldiers were commonly referred to as “*slaviane*.”¹⁰⁹ Some “non-Russians” even adopted or were referred to by Russian names at the front.¹¹⁰ Experience showed that when properly trained, attended to and given time to learn the language of the army, these troops performed as well as others. By August of 1943, internal memos of the army’s political department could boast that:

The battle qualities shown by the junior commanders and soldiers of non-Russian ethnicity have shattered the widely held belief that spread in the Summer and Fall of 1942 among a number of commanders and political officer that apparently Uzbeks, Georgians, Azerbaijanis and others are incapable of fighting.¹¹¹

However, once the problem of “non-Russians” was dealt with, new issues arose.¹¹²

“Non-Russians,” even if they had not been fully integrated into Soviet society, had been part of the Soviet Union since its formation. Soldiers drawn from regions that had become Soviet only on the eve of the war (Western Ukraine, Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) presented a very specific set of problems. They had not had time to become integrated into the Soviet system, and many were hostile to it, as they had fresh memories of sovereignty. Soviet power was associated with violence, deportations and the nationalization of property. The Baltic republics all fielded their own national military units, each of which had a special corporate identity. The Baltic formations, all of which had had adequate time to train, fought well. However, once the army liberated territory beyond the 1939 borders, the character of the army changed significantly. Draftees from these regions from 1944 on often presented a serious challenge to political officers and commanders as differences in culture and language were dramatic. Tatiana Atabek, a medic and Komsomol member, recorded in her diary how difficult it was to explain to Bessarabian recruits what was expected of them,¹¹³ while Aleksandr Shcherbakov, head of the Political Department of the Army, warned high-level political officers of the special case that these and Western Ukrainian recruits represented, taking a survey of a contingent of recent draftees:

Of course these are not people who have lived under our influence for twenty five years... If you take Western Ukrainian peasants and Bessarabians, well 70-80% are illiterate. We have nothing like that in our country. In our army every single person is literate. There are many

were frightening days and months, when all we dreamt of was being sent us into battle so that these soldiers would die.”

¹⁰⁸ There was a widely circulated story about Muslim soldiers all praying around the first of their co-ethnics to be killed or wounded and Germans bombing this clump of soldiers. See e.g. Boris Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2005), pp. 119-120.

¹⁰⁹ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 103, ll. 2ob-3.

¹¹⁰ Dunaevskia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, p. 156.

¹¹¹ RGASPI f. 88, op. 1, d. 964, l. 1ob.

¹¹² For a more complete discussion of the “non-Russians,” see Brandon Schechter, “‘The People’s Instructions’: Indigenizing the Great Patriotic War Among ‘Non-Russians,’” *Ab Imperio*, 2012:3, pp. 109-133.

¹¹³ Tat’iana Repina (Atabek), *K biografii voennogo pokoleniia* (Moscow: Moskovskie uchebniki i Kartolitografiia, 2004), p. 224. (Hereafter referred to as Atabek, her last name during the war.)

religious people, prejudices. Matters that are entirely clear to our Soviet person are like a book with seven seals to them.¹¹⁴

This led to specific propaganda aimed at integrating them into the Soviet fold and motivating them to fight.¹¹⁵ The special attention paid to these cadres is very instructive. Political officers perceived these men as coming from a different time, as not having progressed through the stages of history that the October Revolution and Stalin's Revolution from Above had visited on the Soviet Union. These men would be socialized into Soviet society in the ranks of the army, under unusually difficult conditions. Much like Dzhuma, our Uzbek draftee, they were in for a shock even greater than those of their comrades, and were nearly guaranteed duties in the most expendable positions.

At the opposite end of the spectrum were the large numbers of college students, factory workers and other "politically conscious" people who volunteered to serve in the *narodnoe opolchenie* – "People's Guard" formations that formed as the Wehrmacht closed in on major cities at the beginning of the war. This practice was a clear trading of lives for time, as these poorly trained and armed formations were often devastated in short order, although some went on to become elite formations. These units were often made up of the kinds of people who could have received deferments – college students, writers, factory workers, etc. – and represented a major loss not only in the military, but among various fields of scholarship and skilled labor, for example, several leading lights in the biology department of Leningrad State University were killed over seven days in 1941.¹¹⁶

Narodnoe opolchenie led many college-educated people into the army for the first time, but as the war went on, they continued to enter the ranks either as volunteers, or once deferments disappeared. Commanders and veteran soldiers had a variety of responses to the sudden presence of the intelligentsia in the ranks. Grigorii Baklanov recalled the antipathy of his drill sergeant towards educated soldiers, while a commander interviewed by the Mints Commission said that despite initial misgivings that "an educated person won't last long," *intelligenty* under his command had become "the real deal."¹¹⁷

One decorated veteran, who, at a critical moment in the Battle of Kursk, inspired his comrades to advance under heavy fire, described to the Mints commission how far he was from the ideal soldier:

I am over forty, physically much weaker than most people my age. I am an "unreformable *intelligent*" and no matter how much I try, even as a rank and file soldier, I could not understand and master skills connected to physical action, skills that are simple for the wide masses of people. I continue to be worthless and usually become the butt of jokes by other soldiers. The soldiers didn't even understand that there are people who don't know

¹¹⁴ RGASPI f. 88, op. 1, d. 972, ll. 5-6. An propaganda article covering similar material drove this point further, claiming that: "In one military district Red Army soldiers from the Western districts were polled. It turns out, that among them 46 percent had never seen a film, 54 percent never heard a radio, 63 percent had never seen a combine or a tractor, more than half are illiterate or semiliterate. Isn't it clear, that these people require a special approach in political work?" "Soveshchanie nachal'nikov otdelov agitatsii i propagandy politupravleniia voennykh okrugov," *Propagandist i agitator Krasnoi Armii*, 1944:17, p. 36.

¹¹⁵ Viktor Muradian, *Boevoe bratstvo* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1978), pp. 284-290.

¹¹⁶ For a brief memoir reflecting on a fairly typical experience of service in the *narodnoe opolcheniie*, see Nison Shapiro, "Semero iz semnadtsati," *Neva*, 2002:9, pp. 223-225. Conversely, several of these units went on to become elite formations, and pointed to common occupations within the same unit as a source of corporate pride. E.g. NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 27, l. 8.

¹¹⁷ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 57, d. 2 ll. 9-10; Baklanov, *Zhizn' podarennaia dvazhdy*, p. 50.

how to behave around a horse, that don't know how to hold a shovel, for whom every simple task needs explanation.¹¹⁸

Okhitovich was too old, too educated and too different from his comrades, but nonetheless eventually became a hero. The army frequently rechecked its cadres to see if it could re-categorize soldiers into combat roles, and also rechecked those whom it had rejected from service.¹¹⁹ To put more soldiers in combat positions, the army dramatically reduced the size of its rear-area units, where it attempted to replace as many young, able bodied men as possible with older soldiers, those unfit for combat and women. The rear area was to become a space of older men and women.¹²⁰

The age of soldiers in the ranks expanded dramatically, ranging from 17 to 56.¹²¹ Not surprisingly, age mattered, but sometimes in ways that seemed counterintuitive. As we have seen in the case of Okhitovich, older men could become useful soldiers. In fact a different kind of older man, the veteran of WWI who had returned to the ranks, became a stock figure in wartime propaganda. Young men who were of the more traditional draft age were sometimes viewed with derision as they acted “just like children” – playing with shrapnel and crying “about every little thing”.¹²² Indeed, Yeremenko, commanding the Stalingrad Front, is reported to have told Vasili Grossman the following: “The youth have no life experience, they are like kids, wherever you send them, that's where they die. The smartest soldier is 25-30 years old. And the older ones – are not quite healthy, his family is on his mind.”¹²³ Another commander noted that older soldiers often knew a trade such as cobbling or wood-working, making them more useful for their comrades.¹²⁴ Soldiers over forty were often assigned to non-combat roles such as a cook in order to free young men for combatant roles, but older men were not the only ones fulfilling household duties.

Starting in 1941, women were introduced into the army in uneven ways and into specific specializations, a process described by Anna Krylova in *Soviet Women in Combat*.¹²⁵ One of their main tasks was to free men for combat duties, although women also served in combat positions, most notably as pilots, snipers, anti-aircraft gunners, communications specialists, medics and traffic controllers.¹²⁶ Virtually everyone asked about women's

¹¹⁸ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 71, d. 15, ll. 1-2.

¹¹⁹ See e.g. RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 73, ll. 148-153, in A. I. Barsukov, et. al., *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iyunia 1941 g. —1942 g.*, p. 361-365; Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, p. 115.

¹²⁰ See e.g., RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 70, ll. 431-432 in Barsukov, et al., *Prokazy Narodnogo Komissarra oborony 22 iyunia 1941 g.-1942 g.*, pp. 217-218; RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 72, l. 258 in *Ibid.*, pp. 295-296. The second order was a complaint about the failure to replace young men with older soldiers and women, which stated: “The presence of a large number of health young soldiers in the staffs, institutes and rear-area organs has justly aroused the censure of fighting soldiers and commanders, who write about this to Comrade Stalin from the hospital.”

¹²¹ Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought*, pp. 121-123. See e.g., APRF f. 2, op. 50, d. 266, ll. 27-34, in Kudriashov, *Voina*, p. 123; RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 73, ll. 148-153, in A. I. Barsukov, et. al., *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iyunia 1941 g. —1942 g.*, p. 361-365

¹²² NA IRI RAN f., 2, r. I, op. 223, d. 10, ll. 1-1ob.

¹²³ Vasili Grossman. *Gody voiny* (Moscow: Pravda, 1989), p. 352.

¹²⁴ Tokarev, *Vesti dnevnik na fronte zapreshalos'*, p. 140.

¹²⁵ See chapters 2 and 3 of Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*.

¹²⁶ See e.g. RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 70, ll. 251-252 in A. I. Barsukov, et. al., *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iyunia 1941 g. —1942 g.*, pp. 213-214; RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 70, ll. 369-371 in *Ibid.*, pp. 214-215; RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 74, ll. 7-8, in A. I. Barsukov, et. al., *Prikazy Narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR (1941-1945)*, pp. 13-14.

performance at the front said that not only did they perform as well as men, but they also made the front a more civilized place: “it is simply pleasant to meet a neat, clean girl among the dirty soldiers at the front.”¹²⁷ Some feared that service would disrupt women’s ability to become mothers, as the commandant of a special all-woman sniper school told the Mints Commission in 1944:

The fighting qualities of the girls have been proven and no one can argue with them. But one could pose the question from another point of view: Does the country need such a sacrifice, because I think that few of these girls will become healthy mothers.¹²⁸

The question of how to use women’s bodies – whether they served the state better as soldiers or mothers, and how mutually exclusive these roles were – was one that would remain ambiguous. Women’s bodies presented a particular problem to the army. Their figures were often too small for military clothing and the army flip-flopped on whether clothing should be unisex or to make concessions to women in the ranks. All documents in the army used the grammatically male form to designate their bearer. Yet traditional gender roles would impact women’s service and women were often faced with what we would now call sexual harassment, a theme that will be discussed further below.

Soldiers’ bodies could speak to their histories, which in turn could impact their present. Despite the expansion of cadres, specific branches of service still had very specific physical standards, as put forth by *Order No. 336*, the standard for accepting men into the army. Deranged and mentally underdeveloped men were rejected from the service. NKVD men couldn’t suffer from hemorrhoids, commanders couldn’t have speech impediments, paratroopers couldn’t weigh more than 80 kilograms and tankers had to have powerful hearts and lungs.¹²⁹ It was common to find former criminals in reconnaissance units, as the skills necessary in both endeavors tend to overlap. Peasants ended up overwhelmingly in the infantry, while urban cadres, who were generally more educated, often found themselves in more technical branches of service with longer life spans. Prewar profession could determine wartime specialization, as drivers, cooks, writers, artists, thespians and other specialists would often continue their prewar profession in the service. Differences among soldiers were enhanced by the various forms of body modification that could be observed among soldiers, including tattoos, circumcision, and even a professional pickpocket who had several fingers removed facilitate his work.¹³⁰ Soldiers from different regions might vary by height, particularly those who were less severely or wholly unaffected by Collectivization and wartime hunger. A commander in the Latvian Rifle Division remarked on the changing groups coming into his unit, noting that until April of 1942 most of his men were so tall “you looked like a kid next to them,” with size 45-46 [12-13 US sizes] boots being the norm and one soldier having size 49 [US 16] boots. The next set of reinforcements he received were starving men from Leningrad and Tashkent who required special attention.¹³¹

Both starving soldiers and giant soldiers had special needs, and in order for a unit to succeed, all of these needs would have to be met. Commanders needed to feed the starving

¹²⁷ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 3, l. 7ob.; Yakupov, *Frontovye zarisovki*, p. 104. NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 16, d. 4, l. 109. Gabriel Temkin, however, disagreed. Temkin, *My Just War*, pp. 202-203.

¹²⁸ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 3, l. 7ob.

¹²⁹ *Prikaz Narodnogo komissara oborony N. 336* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1942), p. 60.

¹³⁰ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 13-b, l. 104.

¹³¹ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 16, d. 4, l. 108ob.

and clothe the enormous. They would also have to find a common language with them and create a sense of camaraderie. In this particular unit, originally from Latvia, soldiers of all nationalities began to refer to themselves as Latvians out of unit pride.¹³² The war could transform soldiers' sense of themselves in surprising ways. Ideally, whatever the primary identification before the war had been – whether nationality, region, religion or profession – was to be replaced by that of the soldier.

The army was interested principally in bodies, but could not ignore souls. Commanders needed to inspire men and women from a wide variety of backgrounds to risk their lives saving a state that some of them despised. There were numerous ways that the state attempted to appeal to these men and women. One side of the coin drew on Russian and “non-Russian” national traditions, revolutionary traditions, by showcasing German atrocities and by attempting to provide for their families. The other side of this coin was coercion and disciplining. While discipline is key to any army's success, the Red Army had a particular problem of trying to cobble together a fighting force from inexperienced civilians to fight an enemy who was rapidly advancing deep into Soviet territory. These prerogatives, combined with the Bolshevik readiness to sacrifice many lives now for a brighter future, lead to a draconian disciplinary regime. However, the army began the war without many of the typical instruments of documentation key to discipline or even basic recordkeeping.

Becoming State Property

The living and dead were often undocumented in the war's early days. Although Red Army regulations from shortly before the war laid out a clear system of documenting the dead, these proved inadequate and there was no consistent system in place to document living soldiers.¹³³ Every soldier was issued a “personal medallion” or “death medallion,” a Bakelite cylinder with two long thin pieces of newsprint on which all of a soldier's personal information was kept.¹³⁴ Worn in a special pocket on the trousers, this was the RKKA's equivalent of a dog tag, one copy staying in the capsule with the body, the other being collected by the commander as a record. The capsule was exclusively meant to document the dead and not the living, the capsule itself being shut tight at all times to prevent moisture from destroying the newsprint paper inside. Many soldiers refused to fill out the information and threw them away, believing that if they used them as directed, they were sealing their own fate. Mansur Abdulin recalled how soldiers often subverted this document:

We were... given plastic cartridges with a screw top. Inside was a ribbon of paper that we were to fill out ourselves with all of our personal information, then screw the cartridge shut, so that no dampness crept in and place it in our little pocket. “Death passport,” that is how we christened this cartridge among ourselves. I do know what others did, but I quietly threw this passport away, so that no one would see. In its place in my pants I put my talisman – the object I should preserve until the end of the war. Probably, all of my comrades had things that

¹³² NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 16, d. 4, l. 105ob.

¹³³RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 97, l. 263-272, in A.S. Yemelin, *et. al.*, *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1937-21 iyunia 1941 g.*, p. 260.

¹³⁴ Chudakova, *Ratnoe schastiie*, pp. 174-175.

served them as talismans, but you couldn't talk about it: a talisman "had power" if only you yourself knew about it.¹³⁵

"Death passports" proved so unpopular that they were discontinued on 17 November 1942, as all the same information could be found in the Red Army Booklet, which was introduced months into the war. The Red Army Booklet, a passport like document made of newsprint was then the only form of identification for both living and dead soldiers, a practice which has created great difficulty in identifying Red Army dead disinterred to this day.¹³⁶ Some of the less mystically oriented at the front were disturbed by the removal of the death medallions as a form of identification.¹³⁷ Many soldiers feared disappearing into nothingness, as if their lives had never existed.¹³⁸ Indeed, it was easy for soldiers to simply disappear early in the war, as surprisingly little effort was made to document them.

The Red Army began the war without a single, army-wide document that could be used to identify soldiers at the front. A Red Army book that contained detailed information about the soldier and his service was cancelled in 1940, and in practice was to be collected from the soldier before going to the front anyway. By Fall of 1941, it had become apparent that this situation was a serious danger to the army. As Stalin noted, "Red Army men and junior commanders ended up at the front without documents, and our division, which ought to be a closed fortress, impenetrable to outsiders, has become in practice a public thoroughfare." Enemy agents could easily penetrate the ranks of the army and indeed already had. Stalin cited the execution of seven enemy agents in one division alone, and was certain that many more agents would be found. Without proper documentation, it was impossible to see if legitimate soldiers were receiving their allotted uniforms, equipment and weapons. In the chaos of encirclements, retreats and rushed mobilizations of 1941, it was often impossible to control and document the movement of soldiers and bring individual soldiers to responsibility for desertion or other crimes, let alone tell loyal soldiers from enemy agents.¹³⁹

On October 7th, 1941, a new Red Army Booklet [*Krasnoarmeiskaia knizhka*] was instituted that was to be immediately issued to all soldiers in the ranks. Signed by the soldier and his immediate superior, showing (in theory, if not always in practice) the bearer's photograph and stamped with the unit's seal, these thin sheets of newsprint became the only document that proved who one was in the army. Any soldier caught without a Red Army Booklet was to be arrested as a suspected spy. The Red Army booklet tied soldiers to their unit and also to every piece of equipment they were issued. It was a document that stated identity and responsibility very clearly. In the rear these documents were to be checked every day during morning inspection, while at the front no less than

¹³⁵ M.G. Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1985), p. 60, Chudakova, *Ratnoe schastiie*, pp. 174-175: "Already at the beginning of the war a belief was established that those with these amulets would be the first killed. Many at the front didn't wear them: they would receive them and throw them away on the spot, throwing them, without fail, over the left shoulder and also with the chant: 'Vanish, vanish, get lost!' Naïve, but true. This ritual was traditional – the newbies imitated the *frontoviks*, as uncle-mentors, some took it seriously, others as a joke."

¹³⁶ RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 106-a, l. 512, in Barsukov, *et. al.*, *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iyunia 1941 g. — 1942 g.*, p. 368.

¹³⁷ Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, pp. 109-110.

¹³⁸ Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, p. 22.

¹³⁹ RGVA, f.4, op. 12, d. 99, l 274-277, in Barsukov, *et. al.*, *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iyunia 1941 g. — 1942 g.*, pp. 111-112

once every three days.¹⁴⁰ The Red Army book was supposed to bring order to the chaos of an army of such massive scale in a war that was moving very quickly. A propaganda campaign surrounded its introduction with the two-pronged messages of vigilance against impostors and responsibility for every piece of equipment one had been issued.¹⁴¹ While its introduction highlighted the chaos and carelessness that could be found in the army, the categories that comprised it and the way in which it was used reveal how the state had come to view its “little cogs”.

A soldier’s Red Army Booklet contained all of the information the state deemed necessary about its cadres. Name, education, nationality, birthdate, prewar occupation, next of kin and their address and blood type were all that was written of their prewar life. Their wartime life was recorded via date and place of induction, specialization, unit, ID number, notes on where they had served, when they had taken their oath of service, wounds they had received, which medals they had been awarded and weapons issued along with their serial numbers, uniforms and equipment issued, and on the final page, their sizes. On the pages of the Red Army Booklet, the biography of a soldier was reduced to the parameters of the army and tied to the objects a soldier was issued. The Red Army Booklet also became the primary document used to record soldiers’ deaths, being collected from the dead on the battlefield and in hospitals.

On the surface, this document was simply a continuation of the prewar internal passport, documenting a soldier and tying him or her to a specific territory and profession, in this case, their military unit. However, it was issued much more widely than passports, and the Red Army Booklet was the first passport-like document that the vast majority of peasants received.¹⁴² Class had no place on the pages of this document, despite its predominance in the lives of Soviet citizens and on the pages of the Soviet passport and application forms. While class would still be recorded in the files of the NKVD, both the Red Army Booklet and official propaganda encouraged soldiers and commanders to ignore the class origins of its fighters, and to focus instead on what they had done at the front.¹⁴³ *Krasnaia zvezda* circulated an article in which it decried focusing on a commander’s class background when introducing new troops to a unit:

What does a young fighter need this for? The horse and sheep of the commander’s parents are of no interest to him. He needs to know what kind of warrior is this commander, to whom his fate and life have been given. Where and how has he beaten the Germans? What is his character?¹⁴⁴

The pragmatic need to use every soldier as a resource overrode assumptions about class and other “dangerous elements” that were to be filtered out before being sent to the front. The army was only interested in what could be made useful and was often quick to ignore aspects of a person’s identity that did not pertain to one’s soldierly duties.

¹⁴⁰ RGVA, f.4, op. 12, d. 99, l 274-277, in Barsukov, *et. al.*, *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iunia 1941 g. —1942 g.*, pp. 111-112.

¹⁴¹ TsAMO f. 32, op. 920265, d. 4, ll. 2-3, N.I. Borodin and N.V. Usenko, *Glavnye Politicheskie Organy Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine 1941—1945 gg.: Dokumenty i materialy. T.17—6(1—2). Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia*, (Moscow, TERRA, 1996), pp. 78-79.

¹⁴² A special thanks to Dominique Arel for pointing this out.

¹⁴³ TSA FSB Rossii, f. 14, on. S, d. 23, l. 386–391, in Zhadobin, *et al.*, “*Ognennaia duga*,” p. 26.

¹⁴⁴ A. Litvinov, “Vvod v boi novogo popolneniia,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, April 20, 1943. Note that during collectivization, in some regions owning several sheep and a horse could earn one the status of “kulak,” and thus a loss of all property and deportation.

The exclusion of class and inclusion of such categories as profession, ethnicity and education are telling as to what the state needed from its soldiers. While soldiers were interchangeable parts in a military machine, not every soldier was the same sort of part. Some were cogs, others belts. An uneducated soldier could not be used as a translator, while a linguist could not be used as an engineer. Both formally and informally, on the level of the army and individual unit, the ranks were periodically swept for specialists – writers, translators, cooks, tailors, cobblers, carpenters and others.¹⁴⁵ Every commander of a small unit wanted a cobbler and a woodworker. However, in dire situations, everyone could become cannon fodder, as the army gambled specialists' lives for time. Nationality remained important for reasons listed above, and an educated "non-Russian" could act as a translator for their rural co-ethnics, and those rural co-ethnics needed to be identified quickly to get the extra help that would allow them to survive. Finally, as we shall see, the soldier's next of kin were used as a means to pressure him or her into compliance and sometimes as a determinant of reliability – a soldier whose family was on nearby occupied territory might be highly motivated to liberate his home town or to desert to the enemy, depending on the situation. This document carried with it a set of responsibilities that were simply draconian. Soldiers were subject to extremely harsh discipline and held to a very high standard. Essentially, the soldier's body became property of the state.

The Civilian Body Transformed

Upon induction into the army, soldiers would literally shed their previous identities. Passports were surrendered. They would give up their civilian clothing, whether they were fine suits, summer dresses, prison uniforms, or silken Uzbek robes.¹⁴⁶ One ex-convict who was given a position of authority was so excited to reinvent himself that he wore only his tunic in the winter.¹⁴⁷ It could be weeks before inductees received uniforms, forcing them to carry out the beginning of their service in civilian clothes. Some sent their clothes home to younger siblings or instructed their families to sell their clothing.¹⁴⁸ Other soldiers eagerly awaited the issue of military clothing so that they could sell or trade their civilian clothes for food.¹⁴⁹

Literature and propaganda from the period drew a discrete line between one's prewar and wartime biography. Baurdzhan Momysh-uly, an ethnically Kazakh commander, explained to inductees that they had entered a different world:

Yesterday you were people of different professions, different means. Yesterday there were among you rank and file *kolkhozniki* and directors. From today on you are fighters and junior commanders of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, p. 64 noted that education could have a tremendous impact on one's fate. As infantry soldiers had a very small chance of survival: "They took people with seven classes of school or more into the officer's schools. Same thing for artillery and other specialized units. The semiliterate were punished for their social condition. Particularly Asians, who spoke Russian poorly (a Russian *muzhik* still might be able to become a teamster or get another less deadly job)."

¹⁴⁶ RGVA f.4, op. 15, d. 27, ll. 105-113, in Veshchikov, *et. al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, p. 21; Lesin, *Byla voina*, pp. 43-44, 53.

¹⁴⁷ Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 64.

¹⁴⁸ Rafgat Shakirovich Akhtiamov in N.S. Frolov, editor, *Vse oni khoteli zhit': Frontovye pis'ma pogibshikh soldat, vospominaniia veteranov voiny* (Kazan': Tarikh, 2003), p. 26; Chekhovich, *Dnevnik Ofitsera*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁹ David Samoilov, *Podennye zapisi, T.1* (Moskva: Vremia, 2002), pp. 152-153.

¹⁵⁰ Aleksandr Bek, *Volokolamskoe shosse. Novoe naznachenii* (Moscow: Pravda, 1988), p. 58.

Induction into the army was meant to partially erase one's prewar identity, providing chances for redemption and new challenges. One diarist records consciously avoiding any thoughts of home and his loved ones in order to be as present with his comrades as possible.¹⁵¹

Men's heads would be shaven so that differences in age disappeared, as poet Aleksandr Tvardovskii wrote: "Look – they are just like kids! / So who is, in truth, a greenhorn / Single or married [you can't tell] / [Among] this shorn people."¹⁵² The privilege of having longer hair belonged to officers and *sverkhsrochniki* [those who had already served their standard two year term in the army], but with lice infestations this privilege could vanish.¹⁵³ Women had varied fortunes, from having their heads shaved or cropped to being allowed to wear long braids. This seemed to depend on their commander's attitude, highlighting women's status as oddities.¹⁵⁴

Soldiers learned to stand, move and speak by a set of regulations that were universal to the army and alien to the civilian world. Soldiers would move in ranks, constantly count off to check that all were present, and became subject to constant surveillance by their superiors. Manuals demonstrated everything from the proper way to brush one's teeth to how to form a marching column. Soldiers learned to move as massive biological machines, to hold their fists along the seams of their pants, with their feet forming a perfect "v."¹⁵⁵ Every day they were to shave, and moustaches were sometimes seen as claims to special status.¹⁵⁶ Soldiers were responsible for a particular standard of hygiene and a high standard of conduct.

Discipline and Punish

Yet soldiers were often unclear about how serious their new responsibilities were. Reports from early in the war show that soldiers who did not speak Russian were often unaware of the consequences of their actions, and in general discipline could be remarkably lax.¹⁵⁷ Many soldiers were simply not used to military discipline and many commanders were unable to establish the iron discipline required of them by Soviet law. Green soldiers did not seem to understand the point. As scout Golofeevskaiia recalled:

It is very difficult to get used to discipline. We didn't immediately learn the word "yest'" [literally "to be," the Red Army equivalent of "Yes, sir!"]. More often you heard "I won't," "I don't want to". Only later, when we started fighting, did we understand that discipline means a lot in the army.¹⁵⁸

The alien nature of discipline is something that commanders also noticed. Momysh-uly reflected at a wartime writer's conference that: "A soldier is an adult, but his social status

¹⁵¹ V.P. Kiselev. "Voina i zhizn' v predstavlenii 20-letnikh frontovikov (iz moego dnevnika)" in A.A. Kulikov, A.N. Sakharov, *Obshchestvo i vlast'. Rossiiskaia provintsiiia. T.3 iun' 1941 g.-1953g.* (Moscow: IRI RAN, 2005), pp. 998-1038, p. 1008.

¹⁵² Aleksandr Tvardovskii, *Vasilii Terkin: Kniga pro boitsa* (Moscow: "Detskaia literature," 1977), p. 25.

¹⁵³ Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 142.

¹⁵⁴ See e.g. Kochneva, Aleksandra Feodorovna. Interview by Bair Irincheev. Otdel «Pekhotentsy». www.iremember.ru (14 March 2007); Kunitsina, Nina Ivanovna. Interview by Artem Drabkin. Otdel «Letchiki». www.iremember.ru (14 March 2007); Baurdzhan Momysh-Uly, *Za nami Moskva: Zapiski ofitsera* (Alma-Ata: Kazgoslitzdat, 1962), p. 385.

¹⁵⁵ *Rukovodstvo dlia Boitsa Pekhoty* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1940) [RBP-40], pp. 89-92, 103-120.

¹⁵⁶ Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, p. 141.

¹⁵⁷ RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 85, ll. 66-67; NA IRI RAN f. 2, p. III, op. 5, d. 2-a, l. 51.

¹⁵⁸ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7 d. 13-b, l. 21.

reduces him to junior ranks, and this junior rank demands no less thoughtful attention and tutelage than a young man.”¹⁵⁹ Anatolii Genatulin, a boy of seventeen when he entered the army, reflected on his barracks adolescence and the beatings he took:

We had to have the boyish carelessness, laziness, childish sleepiness and all we had learned about motherly pity to physical and spiritual weakness and have our unripe bodies hammered into the yoke of military ranks and habituate our consciousness to the harsh ways of the army. In this crusty masculine society, where instead of the affectionate call of mother and gentle nagging you hear commands that resonate like metal, yells and swearing, we were brutalized and ripened for the front, for killing and death.¹⁶⁰

The pouring of the soldier’s body into the “yoke of military ranks” carried with it the implicit understanding and explicit indicators that soldiers were no longer the masters of their own bodies. As Momysh-uly warned recruits to the Red Army:

[L]et everyone coming into the ranks or preparing to enter the army know this: perhaps you were a good person before, perhaps people loved and praised you, but whoever and whatever you were earlier, if you commit a crime, an act of cowardice or treason, you will be executed.¹⁶¹

While the fact that soldiers were expected to risk their lives seems obvious, other aspects of how their bodies became the preserve of the state were less so. Soldiers were expected to eat only what the state provided them.¹⁶² While on guard duty, soldiers were forbidden “to leave their post, sleep, sit, lean against anything, talk, eat, drink, smoke, sing, answer the call of nature, accept any object from any person, become distracted from continuous observation of their position.”¹⁶³ Soldiers were forced to exert themselves on the march and in combat in ways that pushed them to the limits, as one commander wrote home to his wife: “it would be enough to tell you that in three days I walked 92 kilometers and slept for an hour and a half. This fundamental test of nerves has ended and I didn’t break.”¹⁶⁴ On these intensive marches, there was no option but to keep moving and soldiers learned to sleep while walking.¹⁶⁵ All of these constraints are standard for any army.

What made the Red Army particular was a readiness to use force against its own soldiers and to treat their families as hostages. The 1940 Code of Discipline [*Distsiplinarnyi ustav*] for the Red Army was particularly strict; as the war continued, it became more so. The authors of the Code of Discipline reasoned that discipline should be “higher, stronger and more severe” in a society without class contradictions, which demanded absolute loyalty. “The order of a commander or leader is law for his subordinate. It should be fulfilled without question, exactly and on time.” Officers were also reminded that they were responsible for any breakdowns in discipline and that they were allowed to use any methods, including physical force and weapons, against those who “failed to follow orders, openly resisted or maliciously failed to observe discipline.”¹⁶⁶ While most infractions led to

¹⁵⁹ Baurdzhan Momysh-uly, *Psikhologia voiny*, (Alma-Ata: Kazakhstan, 1990), p. 32.

¹⁶⁰ Anatolii Genatulin, *Sto shagov na voine* (Moscow: RBP, 1995), p. 5.

¹⁶¹ Aleksandr Bek *Volokolamskoe shosse* (Moscow: Pravda, 1988), p. 27.

¹⁶² See Chapter 3 for more on food.

¹⁶³ *Ustav garnizonnoi sluzhby Krasnoi Armii* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1942), p. 21.

¹⁶⁴ RGASPI f. M-33, op. 1, d. 853, l. 179. He later slept fourteen hours, joking that “if a German shell hit me right in the gut I wouldn’t have woken up.”

¹⁶⁵ Genatulin, *Strakh*, p. 15.

¹⁶⁶ RGVA f. 4, op. 15, d. 31, ll. 57-65, in A.S. Yemelin, et al. *Prikazy Narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1937-21 iunia 1941 g. T. 13 (2-1)*. *Russkii Arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia* (Moscow: Terra, 1994), pp. 180-183.

less severe punishment, the threat of violence was never far away. Most soldiers seem to have witnessed a show execution early in their service, in which soldiers were assembled to watch one or more men put to death, sometimes required to pull the trigger themselves. Often, such executions served as punishment for self-mutilation or desertion.¹⁶⁷ These were highly ritualized actions in which the state made clear its right to take the lives of soldiers in its service.

Despite an already harsh regime, both in 1941 and 1942, the army issued orders to make the regime of discipline more rigid and threat of violence more apparent. Even so, the state remained ambiguous as to how important violence was to its strategy. For example, in September of 1941, an order was issued that gave the commanders of divisions and their commissars the right to sign death sentences, but within a month another corrective order decried the use of repression as opposed to “educational work,” citing various moments when fists and bullets were used where words would have been more adequate.¹⁶⁸ The two most famous orders expanding the use of violence, No. 270 and No. 227, deserve closer attention in this regard.¹⁶⁹

Order 270, issued on 16 August, 1941, gave subordinates the right to execute their superiors if they should panic.¹⁷⁰ Order 227, issued on 28 July, 1942, the (in)famous “Not one step backwards” order, which was read to all troops and became a motto for the army, established a new, harsher disciplinary regime. This order claimed that panicky soldiers were contributing to a “retreating mood” in the army. It called for the destruction of panic mongers and cowards “on the spot”, and labeled anyone retreating without orders from above a traitor. The order established blocking detachments, well-armed formations placed in the rear of “unstable divisions” to keep soldiers from retreating, by opening fire if necessary. Adopting German tactics, it established penal units for commanders and soldiers who had disgraced themselves; such units were to take on the most dangerous tasks in order to “expiate their sins with blood.” Penal units provided an alternative to executions for serious crimes and were as such a more practical way to use the lives of soldiers and commanders who had failed to live up to Bolshevik standards.¹⁷¹

Soviet soldiers were expected to fight to the very last and were under immense pressure to do so. Red Army men had no right to surrender to the enemy or “in any way to betray military secrets.”¹⁷² The Soviet state had defined surrender to the enemy as treason,

¹⁶⁷ E.g. Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, p. 73.

¹⁶⁸ RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 62, l. 331, in Barsukov, et al., *Prikazy Narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iuniiia 1941 g.-1942 g.*, p. 84. This was later reexamined. RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 66, ll. 149-152, in *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.

¹⁶⁹ Amir Weiner has argued that these orders are a sort of distillation of Stalinist thinking, while Amnon Sella claims that these orders were poor for morale. I argue, alongside Roger Reese, that these orders are more of a desperate response to the situation at the front, adding that there is a surprising degree of flexibility that these orders invite. Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought*, pp. 63, 153, 160-175; Weiner, “Something to Die For, a Lot to Kill For,” pp. 107-108.

¹⁷⁰ RGVA f. 4, op. 12, d. 98, ll. 617-622 in Barsukov, et al., *Prikazy Narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iuniiia 1941 g.-1942 g.*, pp. 58-60.

¹⁷¹ RGVA f. 4, op. 12, d. 105, ll. 122-128, in *Prikazy Narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iuniiia 1941 g.-1942 g.*, pp. 276-279.

¹⁷² *Boevoi Ustav Pekhoty Krasnoi Armii. Chast' 1 (Boets, otdeleniie, vzvod, rota)*. (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1942), p. 28. Hereafter *BUP-42*.

and gave permission to its soldiers to execute anyone attempting to do so.¹⁷³ The families of soldiers who surrendered to the enemy were also to be punished, something that soldiers were made aware of.¹⁷⁴ Propaganda stressed repeatedly that there was no future for the traitor and that even his loved ones would forsake him.¹⁷⁵ The military press and propagandists put great effort into reminding soldiers of their duty and the price for failing to fulfill it. Soldier's responsibilities, and the legal consequences of failure, were common themes of agitation. Copies of the *Military Oath*, in Russian and a variety of other languages, were common pieces of print propaganda. To the very end of the war, this document remained a key part of agitation and propaganda. As one article from April of 1944 put it, "it is necessary to create an air of holiness around the military oath, using examples of Heroes of the Patriotic War to show how best to fulfill it."¹⁷⁶ The last line of the *Military Oath* reads "If I maliciously break this solemn oath, then I will suffer severe punishment by Soviet law, the total hatred and scorn of the working people".¹⁷⁷ Executions carried with them the confiscation of all property, not only disgracing a soldier, but leaving his beneficiaries with nothing.

In moments of panic or under extreme duress soldiers sometimes shot themselves in the hand or foot in order to be evacuated to the rear. In the Red Army, this act, called "*samostrel*" – "self shooting" or *chlenovreditel'stvo* – "self mutilation", was considered an act of treason, punishable by execution or being sent to a penal unit. On 2 August, 1941, the Special Section was given permission to arrest and if deemed necessary execute those who practiced self mutilation.¹⁷⁸ The NKVD and political organs of the army monitored these acts closely, and those attempting to injure themselves to escape the front found increasingly creative means. Usually these soldiers, dubbed *samostrely* or *levoruchniki*, shot themselves in the left hand (their right was still necessary to work), often through a piece of wood, bread, bucket or cloth, so as not to leave a telltale powder burn on their hand. Surgeons, officers and political organs learned to see through these methods, sometimes assigning specialists to look out for *samostrely*.¹⁷⁹ Some soldiers "voted", sticking their left hand above the trench at dawn until enemy soldiers shot it. Gabriel Temkin claimed: "At times of heavy trench warfare... one could observe in the very early morning long strings of wounded soldiers streaming out of the front and walking slowly toward dressings stations."

¹⁷³ RGVA f. 4, op. 12, d. 98, ll. 617-622 in Barsukov, et al., *Priказы Narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iiunija 1941 g.-1942 g.*, pp. 59-60.

¹⁷⁴ "Programma politicheskoi podgotovki nachal'stvuiushchego sostava," *Propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1941:20, p. 21. NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. 1, op. 30, d. 1, ll. 235-236. One political officer described how new recruits would be given a special presentation by the units legal staff about ways in which they could be punished. See Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought*, p. 169.

¹⁷⁵ See for example Vera Inber, "Zhenshine," *Krasnoarmeets*, 1942:15, p. 3. This poem describes how a woman will never touch a coward, even if she loved him deeply before the war.

¹⁷⁶ M. Mironov, "O voinskoi vopsitanii ofiterskikh kadrov," *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*. 1944:7-8, pp. 5-10; 8.

¹⁷⁷ Irakli Toidze, "Rodina mat' zovet!" in P.A. Snopkov, et al., *Plakaty voiny i pobey. 1941-1945* (Moscow: Kontakt-Kul'tura, 2005), p. 19.

¹⁷⁸ RGASPI f. 644, op. 1, d. 5, l. 176.

¹⁷⁹ NA IRI RAN f.2, r. 1, op. 123, d. 13 l. 2ob.

Eventually all soldiers wounded in the left hand became suspect, and those who “voted” could be caught and punished.¹⁸⁰

Many soldiers, particularly commanders, often endorsed the harsh punishments meted out to *samostryely* and those who showed cowardice. At least one commander described how soldiers applauded the ad hoc execution of soldiers who had shown cowardice.¹⁸¹ Artillery officer Vasilii Chekalov reported a more intimate encounter. When confronted with a soldier who had shot himself in the hand because he feared for his wife and child, another soldier, almost in tears, screamed: “And you think that I don’t have a wife and child. All of us have someone that we need to fight for.” Chekalov himself called for the execution of this man, which was carried out immediately.¹⁸² Baurdzhan Momysh-uly imagined the thought process that led to *samostryel*: “He loves life, he wants to enjoy air, land and sky. And he decided that you can die and he will live. That’s how parasites live, at someone else’s cost.” However, Momysh-uly also discussed how difficult it was to kill one of his soldiers, it was like “cutting a piece of flesh from your own body.”¹⁸³ As is apparent from these statements, soldiers could feel rage towards those they felt were not pulling their weight in a situation where all were expected to risk their lives for the common good. Commanders did use lethal force to ensure that their orders were fulfilled. Not everyone thought that this was reasonable and often soldiers perceived a commander who was too willing to wave his pistol at his subordinates as hysterical or as a coward.¹⁸⁴

The threat of violence was very real for soldiers in the Red Army, and 994,300 were prosecuted by military tribunal, ultimately tallied as a permanent loss for the army.¹⁸⁵ According to military lawyer Yakov Aizenshtat there were few options open to members of a tribunal other than execution, penal units, or full acquittal (a rarity, given the desire to strengthen discipline).¹⁸⁶ No official statistics concerning battlefield executions exist, but references to them are found in interviews, official reports, diaries, and memoirs. As Roger Reese has pointed out, this appeal to violence was largely an act of desperation and sign of weakness, as the state used fists and bullets as a means to force poorly trained and supplied troops to do the impossible.¹⁸⁷

The Subversion of Discipline

¹⁸⁰ Tempkin, *My Just War*, p. 178; A. A. Sarkisov, “Gody voiny (1941–1945 gg.),” *Voенно-istoricheskii arkhiv*. 2002:3, pp. 97-129; pp. 108-109; Reutov, *Gvardeets*, p. 84. See also the special attention paid to wounds in the left hand by inspectors sent to check on provisioning in the 50th Army. They deemed it necessary to record that 18% of the wounded in that army for the month of April 1942 had been wounded in the left or right hand or arm (over three times as many in the left arm). TsAMO RF, f. 208, op. 2563, d. 48, ll. 64-75, in P. I. Veshchikov, et. al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, p. 239.

¹⁸¹ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 30, d. 1, l. 236.

¹⁸² Vasilii Chekalov, *Voенnyi dnevnik. 1941. 1942. 1943.* (Moscow: Zdravyy smisl, 2004), pp. 34-36.

¹⁸³ Bek, *Volokolamskoe shosse*, pp. 23, 26.

¹⁸⁴ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 2, d. 3, 11ob.; Belov, *Frontovoi dnevnik N.F. Belova. 1941-1944 gody*, entry from 13.02.43.

¹⁸⁵ *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, p. 140. 400,000 of those prosecuted had their sentence commuted to service in a penal unit.

¹⁸⁶ Yakov Aizenshtat, *Zapiski sekretaria voennogo tirbunala* (London: Overseas Interchange Limited, 1991), pp. 6-7.

¹⁸⁷ Reese, *Why Stalin’s Soldiers Fought*, pp. 168-171.

Despite the intensity of the disciplinary regime, there was a variety of ways in which soldiers could subvert it. Among them were “voting” and “*samostrel*,” though as we have seen these were very risky means of extracting one’s person from harm’s way. Less permanent forms of physical damage were sometimes employed simply to avoid work. One scout told of how professional criminals under her command would beat themselves with belts to get a medical exemption from manual labor.¹⁸⁸ The fact that the army consisted largely of yesterday’s civilians meant that basic forms of discipline would sometimes be replaced by more informal structures, such as when soldiers on guard duty failed to stop people they knew.

Some soldiers used the disciplinary regime itself to their advantage. Forging documents, particularly doctor’s notes, was one way to avoid serving on the firing line. Surgeon Vishnevskii wrote of a soldier who forged a note stating he had a defective bladder and needed to be near “a pee-pee’er” until 1942. He was found out and arrested.¹⁸⁹ Official reports told of medical personnel creating forged documents, sometimes with the goal of crossing into enemy territory.¹⁹⁰

The disciplinary regime was only functional if the army could control soldiers, which in 1941 and 1942 was often impossible. In 1941 the single largest category of permanent losses were missing and POWs (2,335,482 or 52,2%).¹⁹¹ Millions of soldiers surrendered to the enemy in encirclements or crossed no man’s land to surrender. Their motivations for doing so varied from fear to principled opposition to the Soviet state. Often those whose families had suffered during the Revolution or Collectivization crossed over to the enemy. In 1942, “non-Russians” were considered to be particularly susceptible to this temptation.¹⁹² The Germans, for their part, put considerable resources into luring soldiers to desert to them, including leaflets and radio broadcasts.

Acts of desertion required explanation. State organs understood that terrible conditions would encourage desertions, and as subsequent chapters will show, put significant effort into improving soldiers’ material conditions. Often, desertion was seen as the work of internal enemies preying on the ignorant. One soldier interviewed by the Mints Commission stated: “I told you about the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs that ran away. These are people who came from the *auls* [small Central Asian villages]. They had been manipulated by the *basmachi* [anti-government bandits]. But the Kazakhs, who had gone through school, they were totally different people.”¹⁹³ Acts of desertion and *samostrel* evoked a sense of failure in political officers akin to a priest who has failed to save a soul.¹⁹⁴

Desertion by a few soldiers could lead to investigation and serious trouble. As a result, commanders came up with creative methods to keep soldiers in place. Many tried to put Communists and Komsomol members on guard, as they were considered more motivated. An officer in the Latvian Rifle Division would place a Jew alongside whoever was

¹⁸⁸ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 13-b, l. 106.

¹⁸⁹ A.A. Vishnevskii, *Dnevnik khirurga: Velikaia Otechestvennaia Voina 1941-1945 gg.* (Moscow: Meditsina, 1970), p. 124.

¹⁹⁰ TsAMO f. 232, op. 590, d. 147, ll. 32-39, in A.M. Sokolov et al. *Preliudiia Kurskoi bitvy: Dokumenty i materialy 6 dekabria 1942 g.-25 apreliia 1943 g.*, pp. 334-338.

¹⁹¹ *Grif sekretnosti sniat*, pp. 146-147.

¹⁹² RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 85, ll. 55-68; RGASPI f. 17, op. 125 d. 104, ll 200-201.

¹⁹³ NA IRI f. 2, p. I, op. 28, d. 30, l. 13.

¹⁹⁴ Vasiliĭ Glotov, *Vstrechi: Frontovoi dnevnik, ocherki* (L'vov: Kameniar, 1980), p. 47.

on watch, knowing the Nazis would not take a Jew prisoner.¹⁹⁵ Another officer tried to separate people from the same area, so that they would have no chance to conspire.¹⁹⁶ On the eve of the Battle of Kursk, the army conducted special operation “Treason” [*Izmena Rodine*], in which specially trained soldiers pretended to be surrendering, then opened fire on the Germans who tried to take them prisoner. This had the expressed purpose of making surrender to the enemy more difficult.¹⁹⁷ But desertion was and remained a significant problem.

If soldiers were near their homes, the motivation to desert could be much greater. Political Officer Reutov, grudgingly wrote in his diary in October of 1942 that: “People from occupied regions continue to go over to the enemy in groups. Among them there are even political officers [*politruki*]. The Germans have a smart policy: they let them go home.”¹⁹⁸ At times when the army was in massive disarray, this could occur with virtually no consequences for the soldiers involved. One officer complained after a large number of soldiers near Voronezh returned to their villages as the Germans pushed back the front were not brought to answer for their crimes and drafted into the army with no questions asked:

These deserters were forgiven everything. As a rule no one looked into their past. Quite the opposite, in a number of cases being home during the period when one’s village was occupied by the Germans was counted almost as a service: it was everywhere believed that every soldier drafted from formerly occupied territory would hate the Germans and earnestly beat them.¹⁹⁹

While this attitude probably had as much to do with the need for warm bodies as anything else, it was not lost on these soldiers that if Soviet power did return to their village, it would be impractical to punish all of them. In addition, this sort of desertion had a logic more complex than mere cowardice, as it gave soldiers a chance to help their families under occupation. During 1941 and 1942 when desertion was at its peak, the future existence of the Soviet Union looked unlikely.

The Sexes and Discipline

Indiscipline and insubordination were not always related to self-preservation. Mixing men and women in the ranks of the army had predictable results, and could lead to confusion. First, there was the issue of physical difference. While demanding that women fulfill all regulations, “a commander and political officer should always remember, that they are dealing with a warrior-girl, and not a man. They should take into account the peculiarities of the physical condition, character and needs of a girl.”²⁰⁰ These peculiarities arose from traditional ideas of gender and attenuating roles.

And of course there was the issue of sex. On the one hand, the Komsomol organization, which had mobilized more than half of the women into the army, made it clear through print propaganda and its activists that sex was forbidden. Virginity, or at

¹⁹⁵ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 16, d. 3b, l. 242-243.

¹⁹⁶ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 11, l. 58.

¹⁹⁷ TSA FSB Rossii, f. 14, on. S, d. 23, l. 386–391, in Zhadobin, et al., *Kurskaia duga glazami Lubiankoi*, p. 25.

¹⁹⁸ Reutov, *Gvardeets*, p. 116.

¹⁹⁹ RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 130, l. 33.

²⁰⁰ K. Kniazeva, “Vospitanie devushek-voennosluzhashchikh,” *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1944:15-16, p. 33.

least abstinence, was considered by many to be a part of military discipline for women, and women in the ranks were invariably referred to as “girls”, rather than women, with “woman” sometimes used as a term of derision that implied promiscuity.²⁰¹

On the other hand, as early as 1942, high-level members of the Army’s Political Department had made it clear that commanders were not to be punished for pursuing relations with their subordinates. As the head of the Political Department of the Army stated in 1942 at a meeting of high-ranking political officers:

If people come together – a commander and a woman, then what is the big deal? We are all grown ups and should understand what is permissible and what is not, what are normal human relations and what is moral decay...”²⁰²

Shcherbakov made this statement after a series of complaints were lodged against commanders by the party organizations of various Red Army units. Commanders were clearly given the go ahead for consensual relations with their subordinates. A commander’s word was law, and as a result it was not obvious to some women, and it appears commanders as well, whether women in the ranks had the right to refuse advances by their superiors. Women who resisted unwanted advances could have their service made much more unpleasant, as in one way or another, their commander controlled their bodies:

Men really force themselves. We had a platoon commander Dugman, who tried to act by giving commands. But I told him that in this case we are equals, even if I am a corporal and he is a lieutenant... in two days he called me in again and said, if you don’t want to voluntarily, I’ll shoot you... I scratched and bit and got away, then I told the Party Organizer. He got five days arrest. Later he got back at me. He would send me where the scouts were to hunt, to places that were mined and shelled more.²⁰³

A scorned officer could get his subordinate killed or make her life miserable, and many believed that they had a right to sex. In fact, the expectation of sex with subordinates was so common that one soldier recorded in his diary a particular system of organization:

A regimental doctor, if of course it’s a woman, lives with the regimental commander, a battalion doctor with the battalion commander, the company medical instructor with the company commander, battery medic with the battery commander and so on. Of course there are frequent exceptions, but anyway this is the characteristic “organizational structure.” The thing of it is that regulations breed habits of such strength in the army, that is to always give preference to one’s seniors, that these “seniors” have a double advantage in love.²⁰⁴

As we see from this quote, sex and love at the front were heavily dependent on rank and fell under the category of discipline in unexpected ways. Of course, where romance and hormones are concerned, discipline could be subverted.

A special category of woman soldier, the “PPZh” [*Pokhodno-polevaia zhena* – Mobile Field Wife] emerged during the war as a term of derision.²⁰⁵ They were considered by some in the ranks and at home to have prostituted themselves to get easier assignments in the army, and some veterans recalled: “Soldiers looked at these women with cheerful spite,

²⁰¹ E.g. NA IRI RAN f. 2. r. X, op. 7, d. 8, ll. 5, 9, 13; Yelena Konenko, “Devushka v shineli,” *Krasnoarmeets*, 1943:12, pp. 20-22

²⁰² RGASPI f. 88, op. 1, d.948, ll. 12-14.

²⁰³ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 2a, ll. 2-2ob.

²⁰⁴ A.A. Kovalevskii, “Nynche u nas peredyshka...” *Neva*, 1995:5, pp. 86-87.

²⁰⁵ On PPZh, see Grossman, *Gody voiny*, pp. 242-243; Aizenshtat, *Zapiski sekretaria voennogo tribunala*, p. 116. On “easy girls” see NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 8, l. 9ob.

saying ‘for some war is a stepmother, for others their tender mother’, and most often with envy for those whom such a beauty kept warm.”²⁰⁶ Sex was indeed a way out of the army for many women, as until September 1944, pregnant women were discharged.²⁰⁷ Some women became pregnant purposefully in order to be released from service, some after years of service with a presumed life-long partner, others as a way to “win the war” – simply to get out of the army.²⁰⁸ As Oleg Budnitsky has convincingly argued, the war led to a veritable sexual revolution in the Soviet Union, with the extreme stress of the war and the movement of people facilitating a major change in the sexual lives of Soviet citizens.²⁰⁹

The experiences of women, perhaps more than any other group, bring home the gravity of the claims that the state made on soldiers’ bodies. The state claimed and then transferred to its deputies, the commanders, total control over a soldier’s body. In the case of women, there were specific issues that men were unlikely to face. Total control was claimed, yet always negotiated among individuals, even if appeals to violence could ultimately turn this negotiation into a dictation of the commander’s will. Having laid out how the state took possession of soldiers’ bodies and who these soldiers were, we will now examine how military service impacted soldiers’ bodies.

Injury

Soldiers, as Elaine Scarry has pointed out, offer their bodies to harm in battle, becoming the currency of warfare.²¹⁰ But, as we have seen above, long before entering combat, the army dictated to soldiers how to stand, move, groom themselves and bathe. Soldiers learned to move in large collectives on parade and move like one organism in combat training. These changes in habit could mark someone for a lifetime, but more than anything else, the modern machinery of war could irreversibly impact the human body. The Bolsheviks had instituted a disciplinary regime and taken control of soldiers’ bodies in order to compel them to face the possibility of death and maiming to defend the state.

Soldiers faced the possibility of death, which could be abstract, but they saw very concretely what shrapnel, bullets and flames could do to the human body. Many soldiers reflected in their diaries, memoirs or letters home on how they or friends had been maimed in combat. One commander asked rhetorically how a jocular friend “could smile with a shattered jaw.”²¹¹ A sniper described how an explosion ripped through his body: “The whole right side of my body torn open – my face, head, hands and feet... even my bones were visible – the meat was torn off them. But now none of that hinders my ability to hold a sniper rifle.”²¹² In this case the soldier blithely described terrible wounds from which he had made a full recovery, something that the state encouraged. Many reflected on how pieces of shrapnel became a part of them, sometimes being kept as souvenirs or being

²⁰⁶ Lev Kopelev, *Khranit’ vechno*, T. 1 (Moscow: TERRA, 2004), p. 90.

²⁰⁷ RGVA f. 4, op. 12, d. 110, ll. 279-280 in Barsukov, *et. al.*, *Prikazy Narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943—1945 gg.*, pp. 317-318.

²⁰⁸ Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, pp. 338-339, 352, 386, 407-409; Atabek, *K biografii frontovogo pokoleniia*, p. 97.

²⁰⁹ Oleg Budnitskii, “Muzhchiny i zhenshiny v Krasnoi Armii (1941-1945)”.

²¹⁰ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 21.

²¹¹ Kiselev, “Voina i zhizn’ v predstavlenii 20-letnikh frontovikov (iz moego dnevnika),” p. 1020.

²¹² NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. II, op. 103, d. 6, l. 3.

removed years after the war.²¹³ The reaction of soldiers with more debilitating injuries could vary widely.²¹⁴ In the macho culture of the army, scars were a way to prove one had done their part, with phrases like “my résumé is on my hide” and a “a scar decorates a man” being common.²¹⁵ Soldiers feared being crippled or disfigured, but wounds carried a certain ambiguity, as political officer Nagim Khaziiaizov reflected in the war’s immediate aftermath:

The nurse just brought me the fragment of shrapnel from the operating room as a “souvenir” [*na pamiat*]. I look at it and don’t know what to say. I can’t be angry with it – you see it could have been worse – it could have killed or permanently disfigured me. So it turns out that this fragment “saved” me. However, I am upset with it, because it took me from the ranks in the most interesting days of the war.²¹⁶

Wounds could be terrifying, but were not necessarily unwelcome. Khaziiaizov was not alone in thinking that a piece of shrapnel had “saved” him.

Loginov’s men all eagerly anticipated an offensive for three reasons – “there is no victory without an offensive,” they could capture supplies and eat their fill, and they could “receive a light wound and finally get enough sleep in the hospital. No body thinks about the fact that he could be killed.”²¹⁷ The Red Army had no regular system of furloughs or leave, so being wounded was the only exit from a system of service in which units fought until they suffered heavy losses and were then rebuilt, with unharmed soldiers given little to no opportunity to leave the ranks.²¹⁸ *Samostrely* also counted on the relaxation offered by hospitals, if not a full discharge.²¹⁹ Being wounded meant that the state could make less claims on the body and was a visceral demonstration that you were fulfilling your duties to the state.²²⁰ Indeed, doctors could use the character of injuries they were treating as a sign of how well soldiers were fighting; more bullet wounds meant stubborn defense, according to some medical personnel.²²¹ The hospital offered a period of rest and relaxation and escape from immediate danger in the minds of soldiers if not always in practice. First, wounded soldiers had to escape the battlefield.

The army’s strict disciplinary regime touched the wounded as well. Soldiers were provided with a bandage to patch themselves up and regulations gave specific instructions to soldiers who were wounded:

If wounded, bandage yourself and continue to fight. **Leave the battlefield with the permission of your commander.** Take your personal weapon and one pack (magazine) of cartridges; if it is necessary to move, crawl with your weapon to cover and wait for a medic.

²¹³ Baklanov, *Zhizn’, podarenaia dvazhdy*, p. 64; Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, pp. 50, 168.

²¹⁴ E.g. Slezkin, *Do voiny i na voine*, p. 493.

²¹⁵ Grigorii Baklanov, “Naveki–deviatnadsatletnie,” *Voennye povesti*, p. 222. RGASPI f. M-33, op. 1, d. 853, l. 350. Marchenko wrote home to his wife “Now I don’t feel the wound at all and it is becoming less and less visible” however, he continued: “I don’t want to catch any more bullets or shrapnel, I think three times is more than enough, don’t you think?”

²¹⁶ RGASPI f. M-33 op. 1 d. 1085, l. 96 [vypiski iz dnevnikov Khaiaizova Nagima Rakhimovicha].

²¹⁷ Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, p. 10.

²¹⁸ Belov, *Frontovoi dnevnik N.F. Belova 1941-1944 gg.*, entry from 10.08.43: “We are relocating to Khmelevaia. Going to form up the unit. A new group of recruits. But again, after one or two months of battle, and then three months of training the troops and sitting in defense.”

²¹⁹ Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, p. 47.

²²⁰ So much so, that a special decoration was devised for wounded soldiers (see Chapter 2).

²²¹ Vishnevskii, *Dnevnik khirurg*, p. 33.

It is forbidden to leave the battlefield to accompany the wounded.²²²

Given that prisoners and the wounded were often disposed of on the battlefields of the Great Patriotic War, this policy had a practical side. It emphasized the self-reliance that Red Army soldiers were supposed to exhibit. This order also highlights the gray zone that wounded soldiers inhabited as state property – given that they were no longer active defenders, they were also no longer top priority, and Red Army medical treatment often left men and women more or less on their own.

As we see from combat regulations, soldiers were instructed to actively wait for evacuation, and post-war and wartime medical literature points to the fact that soldiers were often expected to walk to medical units on their own.²²³ Medics [*sanitary*] or *feld'shery* [health inspectors] or other soldiers provided basic medical treatment (i.e. stopped bleeding, provided basic splints and burn treatment, etc.) and helped non-ambulatory wounded evacuate. But medics suffered high casualties and were often too few to effectively provide services.²²⁴ Once soldiers arrived at either a medical point (sometimes called a “nest” – the first relatively safe place where the wounded could rest) or a Medical Sanitary Battalion [*Medsanbat* – the medical unit attached to a division] they were to receive further treatment. At the *Medsanbat*, the decision was made to treat soldiers within their own unit (light shrapnel and bullet wounds, burns and minor frostbite) or to evacuate them away from the unit and further to the rear. Medics also sorted soldiers by the character of their injuries and several specialized wards and hospitals were set up to deal with particular types of wounds at the front level.²²⁵

Regulations provided for an adequate system, but reality created a much messier situation. One senior medical officer pointed to a 250-bed hospital on the Kalinin Front that in March of 1942 received 13,335 wounded and another that functioned at quadruple capacity through the month.²²⁶ Services at such overcrowded hospitals were sparse to say the least. Boris Komsii, wounded at the Battle of Kursk, complained to his diary:

Disgracefully disorganized. We are in an empty hut with broken windows and sleep on the floor, four men on two mattresses, which we [they all had arm wounds-BMS] ourselves have to fill. There is absolutely nothing to distract oneself with, it is impossible to get books or even newspapers. They feed us poorly, and there is terrible disorder in the canteen – we have to eat standing, etc. It makes one's soul ache – is this the treatment wounded soldiers deserve?²²⁷

Experienced medical personnel were often in short supply, as were all resources. Creative doctors and nurses learned to adapt to these conditions, e.g. replacing plaster with splints or recycling bandages, but exhausted and inexperienced personnel were pushed to the

²²² *BUP-42*, p. 28. Bold print in the original.

²²³ Vishnevskii, *Dnevnik khirurga*, p. 137. A poll taken of 2000 wounded by one surgeon revealed that 800 had walked themselves to the hospital, 600 had been helped by comrades and 600 by medics.

²²⁴ A.I. Burnazian, *Bo'rba za zhizn' ranenykh i bol'nykh na Kalininskom-1-m Pribaltiiskom fronte 1941-1945* (Moscow: Meditsina, 1982).p. 125.

²²⁵ *Ukazaniia po meditsinskoi sortirovke i evakuatsii po naznacheniuiu tak nazyvaemykh legko ranenykh v polevoi sanitarnoi sluzhbe* (Moscow: Medgiz, 1942), pp. 2-4. For a harrowing account of what it was like to work in a head trauma ward, see Anatolii Genatulin, “Dve nedeli,” *Vot knochitsia voina* (Moscow: Pravda, 1988) head trauma ward. pp. 75-107

²²⁶ Burnazian, *Bor'ba za zhizn'...*, p. 39.

²²⁷ Komsii, “Dnevnik 1943-1945 gg.” p. 30.

limits during heavy fighting and due to constant lack of supplies.²²⁸ Under these conditions, hospital personnel often failed to keep proper records on both the living and the dead, failing to notify next of kin and provide a proper burial.²²⁹ Even worse, in the massive retreats of 1941 and 1942, the wounded were often left to their own devices by retreating comrades, as political officer and former Lenin Museum worker Shtin reflected while convalescing:

[In July of 1941] Our medical services were still very poorly organized, and the wounded walked, crawled and even hopped on one leg past us. From the front to the first medical wagon they had to cover 3-4 kilometers in this fashion. In general the situation in the first days was such that if you were wounded and couldn't walk, that meant you were dead. Units retreated and almost never took their wounded.²³⁰

Conversely, when the army advanced rapidly it could outrun its hospitals, leaving wounded to fend for themselves for long periods of time.²³¹

Every wounded soldier was at the mercy of the situation at the front, the level of organization in his or her unit, and the skills of those providing treatment. The *Medsanbat* of the 322nd Rifle Division could boast of ideal organization in 1944, with soldiers immediately being washed, shaved and hair cut, their clothing disinfected and the nature of their wounds recorded. Men and women were even separated to prevent the spread of venereal disease.²³² However, not all units were this well organized.

Some hospitals evacuated soldiers too severely injured to safely transport (e.g. with a shattered jaw, crushed trachea or gut shot), worsening their agony. Others needing only minor treatment were sent to rear-area hospitals, depriving the severely afflicted of space in overcrowded wards.²³³ Last but not least, wounded soldiers were often left to move from one hospital to another without any transport or food, sometimes while still under enemy fire.²³⁴ One war correspondent wrote to party officials in the fall of 1943 complaining that passing trucks often refused to take wounded soldiers and that commanders and medical personnel often had no idea where to direct groups of wounded soldiers. This lack of

²²⁸ Burnazian, *Bor'ba za zhizn'*, p. 116; NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 11, l. 3ob.-4ob, Liudmila Bernshtein described the nightmarish conditions of her work in the winter of 1942: "I worked under dismal conditions, in an open shed, beastly cold, with the only light a small fire. There were a few wounded. I had no experience. In peaceful conditions, near Moscow, I was considered a decent nurse, but soon I understood, that I didn't know how to work. There was an absurd number of wounded, almost 500 people the first day. The wounded came themselves, they were dragged by dogs, their comrades carried them. First of all we didn't have enough time to treat them, and second we had no experience, there was a lot that we didn't understand so we worked roughly, without a doubt. Only later did I understand that the splints we made didn't help the soldiers. There were no doctors, only military *feld'shery*. People froze, crawled to use, got to us any which way..." Sella, *The Value of Human Life in Soviet Warfare*, pp. 26, 27, 36, 38, 60; One surgeon described to the Mints Commission how they recycled bandages due to shortage. NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 123, d. 13, l. 3.

²²⁹ TsAMO Rf, f. 449, op. 9957, d. 3, ll. 131-132 in P. I. Veshchikov, *et. al., Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.: Dokumenty i materialy. T.25(14). Russkii arkhiv: Velikia Otechestvennaia* (Moskva, TERRA, 1998), pp. 575-577.

²³⁰ IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 2, d. 3, l. 7.

²³¹ Sella, *The Value of Human Life in Soviet Warfare*, p. 60.

²³² NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 123, d. 13, l. 2.

²³³ TsAMO RF, f. 449, op. 9957, d. 4, l. 25, in Veshchikov, *et. al., Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 475-476.

²³⁴ Komskii, "Dnevnik 1943-1945 gg." p. 31 ; TsAMO RF f. 208, op. 2563, d. 48, ll. 64-75, in Veshchikov, *et. al., Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, p. 239

attention to the needs of the wounded prompted soldiers to complain: “We are so needed in battle, but as soon as we are wounded we aren’t needed by anyone.”²³⁵ Wounded soldiers were painfully aware that their status was much lower than that of able bodied men and the Red Army medical system was geared at getting soldiers back into combat as quickly as possible.

At the end of the war, it was claimed that 77.5% of the wounded were returned to the ranks, and during the war wounded soldiers were reminded that “[t]he vast majority of soldiers return to the front, so it is not suitable to get accustomed to the gentle atmosphere [*teplichnaia obstanovka*] of the hospital, otherwise the transition to the harsh life in the ranks will be particularly difficult.”²³⁶ The lightly wounded were to be left in the *Medsanbat* so that they could return to their unit as quickly as possible. This practice led some soldiers who were badly wounded to stay in the *Medsanbat* rather than evacuate, so that they could stay with their comrades or maintain their status.²³⁷ Some units reported that the *Medsanbat* was their primary source for replacement manpower.²³⁸ Soldiers evacuated further to the rear would generally be thrown into a different social world upon their recovery, forced to forge new relationships as replacements in marching companies.

While recuperating in hospitals, returning to their old unit or making a place for themselves in a new unit, soldiers learned of the death of their comrades and had time to realize the dual cycles that governed the use of their bodies.²³⁹ The first was the attrition of military units, a constant cycle of filling the ranks, training, losses at the front until a unit was taken off the line to rebuild. The second was the soldier’s individual path through this system, from training to the front to being wounded and filtered through various hospitals until returning to the front via either a marching company or the recovery team, a special unit for soldiers returning from the *Medsanbat*.²⁴⁰ This second cycle lead to soldiers constantly establishing links with new comrades, in trains, wards and on the march, and soldiers were encouraged to share their experiences and learn from each other while

²³⁵ RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 130, l. 54. War correspondent Rostkov, writing for *Pravda* on the Steppe Front, complained in November of 1943, that: “[the wounded] are given virtually no attention. The wounded walk tens of kilometers from one hospital to another. Often they have no ration card, and even if they do, they can’t get anything with it. Passing cars often refuse to take the wounded. The wounded are stuck for several days without food or smokes. I saw wounded me, who were walking from Krivoi Rog to the Dnieper. The most shocking was to see how they walked along a major road, where hundreds of automobiles passed by. The commanders don’t know where the medical stations (*sanitarnye punkty*) are, and the soldiers seek them out for a long time. The medics themselves don’t know where the medical sanitary battalions are. This lack of organization is characteristic of the medical services of many divisions and armies...”

²³⁶ TsAMO RF, f. 67, op. 12020, d. 19, ll. 1-59, in Veshchikov, *et. al., Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, p. 706; I.B. Rostotskii, *Boets v Gospitala* (Moscow: Institut sanitarnogo prosveshcheniia 1942), pp. 40-41.

²³⁷ E.g. Gataulla Makhmutov, (“Iz voennogo dnevnika 1941-1945 godov,” *Gostiinyi dvor* 2005:16, p. 82) avoided evacuation East to stay with his unit and his brother, while Nikolai Nikulin, (*Vospominaniia o voine*, p. 82) refused to be evacuated because he feared that he would be sent to the front as an infantryman, losing his somewhat safer status as an artillerist. NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 4, l. 1. Lt. Colonel Batiukhin, commanding the 79th Guards Rifle Division, boasted: “In our division no one wants to go further than the *medsanbat*: I’ll stay here so as to not lose the division, so as to come back to the division.”

²³⁸ Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 222.

²³⁹ E.g. Bulat Okudzhava, *Bud’ zdorov, shkoliar* (Frankfurt/Main: Posev-Verlag, 1964), pp. 69-70.

²⁴⁰ TsAMO f. 2, op. 795437, d. 9, l. 274 in P. I. Veshchikov, *et. al., Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 233-234.

recovering.²⁴¹ This cycle would continue until a soldier was killed, captured, crippled or the war ended.²⁴²

Conclusion

The goals of the state and soldier at once overlapped and contradicted each other. Most soldiers wanted to defeat the Nazis, but they also wanted to survive. The state was prepared to pay a massive cost in the lives of its citizens in order to stay intact. This created fatalism common among soldiers that David Samoilov ascribed to the peasant background of most of those in ranks, epitomized by the folk saying: “Don’t volunteer for anything and don’t refuse anything.”²⁴³ Both the violent coercion of the state and the pressure to do one’s fair share weighed on soldiers as their bodies were offered in exchange for territory, enemy machinery and the lives of enemy soldiers.

In return for everything that the state demanded from soldiers, it would feed and clothe them better than average citizens, arm them, show genuine concern for the conditions they inhabited and invest the soldier’s every action with meaning. In the following chapters, we will see how Dzhuma, whose shivering, naked body opened this chapter, and millions of his comrades were clothed, fed, armed, sheltered and later given license to take enemy property.²⁴⁴ Their experiences would fundamentally alter what it meant to be “Soviet”, but before these men and women would preserve the Bolshevik Regime and defeat the Third Reich, the state took possession of their bodies. The state and soldier would negotiate this via objects in the course of the war. These soldiers would also be forced to come to terms with each other on an intimate, everyday level in which their lives were in constant danger. The common ground of such diverse people was the sparse assortment of objects and practices surrounding their use.

²⁴¹ Rostotskii, *Boets v hospitale* p. 39.

²⁴² For more on the fate of disabled soldiers after demobilization, see Beate Fieseler, “ Soviet-style welfare: the disabled soldiers of the ‘Great Patriotic War,’” in Michael Rasell and Elena Iarlsaia-Smirnova, eds., *Disability in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: History, Policy and Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 18-41; Frances Bernstein, “Prosthetic Promise and Potemkin Limbs in late-Stalinist Russia,” *Ibid.*, pp. 42-66. For details about how soldiers’ remains were treated, see Chapter 4.

²⁴³ Samoilov, *Pamiatnie zapiski*, pp. 204-205.

²⁴⁴ Actually, the real Dzhuma was felled by a sniper’s bullet in central Russia in 1943.

Chapter 2 A Personal Banner: Life in Red Army Uniform, 1941-1945

Introduction

In the Summer and Fall of 1941, hundreds of thousands of Red Army soldiers and commanders surrendered to the enemy or abandoned their uniforms while fleeing the battlefield. According to Soviet Law, surrender was treason, and it was obvious that soldiers abandoning their arms and uniforms threatened the collapse of the Soviet state. On August 16, 1941, Stalin issued Order No. 270, in which he posed the question:

Can the Red Army tolerate cowards who desert to the enemy and surrendering or cowardly leaders, who rip off their rank and desert to the rear at the first sign of danger? No, we can't! If we let these cowards and deserters have their way, they will very quickly demoralize the army and destroy our Motherland. Cowards and deserters must be destroyed.²⁴⁵

It seemed that the army had indeed disintegrated, but many soldiers continued to believe in their duty to Soviet state. One of the soldiers escaping encirclement in 1941, Kharis Yakupov, recalled that:

There was only one thing that was considered reprehensible and punished: when someone among the soldiers stole through to their own having changed into civilian clothes. For us, the uniform was like a banner and to abandon it was deemed to be an act as shameful as any display of cowardice.²⁴⁶

Yakupov's memoirs echoed Order 270.

The image of uniform as a banner that Yakupov used in his memoirs was one that had been developed in the Soviet military press during the war. It reached a climax in 1943, when the army underwent a dramatic makeover. The army abandoned the uniform that so many soldiers had themselves cast-off or wore while surrendering, introducing a "new-old" uniform reminiscent of late-tsarist styles.²⁴⁷ The formerly hated *pogony* (shoulder boards), which had been torn from the uniforms of Tsarist and White officers, were recast as a point of pride: "Having put on *pogony*, Soviet soldiers and officers will carry them through the fire of battles as their own small, personal banners, which the Motherland solemnly gave them."²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 98, l. 617-622, in A. I. Barsukov, *et. al.*, *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iiunia 1941 g. — 1942 g.*, pp. 58-60.

²⁴⁶ Kharis Yakupov, *Frontovye zarisovki: zapiski khudozhnika* (Kazan': Tatkgizdat, 1981), pp. 19-20, 26. See also RGVA, f. 208, op. 14703, d. 1, l. 141-143, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.: Dokumenty i materialy. Russkii arkhiv: Velikia Otechestvennaia. T.25 (14)* (Moscow, TERRA, 1998), p. 90, a report from July 1941 concerning shortages in uniforms, partially due to soldiers and commanders returning from encirclements in various states of undress and in peasant dress. Note: until the very end of the war, units that lost their banner would be disbanded, their personnel being sent to punishment units, thus further cementing the relationship between personal and unit banner. See RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d.78, l. 421, in A. I. Barsukov, *et. al.*, *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943-1945gg.: Dokumenty i materialy. Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia. T. 13 (2—3)* (Moscow: TERRA, 1997), pp. 332-333; RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 110, l. 587-588, *Ibid.*, p. 338. The latter is an exception – the banners of two regiments were replaced as most of its officers died attempting to save them while encircled.

²⁴⁷ In her diary, Irina Duanevskaja referred to the model 1943 uniform as the "new-old model." Irina Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, p. 170.

²⁴⁸ R. Moran, "O vruchenii pogonov," *Krasnaia zvezda*, January 28, 1943. Aleksandr Lesin cites this passage in his diary. Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 130.

In all armies uniforms serve as a certificate of obligation, with clear indicators of specialization and place within the military's hierarchy. However, unlike most other belligerents, soldiers wore their decorations (medals, etc.) at all times, including in battle, highlighting their own wartime biography via medals tied to concrete actions that were easily recognizable due to a strong presence in the media. This made Red Army uniforms a rich text that was readable by both soldiers and civilians. As one correspondent noted in a profile of a heroic soldier: "Fellow, you have the whole history of your life at the front on your chest."²⁴⁹ Also in contrast to the uniforms worn by other belligerents, the Red Army did not wear distinctive insignia for individual units.²⁵⁰ As a consequence, the soldier's uniform truly was a personal banner, showcasing the wearer's own accomplishments.

These garments provide a window into the peculiarities of life in Red Army uniforms, the Soviet state's symbolism and the corporate identity of soldiers. The relationships between the Party-State and the past, the outside world and its citizens were changed by the war and found its expression nowhere more vividly than in the uniforms of the Red Army. At the same moment that the soldier's uniform became more national, the motto of military banners changed from "Workers of The World Unite!" to "For our Soviet Motherland!"²⁵¹ While the shift in rhetoric explicitly embroidered on banners was clear enough, the meanings of the change in uniforms were subject to interpretation. All the more so because these uniforms, with clear associations with a *Russian* national past, were being worn by hundreds of thousands of soldiers classified as "non-Russians," i.e. cadres drawn from the ethnic enclaves of the Soviet Union.

What follows is an ethnographic sketch of life in uniform in the Red Army. The reader will proceed with Red Army soldiers from the moment of induction when they were shorn and undressed, and then progress layer by layer from underwear to overcoat. In so doing, we will have a chance to explore often overlooked details of life in the Red Army, the way uniforms changed how soldiers thought of themselves and interacted with each other, and, particularly from 1943, the changing symbolism employed by the Soviet regime.

Uniforms as a genre

Clothing is always fraught with meaning and symbolism, and is inevitably biographical. The clothing, heraldry, arms and armor of ancient Roman soldiers and gladiators, medieval knights, Sioux warriors, and modern gang members can all be taken as readable texts. These texts speak to the practical concerns of the roles their wearers fulfill, and also showcase the identity ascribed to and claimed by their wearer. Fashion has been described both as the space in which the disparate parts of modern identity are resolved and synthesized and as a series of symbols or even a language that can be semiotically

²⁴⁹ Vasili Subbotin, "Soldatskaia dusha," *Krasnaia zvezda*, February 19, 1943.

²⁵⁰ The British, German, French and American armies all had some device, such as distinctive patches, brass shoulder titles or cloth collar or cuff titles for individual military units, used as a point of pride, source of corporate identity and way of identifying personnel. Later regulations would call for unit insignia on non-combat uniforms, but soldiers in the field, with the exception of *kursanty* (cadets) sent into combat as an emergency measure, would not have unit specific insignia.

²⁵¹ RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 106-a, l. 566-568, in A. I. Barsukov, *et. al.*, *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iunia 1941 g. — 1942 g.*, pp. 383-384.

parsed.²⁵² Clearly, from at least the sumptuary laws of the early modern era (if not all the way back to bands of prehistoric humans) through the subcultures of today, clothing is used as a means of self-expression and in the construction of group identity, often with objects that indicate personal accomplishments. However, there is something special about uniforms that set them apart from other types of clothing.

An issued uniform is a “certificate of legitimacy,” a guarantee that its bearer will adhere to certain norms, making every action of a person in uniform reflect not only on him or her, but on the institution that gave them this clothing.²⁵³ It also clearly defines one’s place within the hierarchy of the institution, revealing relationships and forcing subordination at a glance.²⁵⁴ At the same time, a uniform can make a person anonymous, subsuming previous identities and making him or her part of a mass of similar people, impossible to identify as an individual. Donning a uniform, one partially surrenders both autonomy and identity to the body that issues the clothing.

Regimes and institutions design uniforms with particular symbolic and practical concerns in mind. On the one hand they must provide sufficient freedom of movement and protection for the wearers to discharge their duties, on the other they must be sufficiently impressive and easily identifiable. While subject to changing fashions, their mode of wear is dictated to rather than decided by the wearer. The proper wear of uniforms, keeping them clean and in repair, is often more important than the articles themselves, bearing real consequences for those in violation of the norms.²⁵⁵ Finally, being in uniform includes bodily practices and the mastery of a particular etiquette, and thus influences the wearer’s way of being.²⁵⁶

The Red Army

The Red Army, in contrast to other militaries, had no caste of officers, nor indeed the word “officer” in 1941. Formed as a revolutionary army, it was drawn from a society that had been purged of “exploiting” classes. There could be no such thing as an officer at the beginning of the war, only commanders. Ranks such as lieutenant, major, etc. had only recently been returned to the military’s lexicon; authority had previously centered on the role one fulfilled (e.g. *kombrig* – “brigade commander”), rather than rank as a status in and of itself.²⁵⁷ The return of officers and their rising authority would be tied to changes in

²⁵² Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp. 11-12; Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes* (New York: Random House, 1981), pp. 11-13.

²⁵³ Nathan Joseph, *Uniforms and Nonuniforms: Communication Through Clothing* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 66.

²⁵⁴ In this regard, uniforms are used by issuing institutions to consciously construct a schema that can be easily read via Bourdieu’s *Distinction*. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).

²⁵⁵ Jennifer Craik, *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression* (New York: Berg, 2005), p. 4; Joseph, *Uniforms*, p. 69.

²⁵⁶ There is perhaps no item that demonstrates Norbert Elias’ *Civilizing Process* more completely and explicitly than the military uniform, as even in societies that have undergone their version of the process he describes, uniforms and military service force their wearers to conform to a new etiquette. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (New York: Urizen Books, 1978).

²⁵⁷ In 1935, all ranks up to colonel returned, and in 1940, the rank of general was introduced to the Red Army. RGVA, f. 4, op. 12-a, d. 82, l. 562-628, in Barsukov, *et. al.*, *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1937-21 iunia 1941 g.*, p. 43; RGVA, f. 4, op. 15, d. 31, l. 288, *Ibid.*, pp. 133-134.

uniforms in 1943 and the return of a distinctively Russian past as a major foundational mythology, a process that began before the war. Symbolically, the Red Army also underwent serious changes in appearance. In 1941, one could still see traces of the Civil War uniform as soldiers continued to wear headgear and insignia that echoed that period. But quickly, as the war progressed, uniforms became at first more practical, then took on an entirely different symbolism. The Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist regime was increasingly grounding itself in a past fixated on great, primarily Russian, men and seeking great men and women among the ranks of the Red Army to meet the regime's current crisis.²⁵⁸ Their deeds in uniform could erase past errors, while acts of cowardice effaced prior accolades.

While the uniform was to subsume one's identity, it was also separate from it. In saluting an officer, Red Army regulations demanded that soldiers acknowledge rank, but not the name of the commander, even if he was familiar to the soldier.²⁵⁹ The soldier was, in fact, not saluting the commander, but his uniform, and by extension the state.²⁶⁰ The uniform was after all a symbol of the state, and every soldier its representative.²⁶¹

The conduct of people in uniform is a concern of any institution that doles out standardized clothing. The Red Army was no exception. Soldiers' diaries and letters abound with declarations of the responsibilities that come from being in uniform, and official organs voiced concern about how individual soldiers could discredit the army.²⁶² Marauders, drunks, or just dirty and sloppy soldiers could make the army of defenders and liberators look like a band of thugs, gangsters and beggars. Soldiers who were ragged, dirty and unshaven spoke of a critical situation in the army, pointing to potential collapse and of men who had lost their discipline (or who were too busy doing other things). An order from August of 1942 spoke of soldiers wearing unseasonal, dirty and ripped clothing and boots as "completely intolerable facts, bringing shame on the dignity of Red Army personnel" and began to crack down on both soldiers who appeared out of proper uniform and the quartermasters who failed to supply them.²⁶³ Momysh-uly told Soviet writers that: "Tidiness, cleanliness of body and soul give birth to personal pride and self discipline, exactingness to yourself and those around you. A slack appearance is a sign that a person is despicable. Filth rots a person."²⁶⁴

The desire to instill greater discipline was part of what motivated the 1943 change in uniforms, and as the army gained experience and professionalism, attention focused more and more on soldiers' appearance, especially as they crossed the border of the Soviet Union.²⁶⁵ As greater attention was being paid to the soldier's uniform and bearing, the state increasingly placed responsibility for repairs, washing and grooming on the soldiers'

²⁵⁸ David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 173-174.

²⁵⁹ *Rukhvodstvo dlia boitsa pekhoty*, pp. 53-55.

²⁶⁰ A. Krivitskii, "O voennom mundire i pogonakh," *Krasnaia zvezda*, January 17, 1943.

²⁶¹ Joseph, *Uniforms and Nonuniforms*, pp. 3, 66-7; Krivitskii, "O voennom mundire i pogonakh."

²⁶² E.g. Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 287; M.G. Shumelishkii, *Dnevnik soldata* (Moscow: "Kolos," 2000), p. 26.

²⁶³ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 9, l. 590, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 266-267.

²⁶⁴ Momysh-uly, *Psikhologiya voiny*, p. 48. Conversely, Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 224, recalled how seeing his regimental commander covered in mud instilled confidence as it meant he had been at the front gathering information.

²⁶⁵ TsAMO RF, f. 32, op. 795436, d. 11, l. 36-39, in Borodin and Usenko, *Glavnye Politicheskie Organy Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine 1941—1945 gg.*, pp. 292-295.

shoulders, so that many began to carry needles tucked into their hats.²⁶⁶ A *Krasnaia zvezda* article stated: “A soldier is obliged to be concerned, let’s say, with his appearance – to have on his person a needle with thread, to repair his uniform; a razor, so he doesn't go around with a beard; and awl and nails, to repair his boots.”²⁶⁷ Soldiers, under pressure to meet uniform standards and with the anonymity that a uniform provided, often resorted to theft.²⁶⁸ In the Red Army the movement of goods and people was constant, something discussed at length in Chapter 1.

Just as men and women moved from unit to unit, articles of clothing moved from person to person. Shortages haunted the Red Army throughout the conflict. Warehouses that had been concentrated in the western Soviet Union fell into German hands at the beginning of the war, as did many of the most industrialized regions. The army that had existed in June of 1941 had been decimated by December and millions of new cadres had to be outfitted. The army was forced to make items last, replacing them less frequently. This led to criminal responsibility for the mistreatment of equipment, an eventual fine of 250% of the value of any item a soldier ruined or lost, and major efforts to keep items in service as long as possible.²⁶⁹ The most salient example of this was the recycling of uniforms and equipment, taking from the rear to give to the front, and from the dead to give to the living. Lightly wounded soldiers were expected to carry everything of use with them to the aid station, while those carrying the severely wounded were expected to carry their gear and weapons as well.²⁷⁰ Various orders circulated demanding that scarce items such as helmets and overcoats be taken from rear area soldiers to give to frontline troops.²⁷¹ The dead were stripped of virtually everything useful, all equipment, shoes, belts and overcoats, leaving only the uniform and underwear with the body.²⁷² When it came to enemy corpses, an order came in February of 1943 to take everything including underwear, as “a dog should be buried like a dog.”²⁷³

While taking clothes from enemy dead was something akin to skinning a beast, using clothing people on your own side had died in could be quiet disturbing. Rear area soldiers were to wear second-hand clothing, being issued new clothes only when sent to

²⁶⁶ TSAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 9, l. 590, *Ibid.*; RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 75, l. 52-54, in Barsukov, et al., *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943-1945gg.*, pp. 29-30. As the war progressed, the emphasis of complaints goes from not providing services such as washing, haircutting and repair to not providing the means for soldiers to serve themselves. *Pamiatka krasnoarmeitsa o podgonke, noshenii i ukhode za obmundirovaniem i obuv'iu* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1941), p. 26.

²⁶⁷ “Zabota o boitse,” *Krasnaia Zvezda*, December 11, 1942.

²⁶⁸ Suris, *Frontovoi*, p. 32; Shumileshskii, *Dnevnik*, p. 26; Samoilo, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, p. 232.

²⁶⁹ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 920266, d. 1, l. 463-496, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 105-108; TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 9, l. 254, 255, *Ibid.*, 231-233. RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 108, l. 36a, in Barsukov, et al., *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943-1945gg.*, pp. 186-187. The army shifted from a model of replacement based on the lifespan of a garment to pinpointing the reasons for its wearing out.

²⁷⁰ TsAMO RF f. 219, op. 692, d. 1, l. 352-354, in Veshchikov, et. al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 160-162.

²⁷¹ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 9, l. 158, *op cit.*, p. 216; RGVA, f.4, op. 11, d. 67, l. 158-160 in Barsukov, et al., *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iunია 1941 g. — 1942 g.*, pp. 193-4.

²⁷² TsAMO RF f. 4, op. 11, d. 70, l. 1, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 193-194.

²⁷³ TsAMO RF f. 232, op. 643, d. 18, l. 236, in Sokolov, et al., *Preludiia Kurskoi bitvy: Dokumenty i materialy 6 dekabria 1942g.-25 apreliia 1943 g.*, p. 35.

the front.²⁷⁴ It was usually impossible to tell anything about the previous owner, but occasionally an indelible imprint was left on the inherited garment, as Efraim Sevela's hero Monia Tsatskes mused:

Monia was dressed in a second-hand uniform, and on the left side of his short, worn overcoat a torn piece of broadcloth was roughly darned with severe thread – the traces of a hit by shrapnel straight to the heart. For this reason the previous owner no longer needed his overcoat. After disinfection and some minor repairs it was given to Red Army reinforcements, to Private Tsatskes.²⁷⁵

Such occurrences were entirely possible, as orders stated that items taken from the dead were “to be immediately brought into order.”²⁷⁶ Articles of clothing went from person to person anonymously, but could become talismans and were the second skin of their wearers like no other genre of clothing.

Soldiers on campaign travel primarily on foot, if they are lucky on horseback, the back of a tank or truck or perhaps by train. They spend most of their time outside or in structures that they build themselves with spades, i.e. in the ground, and quickly came to learn which parts of their bodies froze first.²⁷⁷ They had limited access to water, and soap was issued at the rate of 200 grams per month for men and from April 1943, 300 grams for women.²⁷⁸ Rarely was there an opportunity to undress.²⁷⁹ As a result, soldiers were filthy. Nikolai Chekhovich wrote to his mother: “Today was the first time for a whole month that I could scrape the mud off of my clothing.”²⁸⁰ Once soldiers were cold and wet, they might stay that way for days or weeks, as Lesin recorded in his diary “...everything froze, including the overcoats on our backs.”²⁸¹ Under these conditions, the uniform became literally an outer layer of the soldiers' bodies.

Part I: Underwear and Fellow Travellers

Underwear in the Red Army circulated even more frequently than other forms of clothing, as it was the most likely to be washed and changed, being the only article of

²⁷⁴ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 920266, d. 2, l. 12-19, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 208-212. Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, p. 60.

²⁷⁵ Sevela, *Monia Tsatskes- znamionosets*, p. 28. The passage continues: “Of course, to wear this patch like a target on his heart was unpleasant. But, on the other hand, it was a good sign, like a talisman. It is well known that a bullet doesn't hit the same place twice. This is almost a rule. And if there is an exception, why should it happen with Monia Tsatskes?” See also Baklanov, “Naveki-deviatnadsatiletnie,” *Voennye povesti*, p. 177.

²⁷⁶ TsAMO RF f. 4, op. 11, d. 70, l. 1, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 193-194.

²⁷⁷ Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, p. 34: “Before this I never noticed, but the part of you most vulnerable to cold is the knee. Maybe, because on a person's knees there is nothing to preserve heat – there's nothing but skin and bones.”

²⁷⁸ RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 99, l.128-143, 146-147, 151-152, in Barsukov, et al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iyunia 1941 g.—1942 g.*, 97; RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 107, l. 677, in Barsukov, et al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943-1945gg.*, p. 115.

²⁷⁹ Chekhovich, *Dnevnik ofitsera*, p. 43; Fassakh Gimaevich Gilaev in Frolov, editor, *Vse oni khoteli zhit'*, p. 69: “We don't undress, that's how busy we are.”

²⁸⁰ Chekhovich, *Dnevnik ofitsera*, p. 69, see also pp. 21-22, about how much weight dirt added to clothing.

²⁸¹ Lesin, *Byla voina*, pp. 90-99. It is clear in his diary that the elements were nearly as dangerous as the Germans.

clothing a soldier was authorized to have a change of, carried in their packs.²⁸² Underwear had a particular place in the Soviet project. They were part of the modernizing and civilizing mission of the state. Underwear, soap and bathhouses had been central objects in the attempt to raise the cultural level of workers and peasants via improved hygiene in the 1920s. By the 1930s this process disappeared from official rhetoric, but the army would give new life to the 1920s rhetoric, largely for reasons of failure.²⁸³ Usually underwear functions as the last line between a person and society, as the final border between a person and the outside world, with all of its grime, as well as the guard against people's filthy bodies.²⁸⁴ Due to the fact that soldiers lived in their clothes, underwear often failed to fulfill the former role.

It was rare that anyone in the army had time to change their underwear, something usually done only when they went to a bathhouse, which could be as often as once every ten days, or as rare as every several months.²⁸⁵ The rarity of bathing ensured that lice and various skin ailments would be a constant problem:

We dreamed about a bathhouse. We didn't remember when we had bathed or put on clean underwear. Our shirts and drawers had become encrusted with salt, becoming gray-yellow.

Our unwashed bodies stung from the bites of parasites. We itched...²⁸⁶

As Lesin wrote in his diary, lice could become an obsession: "If one asked what our company is doing, we would answer in two words: crushing lice."²⁸⁷ Other soldiers recalled that they popped lice with their teeth and nails, a lengthy process, or froze them in the snow.²⁸⁸ Some old soldiers believed that lice emerged due to melancholy for home.²⁸⁹ In particularly desperate situations, lice could go from the personal banner to the division's, as Boris Suris wrote in his diary: "We managed to save the division's banner (the *starshina* of the Commandant's Company carried it out on his back, and it got lice)."²⁹⁰ Given how irritating and ever-present lice were, it is perhaps unsurprising that any information concerning lice was censored.²⁹¹ Though some soldiers found creative ways to write home about their new companions, calling them "tankettes."²⁹²

Lice could not be ignored at the front, and battles with lice took place primarily in the bathhouse. In the bathhouse, whether set up by the soldiers themselves or as a travelling sanitary (tent) station, soldiers would have their clothing disinfected in special

²⁸² *Rukhovodstvo dlia boitsa pekhoty*, pp. 75-76 (if we include *portyanki*).

²⁸³ Ol'ga Gurova, *Sovetskoe nizhnee bel'e: mezhdru ideologii i povsednevnost'iu* (Moscow: NLO, 2008), pp. 38-64.

²⁸⁴ Gurova, *Sovetskoe nizhnee bel'e*, p. 46, for an excellent treatment of the history of underwear in the Atlantic World, see Kathleen M. Brown, *Foul bodies: Cleanliness in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

²⁸⁵ TsAMO RF, F. 239, d. 2204, op. 167, l. 115-120, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, p. 569; TsAMO RF, f. 235, op. 2096, d. 103, l. 84-86, *Ibid.*, p. 600.

²⁸⁶ Genatulin, *Vot konchitsia*, p. 210.

²⁸⁷ Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 82.

²⁸⁸ Boris Antropov, "Daleko za rubezhom," *Gostinii dvor*. 2005: pp. 16, 71-72.

²⁸⁹ V.P. Kiselev. "Voina i zhizn' v predstavlenii 20-letnikh frontovikov (iz moego dnevnika)," p. 1008.

²⁹⁰ Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 77.

²⁹¹ TsA FSB RF, F. 14, op. 5. D. 96, l. 83-91, in A.T. Zhadobin, et al., *Stalingradskaia epopeia: Materialy NKVD SSSR i voennoi tsenzury iz Central'nogo arkhiva FSB RF* (Moscow: Zvonitsa MG, 2000), pp. 141-147; RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 77, l. 174-193, in Barsukov, et al., *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943-1945gg.*, p. 257.

²⁹² Petr Georgievich Veselov, *Pis'ma s voiny 1941-1945* (Ioshkar-Ola: Mariiskii poligraficheskoi-izdatel'skii kombinat, 1995), pp. 102-103.

ovens and deloused.²⁹³ While they would get their uniforms back, chances were that they would get a different set of underwear.²⁹⁴ Some soldiers ritualistically changed their underwear before battle, for good luck; others believed that changing underwear would bring bad luck.²⁹⁵ When soldiers did get a chance to undress, it could be a moment of revelation as to how much their bodies had changed. Chekhovich wrote his mother about how tan his face and hands had become, while Dunaevskaia, serving on the Leningrad Front, recalled the shock she felt when confronted with how much weight she had lost.²⁹⁶

Except for sailors²⁹⁷, who had striped shirts of which they were immensely proud, the underwear issued to soldiers came in one of three types: flannel boxers, long white cotton drawers with a long sleeve undershirt from May to October or white flannel drawers with matching shirt from October to May. They were simple, anonymous, and looked very much like the underwear in Soviet catalogues from the 1930's.²⁹⁸ Often, ties were substituted for buttons for the sake of speed of manufacture. For men in the ranks, this would be familiar and utterly unremarkable clothing. However, for 800,000 or more women in the ranks, these garments could be traumatic: "In the beginning there were men's uniforms, underwear was also men's. Even worse, long-johns (laughs). We almost burst into tears, when they gave us those long-johns."²⁹⁹ Aesthetics aside, women were not provided with any specialized underwear and often had to make do on their own:

And from those ribbons – they were made from jersey – we sewed ourselves stockings. They wouldn't give us any stockings! We walked around in men's drawers and in men's shirts. There were no bras. We sewed ourselves bras from those green triangular scarves they used for bandages. The senior physicians chewed us out, but what were we supposed to do?³⁰⁰

²⁹³ Opinions vary on how effective the delousing was. Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, pp. 186-188 remembers it as effective, while Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 83 wrote in his diary: "No disinfection room helps. After disinfection of our underwear and everything else, you only feel yourself a person until you go to bed, while you are on your feet."

²⁹⁴ Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, 24; Gurova, *Sovietskoie nizhnee bel'e*, p. 123; Ekaterina Degot', Iuliia Demidenko, *Pamiat' tela: Nizhnee bel'e sovietsoi epokhi. Katalog vystavki* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi muzei istorii Sankt-Peterburga, 2000), p. 80: "Underwear in the army is underwear in general, without any sizes... In the army all underwear is for everyone's use."

²⁹⁵ Grigorii Pernaevskii, "Ekipazh mashiny boevoi" in Artem Drabkin, ed. *Ia dralsia na T-34*. (Moscow: Eksmo, 2005), p. 64.

²⁹⁶ Chekhovich, *Dnevnik Ofitsera*, p. 46; Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, p. 57.

²⁹⁷ Due to a shortage of soldiers, sailors were sent to fight on land in large numbers during the war.

²⁹⁸ Degot', *Pamiat' Tela*; Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, p. 76, recalled the awful smell of anti-lice solvent on underwear.

²⁹⁹ Golubkova Iudif' Vladimirovna, Interview by Artem Drabkin. Section "Sviazistki," www.iremember.ru (14 March 2007). Vera Ivanovna Malakhova, "Four Years a Frontline Physician" in Barbara Alpern Engel and Anastasia Posadskaya-Vanderbeck, eds., *A Revolution of Their Own: Voices of Women in Soviet History* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), pp. 175-218; 198. Malakhova recalled that the increased stress of the front could lead to a condition know as amenorrhea, her intermittent bleeding became so bad that she would lag behind her unit.

³⁰⁰ Malakhova, "Four Years a Frontline Physician," p. 199. Golubkova, interview: "What talk of bras, there were none. We didn't have towels either. You find a rag somewhere and that's a towel. What we always asked for, at any house we went by, was linen. We would ask or we could just take it, if no one was there. This we would steal, I won't deny it. Or we'd go to a store and ask. We used it for under-collars and making underwear... We had some women with splendid breasts. They, of course, had to have bras. But we, the young ones, could at first get along without them."

The lack of underwear highlighted how unprepared the regime was to take women into the army and how much the army was skimping on resources in order to provide for such a hugely expanded army. The army did not provide anything like sanitary napkins either. So again women were left to informal measures to decide this problem themselves, as one sniper told the Mints Commission: "Its very difficult during menstruation. There are no bandages and nowhere to wash up. The girls told the divisional Komsomol organization about this and they told the medic to give as much bandages and wadding as we needed."³⁰¹ Improvisation was a way of life in the army.

Underwear often became the victim of the regime's shoestring budget, as soldiers traded them for food or sold them in echelon, leading to a shortage of underwear at the front and increased attempts at surveillance on the road to the front.³⁰² This shortage could lead to major consequences. In March of 1943, even after disinfection 90% of the 91st Rifle Division had lice, largely because they had no change of underwear. Neighboring units were no better off, due to a lack of soap, leaving them "in an unsanitary condition."³⁰³ At least one soldier remembered how he and his comrades purposefully allowed lousy clothing to burn in order to receive fresh replacements, a practice occasionally endorsed by high-ranking commanders.³⁰⁴ Aside from intentional destruction, forgetfulness could cause soldiers to lose their clothing, as Boris Antropov remembered:

By strict rules, soldiers were supposed to thoroughly check their pockets, so that neither bullets, nor matches nor lighters filled with gasoline remained before they gave their laundry (which was hung on a wire circle in a special room with a very high temperature). But it happened that someone forgot... And then the following happened: naked, clean, steamed soldiers came out of the banya tent into God's light and struck onto the ashes of their laundry.³⁰⁵

Underwear, like the bodies of soldiers, was *de jure* the property of the state, but *de facto* under the control of the soldier, and in the case of women frequently constructed of materials that were either unissued or a creative reuse of military resources. The clothing closest to their skin wasn't truly theirs, but was something they could exercise a great deal of agency over, even if the items seemed to exercise control over them.

Part II: An Army Travels On Its Feet

Pants (and Skirts)

Pants in the Red Army were of the jodhpur style, and underwent less change than most other parts of the uniform in the course of the war. While at the war's beginning it would be typical for officers to have significantly higher quality trousers of blue and for everyone to be issued wool trousers in the winter and cotton ones in the summer, these

³⁰¹ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 2a, ll. 6ob-7. See also Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, pp. 98-99 about using personal first aid packets during her period.

³⁰² TsAMO RF, f. 213, op. 2026, d. 1, l. 52, in Vehschikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, p. 195; Samoilov, *Podennye zapisi*, pp. 152-153.

³⁰³ TsAMO RF, f. 32, op. 11289, d. 434, l. 332-348, in Sokolov, et al., *Prelidiia Kurskoi bitvy: Dokumenty i materialy 6 dekabria 1942g.-25 apreliia 1943 g.*, p. 369.

³⁰⁴ Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, p. 73. RGASPI f. 88, op. 1, d. 958, l. 3. One committee member inspecting soldiers on the Kalinin Front in the winter of 1943 "ordered the removal of all clothing and burned them, as nothing else could be done."

³⁰⁵ Antropov, "Daleko za rubezhom", p. 72.

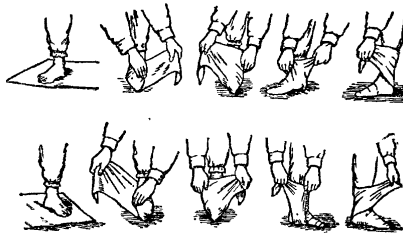
practices largely gave way to more practical concerns as the war forced austerity on the regime.³⁰⁶ As they would be doing most of the crawling and digging, soldier received trousers with knee reinforcements, which did not always ensure long life of the garment and made soldiers distinguishable from officers at a distance.³⁰⁷

The army shifted towards a greater contrast in its seasonal clothing issue in the wake of the winter war, providing cotton pants in the summer and cotton padded pants in the winter. These were quite warm as long as the soldier could keep dry, but the increasingly diverse cadres of the army made sizing a major issue, as one female soldier recalled:

I remember that the padded trousers they gave me in winter were frighteningly wide. I was swimming in them, like in a jump suit, and the thin waist belt on these pants went higher than my chest, I pulled them up under my arm-pits. Over this I put on my tunic, and around my waist I put on a soldier's belt... there was no talk of special women's uniforms.³⁰⁸

Clothing was designed with a young, active man's body in mind, and was poorly suited to older men and young women who would increasingly make up the army. While men's clothing was a necessity for female medics and snipers crawling across no man's land, the desire to maintain a semblance of femininity was very strong, and it was not uncommon for women to receive skirts or dresses for official functions and holidays.³⁰⁹

Portyanki and Boots



Portyanki from a Red Army manual.³¹⁰

Red Army soldiers didn't wear socks. Instead, an ancient article from the peasant wardrobe was issued. *Portyanki*, or foot wraps, which came in winter and summer variants, where simply rectangular strips of cloth held in place by tension. While familiar to most peasant cadres, they were alien to those drafted from the city: "For a long time the biggest

³⁰⁶ Although commanders not at the immediate front still wore these trousers as the war continued.

³⁰⁷ "Nash Shafai," in D. D. Petrov, ed., *Frontovaia pechat' o voynakh iz Yakutii: Sbornik statei, ocherkov, korrespondentsii, zametok, soobshchenii* (Iakutsk: Iakutskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1982), p. 58. One article from a front-line paper told of a sniper who worked so hard, that he would go through a pair of pants in a day, crawling in his hunt for the enemy.

³⁰⁸ Iavorskaia Irina Vladimirovna. Interview by Bair Irincheev in Artem Drabkin and Bari Irincheev, "A zori zdes' gromkie": *Zhenskoe litso voiny* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2012), pp. 82-108; pp. 102-103. She continued: "But, since I was 16-17 years old, and wanted to show off in front others, I would ask the *starshina* (Sgt. Major) for a tunic in the smallest size to wear and one in the biggest size. I have been an artisan since childhood, and from the big tunic I quietly sewed myself a skirt."

³⁰⁹ Iulia K. Zhukova, *Devushka so snapperskoy vintovkoy: Vospominaniia vypusknitsy Tsentral'noy zhenskoy shkoly snapperskoy podgotovki 1944-1945* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2006), p. 77; Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, pp. 98-99. Dunaevskaia was highly critical of any attempt to introduce women's clothing in frontline conditions.

³¹⁰ *Posobie komandiru i boitsu strelkovogo otdeleniia* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1943), p. 123.

problem remained *portyanki*. If there happened to be even one wrinkle, your feet could be rubbed to blood, and commanders instilled in us that it was a crime to have blistered feet in the army.”³¹¹ When properly wrapped, *portyanki* were quite comfortable. They do not wear out at the toes and heel like socks, and can be turned around to a dry corner for multiple uses.³¹² *Portyanki* were to be changed at least every 4-5 days, so as not to damage shoes.³¹³ An incredible resource saver that allowed cloth to become footwear for millions, *portyanki* were an exemplar of the Red Army’s mastery of doing more with less. On the feet of soldiers who drove tanks and flew planes was an article of clothing that could be found in the bast shoes of medieval peasants.

Once *portyanki* were wrapped around the feet, one had to slip them quickly into whatever shoes they had been issued. The army provided a variety of footwear and many soldiers showed personal preferences for the types of boots they wore. Less popular, though not without its fans were low boots with puttees (*obmotki*), which replaced jackboots as a stopgap measure.³¹⁴ Some soldiers especially liked American-made boots received through Lend-Lease, though in the post-war period praising them became taboo.³¹⁵ Puttees, or “three-meter bootlegs,” so called because they were made of long strips of cloth, had a tendency to come undone and were generally disliked by most soldiers, though others found they kept out deep mud and snow better than wide-mouthed jackboots.³¹⁶ As Lev Slezkin recalled:

Puttees were our sorrow. They did nothing to decorate our legs and gave no elegance to our military appearance, complicating our dress, which is always done on the quick. When winter came, to our joy, they gave us boots. They were, true, not of the best quality: the top of the boot was made of artificial leather [*kirza*], the sole of rubber, and the nose of low quality leather, even when oiled with blubber they would get wet in a hard rain.³¹⁷

Kirza (*Kozha-zamenitel’ Kirovskogo zavoda*) was first used in 1936-7 and authorized to replace leather goods in 1940, as a way of stretching resources for an expanding army.³¹⁸ Some soldiers tried to use captured German boots, but many complained that they were too tight at the ankle and too wide at the top, one soldier recalling that he had to cut himself out of a pair of captured German boots and crawl back to his ragged old *kirza* boots.³¹⁹ As a way of distinguishing themselves, some soldiers ordered boots made of green cotton for summer months.³²⁰ Officers were authorized to wear “chrome boots” of shiny

³¹¹ Zhukova, *Devushka so sniperskoi vintovkoi*, p. 73.

³¹² Baklanov, *Zhizn’, podarenaia dvazhdy*, p. 52. Anatolii Genatullin, *Strakh* (Moscow: Sovietskii voen, 1990), p. 13.

³¹³ *Pamiatka krasnoarmeitsa o podgonke...*, pp. 26, 41.

³¹⁴ Nikolai Litvin, and Stuart Britton. *800 Days on the Eastern Front: A Russian Soldier Remembers World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), p. 51. K.V. Tsyplenkov, *Uniforma rossiiskogo voennogo vozdušnogo flota. V 2-kh t. T.2 ch. 1* (Moscow: Russkii Vitiazi, 2007), p. 50.

³¹⁵ Nicholas S. Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1946), pp. 404-408; Sevela, *Monia Tsatskes*, p. 28; N.A. Antipenko, *Na glavnom upravlenii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1967), p. 303.

³¹⁶ Moniushko, *From Leningrad to Hungary*, p. 58.

³¹⁷ Slezkine, *Do voini i na voine*, p. 309.

³¹⁸ K.V. Tsyplenkov, *Uniforma rossiiskogo voennogo vozdušnogo flota*, p. 50.

³¹⁹ Yakushin, *On the Roads of War*, pp. 133-134.

³²⁰ Suris, *Frontovoi dnevniki*, p. 32; Zhukova, *Devushka so sniperskoi vintovkoi*, p. 170.

leather as a sign of rank, though many wore simple *kirza* boots. Finally, for the extreme cold, Red Army personnel were issued *valenki*, traditional peasant felt boots.

Seasonal change was often the worst time for soldiers. As winter turned to spring, felt boots that were ideal for extreme cold became sponges absorbing frigid water, leading to increased cases of frostbite.³²¹ As fall turned to winter, people froze in thin *kirza* and leather boots. Sometimes, soldiers never received proper seasonal clothing or received it late in the season, wearing heavy clothes in the Summer and freezing in the Winter.³²² The situation in Spring and Fall frequently aroused the scorn of inspectors, as they observed soldiers who were sometimes barefoot or resorted to wearing rubber anti-chemical stockings in the absence of adequate footwear.³²³ Unlike animals and mechanized equipment, humans could be forced to work under any conditions, from severe frost to summer heat to the seas of mud that visited Russia and Ukraine every spring and fall.³²⁴ As Vasilii Grossman wrote in his notebook: "Certainly no one has seen such filth: rain, snow, grain, a liquid, bottomless swamp, a black dough kneaded by thousands of boots, wheels and tracks."³²⁵

Beyond the seasons, shoes had a natural lifespan, which supply could not always meet. In early December 1943 the 1st Ukrainian Front's Head Political Officer sent a panicked telegram to Shcherbakov, Head of the Political Department of the Red Army, in which he revealed that between ten and fifteen percent of troops on that front were "entirely barefoot", and that a much larger portion of troops were in a horrible condition. He requested a million pairs of *valenki* and the telegram was given to Stalin, who passed it along to Khrulev, the army's head quartermaster.³²⁶

There was no single piece of the uniform that was more important from a practical perspective than boots. Not having proper footwear could lead to unimaginable suffering when one was constantly exposed to the elements and walked everywhere. One K.A. Yermolaev refused multiple times to leave a hospital in Kazan until he was issued boots in his size, writing the Tatar Obkom: "I have already had frostbite twice in my left foot and refuse to leave in tight shoes."³²⁷ That he could write such a letter speaks of how serious the issue of shoes could be. In the 44th Army, from 68-72% of cases of frostbite (a 11.9% ratio to losses in battle) were caused by tight shoes.³²⁸ Soldiers were instructed to try any pair of shoes on with two pairs of *portyanki*, to ensure that one could move freely.³²⁹ Later,

³²¹ N.F. Belov, *Frontovoi dnevnik 1941-1945 gody* N.F. Belova, <http://www.booksite.ru/fulltext/vol/ogd/atwo/19.htm#27> (September 02, 2011).

³²² TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 11, l. 101-104, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 329-332.

³²³ TsAMO RF, f. 208, op. 14139, d. 1, l. 188-190, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 166-168; Antipenko, *Na glavnom upravlenii*, p. 302.

³²⁴ Temkin, *My Just War*, pp. 162-163. Temkin has a vivid account of soldiers moving through the *rasputitsa* (thaw when rural roads become seas of mud).

³²⁵ Grossman. *Gody voiny*, p. 284.

³²⁶ AP RF, f. 3, op. 40, d. 272, l. 132-135, in Kudriashov, *Voina: 1941-1945*, pp. 319-320.

³²⁷ *Pis'ma s fronta 1941-1945gg. Sbornik dokumentov* (Kazan': Gasyr, 2010), pp. 158-159.

³²⁸ TsAMO RF, f. 228, op. 505, d. 2, l. 141, in Sokolov, et al., *Preliudiia Kurskoi bitvy: Dokumenty i materialy 6 dekabria 1942g.-25 aprelia 1943 g.*, pp. 375-377. Interestingly, the report notes a higher incidence of frostbite among "southerners," i.e. those from the Trans-Caucasian Region.

³²⁹ *Rukhovodstvo dlia boitsa pekhoty*, p. 100; TsAMO RF, f. 213 op. 2026, d.1, l. 15, 16, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 174-5.

some soldiers were ordered to keep a second pair of boots, in their pack, an order that was frequently ignored.³³⁰ The state intensified pressure on supply units; starting in November of 1941 severe punishment was meted out for negligence (i.e. those who issued clothing, especially shoes “for appearances” [*radi galochki*] irrespective of size).³³¹ This did not always work; Irina Dunaevksia described walking twenty kilometers to get boots in her (tiny) size to no avail.³³²

Boots too large, too small or too worn out lead to suffering. Chekhovich wrote his mother about the declining fortunes of his boots, that “held, held and then started leaking” despite “nearly daily repairs” until finally he lamented “[I] really rubbed my feet raw – till they were bloody... but kept going.”³³³ The army was deeply concerned with reserves of boots and their repair, dedicating considerable attention to them.³³⁴

Boots were supposed to be cleaned to a bright shine at all times.³³⁵ They became a significant part of the military’s civilizing process, for they were the article most quick to get dirty, the hardest to keep clean, but also the most practically significant. As the emphasis on the soldier’s appearance increased, boots were expected to be clean whenever one was lucky enough to get leave; however, as Nikolai Inozemtsev wrote in his diary, having ragged boots that spoke to one coming from the front could earn favors among civilians.³³⁶ Boots were indeed one of the most obvious ways to tell how long someone had been in the army, Tvardovskii’s hero Terkin proudly proclaimed: “Not the first pair of boots/ without repair I wear.”³³⁷ Boots were constantly an issue, right up to the end of the war, and often replaced under combat conditions. One soldier upon receiving a new pair of boots in Berlin, autographed his old ones adding “got to Berlin, 1945” and threw them into a tree as a record of his achievement.³³⁸ Like everything else a soldier wore, boots were ubiquitous yet personal. Boots were the part of one’s uniform most likely to cause pain and the first thing taken off of the dead to give the living.³³⁹

Part III: Tunics, The Personal Banner

Government Symbolism and the Tunic

Unlike boots, tunics were not recycled from the dead to the living, nor did they circulate like underwear. A tunic [*gimnasterka*] was expected to be worn by a soldier for 6

³³⁰ Antipenko, *Na glavnom upravlenii*, p. 92; Temkin, *My Just War*, 162; TsAMO RF, f. 202, op. 5, d. 1329, l. 38 in Sokolov, et al., *Preliudiia Kurskoi bitvy*, pp. 138-139.

³³¹ TsAMO RF, f. 213 op. 2026, d.1, l. 15, 16 in Veshchikov, et. al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 174-5.

³³² Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, p. 358.

³³³ Chekhovich, *Dnevnik Ofitsera*, pp. 65, 68.

³³⁴ TsAMO RF, f. 32, op. 11289, d. 434, l. 332-348 in Sokolov, et al., *Preliudiia Kurskoi bitvy: Dokumenty i materialy 6 dekabria 1942g.-25 apreliia 1943 g.*, p. 369.

³³⁵ Zhukova, *Devushka so snapierskoi vintovkoi*, pp. 74-5.

³³⁶ N.N. Inozemtsev, *Frontovoi dnevnik* (Moscow: Nauka, 2005), p. 92.

³³⁷ Tvardovskii, *Vasilii Terkin*, p. 9.

³³⁸ Rakhimzhan Koshkarbaev, *Shturm: Den' 1410* (Alma-Ata: “Zhalyn”, 1983), p. 128.

³³⁹ Mikhail Loginov was nearly buried alive, and saved only when soldiers from the Trophy Command tried to take his boots off of him and noticed he was breathing. Mikhail Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte* (Kazan': Tatknigizdat', 1984), p. 93. Litvin, *800 Days on the Eastern Front*, p. 51. While crushed by the death of his close friend, Litvin felt no sentiment about offering his friend’s boots to strangers.

months, being replaced with the winter or summer issue of clothing, and was often salty from the soldier's sweat and faded by the sun.³⁴⁰ Despite their long period of wear, tunics would undergo the greatest amount of change during the war, and were a subject of reform even before the war began. As the primary uniform item, the tunic was the main text of a soldier's biography, being the garment that carried insignia and to which all medals and orders were affixed, it was one's personal banner. Unlike other armies, there was no indication of what unit one belonged to anywhere on the uniform, only the soldier's branch of service. The tunics themselves were among the simplest uniforms issued by any army to its combatants, being pullover shirts made of cotton or wool, with elbow patches for enlisted men.

Like all uniforms, there was a specific technique to wearing the *gimnasterka*. A tunic was considered to properly fit when the sleeves came to the base of a soldier's thumb and the tail reached the perineum, while the neither the neck nor sleeves confined movement. As the tunic was loose fitting, a belt was required to give it a smart appearance, soldiers folding the tunic in the back so as not to create unattractive wrinkles that could cause blisters in the front. Not a single button or hook could be undone without the commander's permission and without the daily sewing of collar liners [*podvorotniki*], a soldier was not in uniform.³⁴¹

The shortages brought about by the war in both men and material made being stylish difficult, as the army was forced to simplify uniforms, including the authorization of non-uniform buttons (often simply stamped steel) in November of 1941.³⁴² Moreover, the cadres brought into the army forced it to reconsider its sizing system. A report from September 1941 lamented that uniforms were usually incorrectly sized, shrunk one size after the first washing and poorly fitted to the older soldiers who were increasingly being called up, recommending that smaller sizes be excluded from production altogether.³⁴³ As the war continued, uniforms would be recycled from the wounded and soldiers in training wore exclusively second-hand clothes, fresh tunics being reserved for those at or on their way to the front.³⁴⁴

In 1941, tunics still retained traces of the Civil War, bearing the bright color scheme for branches of service (infantry, artillery, cavalry, etc.) worked out during the Revolution, and having fall collars to distinguish them from the standing tsarist collar. Two breast pockets were to hold the soldier's documents, a first aid packet and before 1941 the death medallion. Rank (in the form of red enameled geometric shapes) and branch of service were worn on the collar in vivid colors (raspberry red for infantry, medium blue for cavalry, etc.) with brass pips (a tank for armored troops, crossed shovels for engineers, etc.), making soldiers easily distinguishable. One's branch of service could be a source of corporate pride, particularly among those branches that required special training. The most trained cadres, commanders, had additional piping on the cuff in their branch of service color, chevrons on the sleeve and political officers sported a gold-braided Red Star with hammer and sickle on their sleeve.

³⁴⁰ Tvardovskii, *Vasilii Terkin*, p. 12.

³⁴¹ *Pamiatka krasnoarmeitsa o podgonke*, 16, 38-39. *Rukhovodstvo dlia boitsa pekhoty*, p. 76.

³⁴² Tsyplenkov, *Uniforma rossiiskogo voennogo vozdushnogo flota*, p. 150.

³⁴³ TsAMO RF, f. 208, op. 14703 c, d. 2, l. 339-343, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 136-7.

³⁴⁴ Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, p. 60.



The uniform worn by the Red Army at the beginning of the war.³⁴⁵

While quite attractive, in the immediate aftermath of the Winter War, these insignia were found to be too noticeable for the safety of soldiers and officers and would be replaced in August of 1941 by “defense collar tabs” [*zashchitnye petlitsy*] of olive drab with rank and insignia in muted green.³⁴⁶ However, once these new insignia were introduced, soldiers and particularly commanders began to complain and seek the old style insignia, as the writer V.E. Ardov wrote to Stalin:

...very many commanders and political officers even under front conditions express a keen interest in the insignia given with their rank. Commanders try to get not the front style (defense color) collar tabs, but colorful ones; they value the red, enameled emblems, and not the muted ones. They look for red (commissar) sleeve stars and commander’s chevrons. This is all understandable. The wearing of these signs, which only commanders, commissars and leaders of the Red Army have the right to wear, inspires people, arousing respect for them from the population, decorates the difficulty and danger of battle service.³⁴⁷

The desire to be stylish could overtake other concerns, including safety, and Ardov considered style to be a potential stimulus to improving battlefield performance.

*Pogony: The “New-Old” Uniform*³⁴⁸

On January 06 1943, less than a month before the German surrender at Stalingrad, the Red Army received an order fundamentally changing its uniform. The fall collar of the tunic would be replaced by a standing one with two buttons, pockets would no longer be seen on soldier’s tunics, and would be inset on officer’s and sergeants uniforms. This new

³⁴⁵ V. Pravdin, Z. Pravdin, *Molodezh’, v boi za Rodinu!* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1941).

³⁴⁶ RGVA, f. 4, 0-. 14, d. 2737, l.58-70, in N.S. Tarkhov, ed., *“Zimniaia voina”: Rabota nad oshibkami aprel’-mai 1940 g.: Materialy komissii Glavnogo voennogo soviet Krasnoi Armii po obobshcheniiu opyta finskoi kampanii* (Sankt-Peterburg: Letnii sad, 2004), 119; RVGA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 97, l. 384, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, p. 103.

³⁴⁷ “‘Eto to, shto naboilelo, shto prositsia naruzhu’: Pis’ma I.V. Stalinu. 1941-1942 gg.,” *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 2005:2, p. 28; underlined in original, probably by Stalin.

³⁴⁸ In her diary Duanevskia referred to the uniform as the “new-old model.” Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, p. 170.

model looked even more like a traditional peasants tunic than the early war uniform, but this was not the only association the “new-old” uniform held. The new uniform would be familiar to anyone living in the Soviet Union, as it was a return to late-Tsarist uniforms including the previously hated *pogony*. This change had been discussed several times before, in 1940, when the state looked to create more gallant peace-time uniforms (many of which looked as if from the Napoleonic era) and again in 1941 when a distinctive uniform for Guards units was supposed to be designed.³⁴⁹ The new *pogony* would come in everyday (peace-time and rear-area) and field (combat) versions, the former of which would even revive gold for officers!

The return of *pogony* was announced at a moment when victory at Stalingrad was inevitable. However, the decision to introduce the new uniform had been made in October of 1942, a period General Chuikov, commanding the famous 62nd Army in Stalingrad, described as “the most horrible period of the enemy’s assault.”³⁵⁰ Their introduction diverted resources from civilian clothing and underwear production, which continued to be a deficit resource.³⁵¹ Since the outbreak of the war the army had been simplifying all of its equipment, from packs and grenade pouches to shovels and rifles, in order to stretch resources. Clearly, this change in symbolism took precedence over materialistically pragmatic concerns. How do we explain this dramatic shift and how did those wearing these new uniforms react to them?



The Model 1943 Uniform with *pogony*.³⁵²

A *Krasnaia zvezda* article from January of 1943 explained the timing of the soldiers’ makeover in terms both pragmatic and historical:

Now, in the days of desperate battle with the enemy, it would not seem to be the time to become preoccupied with the soldier’s appearance. This is not correct. Discipline and single command [*edinonachaliie*] were, are and will continue to be the foundation of the successful military activity [*boevaia deiatel’nost’*] of the army. The introduction of *pogony*, which clearly express the subordination of juniors to seniors in service, strengthening the authority of leaders, has a principal and important meaning. *Pogony* are not decorations, but an inseparable and symbolic part of the military uniform. And the fact that they have appeared on the shoulders of Soviet warriors at this moment, at the climax of the struggle,

³⁴⁹ Tsyplenkov, *Uniforma rossiiskogo voennogo vozdušnogo flota*, pp. 132, 218.

³⁵⁰ IRI RAN f. 2 r. III op. 5 d. 2a l. 16.

³⁵¹ Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii [GARF] f. R-5446, op. 44a, d. 9427, l. 41.

³⁵² A. Kokorekin, *Kogda broneboishik stoit na puti...* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1943).

makes them a doubly honorable sign, forever linked with the legendary battle for the honor and independence of the beloved fatherland [*otchizna*].³⁵³

Pogony are linked both with increased military effectiveness and a marker of historical change.

Pogony were one of the preeminent symbols of the old Regime during the Revolution. Boris Kolonitskii, a specialist on symbols in the Russian Revolution, has pointed out that in 1917 the degree of antipathy towards *pogony* was a reliable indicator of its “degree of revolutionization” as well as the catalyst for radicalization.³⁵⁴ It was not uncommon to demand the removal of *pogony* in the early phases of the Revolution or to drive nails through the *pogony* of captured White officers during the Civil War.³⁵⁵ Kolchak, one of the leaders of the White movement, told his Bolshevik captors shortly before being executed:

Personally, I had a positive attitude towards *pogony*, which was motivated by the fact that this was a purely Russian form of insignia that didn't exist anywhere else. I believed that our army, when it was in *pogony*, fought, and when the army changed its spirit, when it took off *pogony*, this was connected to a period of the greatest disintegration and shame.³⁵⁶

Kolchak saw *pogony* as distinctively, *nationally* Russian, as opposed to his enemies who were internationalists without a connection to a distinct motherland. He also saw them as a sign of discipline and a guarantor of performance by the army. Ironically, the Main Political Directorate of the Red Army (GlavPURKKA) and many Soviet commanders would come to agree with Kolchak a few decades after the Cheka put him to death. For example, General Chuikov told a historian in Stalingrad that: “The factor of ambition [*chestoliubie*] remains, but it is talked about least of all... Tell me, please, the title ‘Guards’ and similar things, the titles, given to our heroes, *pogony*, you think that Stalin isn't taking this into account?”³⁵⁷

The day after the return of *pogony* was announced, Aleksandr Krivitskii published a lengthy article in *Krasnaia zvezda* concerning the sea change in the regime's symbolism. After a lengthy history of uniforms in Europe and Russia, Krivitskii stated:

After the October Revolution, when reactionary officers opposed Soviet power with weapons in hand, the young Red Army refused the uniform that its enemy wore. Since that time a lot of water had passed under the bridge. The Red Army has grown and become stronger. In her ranks wonderful officer cadres have formed, and now the country gives its sons the signs of military dignity, decorating the uniform of the Russian Army in 1812, the heroes of the defense of Sevastopol and the battles with Germans in the years of the First World War.³⁵⁸

In one of the few references to the Civil War in propaganda about *pogony*, Krivitskii dismisses what had been a fundamental difference between Whites and Reds. Instead, he emphasizes the Red Army as the descendant of *Russian* military traditions in a way consistent with propaganda centered on the Soviet edition of traditional Russian

³⁵³ Moran, “O vruchenii pogonov.”

³⁵⁴ B.I. Kolonitskii, *Pogony: Bor'ba za vlast' v 1917 godu*. (St. Petersburg: Ostrov, 2001), p. 82.

³⁵⁵ Ibid, pp. 79-80.

³⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 79.

³⁵⁷ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 2a, l. 7ob.-8.

³⁵⁸ A. Krivitskii. “O voennom mundire i pogonakh,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, January 07, 1943. Nikolai Inozemtsev echoed these sentiments in his diary in 1944, see Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, p. 176; David Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity 1917-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 6.

nationalism.³⁵⁹ A pantheon of great heroes was invoked, and propaganda images from before the war had been keyed into portraying Red Army personnel as the descendants of traditional Russian heroes such as Nevsky, Suvorov, Kutuzov, while occasionally paying heed to (also long deceased) Civil War figures such as Chapaev, Shchors and Frunze. The state was no longer portraying itself as a world revolutionary-oriented regime, but rather as something like a nation with ancient roots, which had had its potential unchained by the Revolution.

As the Soviet state began to resemble nation states more closely, its army followed suit. The authority of commanders was strengthened in a variety of ways. Dual command, the practice by which orders given by a commander needed to be cosigned by commissars, was replaced by single command, giving commanders full authority.³⁶⁰ Orders and propaganda emphasized that soldiers were required to follow commands unto death. Finally, the term “officer” was reintroduced with a corresponding emphasis on hierarchy in the army. Before 1943 the army was divided into privates, junior commanders (which included both sergeants and lieutenants), supervisory cadres [*nachal'stvuiushchii sostav*] and command staff.³⁶¹ Beginning in 1943 the army was divided into privates, sergeants, officers and generals.³⁶² Classification had become more rigid and new divisions were made between classes of cadres.

Pogony were part of a larger program to improve the status of officers and discipline of soldiers that had been building momentum as the army retreated towards Stalingrad and the Caucasus, and the heroic past that *pogony* were meant to invoke was a theme well worn before soldiers clipped them onto new tunics. Two reoccurring themes in *Krasnaia zvezda* in 1942-1943 are concern for the soldier and the importance of appearances. No one was presented as model for emulation more than Suvorov, conqueror of the Alps, portrayed as a stern, demanding officer whose first concern was always for his soldiers. Commanders were charged with insuring that their men were well provided for and properly dressed, both of which would improve morale and the authority of the commander.³⁶³

1943 is often cited as the year by which the Red Army had learned to fight.³⁶⁴ The cadres who had come into the army in 1941-1942 were often poorly trained as crises at the front led to accelerated training (sometimes as little as a month) and the use of *kursanti* [cadets] as regular soldiers. Many soldiers were learning how to fight at the front. By 1943

³⁵⁹ On the failure of nationalizing projects before the Bolsheviks see the work of Joshua Sanborn and David Brandenberger. Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation*; Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, pp. 10, 226. Krivitskii's sentiments that the Civil War was an aberration were echoed in a lesson for agitators, published a week later N. Brychev, “Novye znaki razlichii,” *Bloknot agitatora Krasnoi Armii*, 1943:2, pp. 26-31.

³⁶⁰ Many commissars, left without a job at most levels, became regular officers either immediately or after taking special courses.

³⁶¹ RGVA f.4, 0-. 12-a, d. 82, l. 562-628, in Barsukov, et al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1937-21 i iunia 1941 g.*, p. 43.

³⁶² RVGA f. 4, op. 12, d. 90, l. 5 in Barsukov, et al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 i iunia 1941 g. —1942 g.*, p. 64; RVGA, f.4, op. 12, d. 106-a, l. 242-243 *Ibid.*, pp. 360-361.

³⁶³ “Zabota o boitse.” See also, General-maior A.A. Ignatiev, “Riadovoi,” *Krasnoarmeets*. 1943:1, pp. 2-3.

³⁶⁴ Dunn, *Hitler's Nemesis*, pp. xviii-xix; Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p.120: “...by the end of 1943, even the least martial nations had learned to fight.” General-maior V.N. Nesmelov, “Krasnaia armia stala kadrovoi armiei,” *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1943:7, pp. 1-2.

collective experience had accumulated and the situation at the front had stabilized to the point where soldiers could receive more training and increasingly impressive weapons.³⁶⁵ The new uniforms were thus the mark of a new army, one that had mastered its trade and would be advancing West rather than retreating East. This change was noted both by liberated civilians and German prisoners, as Major General Mishchenko, the commander of the 148th Rifle division noted:

The battles around Malen'kii Arkhangel'sk in Orlovskii oblast' were interesting. I need to mention that we came as liberators on Red Army Day, 23 February, 1943. And by this time we had received *pogony* and the entrance of soldiers and officers into Malen'kii Arkhangel'sk with *pogony* made quite an impression – the effect was extraordinary. When we took German prisoners, they told us, that this isn't the Red Army, that we beat in 1941. Now that army is no more, the say, and now the Tsarist, Russian army has taken form.³⁶⁶

Given the importance of *pogony* to propaganda and the army's image, it is unsurprising that the change was supposed to take place rapidly. The shift was to be completed over a period of two weeks, from February 1st-15th, 1943, although this would ultimately be extended to March 15. By April 1, 1943, more than 32.4 million pairs of *pogony* were sent to the army.³⁶⁷ Soldiers would be allowed to wear out their old uniforms, with attached *pogony* until they were issued new tunics, and a variety of hybrid uniforms appear in photographs from 1943 as soldiers improvised with what was available.³⁶⁸ The issuing of *pogony* was supposed to be accompanied by a ceremony, worked out under various conditions whether at the front or in the rear. This ceremony was to serve as a reaffirmation of the soldier's responsibilities before the state and become an unforgettable moment in the soldier's life. Aleksandr Lesin said that he was given his *pogony* at the Kalinin Front "not exactly in a grand manner, but not without words of encouragement."³⁶⁹

With the new uniforms, came new responsibilities that went beyond rhetoric. The term "the honor of your uniform" (*chest' mundira*), which before had been associated with Tsarist officers entered Soviet agitation. At the front one honored their uniform with daring deeds, while in the rear by being model citizens.³⁷⁰ Since *pogony* had "given soldiers a strict military appearance... indicating that they belong to the army," "any little thing" that a soldier did was "of serious importance."³⁷¹ Once *pogony* were introduced, soldiers were no longer allowed to appear at bazars or markets in uniform, could no longer walk in the city with baggage, stand on the running boards of public transport, or to sit in the presence of superior officers. Soldiers could not go to theaters, the cinema or any public place in

³⁶⁵ Dunn, *Hitler's Nemesis*, pp. 12-13, 68, 86-89; F. T. Bulatov, *Budni frontovyykh let* (Kazan': Tatknigizdat, 1984), p. 44; Vasilii I. Glotov, *Vstrechi: Frontovoi dnevnik, ocherki*. (L'vov: Kameniar, 1980), p. 34: "The army has switched over to a new uniform and insignia. Instead of cubes and pips – *pogony*. This is seen as an inheritance of the traditions of the Russian army. But this is just an external change. What is most pleasing of all is the staying power of our warriors, their endurance and battle craft. They quickly master new, upgraded equipment – artillery, tanks, planes, communications. A lot has changed in the science of battle, tactics. This means that we are maturing!"

³⁶⁶ IRI RAN f. 2, r. 1, op. 124, d. 1, l. 1.

³⁶⁷ Tsyplenkov, *Uniforma rossiiskogo voennogo vozdušnogo flota*, pp. 218-221. General Khrulev was actually forced to ask for more time in instituting the new uniforms.

³⁶⁸ TsAMO RF, f. 2, 0- 729266, d. 6, l. 72, in Veshchikov, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, p. 314.

³⁶⁹ Moran, "O vruchenii pogonov," Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 130.

³⁷⁰ Brychev, "Novye znaki razlichii," p. 29.

³⁷¹ "Voennosluzhashchie vne stroia," *Krasnaia zvezda*, July 18, 1943.

padded jackets or *valenki*, without shinning their buttons, shaving and combing their hair.³⁷² They were also to be polite and observe military etiquette wherever they went.³⁷³ This was more than simply lip service, as memoirs and diaries record how soldiers were harassed and arrested for improper appearances or had their pay docked for swearing from 1943.³⁷⁴ Soldiers were now representing an increasingly successful army, and as such were to exhibit proper decorum at all times, especially in front of those they were defending. The growing cult of the uniform was one of the most publicly recognizable aspects of the campaign to professionalize the Red Army and create a separate caste of officers with corresponding hierarchical relations. By 1945, the army was in many ways an institution that even Admiral Kolchak would approve of.

Officers were permitted to wear special uniforms [*kiteli*] more in line with European tunics (they buttoned all the way down the front), and were allowed and in some ways encouraged to order clothing from tailors, creating room for the market in a socialist society.³⁷⁵ This gave some soldiers an opportunity to escape the hardships of the front. An officer recalled how one of the better soldiers in his company, having found a sewing machine in a liberated village and some captured German broadcloth, sewed him a new tunic and pants overnight. Soon, the officer explained: "The battalion commander saw my new clothes, and immediately asked, 'Who made it? Where? Send me your tailor!' In short within a month this soldier was making clothes for someone in the Corps. He had become 'a rear-area rat.'"³⁷⁶ The officer believed that the soldier in question simply wanted to do something nice for him, but his skills got him off the firing line. It was clear that there was a need for tailors to spruce up the army's appearance, and officers were prepared to pull strings to make sure that they and their family circle were appropriately dapper, even if it meant recycling enemy uniforms.³⁷⁷

Improving the appearance and bearing of officers was part of the perpetual Bolshevik concern with "raising the cultural level" of what was still an overwhelmingly peasant society. Official propaganda stated that in the old army "The authority of a Russian officer was based on his higher cultural level... In our Red Army officers are required to be of an even higher cultural level."³⁷⁸ Soldiers and officers alike occasionally complained about the low cultural level of the army's commanders. Some officers took it upon themselves to write tracts reminiscent of nineteenth-century etiquette manuals, including how best to blow one's nose, chew food, use knives and forks, drink, spend money and

³⁷² "Perekhod na novye znaki razlichiiia – pogony," *Krasnaia zvezda*, January 31, 1943.

³⁷³ "Voennosluzhashchie vne stroia."

³⁷⁴ E.g. Lesin, *Byla voina*, pp. 246-247; Tempkin, *My Just War*, pp. 129-130.

³⁷⁵ Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, p. 243. After the war, General Semyon Buddennyi wrote the General Staff suggesting a series of special stores, clothing and privileges, including dachas and theatre tickets for Soviet officers, particularly those with wartime service and serving 25 years or more. RGASPI f. 84 op. 1 d. 96 l. 103-106.

³⁷⁶ Yan Pavlovich Kaplan, Interview by Girgorii Kofman, Otdel "Pekhotentsy," <http://www.iremember.ru/pulemetchiki/kaplan-yan-pavlovich/stranitsa-8.html> (11 November 2011): Kaplan said elsewhere about this soldier: "I had managed to get to know him well and I think he did this out of pure intentions, and not an act of bootlicking. You see he had already fought more than adequately. I can't judge him. In the war, everyone has their own fate, which you cannot see in advance."

³⁷⁷ Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 259, discussed how officers would take Hungarian tunics and re-sew them into *kitteli*. Hungarian belts were also taken as trophies and used.

³⁷⁸ General-leitenant A. Ignatiev, "Ofistery," *Krasnoarmeets*. 1943:17-18, p. 5.

interact with the wives of one's superiors. These books so enraged A.S. Shcherbakov, head of the Army's Political Department, that he forbade the publication of such works, stating: these works "interpret in a perverted and philistine spirit questions of morality and etiquette, soldierly education, military honor and often propagandize views alien to the Red Army." Shcherbakov reminded his subordinates that the purpose of discipline was to fulfill goals of the military, not to recreate the officer corps of the Tsarist era.³⁷⁹ So despite a clear appeal to the pre-revolutionary past, something remained of the Revolutionary nature of the regime. Confusion over the meaning of *pogony* was not limited to the authors of ill-fated etiquette manuals, as many soldiers themselves were at a loss in their attempts to understand these new "small, personal banners."

Soldiers react to pogony: Symbolism and Aesthetics

"They are introducing *pogony* - we don't get it [*nedouemevaem*]" Boris Suris laconically wrote in his diary in January of 1943.³⁸⁰ Suris was not alone in not knowing what to make of the "new-old" form. High-ranking officers related how awkward they felt at the sight of *pogony* in January-February 1943.³⁸¹ *Pogony* soon became ubiquitous and everyone adjusted to them. However, among soldiers, responses ran the gamut from extreme discomfort, to indifference, to truculent enthusiasm. Many soldiers understood that a major shift was taking place.

Guards Lieutenant Akhtiamov, a Tatar from a small village, was very enthusiastic about the new uniform, stating "I have such clothing now as no one in the village ever dreamed about" in one letter and "the government has dressed us very well, I only want to go visiting, that's how pretty the new uniform is" in the next.³⁸² Akhtiamov betrayed no sense of the political in his letters home, and seemed genuinely enthusiastic about the new uniform from a purely aesthetic point of view. As the representative of a national minority, he could have had reason to interpret this shift as a return to Tsarist norms and oppression that would make his people second-class citizens, but he betrays no sense of worry. Lev Slezkin, an urban Russian, remembered that soldiers were at first indifferent to the introduction of *pogony*, but that once they received them "many received satisfaction... not so much due to the restoration of an external link with a tradition that had disappeared for a quarter century, as much as *pogony* gave the wearers a certain swagger and bellicosity."³⁸³ The Head Political Officer of the 79th Guards Rifle Division told the Mints Commission that:

Not a single negative comment was registered towards them, unlike 1918-1919. People's attitude has changed completely. Even before they got their *pogony*, Red Army men sewed straps for *pogony* on their uniforms. Everyone couldn't wait to get their *pogony*. Some joked that they felt like plucked chickens without them.³⁸⁴

³⁷⁹ TsAMO RF, f. 32, op. 795436, d. 12, l. 19, in Borodin and Usenko, *Glavnye Politicheskie Organy Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine 1941—1945 gg.*, pp. 271-272.

³⁸⁰ Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 74.

³⁸¹ N.V. Pupyshev, *V pamiati i v serdtse* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1986), p. 110; F.G. Bulatov, *Budni frontovyykh let*, p. 45.

³⁸² Akhtiamov, in Frolov, ed., *Vse oni khoteli zhit'*, p. 59. Note: his father had served in the Tsarist army.

³⁸³ Slezkine, *Do voini i na voine*, pp. 456-7. Slezkine also recalled how the driver of his tank became obsessed with his *pogony*, and ended up sewing them too short in an attempt to make them more attractive.

³⁸⁴ IRI RAN f. 2 r. III op. 5 d. 4 l. 30ob.

Pogony made soldiers' shoulders look broader, creating a more masculine appearance, but not everyone took them to be simply attractive elements of their uniform.

Many soldiers saw the return of *pogony* exactly as Red Army propaganda presented it, as one Senior Lt. Bogomolov stated:

this is a great thing for the strengthening of discipline in the Red Army. The new uniform gives an even more martial countenance. It recalls our forefathers – the Russian commanders-victors Suvorov and Kutuzov. Every soldier will conduct battle all the better for the honor of his uniform...³⁸⁵

Another officer thought it simply impossible that soldiers could remove such a uniform and dress in civilian clothes, as had been common in 1941.³⁸⁶ For some, the fact that the government could afford to undertake such a clearly expensive and not apparently necessary campaign in the midst of war was a positive sign.³⁸⁷ David Samoilov, an urban Jew and later a famous poet, saw “the appeal to tradition” in general as a sign of the “the entry of our government into the moment of maturity, the classical stage of development.”³⁸⁸ For many the national and traditional was either more attractive or in no way contradictory to the ostensibly socialist society they were fighting for.

However, many soldiers continued to be confused by or even opposed to *pogony*. According to reports by NKVD agents, several saw *pogony* as signs of the bourgeois world, as something that the capitalist allies of the Soviet Union had forced on the socialist state. Others were simply disgusted by the return of the old, musing that old forms of address such as “*gospodin*” [“mister,” but with an aristocratic ring] and symbols like the double-headed eagle would reappear. Some took this as a sign that Churches would be reopened, old hierarchies would reappear and the Soviet Union would become a capitalist country:

25 years under Soviet power we struggled against the old orders, and now they are bringing back *pogony*. Probably they will soon introduce *starosta*, like before, and later lords and capitalists...

I think that our government will be organized like England and America, because the Soviet country cannot exist alone among capitalist countries...

Again they want to make the old regime and a fascist army, as the fascists wear *pogony*. Soon they will clip on *pogony* and we will be eternal soldiers...³⁸⁹

Others bemoaned the low cultural level of Soviet officers as compared to their perception of Tsarist cadres:

Many don't understand the fact that the old officer of the Russian army was a most cultured person, and ours – simply a shame [*sramota*].

It's unfortunate that many will profane them [*pogony*]. How do you put *pogony* on our commander, when he goes around dirty and ragged. You won't raise authority with just *pogony*...³⁹⁰

³⁸⁵ TsA FSB RF, f. 14, op. 4, d. 913, l. 151-153, in Zhadobin, et al., *Stalingradskaia epopeia*, pp. 388-389.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 388.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 388.

³⁸⁸ Samoilov, *Podennye zapisi*, p. 178.

³⁸⁹ TsA FSB RF, f. 14, op. 4, d. 913, l. 151-153, in Zhadobin, et al., *Stalingradskaia epopeia*, p. 390-1.

³⁹⁰ TsA FSB RF, f. 14, op. 4, d. 913, l. 151-153, in Zhadobin, et al., *Stalingradskaia epopeia*, p. 390, one officer even complained that the army did not set aside a soldier to act as a servant for every officer (*denshik*), a practice that returned shortly after the war (using the term *ordinarets*) and could be observed during the war. RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 80, l. 264-268, in Barsukov, et al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943-1945gg.*, pp. 395-397; Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 142.

A sense of inferiority before the past had overtaken a sense of inferiority before enemies.³⁹¹ Soldiers were becoming more assertive, gaining confidence in their dealings with the enemy and in expressing their opinions to their comrades.

At least one female officer, while favoring the new tunics, decided that *pogony* were impractical for the trenches, as it was difficult to keep them in good order. Moreover, the word “officer...bothered the warriors of my generation” and anyone who wore *pogony*, especially the golden officer’s variety (a “*zolotopogonnik*”) was “an enemy, beast, sadist.”³⁹² However, she soon got used to wearing *pogony* and came to love the salutation “Comrade officer!”³⁹³ Some were disturbed by the reintroduction of *pogony* as a sign of growing nationalism, as Russianness was increasingly becoming a standard of propaganda.³⁹⁴ Regardless of one’s attitude towards *pogony*, as soldiers they had no choice but to wear them, and as the uniform was a soldier’s second skin, adjustment was inevitable.

Despite new uniforms and rhetoric, soldiers and officers continued to live in filthy conditions and wear their clothes for extended periods of time. While recovering from a wound in August of 1943, Boris Suris reflected in his diary about the lack of respect shown by soldiers to officers:

They talk a lot about the honor of an officer, of the dignity of the commander. But what the hell do you need this talk for, when so many of our commanders go around in low boots with puttees or boots that have been torn to shreds and patched up a thousand times, in salty and sun-faded uniforms...³⁹⁵

Even the new uniform would fade and become covered with mud. The fact that shoulder boards could easily be removed caused officers and enlisted men alike to take them off, sometimes to avoid sniper fire.³⁹⁶ Officers at the front occasionally wore private’s tunics and trousers, and enlisted men serving in the rear (secretaries, chauffeurs and newspaper correspondents) sometimes got a hold of tunics meant for officers.³⁹⁷ Men who started their careers as sailors would often leave the neck of their tunic open “to let in sea air” and show off their striped shirts.³⁹⁸ Despite these practices, the army had upped the ante for failing to appear in uniform, particularly in front of large groups of civilians.

The dramatic change in uniforms caught people in occupied territory, former White Guards, and *Ostarbeiteren* [Soviet citizens sent to work in the Third Reich] unawares, and several soldiers recorded or remembered how liberated peoples did not recognize that they were Soviet, some even asking: “Are you Soviets or Germans?”³⁹⁹ Some of the recently

³⁹¹ Danil Granin, “Prekrasnaia uta,” *Nash kombat* (Moscow: VZOA, 2004), pp. 218-9.

³⁹² Chudakova, *Ratnoe schastiie*, p. 23.

³⁹³ Chudakova, *Ratnoe schastiie*, p. 24.

³⁹⁴ Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, p. 237; Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, pp. 120-123.

³⁹⁵ Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, pp. 137-8.

³⁹⁶ Moniushko, *From Leningrad to Hungary*, p. 175; TsAMO RF, f. 239, d. 2204, op. 167, l. 115-120, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, p. 569. Moniushko claims that casualties rose significantly once uniform regulations were enforced, as officers became very conspicuous.

³⁹⁷ Lesin, *Byla voina*, pp. 246-247; Selzkin, *Do voini i na voine*, p. 326. Hero of the Soviet Union Yakov Babenko ordered all of his officers to wear soldier’s clothing in battle. However, once his unit reached Germany, he ordered everyone to appear in proper uniform, “because we are in Germany.” NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 14, ll. 112, 123-124.

³⁹⁸ Genatluin, *Vot konchitsia voina*, p. 42; Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, pp. 137-8.

³⁹⁹ Litvin, *800 Days on the Eastern Front*, p. 29. See also Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 185, Genatulin, *Vot konchitsia voina*, p. 250.

liberated civilians asked questions such as “Is it true that a new aristocracy has been created: that, for example, generals are not allowed to marry common girls?” and “Is it true, that after the introduction of *pogony* there are no longer communists or Komsomol members in the USSR?”⁴⁰⁰ While these men and women had been under occupation, a return to tradition that had begun before the war came to fruition, leading to a new banner, new uniforms and eventually a new anthem that spoke of “Great *Rus*” rather than “the whole world of the starving and enslaved.”⁴⁰¹ Even those who had fled the Revolution gazed in wonder at the Red Army’s *pogony*: “All the emigrants who remained in Belgrade prayed for the Red Army from the depths of their soul. But their feelings were concentrated on *pogony*, The Orders of Suvorov and Kutuzov, on the sacred word ‘Lieutenant Colonel.’”⁴⁰²

A new understanding of what it meant to be Soviet was emerging, one with a new relationship with the past and a clear ethnic hierarchy in which Russian was assumed to be not only the *lingua franca* but also the common culture (in a way similar to German in the late Hapsburg Empire), which David Brandenberger has tracked as National Bolshevism, updating Mikhail Agurskii’s theory.⁴⁰³ New forms of social differentiation also came to the fore, as a class of officers was established. The war had changed the way the regime positioned itself and would also change the way citizens considered their accomplishments.

Decorations: The Emergence of New Icons

As a heroic past was increasingly made relevant and even manifest during the war, Red Army soldiers were encouraged to become heroes, modeling themselves on historical figures or repeating contemporary feats. The military press was filled with accounts of outnumbered and brave soldiers committing miraculous acts of heroism, and the Red Army used decorations of various sorts as didactic tools to encourage heroism.⁴⁰⁴ Both the actions of soldiers who had earned various decorations and the decorations themselves were to serve as a means of raising the consciousness of soldiers:

To award a valiant warrior and skilled commander isn’t the end of it. We must teach others using the example of heroes, we need to tell the fighters more often about the best people, selflessly struggling for the Motherland and drive these stories into the hearts of Red Army men.⁴⁰⁵

Soviet history had always had a place for great men, particularly under Stalin. The army encouraged its personnel to become exceptional heroes through the popularization of their feats and the medals that they had been awarded for them, in a way comparable to shock workers and Stakhanovites. Indeed it even researched the Tsarist system of awards and would run articles in the military press about the history of military decorations in Russia, going all the way back to Yaroslav the Wise.⁴⁰⁶ Alongside these articles, lists of those

⁴⁰⁰ RGASPI f. 17 op. 125 d. 242 l. 101.

⁴⁰¹ “Gimn SSSR” and “The Internationale.”

⁴⁰² Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p. 132.

⁴⁰³ Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War*; Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*.

⁴⁰⁴ On the importance of exemplary individuals in Soviet propaganda see Karel C. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda During World War II* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 60-61.

⁴⁰⁵ “Nagrada v boiu,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, March 06, 1943. See also M. Rubinshtein, “O voinskome vospitanii,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, October 18, 1942.

⁴⁰⁶ RGASPI f.17 op. 125 d. 78 l.122 contains a bibliography “The System of Military Decorations in Russia”, submitted to the Propaganda Section of the Party on Spetmeber 24, 1942. For a typical article on decorations,

awarded with various decorations and stories of how soldiers received them were standard reading throughout the war.

The Red Army's practice of wearing decorations at all times was unusual (only the Wehrmacht acted similarly) and that it explicitly used medals as a stimulus. American combat soldiers were famous for their apathy towards decorations, and several armies wore small ribbons in place of medals and even those only on their dress uniforms, making their uniforms a text that few could read.⁴⁰⁷ In the Red Army decorations were part of the uniform at all times, and a point of pride for soldiers.⁴⁰⁸ One could be prosecuted for wearing medals they had not earned, or even more severely for losing their medals, as German spies made extensive use of decorations in order to more convincingly pass themselves off as Red Army soldiers and officers.⁴⁰⁹



The Medal For Valor, The Medal For Combat Service. The “Gold Star” of the Hero of the Soviet Union, and the Order of the Red Star.⁴¹⁰

At the beginning of the war medals were quite rare. Decorations were most often issued on holidays, and could take months or years to find their recipients, who often were no longer with the same unit.⁴¹¹ As of 29 September 1942, 69,436 medals had not found their recipients, because they had either been killed, wounded or transferred to other units.⁴¹² Under these conditions, as one war correspondent noted:

It seems to me that at the front the system of decorations suffers from a shortcoming – it lacks concrete definition. A person gets an order for some sort of heroic act, but while the decoration is formalized a long time goes by, sometimes two or three months, and then the issuing of the order is protracted. Occasionally the person getting the award forgets for what exactly they were decorated, and those around the soldier don't know anything about it...Its clear that the power of such decorations to stimulate is highly insignificant.⁴¹³

see N. Markovin, “Boevye nagrody v snaroi russkoi armii,” *Agitator i Propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1943:7, pp. 42-48.

⁴⁰⁷ Joseph, *Uniforms and Nonuniforms*, pp. 97-98. I suspect that this difference may have a lot to do with the fact that the US issued many less medals, and with the sort of anti-authoritarian and anti-government strains of mid-Century American culture.

⁴⁰⁸ “Orden i medal’ – slava sovietskogo voina,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, June 20, 1943. While the Red Army officially went over to ribbons rather than medals in late 1943, photographic evidence shows that the wearing of medals was common until the final days of the war. The wearing of ribbons themselves was practiced only in the Red Army and Wehrmacht.

⁴⁰⁹ RGVA, f.4, op. 12, d. 108, l. 141, in Barsukov, et al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943-1945gg.*, 148-9; Smislov, *istoriia sovierskikh nagrad*, 214.

⁴¹⁰ *Rukhovodstvo dlia boitsa pekhoty* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1940), p. 37.

⁴¹¹ E.g. Suris received his Stalingrad medal almost a year after it was instituted. Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 163.

⁴¹² RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 78, l. 57.

⁴¹³ RGASPI f. 17, op. 125, d. 78, l. 123.

As the war continued, the process of awarding medals was simplified and the state encouraged officers to award their men (and women) more generously.⁴¹⁴

By 1944 the army created standards for awarding some decorations simply for the number of years one had served, which benefitted career officers overwhelmingly.⁴¹⁵ As one Polish observer noted in late 1944: “In no other army have I seen such a profusion of decorations. Every private had at least three, while the officers had at least a whole row, sometimes one on the left side and one on the right.”⁴¹⁶ Decorations came in several genres and were awarded for everything from baking bread and surviving wounds to truly exceptional acts of bravery such as destroying enemy tanks or seizing enemy banners.

There were a variety of *nagrudnye znaki* or chest badges, awarded before and during the war, and the list expanded during and after the conflict. Paratroopers received a badge for learning how to jump. “Excellent” awards were given to scouts, medics, bakers, cooks, pontoon layers, and a host of other specialists starting from before the war, the list expanding significantly from 1942 on. These were sometimes given for concrete acts that displayed competence or initiative, sometimes simply for being very good at one’s job. For example, one could earn the “Excellent Cook” badge for “systematically” doing such things as “quickly providing hot food and tea,” “using local resources to provide vitamins and greens” as well as properly camouflaging a field kitchen (see embedded imager).⁴¹⁷ Within certain frontline communities, these decorations were highly prized:



This badge [Excellent Scout] was prized more highly than any order, because orders are given out for a feat of heroism, for doing something exceptional, completing a mission or capturing a tongue [enemy soldier for interrogation]. The importance of the mission determines what sort of order you get. But the Excellent Scout Badge is given to a scout in general. It shows how you handle yourself in reconnaissance, what kind of scout you are in total. Therefore it was rated much higher by all scouts.⁴¹⁸

The most common *nagrudnyi znak* was issued to whole units and carried with it more privileges than others. This was the special badge created to distinguish Guards units, elite military formations that had gained their status through combat exploits starting from September 18, 1941 (see embedded image). From May of 1942, soldiers in Guards units earned double pay, officers one and a half of a non-Guards officer, and all Guards personnel had access to better clothing, equipment, food and weapons as



⁴¹⁴ RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 71, l. 386-389, in Barsukov, *et al.*, *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iunia 1941 g. — 1942 g.*, pp. 269-270; “Nagrada v boiu,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, March 06, 1943; Ukaz ot 10 noiabria 1942 goda O predostavlenii prava nagrazhdeniia ordenami i medaliami SSSR i nagrudnymi znakami komanduiushchim frontami, flotami, armiiami i flotiliiami, komandiram korpusov, divizii, brigad, polkov. *Programma Konsul'tantPlius*.

⁴¹⁵ Oleg Smyslov, *Istoriia sovietskikh nagrad: vo slavu otechestva* (Moscow: “Veche,” 2007), pp. 204-5.

⁴¹⁶ Alexandra Orme, *Comes the Comrade* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1950), p. 255. One author has estimated that in 1941 1% of all Red Army personnel had been awarded a medal, in 1942 7% and in 1945 86%. Smyslov, *Istoriia sovietskikh nagrad*, pp. 133-4, 207.

⁴¹⁷ “Polozheniie o nagrudnom znake ‘otlichnyi povar’,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, July 09, 1943.

⁴¹⁸ NA IRI RAN f.2 r.X op.7 d.13-b l.130. It is interesting to note that the badge that this respondent received was taken off the body of a dead soldier.

well as the title “Guards” added to their rank.⁴¹⁹ The ideological underpinnings of Guards units at first seem ambiguous – did they harken back to the era of Red Guards or the elite Guards Regiments of the Tsar’s army? As the war continued, it became obvious the model was Russian and not revolutionary, as commentators called for the return of Imperial military traditions, including distinct regimental uniforms and increased spirit de corps among soldiers.⁴²⁰ Guards soldiers certainly seemed to take pride in their elite status, using salutations such as “a Guards hello to you!” in letters.⁴²¹ Guards units also got the most physically fit and politically mature replacements, and some commented on the greater level of professionalism among Guards soldiers.⁴²²

The enthusiasm for membership in an elite unit was tied to its symbols. Mansur Abdulin, a soldier in the 66th Guards Rifle Division recalled how he and his comrades awaited their Guards Badges:

It bore a strong resemblance to the Order of the Red Banner, which increased our burning impatience to get it and have time to put on airs all the more. If someone happened to meet a Guardsman with a Guards Badge on his chest (from another branch of service or unit), everyone would hear about it instantly, and we would run over to see this beautiful badge with our own eyes... For many the Guards Badge was the only decoration on their tunic, and it seemed to a soldier that he didn’t need any other Orders... Hand drawn Guards Badges appeared on tanks, cannons, cars, wagons and even buggies. We implanted brass Guards Badges into the stocks of our sub-machine guns and rifles...In the winter we wore our Guards Badges on our overcoats, so that it was instantly clear to all – before you is a guardsman! And *komosomoltsy* wore their Komosomol Badges next to their Guards Badge, that was the rule... so that your chest would be “hung” with medals. This warmed a soldier’s soul...⁴²³

Clearly, in a massive, largely anonymous army where cadres moved around constantly, the Guards badge gave soldiers a sense of corporate pride and belonging, as well as a means to make claims about their own worth.

Similar to Guards Badges, in that they were issued to *en masse*, were campaign medals. These were received by every participant in a battle (that survived long enough to get them); e.g. for The Defense of Moscow (issued to over 1,000,000 people, see embedded image), The Defense of Leningrad (issued to over 1,470,000 people), The Defense of Stalingrad (issued to over 760,000 people), etc. The most widely issued campaign medal, Victory over Germany, was issued to everyone in the army in 1945, over 15,000,000 people.⁴²⁴ These medals could take months and sometimes years to reach soldiers and did not imply that the bearers had distinguished themselves during the battle in question, merely that they were present. However,



⁴¹⁹ RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 99, ll. 110-112, in Barsukov, et al., *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iunia 1941 g. — 1942 g.*, pp. 85-6; RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 104, l. 389-391, *Ibid.*, pp. 243-5, Temkin, *My Just War*, 138-9. AP RF f. 3, op. 50 d. 311, ll. 13-30 in Kudraishov, *Voina*, pp. 156-157.

⁴²⁰ “Eto to, shto nobilelo, shto prositsia naruzhu,” pp. 27-30.

⁴²¹ Akhtiamov, *Vse oni khoteli zhit'*, pp. 64, 66.

⁴²² TsGA IPD RT, f. 319, op. 1, d. 20, l. 25.

⁴²³ Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, pp. 76-77.

⁴²⁴ Aleksandr Kuznetsov, *Entsiklopediia russkikh nagrad* (Moscow: “Golos Press,” 2001), pp. 370-373, 287; RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 111, l. 365-368, in Barsukov, et al., *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943-1945gg.*, pp. 371-372.

spotting a campaign medal could be a moment of fellowship, as two soldiers who served at the same battle swapped war stories, and those who had been in the army for years could taunt green soldiers about their accomplishments. After the war, some veterans wore these medals on trips to the relevant cities in order to get special treatment.⁴²⁵ If Guards Badges, campaign medals (and Komsomol pins) were about corporate identity, then most medals, orders and stripes were about personal accomplishment.

On 14 July 1942, the Red Army introduced wound stripes to be awarded to all personnel who had been injured since the beginning of the war.⁴²⁶ Coming in two varieties – red for light wounds or gold/yellow for serious wounds (broken bones or arterial wounds), the regime was explicit in the didactic purpose of these ribbons:

Widely popularize among Red Army men those in service, who were wounded but did not leave their unit, and also those who were wounded but returned to ranks. Use the military press for this. On these examples raise the whole personnel in the spirit of battle traditions of their unit.⁴²⁷

Wound stripes served two purposes: to prove that people could struggle and survive despite injuries received at the front and to identify as heroes those who had survived such wounds. Every wound had a story, and every soldier with a wound had the authority of having not only seen battle, but also having survived the enemy's fire. In one propaganda piece, a soldier uses his wound stripes to discuss his transformation from an enthusiastic, but foolish greenhorn (saying of his first stripe "I don't respect this one") to an effective warrior respected by all.⁴²⁸ They were, like medals more generally, meant to inspire confidence on the part of comrades and were part of a general "*ikonostas*" of medals that every soldier was supposed to strive for.

Several medals were issued in the Red Army, e.g. "For Valor," "For Field Service," for personal accomplishments. While these medals were supposed to be tied to specific battlefield acts, it was not unheard of for soldiers to receive them for reasons other than combat service. One agitator received the medal "For Valor" for organizing a talent show.⁴²⁹ In the 2nd Guards Paratrooper Division, some officers wrote themselves up for fictitious feats of bravery and denied those who had done incredible acts decorations, while others promised medals to men and women for certain services, such as "sewing boots, giving out new costumes, for giving fuel, for living together [*sozhitel'stvo*]"⁴³⁰ The final category was particularly painful for women in the ranks, as it cast a shadow on all of them. Iakov Aisenstat, a military lawyer, recalled of 1943: "Medals and orders were quite a rarity then, even among those who had been at the front from the first day. I looked at the secretaries of the Front Tribunal, young women, and on their chests were orders and medals. It was

⁴²⁵ Lidzhi Indzhiev, *Frontovoi dnevnik* (Elista: Kalmytskoe Knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2002), p. 72. The man in question, a Kalmyk who met May 9th in an internment camp, waited forty years to get his "Defense of the Caucasus" campaign medal.

⁴²⁶ TsAMO RF, f. 32, op. 920265, d. 5, l. 539 in Borodin and Usenko, *Glavnye Politicheskie Organy Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine 1941—1945 gg.*, pp. 151-152.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 151-152. Note: like many other things in the Red Army, it took much longer to issue them than was expected, see L. Vol'folvskii, "Pochemu do sikh por net otlichitel'nykh znakov dlia ranennykh?" *Krasnai zvezda*, August 02, 1942.

⁴²⁸ Subbotin, "Soldatskaia dusha".

⁴²⁹ Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, p. 257.

⁴³⁰ RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 78, l.53-54, in Barsukov, et al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943-1945gg.*, pp. 299-300.

clear to all, what they had received these medals for..."⁴³¹ One's relationship with their commander, who would ultimately write recommendations for medals, could be key as to whether or not a soldier would receive any. As we see, in some situations, medals and orders became a sort of ersatz jewelry for PPZh ("Pokhodno-polevaia zhena" – "mobile field wives"), while women who refused officer's advances were often overlooked for decorations.

Once recommendations were written, another set of factors came into play. Irina Dunaevskaia recalled that medals were usually given out only when the army was advancing, as acts of heroism during a retreat were less desirable to remember, while in general soldiers usually received a decoration a "step" or two lower in the official hierarchy of awards than they were recommended for.⁴³² Sometimes it was impossible to determine the names of those who should be awarded, as they spent so little time in the unit.⁴³³

The subjective and sometimes mercantile attitude of some officers towards medals aside, they were clearly valued by many soldiers. One female sniper recalled that her exceedingly young commander gained her confidence only after she saw his impressive collection of medals.⁴³⁴ Military propaganda encouraged soldiers to earn medals: "Be worthy of this honor, comrade. Fight for it, not sparing your life. Let your sacred love of the Motherland lead you to new feats of heroism. Let your breast be decorated with this golden sign of splendor – the Order of Soldier's glory."⁴³⁵ Medals were proof that one had done their duty, an individual mark that you had done something of note for the war effort, and definitely something to write home about. To put it another way, you weren't really a man unless you had earned a medal. One officer confided to his diary: "At war fiasco after fiasco. No orders. Not even a medal, at least for Stalingrad. I have no reputation. Again I practically start my life over, experiencing suspicion and insincerity on the part of the leadership. The earth crumbles beneath my feet..."⁴³⁶ Among the rank and file, the pressure to earn medals was perhaps less urgent, but still palpable. As Abdulin recalled: "Here soldier psychology is simple: the war has been on for two years, and after Stalingrad it is somehow particularly

⁴³¹ Aisenshtat, *Zapiski sekretariia voennogo tribunala*, p. 120. See also Malakhova, "Four Years a Frontline Physician," p. 215, concerning the stigma attached to women wearing military decorations in the immediate postwar period and "Aleksandrova (Savel'eva) Zoia Nikiforovna" www.iremember.ru (20 October 2010): "The platoon commander, my future husband, sat me down next to the table in the bania. He is sitting cross-legged. He's got a cigarette in his mouth, and the manners of an intellectual. He started to ask who I am, where I'm from: "And do you have any awards?" "I have." – "And which?" – "For combat achievements." – "Aha..." The medal "For combat achievements was usually given to PPZh's. Masha had such an award [her friend who became a PPZh], it's possible that they wanted to humiliate me when they gave me this award. I came to hate him, and later was glad when he was so badly injured that he was barely alive. After the war he told me: "At first we thought that you were some... [Well] That you had sinned a lot and came to us for redemption". This attitude came to a quick end, and they just defended me." See also Kopelev, *Khranit' vechno*, T.1, p. 90.

⁴³² Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, pp. 257-8; NA IRI RAN f. 2 r. I op. 30 d. 23 l. 2ob, after a particularly tough fight, one officer told a historian at the front: "Here people were recommended for decorations, but since the army didn't fulfill the mission given to it by the front, no one was decorated."

⁴³³ Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 357.

⁴³⁴ Zhukova, *Devushka so sniperskoi vintovkoi*, p. 118.

⁴³⁵ "Order slavy," *Krasnoarmeets*, 1944:1, p. 14.

⁴³⁶ Diary entry from March 28, 1944, V. Gel'fand, *Dnevnik 1941-1946*. <http://www.gelfand.de/> (January 20, 2012).

shameful to not have at least one medal on your chest. What have you been doing there, one wonders, if you haven't earned any decorations?!"⁴³⁷

Orders

If medals, proved you were a man, then orders made you were man amongst men (even if you were a woman). Decorations existed in a hierarchy, and the medals that Red Army personnel received were to be worn in a manner that displayed this hierarchy with the highest decorations displayed most prominently.⁴³⁸ Medals and chest badges were considered less significant than orders, which were to be worn above other decorations. Made of precious metals such as silver, gold and platinum, studded with enamel or jewels, orders were an expensive item for the state to manufacture, yet they were issued on a very wide scale. The most commonly awarded order, the Order of the Red Star (cast of silver and enamel), was issued more than 2,860,000 times during the war.⁴³⁹

That the Party was willing to expend such extensive resources on decorations speaks to the emphasis that they put on decorations as a stimulus. The statues of these orders could be very specific, and were frequently republished in the military press to encourage soldiers to earn them. For example a soldier could earn the Order of Glory for such acts as saving the unit's banner or taking an enemy banner, killing fifty or more enemy soldiers, destroying between one and three enemy tanks, etc.⁴⁴⁰ Many of the decorations conceived during the war were instituted in the Summer of 1942, when it looked like the Germans would conquer the Soviet Union.

The state continued to create new orders as the war dragged on, instituting a slew of them between 1942-1945. Many orders were awarded exclusively to people of a certain rank, and existed in various degrees that corresponded to rank. For example, the Order of Victory, which was a diamond studded platinum star, could be awarded only to front commanders and marshals for coordinating and prosecuting a massive offensive. The Order of Suvorov existed in three degrees: the first degree for officers commanding whole fronts or armies and their staff; the second for commanders of corps, divisions and brigades and their staff; the third for regimental, battalion and company commanders.⁴⁴¹ The Order of Bogdan Khmel'nitskii, the only order not to honor a Great Russian, was also one of few that mentioned partisans in its regulations.⁴⁴² The Order of Glory was available only to sergeants, soldiers and pilots and came with an immediate rise through several ranks, a 5-15 ruble a month bonus in pay, a 50% reduction in time to pension and free higher education for the bearer's children. The order itself was conspicuously modeled

⁴³⁷ Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, p. 77, Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 336 also recalls an officer telling a young lieutenant "The war is ending, how are you going to remain without any orders?" and sending him on a particularly dangerous assignment. Genatulin, *Vot konchitsia voina*, also mentions the desire to earn medals, pp. 136-7, 243.

⁴³⁸ "Pravila nosheniia ordenov, medalei, ordenskikh lent i znakov otlichii," *Krasnaia zvezda*, June 20, 1943.

⁴³⁹ G.A. Kolesnikov, A.M. Rozhkov, *Ordena i medali SSSR* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1983), p. 95.

⁴⁴⁰ «Zapoved' artillerista» *Razgromim vraga* №142(371) 07.06.1942, p. 1. http://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/Указ_Президиума_ВС_СССР_от_8.11.1943_об_учреждении_ордена_Славы_I_II_и_III_степени#cite_note-2

⁴⁴¹ G.A. Kolesnikov, A.M. Rozhkov, *Ordena i medali SSSR*, pp. 68-9. Note, every historic figure that had an order named after them also had a movie made about them.

⁴⁴² M.A. Izotova, T.B. Tsareva, *Polnaia entsiklopediia ordenov i medalei Rossii* (Rostov n/D: Vladis, 2008), 242-3.

after the St. George Cross, a combat award from the Russian Empire that was often allowed to be worn in the Soviet period.⁴⁴³



A wartime poster encouraging soldiers to earn the Order of Glory.⁴⁴⁴

Another means of connecting the Red Army with the heroic Russian past, orders also explicitly harkened back to the great men of Russian history, some bearing the names of leaders such as Aleksandr Nevsky, Suvorov, Kutuzov, Nakhimov, Lenin and even the Ukrainian warlord Bogdan Khlemitskii. After being awarded an order, one became a “cavalier” of that order, something akin to an ancient knight. Orders also carried concrete privileges, as the bearer became an *ordenonosets* [“order bearer”]. Every *ordenonosets* was entitled to a free yearly round trip by railroad or boat to anywhere in the Soviet Union, free use of trams in cities, a reduction of taxes, a reduction of time before pension by a third and reduced utility bills – all of which would be enjoyed by their family after the bearer’s death.⁴⁴⁵ Stakhanovites, polar explorers and marshals had commonly received orders in the prewar period, and like them, the new cadre of war veteran *ordenonostsy* were a cut above the rest, privileged people who had attained their status by exceptional acts.

⁴⁴³ RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 108, l. 619-620, in Barsukov, et al., *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943-1945gg.*, p. 226-8; Izotova, Tsareva, *Polnaia entsiklopediia ordenov i medalei Rossii*, pp. 248-9. Reported to have been created by Stalin to offset the number of orders only officers and generals could receive. The color scheme of the ribbon of the Order of Glory is consciously taken from the St. George Cross, a medal awarded only for combat deeds and the only Tsarist medal that Soviet soldiers were allowed to wear. The color scheme of its ribbon would ultimately be used for the “Victory over Germany” medal, and in the Russian Federation “*georgievskie lenti*” are often given out around victory day as a sign of national pride. In 2014, these ribbons were also donned by separatist fighters in Ukraine and as a sign of support for the annexation of Crimea. By 2015 this symbol became ubiquitous and commonly used in advertising.

⁴⁴⁴ Viktor Korettskii, *Porabotal na slavu!* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1944).

⁴⁴⁵ RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 107, l. 590, in Barsukov, et al., *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943-1945gg.*, pp. 100-101.



From left to right, the Order of the Red Banner, The Order of Lenin, The Order of the Great Patriotic War (1st Class), The Order of Suvorov (1st Class) The Order of Bogdhan Khmel'nitskii (3rd Class).⁴⁴⁶

Orders could also be awarded to military units, factories, ships, newspapers and republics, making them both corporate and personal awards. Any corporate entity would have its title read at official functions, and military units would often receive honorific titles for towns it had captured (“52nd Riga-Berlin Guards, Order of Lenin, Orders of Suvorov and Kutuzov Rifle Division”) or for a particularly outstanding commander that had fallen at its head (E.g. “25th Chapaev Rifle Division” or “8th Guards Rifle Division in Honor of Panfilov”). These decorations were attached to the units banner just as soldiers wore their individual medals on their tunics.⁴⁴⁷ The titles and decorations a division carried told a story of its feats that was used to inspire new soldiers in the unit.⁴⁴⁸

The highest award (technically classified as a medal), Hero of the Soviet Union, could be won (often posthumously) by anyone of any rank and was routinely given to pilots for completing 25 missions. The “Gold Star” earned one immortality, as they automatically received an Order of Lenin and their story would be the subject of intense media attention. Should the bearer win a second Hero title, his or her bust was to be cast for in bronze for display in their hometown, though many who were also so honored upon receiving their first.⁴⁴⁹ During the war, more than 11,500 soldiers received this medal, 104 twice and 3 thrice.⁴⁵⁰ People of humble origins, such as Aleksandr Matrosov and Zoia Kosmedianskaia, who sacrificed themselves in the war came to share a place in the pantheon of the conflict’s mythology with men of great stature, such as Stalin and Zhukov, who also wore the Gold Star.

The Meaning of Awards

Due to their transformative power and biographical importance, medals were rarely removed. Part of the punishment of going to a penal unit was the retraction of all decorations and rank, and act made public by reading the punishment before one’s comrades.⁴⁵¹ When going on reconnaissance, medals and all forms of ID would be

⁴⁴⁶ Images from *Rukhovodstvo dlia boitsa pekhoty*, p. 37 and *Bolshaiia sovietskaia entsiklopediia. T. 10* (Moscow: “Sovietskaia entsiklopediia”, 1967), pp. 608-609.

⁴⁴⁷ V.F. Loboda i I.P. Kergal'tsev. *Pravila nosheniia ordenov, medalei SSSR, nagrudnykh znakov i ordenskikh lent* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1948), p. 26. The order, instituting this practice comes from 02 June 1939.

⁴⁴⁸ A. Krivitskii, “O naimenovanii voinskikh chastei i soedinenii,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, February 07, 1943.

⁴⁴⁹ Kolesnikov, *Ordena i medali SSSR*, pp. 28-9.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴⁵¹ RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 105, l. 689-696 in Barsukov, et al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iiunia 1941 g. —1942 g.*, p. 315.

surrendered.⁴⁵² Finally, medals and orders were to be taken from the dead and sent to their families, and occasionally museums, as relics of the fallen.⁴⁵³ During the funeral procession of a high-ranking officer each order he had received was to be carried by an officer on a separate pillow behind the hearse.⁴⁵⁴ When ordinary soldiers were buried far from home in unmarked graves, medals were often the only remains a family received.

Decorations soon entered the lexicon of “speaking Bolshevik,” as people writing letters to various bureaucracies would be sure to mention medals they had been awarded to legitimize their demands.⁴⁵⁵ For those who had been prisoners of war, a decoration could be “a pass to life”, which could erase their perceived guilt.⁴⁵⁶ However, the manner of speaking Bolshevik was changing, as the language had come to incorporate references to a heroic past that had become much more ancient and that was repeating itself. It now included such diverse figures as Nevsky, Suvorov, Chapaev, Stakhanov, Panfilov and Matrosov. Heroic exceptionalism was the language and purpose of decorations. The medals and orders themselves often made reference to a heroic past that posed Russians as an extraordinarily gifted nation, while their primary purpose was to identify and promote outstanding individuals as exemplary models.

Many soldiers desired further distinction. People wrote Stalin and Kalinin with various suggestions for new awards. Before campaign medals were instituted, soldiers wrote in recommendations with elaborate schemes for “Defender of Moscow” and “For the City of Lenin” medals.⁴⁵⁷ Snipers wrote Kalinin suggesting that they be given a chit to dangle off of their Sniper badges, indicating their number of kills. They took as their model the paratrooper badge that had a chit with the number of jumps as soldier had executed.⁴⁵⁸ On May 22, 1942, one V. Ye. Markevich wrote Stalin with three suggestions: to devise medals for participants in the Russo-Japanese and First World War; to devise medals for participation in the Civil War and Winter War; to create some sort of distinctive mark for the wounded. Given the date of this letter, it is feasible that his letter served as the inspiration for instituting wound stripes.⁴⁵⁹ Markevich was not alone in requesting decorations for Civil War veterans.⁴⁶⁰ Veterans were invested in making sure that their service was not forgotten, and many seemed to understand the language of hierarchy and distinction that medals offered, trying to shape its development.

⁴⁵² Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, p. 77: “Going out on reconaissance, for example, a soldier would carefully unscrew them all from his tunic or overcoat and give them along with his documents to his political officer for safe-keeping...”

⁴⁵³ TsAMO RF, f. 243, op. 2963, d. 98, l. 21, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 645-6; “Sobirat’ pamiatniki i relikvi Otechestvennoi voini,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, April 07, 1943.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ustav garizonnoi sluzhby*, pp. 86-7.

⁴⁵⁵ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, pp. 198-238. See for example *Obshchestvo i vlast’. Rossiiskaia provintsia. T.3 iun’ 1941 g.-1953g* (Moscow: IRI RAN, 2005), pp. 977-978. In a late-war letter, a commissar writes on behalf of a soldier in his unit to cease prosecution of his wife for negligence, citing that the soldier has already earned the Order of Red Star and has been recommended for another decoration.

⁴⁵⁶ Baklanov, *Voennye povesti*, p. 263.

⁴⁵⁷ GARF f. P-7523, op. 13. d. 66 ll. 1-2, 38-9.

⁴⁵⁸ GARF f. P-7523 op. 13 d. 66 ll. 66-69

⁴⁵⁹ AP RF f. 3, op. 50, d. 464, ll. 131-133 in Kudriashov, *Voina*, p. 158.

⁴⁶⁰ GARF f. P-7523 op. 13 d. 66. l. 48.

However, not everyone was as enamored of the language of power and recognition as the men who wrote Kalinin and Stalin. As Rashid Rafikov wrote home in 1944 after receiving an Order of the Red Star: "Of course to get an order is a not a bad thing, if you survive this and keep your head on your shoulders. Otherwise I have no interest."⁴⁶¹ Even Tvardovskii's Vasilii Terkin would rather go home than get a medal.⁴⁶² War correspondent Aleksandr Lesin talked to a man who, having been wounded, smoked the paper his recommendation was written on: "I smoked up my order'... Try to interpret this fact. Wouldn't it be better to say that it not in order to get decorations that we fight the fascists!"⁴⁶³

Cynicism and need for a smoke aside, decorations gave the bearer a form of legitimacy as defenders of the Motherland that continues to resonate, as it is not uncommon to see elderly people with medals, particularly on holidays. Decorations were tied to concrete actions or moments in the bearer's life and as such were an object pinned directly into their biography, and this object that was on public display. Medals were highly publicized and recognizable by both soldiers and civilians. Soldiers could tell their biographies via wound stripes and medals. Medals lent a biographical element to the soldier's uniform, personalizing, albeit in the government's terms, an otherwise anonymous article of clothing.

Nonetheless, this remained a language of power that the government controlled. The hierarchy of awards and the regulations of their wear provided a sort of grammar of this language, but its real meaning was always subject to Party control. As soon as medals started becoming more prevalent, concerns of soldiers resting on their laurels became prominent. One war correspondent for *Pravda* wrote from the Steppe Front in November of 1943: "The generous awarding of decorations has gone to many people's heads... Brave soldiers need to be given orders, while those who have shamed themselves, who put on airs need to have their orders taken away. Otherwise the decoration becomes worthless."⁴⁶⁴ In July of 1944, Shcherbakov warned that on the 2nd Ukrainian Front: "The mood has become widespread, when people live in the past, live yesterday's victories."⁴⁶⁵ After the war, this took on a menacing aspect, as on January 1, 1948, benefits tied to decorations were cut, a move that some veterans saw as a betrayal.⁴⁶⁶ Veteran Grigorii Pomerants recalled his sentiments: "...all of us with our orders, medals and wound stripes became nothing... With this [the end of benefits] even externally, officially a line was drawn... You thought you were somebody? Nonsense, you are nothing..."⁴⁶⁷ Nonetheless, during the war, and later during the revival of the war as a foundational myth with public

⁴⁶¹ Rashid Fazhrazievich Rafikov, in Frolov, ed., *Vse oni khoteli zhit'*, p. 82.

⁴⁶² Tvardovskii, *Vasilii Terkin*, pp. 45-48.

⁴⁶³ Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 217.

⁴⁶⁴ RGASPI f. 17 op. 125 d. 130 l. 55-56.

⁴⁶⁵ RGASPI f. 88 op. 1 d. 972 l. 3.

⁴⁶⁶ Prezidium Verkhovnogo Sovieta SSSR. Ukaz ot 16 dekabria 1947 goda. O vnesenii izmenenii v zakonodatel'stvo SSSR v sviazi s izdaniem ukaza Prezidium Verkhovnogo Sovieta SSSR ot 10 sentiabria 1947 goda "o l'gotakh i preimushchestvakh, predostavliaemykh nagrazhdennym ordenami i medaliami SSSR" *KonsultantPlus*.

⁴⁶⁷ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, p. 130.

pomp and ceremony attached to anniversaries, medals continued to be a point of pride and objects that told the story of one's life at the front.⁴⁶⁸

Part IV: Binding and Distinguishing

Overcoats

Red Army overcoats were simple affairs of coarse wool. Soldiers' overcoats were single breasted with hook and eye closures, while commanders had more ostentatious double-breasted models with buttons. Like the tunic, the overcoat bore rank and branch of service insignia, large diamond-shaped collar tabs and chevrons in 1941 and *pogony* with new model collar tabs (showing just branch of service) from 1943 on. The basic outline of the overcoat had not changed since the time of the war with Napoleon.⁴⁶⁹ In 1945, Aleksandr Lesin overheard a German woman say, that "[a]ll the Russians have left their land and put on overcoats, this is our punishment."⁴⁷⁰ The overcoat was one of the iconic symbols of the Red Army soldier, engraved on the Order of the Red Star, pre-war sculptures, and the phrases "to put on the overcoat" and "in overcoats" are obvious illusions to wartime service.⁴⁷¹

Despite their symbolic power, overcoats were often among the items soldiers discarded, and one quartermaster suggested that they not be issued during the summer, as: "Practice has shown that the issue overcoat just weighs the soldier down during the summer, and in the end the overcoat is thrown away."⁴⁷² Red Army soldiers were not issued blankets to keep themselves warm, and the overcoats they wore were carefully folded and tightly wrapped into a blanket roll in the summer months, which could provide a psychological sense of protection.⁴⁷³ When improperly rolled, the rough wool of the overcoat would rub a soldier's face raw and impede their movement.⁴⁷⁴ Like most of the rest of a soldier's kit, the overcoat required practice to be used in a way that would not cause suffering. Forgetful soldiers might simply leave their overcoat lying around, either to be stolen or remembered once the column moved much further ahead. Such loses would generally be temporary at the front, as one could usually receive second-hand outerwear from their fallen comrades.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁶⁸ Indeed, once veterans became central to the regime's legitimacy, the issuance of medals on anniversaries became standard, Dunaevskaia even noted that she had received so many medals "that I couldn't wear them all at the same time." Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do K nigsberga*, p. 409.

⁴⁶⁹ For a good overview of the history of the overcoat, see Pecheikin Aleksandr Valer'evich. "Iz istorii voennogo obmundirovaniia i snariazheniia" <http://history.milportal.ru/2011/06/voennaya-shinel/> (15 March 2012).

⁴⁷⁰ Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 307.

⁴⁷¹ Samoilov, *pamiatnye zapiski*, p. 193.

⁴⁷² TsAMO RF, f. 208, op. 14703 c, d. 2, l. 339-343, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, p. 136.

⁴⁷³ Pecheikin, "Iz istorii voennogo obmundirovaniia i snariazheniia"; *Instruktsia po ukladke*, pp. 27-32.

⁴⁷⁴ Bek, *Volokolamskoe Shosse*, pp. 62-5.

⁴⁷⁵ Genatulin has a story about how his avatar sold one overcoat to an officer, was nearly sent in front of a tribunal, then wore an officer's overcoat for several months. He subsequently lost its replacement, forgetting to put it back on during a pause while marching. Genatulin, *Vot konchitsia voina*, pp. 27-30. Inozemtsev, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 155.

Soldiers in the Red Army gave their overcoats mixed reviews, several complained of freezing in their overcoats in the winter months, and one veteran of the Finnish campaign remembered, that the gray overcoats provided no concealment and hampered movement: "In our overcoats in the snow, we were like flies in sour cream."⁴⁷⁶ Later, the army would shift to a dark brown dye-lot (perhaps to match the color of earth) and many soldiers would shorten the bottom of the overcoat, to improve movement. As with all other items, size was key, as one soldier recalled in 1942: "... we were issued uniforms, overcoats. I got a shorty. It barely covers my knees, and the back belt is practically at my armpits. I won't be going to have my picture taken."⁴⁷⁷

Soldiers who did get overcoats in their size often praised them years after the war: What could be warmer, more comfortable than our soldier's overcoats of coarse gray broadcloth. Not very pretty, not always the right size, which for soldiers served as featherbed, mattress and blanket on the bare ground, in the trench, and even in the snow. I became convinced of this later, having passed the expanses of war, through the wretched weather of fall and cold of winter.⁴⁷⁸

The hems of the overcoat were long. On the march or during an attack, this was of course a minus: you trip over them and you had to shove them under the belt, so they didn't hamper your running. But when there was snow this minus became a plus. The hems of the overcoat were very convenient to wrap around your freezing legs... You could not come up with a better garment for soldiers! Even the material chosen was proper: overcoat broadcloth not only kept you warm, snow didn't stick to it, dried mud was easily scraped from it, rain rolls off it, and it dries quickly. It was harder to get soot off of it. You see, we had oil lamps. In a shell casing from a 45 millimeter canon you pour some oil (*soliarka*) and cut off a piece of the hem of your overcoat and that's the wick. The soot came in flakes, but you could sew on a button or write a letter in this lamplight. You crawl into such a little den, and you don't want to die. You think "How comfortable! How nice!"⁴⁷⁹

A durable and all weather item, overcoats were also multi-functional. Soldier curled up together into overcoats:

There is no brotherhood that binds people closer than the brotherhood that is shared in the lines, and a shared greatcoat is one of its symbols. You feel warm and secure with a friend close by...⁴⁸⁰

Soldiers would use their knapsacks or mittens as pillows, their rain-cape/half tents used as mattresses, the "shabbier" of the two overcoats used to cover the feet and the better of the two used to cover the head in a sort of "sleeping bag, warm and cozy." In extreme cold soldiers would pull the sleeve holes over their heads, and "[w]hen one side goes numb and the other freezes stiff, both men turn over simultaneously and the fitful sleep of the soldiers continues..."⁴⁸¹ Those in service became bedfellows via their shared use of overcoats, as the military's practicality and frugality forced people into greater intimacy in the interests of

⁴⁷⁶ Geroi Sovietskogo Souiza V. Galakhov, "tridtsatoe noiabria," in F.F. Matrosov, ed., *Boi v Finlandii. Vospominaniia uchastnikov*. T. 1 (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1941), p. 36.

⁴⁷⁷ Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 65.

⁴⁷⁸ Anatolii Genatulin, "Bessonnaia pamiat'," *Znamia*, 2005:5. <http://magazines.russ.ru/znamia/2010/5/ge2.html>

⁴⁷⁹ Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, p. 33.

⁴⁸⁰ Vladimir Karpov, *Russia At War 1941-1945* (London: Vendome, 1987), p. 201. Under trench conditions, it was not uncommon to also share your overcoat with rodents, as Boris Shumilevskii recorded in his diary. Shumilevskii, *Dnevnik soldata*, p. 93.

⁴⁸¹ Karpov, *Russia At War*, p. 201.

warmth. Their hems became a wick for improvised lanterns, they protected wounded and healthy soldiers from the elements, they could be improvised into stretchers, and finally, they served as a soldier's personal banner in the cold months, some soldiers attaching their medals to their overcoats.⁴⁸²

The overcoat was one of several items issued for winter wear. The *vatnik* or *fufaika* [padded jacket] also called a *telogreika* ["body warmer"] was a traditional cold weather garment initially considered an undergarment, but had become outerwear during the Winter War. It was considered to be less desirable than the overcoat, authorized for rear-area personnel to provide enough overcoats at the front and being considered not chic enough for soldiers to appear in public wearing them from 1943 on. More stylish were *polushubki*, lambskin coats initially authorized for officers only, but which more and more soldiers wore as the conflict continued.

Red Army personnel suffered from frostbite and the elements as much as any mere mortals, and supplying sufficient cold-weather wear was a constant concern of the regime. The situation seems to have improved as the war continued.⁴⁸³ The state and soldiers worked to define themselves in contradistinction to their enemies, who were portrayed as constantly suffering at the hands of "General Winter." "Winter Fritz" was a stock character of propaganda, appearing in documentary films, cartoons, and the soldiers' own drawings. Sometimes described as "Walruses" with icicles coming out of their noses, consistently shown wrapped in women's shawls and bast shoes that gave them a pathetic, un-martial appearance, the Winter Fritzes emphasized that winter was the period of the Red Army's initial victories and the humiliation of the enemy.⁴⁸⁴ Pathetic groups of these beggar-like figures are often seen being led by a single Red Army man, proud and erect in his overcoat.

Belts

In order to stand proud and erect, the soldier needed a belt that would draw in the waist of the loose fitting tunic or overcoat (which had buttons placed specifically as a marker for the belt).⁴⁸⁵ Belts served many of the same functions that a tie serves in the professional world, as a soldier was not in uniform without one.⁴⁸⁶ The belt was one of the first things taken from a soldier under arrest, and in full kit carried cartridge boxes, grenade pouches, the soldier's spade and water bottle.⁴⁸⁷ Soldiers were instructed in how to make tourniquets using their belts and how to properly wear them so that their equipment didn't flop. The buckle was to be perfectly aligned with the center of their body, and raised slightly higher in the back than the front.⁴⁸⁸

At least one veteran viewed the belt as key in his transformation into a soldier. Grigorii Pomerants recalled in his memoirs:

⁴⁸² Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 178.

⁴⁸³ Bulatov, *Budni frontovykh let*, p. 219.

⁴⁸⁴ E.g. Kharis Yakupov, *Pamiat': Al'bom* (Kazan': Tatknigizdat, 2002), 62, 66, 70; Akhtiamov in Frolov, *Vse oni khotlei zhit'*, 56; Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, pp. 96-97.

⁴⁸⁵ *Pamiatka krasnoarmeitsa o podgonke*, p. 35.

⁴⁸⁶ "The Necktie" in Joanne Finkelstein, *The Fashioned Self* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 107-129.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ustav garnazonnoi sluzhby*, 126; *Rukhovodstvo dlia boitsa pekhoty*, pp. 71-72.

⁴⁸⁸ *Rukhovodstvo dlia boitsa pekhoty*, pp. 48, 98.

In October of 1941 they taught me how to put on the equipment belt in the army way, holding the buckle in the left hand, but I secretly put my trouser belt on the other way, like a civilian, as a symbol of my internal independence. I don't remember when – it didn't coincide with Stalingrad – I took my trouser belt with the left hand. To this day I do it that way. The war became a part of me. Internally I became a soldier and even now sometimes feel myself a soldier.⁴⁸⁹

Belts were important as both functional and decorative items, and as with everything else, a hierarchy of belts existed in the army. Before the massive expansion of the army in the late 1930's, all soldier's belts were thin leather with roller buckles, with officers having a variety of wide, high-quality belts decorated with ostentatious buckles of the "Sam Brown" variety or a hammer and sickle. With the expansion of the army, and particularly once the war began, most soldiers' belts were thick cloth of various colors with leather binding. Leather belts and officer's belt became premium items, borrowed for special occasions such as dates, stolen from comrades and often the mark of a privileged position.⁴⁹⁰ Soldiers, particularly women soldiers, could be harassed by their superiors for wearing an officer's belt or allowed to wear them by an officer with whom they had a special relationship.⁴⁹¹ Generals, a rare sight, surprised some soldiers by the fact that they did not wear belts, having more finely tailored clothing.⁴⁹²

*Headgear: "That battle girlfriend / who sits on your head"*⁴⁹³

Headgear changed with the seasons, and like belts acted as a clear indicator of hierarchy. The earliest hats of the Red Army had been peaked caps and the *budenevka*, or officially *shlem*, most popularly known for General Budenyi, famed cavalry commander of the Civil War. Having a large enameled red star and a large cloth star in branch of service color, the *budenovka* looked like something from another era. The outline of the *budenovka* recalled that of ancient Russian warriors and onion-domed churches, many of which would be destroyed by men wearing these hats during the first Five-Year Plan. One version gives authorship of the *budenovka* to the Russian artist Kustodiev, another to the Imperial regime.⁴⁹⁴ The most distinctive uniform item of the Red Army, coming in both summer and winter weights, was officially discarded in 1940, as it was found to be too cold, but continued to be worn through 1942 and could still be seen on surviving POWs in 1945.

The *budenovka* was replaced by the *shapka-ushanka*, a militarized version of a traditional winter hat. The standard issue *ushanka* was made of cotton, sometimes called "fish-fur" and while it was quite warm, some soldiers found it to be particularly ugly.⁴⁹⁵ For many soldiers, their hats became talismans, as a long lasting item that became molded to

⁴⁸⁹ Grigorii Pomerants. *Zapiski gadkogo ute`nka* (Moscow: Tsentr gumanitarnykh initsiativ, 2012), p. 126.

⁴⁹⁰ Slezkin, *Do voiny i na voine*, p. 326; Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, p. 307.

⁴⁹¹ Zhukova, *Devushka so snaiperskoi vintovkoi*, p. 170.

⁴⁹² Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 66.

⁴⁹³ Tvardovskii, *Vasilii Terkin*, pp. 66-7, in this poem, a wounded Terkin refuses to go to the hospital without his hat.

⁴⁹⁴ T.K. Strizhenova, *Iz istorii sovietskogo kostiuma* (Moscow: Sovietskii khudozhnik, 1972), pp. 24-5. There is also an apocryphal but widely circulated story that these hats were designed during the imperial period for a victory parade in Berlin.

⁴⁹⁵ Chekhovich, *Dnevnik ofitsera*, p. 68. After listing all the warm clothing he was issued in November of 1943, wrote: "My hat, true, is very ugly, so for now I prefer to wear my peaked cap."

the wearer's head.⁴⁹⁶ Headgear was said to retain the distinctive smell of its wearer – usually a mix of sweat, hair and soap. Hats were also the place where soldiers tended to store a needle or two with thread to make repairs to their clothing.⁴⁹⁷ Some claim that soldiers in hospitals could not sleep without their hats, including Tvardovsky's Vasiliï Terkin:

You are not the first
Not the second who suffers so
In the beginning our nerves
Don't let us sleep without a hat.
And as soon as he put on his own [*rodimyi*]
Soldier's head gear
Battle-tested, smelling of smoke
And earth, as they say...
The one in which you live
Never taking it off – So good!
Both when you go to sleep
And when you face death...⁴⁹⁸

While soldiers became attached to their headgear, hats changed with seasons. As winter turned to spring, *budenevki* and *ushanki* were replaced by *pilotki* [wedge caps], *furazhki* [peaked caps] and berets for women (who seem to have received men's head gear as often as not). Headgear often changed before other parts of the uniform, and served as an early indicator of seasonal change, a marker that one had survived another year.⁴⁹⁹ The *pilotka* was similar to headgear worn by most armies at this time, as were peaked caps. All headgear carried a star with hammer and sickle that was at first red enamel and later changed to *defense green*, like the collar tabs and rank pips. Officers wore a finer quality *pilotka* with edging in branch of service color or peaked caps with a bright band of material in their branch of service color until the turnover to olive drab (though the earlier caps remained popular). Generals had distinctive headgear, in winter the *papakha*, which recalled revolutionary heroes such as Chapaev, and in summer peaked caps with special insignia.⁵⁰⁰

In elite formations such as armor troops, cavalry, border guards and NKVD units personnel were authorized to wear caps, and sailors either black *pilotkas* or sailor's caps with their ship's or fleet's title. As the war continued, many cavalry and scout units came to wear fur *kubanka* caps year round.⁵⁰¹ These flourishes contributed to a distinct corporate identity that made its members stand out in an otherwise anonymous institution, and many of these symbols still evoke archetypal associations.

⁴⁹⁶ Lesin, *Byla voina*, pp. 277-9.

⁴⁹⁷ Baklanov, "Mertvye sramu ne imut," *Voennye povesti*, p. 139; *Pamiatka krasnoarmeitsa o podgonke*, p. 26.

⁴⁹⁸ Tvardovskii, *Vasiliï Terkin*, p. 126.

⁴⁹⁹ Aleksandr Tvardovskii, "Ia v svoiu khodil ataku..." *Dnevnik. Pis'ma 1941-1945* (Moscow: VAGRIUS, 2005), p. 90.

⁵⁰⁰ RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 107, l. 209, in Barsukov, et al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iunia 1941 g. — 1942 g.*, p. 40. In 1943 it was authorized for colonels, who often served in positions equivalent to those of generals.

⁵⁰¹ Yakushin, *On the Roads of War*, p. 139.

By regulations, *ushanki* and peaked caps were to be worn straight, and *pilotki* at a slight angle, with the star over the center of the face.⁵⁰² However, as Alexandra Orme observed, soldiers wore their caps every which way, and the angle could be significant:

Our conversation grew louder and louder, more and more lively. The soldiers' caps began travelling about their heads at amazing speed: from over the right ear to the left; from over their eyes on to the backs of their heads. For you must know that a Russian soldier's cap is far from being just a covering for his head. If I had to deal with a dumb Russian soldier, I could guess his innermost feelings simply the movements of his cap. The cap serves to express those feeling for which there are no words in imperfect human speech. The Red Army cap, as we came to realize has a language of its own. That, no doubt, is why it is taken off only in extreme cases and then only high-ranking officers who are much less impulsive than the rank and file, and most who do seem to find the Russian language, one of the richest in the world, adequate to express their joy, surprise or repulsion. Here is a short lesson cap-language. Raised with both hands two inches above the head it betokens great excitement. (This may be joy at the sight of a jug of wine, or at the news of a victory.) Pushed slowly back on to the nape of the neck, it expresses weariness or meditation, or it may also mean that its owner wanted to say something but has forgotten what. (Uncovering of the forehead obviously helps the memory.) Pulled down on to the forehead, sometimes so low that the eyes are scarcely visible is a clear indication of anger. (During descriptions of the ruin and devastation of the Ukrainian towns all caps invariably descend over their owner's eyes.) Cocked over one ear, left or right, the cap expresses astonishment, perplexity, shyness, and, sometimes exuberance. When its owner is sober, the cap travels slowly; after a few vodkas, its movements become much more lively.⁵⁰³

While clearly hyperbolic, Orme's observations do give us a window into how much space for self expression something as simple as the angle of one's cap could give, and photographic evidence shows soldiers wearing their caps at a variety of angles. Soldiers showed their will both in how and what they wore, despite regulations.

Conclusion: Uniformed Modernity

On June 26, 1946 a report was submitted by Red Army rear area services summarizing the experience of the war. Using the favored Bolshevik idiom of high percentages and massive numbers, it spoke of the successes of the army in providing for its soldiers. The report revealed that the army had worn out over 73,000,000 tunics and repaired 32,000,000. It was estimated that each soldier went through 0.95 overcoats, 1.68 tunics, 1.38 pairs of pants and 1.5 pairs of shoes per year.⁵⁰⁴ By recycling and repair, the Red Army had managed to stretch its resources much further and provide for its men more adequately than the Imperial Army. One provisioning officer reflected, that "[o]vercoats,

⁵⁰² *Rukhovodstvo dlia boitsa pekhoty*, p. 48. Whether soldiers were to wear their winter caps with ear flaps up or down was officially determined by the weather, and they were authorized to wear them only tied up top of the hat or below the chin, although many soldiers wore them as suited them, rather than by regulation. *Pamiatka krasnoarmeitsa o podgonke*, pp. 31-34.

⁵⁰³ Orme, *Comes the Comrade*, pp. 19-20.

⁵⁰⁴ TsAMO f. 67, op. 12020, d. 19, ll. 1-59, in Veshchikov, *et. al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 695-696T: The army had also worn out 38,000,000 overcoats, 60,000,000 pairs of pants, 63,000,000 pairs of boots 14,500,000 helmets and 117,000,000 pairs of underwear and repaired over 17,000,000 overcoats, 28,600,000 pairs of pants, 61,000,000 pairs of boots, and 57,000,000 pairs of underwear.

portyanki, valenki, boots, padded jackets, padded trousers, *shapki-ushanki*, underwear... All these things are as necessary for victory as tanks, planes and shells.”⁵⁰⁵ Keeping the army properly clothed certainly was necessary for victory. The numbers and list of objects, ignoring shortages, tell a story of quantifiable success, but they are mute as to the subjective change brought about by the war.

As important as the material necessity of providing uniforms was, the more metaphysical tasks of making those wearing these garments feel proud to be doing so, identifying themselves with the regime and becoming a unified fighting force was perhaps more crucial for victory. Millions of people from different backgrounds passed through the ranks of the Red Army. When people stood in ranks, with tunics buttoned tight, boots shined and belt properly centered, it was by no means apparent who was a peasant, a student, a worker or a former criminal. Underwear would circulate among all these men and women. A Ukrainian would share his overcoat with an Uzbek,⁵⁰⁶ a convict and a Komsomol member could receive the same medals and peasants would command students.⁵⁰⁷ Donning the uniform, men and women were exposed to a peculiar military modernity that forced them first to master proper wear and etiquette, and then the art of killing, relying on each other for survival. Officially, they would no longer be distinguished by their class, age, ethnicity or education, but rather by their rank, specialization and the decorations they had earned via personal achievement on the battlefield.

Yet the army could never completely transfigure all of the men and women who filled its ranks. The juxtaposition of yesterday’s peasants and ultra-modern technology sometimes created visual dissonance:

In surprising contrast to the armored column appeared a little mule, quietly grazing by the side of the road. An old Uzbek in a *pilotka*, stretched like a *tibiuteka* [Muslim skull cap] on his head, with a rifle over his shoulder, rode astride, half asleep along the ditch, as if along an irrigation ditch in Central Asia [*aryk*]. He was leisurely headed to Berlin.⁵⁰⁸

The process of modernization or urbanization in the army consisted of both adjusting to uniforms and making them your own. Even as the army effaced many aspects of earlier identities, there were still times and places when one’s prewar biography and habits bled through khaki tunics and gray overcoats. Every soldier wore their cap a little differently, despite regulations. Everyone knew which pair of boots, which belt and which tunic were theirs, despite the fact that all these items were standard issue.

While everyone might wear their uniform a little differently, distinction was based on unit, rank and decorations more than individual preference. The war had provided a new field in which the most humble of people, the “little screws,” could distinguish themselves. Veterans had a new sense of their own worth, having been encouraged to think of themselves as heroes and agents of historical change. The uniforms they wore when liberating Soviet cities and villages made clear reference to a heroic Soviet-Russian past, with roots centuries deep, making the war an event in which even those who were ambiguous in their relationship with the regime had a stake. This narrative positioned some peoples higher than others and clearly placed the Russians as first among equals. But the uniform also had new associations, it was the uniform of the victorious Red Army, and

⁵⁰⁵ L.P. Grachev, *Doroga ot Volkhova* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1983), p. 197.

⁵⁰⁶ Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, p. 24.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

while it would be worn by Byelorussians, Tajiks and Georgians, to the Germans and Americans alike, everyone in the Red Army was Russian.⁵⁰⁹

The army in 1945 was dramatically different from that of 1941. More diverse, having suffered near total defeat, and being subjected to increased discipline, by 1943 the army was prepared to go toe to toe with their well trained and equipped enemy. This was reflected not only in the string of victories that followed, but also in a new pride of uniforms and in new uniforms themselves. It was impossible to imagine soldiers abandoning their uniforms in 1945. In the uniform of a victorious army, peasants returned to their villages, whether along the Dnepr or in the Ferghana Valley, having seen the capitals of Eastern Europe, with chests full of medals. In Soviet cities from Leningrad to Alma-Aty workers and members of the intelligentsia returned to crowded train stations as conquering heroes. All wore the same uniform, with its traditional, Russian silhouette. In a country devastated by war, many veterans would wear these personal banners for years after their state's banner was raised over the Reichstag.



A poster featuring a soldier of the victorious Red Army in 1946.⁵¹⁰ Note that this is the second in a series of two posters, the first of which “We’ll get to Berlin” was produced in 1944 and is reproduced in the background. There is a narrative here in which the private from the first poster has become an officer with golden *pogony* by earning the Order of Glory. He also sports an Order of

⁵⁰⁹ See Chapter 6 for more on this.

⁵¹⁰ L. Golovanov, *Krasnoi Armii – slava!* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1946).

the Patriotic War, Victory over Germany and The Taking of Berlin Medals and a light wound stripe. The 1946 poster shows the promise of victory over Germany has been fulfilled alongside significant social advancement for the soldier.

Chapter 3⁵¹¹

The State's Pot and the Soldier's Spoon: Rations (*Paëk*) in the Red Army

"Without a spoon, just as without a rifle, it is impossible to wage war."
– Aleksandr Lesin, diary entry, March 29, 1942

Introduction

The soldier who wrote the lines above came to understand all too well how important being fed was to being able to fight.⁵¹² Aleksandr Lesin served on the benighted Kalinin Front. In the spring of 1942, he participated in an offensive that bogged down as starving and exhausted soldiers failed to take their objectives.⁵¹³ The Kalinin Front eventually became a lightning rod for attracting Moscow's attention to the needs of soldiers' stomachs.

On May 31, 1943, Stalin signed an order underlining the failure of the rear area services of the Kalinin Front to properly feed its troops. Among a list of complaints, ranging from unequal distribution, improper storage, and failures to provide hot food or use qualified cadres to prepare and apportion rations, Stalin described the essence of the "criminally irresponsible, un-Soviet attitude towards soldier's food"⁵¹⁴ found among those responsible for feeding the army:

Apparently our commanders have forgotten the best traditions of the Russian Army, of such eminent commanders as Suvorov and Kutuzov. They taught the commanders of all of Europe and the commanders of the Red Army should learn from them. They demonstrated fatherly care about the everyday life and rations of soldiers and demanded the same from their subordinates. Meanwhile, in the Red Army, as is obvious from the given facts, one can find commanders who do not believe that concern for the everyday life and rations of rank and file soldiers is their sacred duty, demonstrating therefore an un-comradely and unacceptable relationship to fighting men.⁵¹⁵

Stalin drew on national and revolutionary traditions to shame officers into fulfilling their duties: feeding one's soldiers poorly was not only un-Soviet but also un-Russian.⁵¹⁶ Soldiers took their officers' failure to fulfill "the sacred duty" of demonstrating their "concern for everyday life and rations" to heart. Red Army men had been assured that the state was capable of providing for them and that failures to do so were the fault of those deputized by the regime under conditions of state monopoly. But failure was everywhere.

"The Kalinin Front is not an exception," Stalin noted; "similar conditions occur on other fronts." Stalin's order was distributed to all fronts as a warning, to be read even by

⁵¹¹ A version of this text has been published in the collected volume Wendy Goldman and Donald Filtzer, eds. *Hunger and War: Food Provisioning in the Soviet Union during World War II* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

⁵¹² Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 76.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁵¹⁴ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 11, ll. 546–549, in Veshchikov, *et. al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, pp. 401–405, p. 402.

⁵¹⁵ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 11, ll. 546–549, in Veshchikov, *et. al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 403.

⁵¹⁶ The shift to Russianness was a significant development of the prewar period that intensified during the war. See Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*.

battalion commanders.⁵¹⁷ Alongside highlighting failure and prescribing punishments, the document provided extensive corrective prescriptions, reinforcing and setting norms that would remain fundamental until the war's end. This document, as Stalin's word, marked the culmination of a flurry of similar inspections in 1942–1943. It reflected and constructed Soviet norms and expectations of nourishment in the hour of the Soviet Union's greatest challenge—a total war that called on citizens to make great sacrifices.⁵¹⁸

The ability to provide for the people was an essential claim made by the socialist state, and by 1943, the state was finally in a position to deliver for the army.⁵¹⁹ In the first years of the war, the Soviet Union lost its bread basket, making food all the more central to victory or defeat. Under these conditions, the state's dedication to provide was reaffirmed to *soldiers*, who were promised ample provisions in return for their service to the state.⁵²⁰ This ideological commitment and the very real consequences of fighting a war on an empty stomach made breakdowns in provisioning deeply disturbing, which in turn forced the state to reaffirm its role as provider.

This chapter will examine the quotidian details of provisioning, which bound Red Army soldiers to the state on the fronts of the Great Patriotic War. It was difficult to imagine such a key resource as food outside of the horizontal bonds between citizens and the vertical relationship to the state. The very term used for rations, *paëk*, implied mutual obligations. *Paëk* could be seen as the physical embodiment of the socialist adage “to each according to his work,” as its etymological root implied an earned share in a common cause.⁵²¹ We will see how rations were constructed by the state and later received and used by soldiers at the front—that is, how *paëk* functioned, was experienced, and occasionally transformed by those in the trenches.⁵²²

⁵¹⁷ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 11, ll. 546–549, Veshchikov, *et. al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 405. This order is also mentioned in memoirs by provisioning officers and histories of the war. See F. S. Saushin, *Khleb i sol'* (Iaroslavl': Verkhne-Volzhscoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1983), p. 56; Anastas Mikoyan, *Tak bylo: Razmyshleniia o minuvshem* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1999), p. 431; S. K. Kurkotkin, *Tyl sovetskikh vooruzhennykh sil v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1977), pp. 202–203.

⁵¹⁸ TsAMO RF, f.2, op. 795437, d. 9, l. 696, in Veshchikov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, pp. 291–292; TsAMO RF, f.2, op. 795437, d. 11, ll. 66–68, in *ibid.*, pp. 306–308; TsAMO RF, f. 47, op. 1029, d. 83, ll. 53–55, in *ibid.*, pp. 321–325; TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 11, ll. 293–295; TsAMO RF, f. 47, op. 1029, d. 84, ll. 23–24, in *ibid.*, pp. 380–382.

⁵¹⁹ The effect of these resources on civilian health often came too little, too late. See e.g. Donald Filtzer, “Starvation Mortality in Soviet Home-Front Industrial Regions During World War II” in Wendy Goldman and Donald Filtzer, eds. *Hunger and War*.

⁵²⁰ This was cemented by published norms in both field manuals and pamphlets and by the soldier's swearing of an oath to the state. See, for example, *Rukhovodstvo boitsa pekhoty*, pp. 44–45.

⁵²¹ 1936 *Constitution of the USSR*, <http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/36cons01.html>. Chapter 1, Article 12 states: “In the U.S.S.R. work is a duty and a matter of honor for every able-bodied citizen, in accordance with the principle: ‘He who does not work, neither shall he eat.’ The principle applied in the U.S.S.R. is that of socialism: ‘From each according to his ability, to each according to his work.’”

⁵²² A note on historiography: In English language historiography, provisioning often receives treatment in larger works on the Red Army more generally, particularly in the works of military historians interested in combat effectiveness and military science. Colonel David Glantz provides a brief, but very good soldiers' eye view of provisioning. See Glantz, *Colossus Reborn*, pp. 555–560. William Moskoff's *The Bread of Affliction* is a pioneering overview, but was written before many of the relevant primary sources became available. See William Moskoff, *The Bread of Affliction: The Food Supply in the USSR During World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Nicholas Ganson's contribution to David Stone's *The Soviet Union at War*

This work is divided into three sections: the first two tell the story of providing, the last focuses on using and consuming. The first section, “The State Provides,” describes how the government thought of rationing, where it drew its resources, and what it sought to provide. The second, “An Inviolable Camp,” deals with failures in the provisioning system and examines how standards improved as the war continued. The third, “Pots and Spoons,” describes what soldiers did with their rations and how they responded to failures.

Rations were a key resource in setting the army apart as a separate class of citizens and in creating clear hierarchies within the army; they both brought together and divided those in the ranks. As the best-fed mass institution during the war, the army is key to understanding Soviet provisioning between 1941 and 1945. It was, after all, for the army’s sake that civilians were being provided with so little.

The State Provides: What and How

The importance of food to state legitimacy and survival was nothing new. The Bolsheviks, like their French predecessors, came to power during a revolution that started as a bread riot, and struggle for control over food production and the ability to provide were key to the state’s claims of legitimacy.⁵²³ Collectivization and the hardships it entailed had been justified by the looming shadow of another world war.⁵²⁴ After the collectivization-induced famine, the party-state emphasized the creation of a consumer

provides a concise overview of the provisioning situation in the country and makes many astute observations, particularly on ways in which the state often waited until situations became disastrous before getting directly involved in provisioning. Ganson, “Food Supply, Rationing and Living Standards,” pp. 69–92. Lizzie Collingham’s thorough treatment of food during the war provides an excellent global context and fair overview of the situation in the Soviet Union. However, given its impressive scope, this work inevitably suffers from a limited source base in its treatment of the Soviet Union. That being said, she provides a good summary of the role of Lend-Lease food aid in provisioning the Soviet army, something that I barely touch on. Her volume is undoubtedly the most broad-based on the subject of food in the Second World War and an indispensable comparative study. See Lizzie Collingham, “Fighting on Empty,” in *The Taste of War: World War Two and the Battle for Food* (New York: Penguin, 2012), pp. 317–346. Soviet historiography on the subject tended to be written by participants with an eye for improving provisioning in the future, often taking the form of memoirs. Some of this work is triumphalist, but a great deal of it is quite revealing and surprisingly frank (see Saushin, Antipenko, and others cited below). However, these authors are not consciously concerned with the cultural dimensions of eating in the army and the transformations taking place in society during the war. Both these and later authors are generally more interested in operational art or simply narrative than a cultural history of food. A major exception to this trend is war veteran and food historian Vil’iam Pokhlebkin, who was keenly interested in how the war impacted Soviet culinary culture and whose work has inspired my own. This chapter brings into sharper focus the rhetorical and political meaning of rations and the details of everyday life. What follows is an attempt to write a cultural history of rations in the Red Army rich in ethnographic detail.

⁵²³ The year 1913 was used because it was the last year before the devastation of the Great War and Civil War, and as such served as a “control group” for pre-Bolshevik economics, the measure by which success or failure was calibrated. See, for example, V. P. Zotov, *Pishchevaia promyshlennost’* (Moscow: Pishchevaia promyshlennost’, 1967).

⁵²⁴ I. V. Stalin, “O zadachakh khoziaistvennikov,” *Socheneniie*, vol. 13 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1952), pp. 30–31, 38–40. In this February 1931 speech, Stalin asked: “Do you want our socialist homeland to be beaten and lose its independence? If you don’t want this, you should liquidate its backwardness in the shortest time and develop a real Bolshevik tempo in the building of its socialist economy” (p. 39). E. A. Osokina, *Za fasadom “stalinskogo izobilia”: Raspredelenie i rynek v snabzhenii v gody ndustrializatsii, 1927–1941* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1998), pp. 226–227.

society and established new hierarchies of consumption.⁵²⁵ This shift in focus from sufficiency to variety was repeated during the Great Patriotic War.

In 1941–1942, the Soviet Union lost vast resources to the rapacious Wehrmacht. Even by 1945, after the war had shifted to enemy territory, the gross production of Soviet food industry stood at half of the level of 1940.⁵²⁶ When Stalin issued his famous “Not One Step Backward” order in the summer of 1942, he pointed out that if the army retreated any farther, it would be dooming itself to starvation:

The territory of the USSR, which the enemy has seized and strives to seize, is bread and other foodstuffs for the army and rear, metal and fuel for industry, factories and plants, supplying the army with weapons and ammunition, rail roads. After the loss of Ukraine, Belorussia, the Baltics, Donbas and other regions we have a lot less territory, and therefore we have a lot less bread and metal and fewer people, factories, and plants. We have lost over 70 million people, more than 800 million poods of grain a year and more than 10 million tons of metal per year. We are no longer superior to the Germans in manpower or grain reserves. To retreat any further is to ruin yourself and to destroy our Motherland. Every new scrap of land we leave to the enemy will in every way possible strengthen the enemy and in every way possible weaken our defense and our Motherland.⁵²⁷

Food was a resource that could mean the difference between victory and defeat, one that would strengthen you or the enemy in a zero-sum equation. As a result, both sides would be waging a campaign of scorched earth whenever they were forced to retreat, lessening the resources left not only to their enemies, but also to civilians caught between the two armies.⁵²⁸ Forced to wage war regardless of a catastrophic loss of material, Soviet leaders strived to establish total control over food distribution under the chaotic conditions of a war it was clearly losing, as well as refining a hierarchy around what was arguably its most precious resource.

Despite these immense losses, in the course of the war the Soviets were able to provide more and more adequately for the military. In 1941, as many resources as possible were moved east, and agricultural production shifted to Central Asia and Siberia. The full-scale development of agriculture in the east, American Lend-Lease aid, as well as the recapture of resources led to palpable improvement in 1943.⁵²⁹

Locavores, Pillagers, and Boxed Lunches: Comparative Approaches to Provisioning

⁵²⁵ See for example Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne*; Osokina, *Za fasadom “Stalinskogo izobiliia,”* p. 173.

⁵²⁶ Zotov, *Pishchevaia promyshlennost’*, pp. 24–25.

⁵²⁷ RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 72, l. 270, in Barsukov, et al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1941–1942 g.*, p. 277. Note that 1 *pood* = 16 kilograms, so Stalin is talking about the loss of 12.8 million metric tons of grain.

⁵²⁸ An order that Stalin gave to the Soviet people in his first address of the war (July 3, 1941) was very explicit as to the extent of the scorched earth policy: “In case of forced retreat of Red Army units, all rolling stock must be evacuated, the enemy must not be left a single engine, a single railway car, a single pound of grain or gallon of fuel. The collective farmers must drive off their cattle, and turn over their grain for safe-keeping of state authorities for transport to the rear. All valuable property, including non-ferrous metals, grain, and fuel that cannot be withdrawn must be destroyed without fail.” Joseph Stalin, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union* (New York: International Publishers, 1945), p. 15. Boris Slutskii recalled that the Wehrmacht was even more obsessively destructive in their retreat, destroying almost every single fruit and vegetable in their wake. Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, pp. 31–32; Inozemtsev, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 46.

⁵²⁹ Zotov, *Pishchevaia promyshlennost’*, pp. 136–138.

Alongside the shift from west to east, another shift took place in the way that civilians and soldiers were eating: provisioning became less central and more local.⁵³⁰ As the war progressed, responsibility for feeding soldiers became increasingly localized. In the first months, it was typical to appeal to higher ranks and invest them with sole control over both food and transport.⁵³¹ In the first two years of the war, the authority and competencies of rear-area officers were expanded and their personal responsibility clarified.⁵³² While central reserves would provide necessities that could not be produced locally, subsidiary agriculture (*podsobnoe khoziaitstvo*) became an increasingly significant part of people's diets. Agricultural work became a common duty of men in uniform, as military units began to tend their own rear-area farms and soldiers were sent to assist local collective farms (*kolkhozy*) with sowing and harvesting.⁵³³ Unlike their American or British allies, Red Army soldiers often had a hand in producing the rations they were eating and knew who prepared them.

Red Army personnel were, to a great extent, *locavores*, in contrast to their American and British allies and similar to their Wehrmacht foe. The United States had taken pains to develop its famous C and K Rations—prepackaged, ready-to-eat, standardized, and completely self-sufficient meals, containing everything from can opener, wooden spoon, entrée, and dessert to gum, cigarettes, matches, and toilet paper, all prominently displaying brand names.⁵³⁴ The British were similar to the Americans, being primarily an expeditionary force. The Wehrmacht combined ready-to-eat items with those needing preparation, and were notorious foragers, often living off what they pillaged from Soviet peasants.⁵³⁵ Indeed the Reich's very strategy called for the extermination by hunger of

⁵³⁰ Collingham, *The Taste of War*, pp. 390–393. Grachev, *Doroga ot Volkhova*, p. 213, claims that the army provided itself with 65 percent (26 out of 40 million tons) of the foodstuffs it required in the course of the war. Of course, *podsobnoe khoziaitstvo* is possible only when a front remains relatively stable for a relatively long period of time; it is impossible during a retreat and very difficult to maintain while advancing. For a discussion of how this played out on the home front, see Wendy Goldman “Not by Bread Alone: Food, Workers, and the State” in Wendy Goldman and Donald Filtzer, eds. *Hunger and War*.

⁵³¹ See for example Saushin, *Khleb i sol'*, p. 41; Antipenko, *Na glavnom upravlenii*, p. 60.

⁵³² Antipenko, *Na glavnom upravlenii*, pp. 7–8; TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 5, ll. 545–547, in Veshchiko, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, pp. 90–100; TsAMO RF, f. 208, op. 224922 c, d. 1, ll. 139–140, in *ibid.*, pp. 123–124; TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 4, l. 378, in *ibid.*, pp. 173–174; TsAMO RF, f. 244, op. 3017, d. 2, ll. 20–23, in *ibid.*, pp. 345–347; TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 11, l. 370, in *ibid.*, p. 384.

⁵³³ See TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 920266, d. 6, l. 47, in *ibid.*, pp. 313–314; TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 920266, d. 6, l. 405, 406, in *ibid.*, pp. 388–389; TsAMO RF, f. 236, op. 2719, d. 76, ll. 14–15, in *ibid.*, pp. 659–660; Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 319; Mikoyan, *Tak bylo*, pp. 469–470; Antipenko, *Na glavnom upravlenii*, p. 117; Grachev, *Doroga ot Volkhova*, pp. 77, 208–213; U. G. Cherniavskii, *Voina i prodovolstviie: Snabzhennia gorodskogo naseleniia v Velikuiu Otechestvennuiu voinu, 1941–1945 gg.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1964), pp. 130–150. For an English-language treatment of subsidiary agriculture, see Moskoff, *The Bread of Affliction*, pp. 94–113. This was, in a sense, a return to “regimental economy,” the means by which the Russian Imperial Regime attempted to make the army defray its own expenses. On regimental economy, see Elise Wirtschafter, *From Peasant to Russian Soldier* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

⁵³⁴ John Samuels, ed., *Ration Development* (Washington, D.C.: Quartermaster Food & Container Institute for the Armed Forces, 1947), pp. 24–48.

⁵³⁵ Collingham, *The Taste of War*, pp. 37–39, 184–187; Douglas Nash, “Tinned Meat in the German Army Iron Ration” and “German ‘Iron’ Rations (eiserne Portionen),” www.dererstezug.com; Eric Tobey, “The German Army K-Ration,” www.dererstezug.com.

millions of Soviet citizens.⁵³⁶ The Red Army relied heavily on whatever was available locally, drawing from central reserves when local reserves failed.⁵³⁷ Red Army forces planned on feeding their men whenever possible with hot, fresh food from field kitchens located not far beyond the front line. Mobile bakeries and even herds of livestock were to follow the army, providing for fresh, high quality food. American soldiers, on the other hand, quickly grew tired of quartermaster officers' over-reliance on the portable C and K Rations, which became the subject of postwar inquiries, while the Wehrmacht's methods turned locals against them.⁵³⁸

The provisioning methods of the Wehrmacht and the Red Army relied on similar logic: a preference for field kitchens, the issuance of a variety of ready-to-eat items in the event that a hot meal was unfeasible, and, most significantly, the extensive use of local resources. There was, of course, a significant difference between their provisioning strategies. The Red Army, while putting the needs of soldiers ahead of civilians, did not have the strategic goal of starving the civilian population of the area from which it drew supplies.⁵³⁹ The objective of the Red Army was the defense and liberation of these civilians, which meant a return to the Soviet fold for some and integration into Socialist norms for others. The Bolsheviks, for most of the war, were taking from their own citizens in an economy that perceived all resources as "the people's," and thus constituting a horizontal connection between provider and defender. This was in sharp contrast to the Nazi strategy of exploiting racial "others," most of whom were slotted for eventual extermination. Wherever they were provisioning, the Red Army showed concern for the feeding of local civilians. Nonetheless, while the logic, goals, and extent of these two armies' provisioning strategies were very different, the ways that Wehrmacht and Red Army soldiers were fed bore striking similarities. The food they ate was often drawn from the same sources, and they could find themselves eating identical dishes. Local provisioning, a key aspect of the Soviet ration system, obscured the borders between military and civilian, as soldiers received similar foodstuffs as civilians, but generally in larger quantities and of better quality. Both combatants and wide swaths of the civilian population received rations during the war. Local provisioning also greatly diversified what soldiers actually ate at the front.

The Rationale of Rationing

The state discussed rations using two terms that effectively meant the same thing and were often used indiscriminately, but which carried with them important semantic differences that are worth parsing. These terms reveal the two major ways of perceiving rations and what was at stake in provisioning. The terms were *paëk* and *prodovol'stvennyye normy*; the latter etymologically posited rations as fuel for biological machines and the former as a resource or even form of payment guaranteed to defenders of the state.

⁵³⁶ See Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Penguin, 2006), pp. 467, 469, 476–480, 538–549.

⁵³⁷ From July 1941 on, local resources were under the control of provisioning officers of the Red Army. See TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 920266, d. 1, l. 480, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, pp. 91–92; TsAMO RF, f. 208, op. 3031, d. 2, ll. 501, 502, in *ibid.*, pp. 172–173.

⁵³⁸ The Quartermaster School for the Quartermaster General, "Rations Conference Notes," January 1949, U.S. Army Quartermaster Foundation, Fort Lee, Va., http://www.qmfound.com/history_of_rations.htm.

⁵³⁹ Collingham, *The Taste of War*, pp. 37–39.

Paëk translated simply into “ration,” but the etymology of the word revealed a certain moral economy of provisioning.⁵⁴⁰ *Paëk* came from the Turkic root *pai*, which meant “share, part in a common cause, coming through mutual agreement to every individual [*paishchik*], in the paying or receiving of a monetary sum or other form of personal property.”⁵⁴¹ The root had close associations with an individual’s “part, fate, destiny and happiness,” and a participant in a common enterprise such as a cooperative was often called a *paishchik*.⁵⁴² The root itself presupposed the necessity of a common cause and mutual obligations in the circulation of rations; it is not a form of welfare but part of a bargain based on who earned what.⁵⁴³ Yet the term also spoke to a certain ambiguity about who owned the *paëk*—the state or the soldier, and whether this changed at any point in the transaction. The status of *paëk* remained uncertain even as the army entered Berlin.

Pai-based understandings of state-citizen relations had been key to how both the Tsarist Army in 1914 and the Bolsheviks in 1918 apportioned resources. The *paika*, a special ration issued to soldiers’ families in time of war, was instituted by the tsarist government in 1912 and later adopted by the Bolsheviks during the Civil War. As Joshua Sanborn points out, this was a manifestation of the state’s understanding that it had a reciprocal relationship with soldiers and owed both them and their families more than other citizens. It was also a powerful tool to control soldiers’ actions—cutting off the *paika* could leave a family to starve.⁵⁴⁴ Under the conditions of the Great Patriotic War, the state continued to show concern for soldiers’ families, but concentrated much more on feeding soldiers themselves.

A more physiological understanding of rations was conveyed by the term *prodovol'stvennye normy*—“food ration norms.” Like *paëk*, this referred to *anything* regularly provided by the state to soldiers (and civilians) that was intended to be physically ingested or used in relation to the body (soap was included in the soldier’s ration). However, *prodovol'stvennye normy* appealed to physical needs, being akin to a science of sustenance. The hierarchies of the norms were, at least etymologically, based purely on the physical need for calories of people fulfilling different tasks. A new set of basic norms was established in September of 1941, replacing all prewar norms. They totaled fourteen in all, and changes would be made to refine them to meet the needs of various types of cadres and growing possibilities of the state well into the war.⁵⁴⁵ As we will see later in this chapter,

⁵⁴⁰ In Russian, the word *ratsion* is also used, but refers to one component of something being doled out (e.g., “your ration of whiskey”), rather than the complex of things being given.

⁵⁴¹ P. Ia. Chernykh, *Istoriko-etimologicheskii slovar' sovremennogo russkogo iazyka*, vol. 1, (Moscow: Russkii iazyk, 1993), p. 615.

⁵⁴² Preobrazhenskii, Aleksandr Grigor'evich, *Etimologicheskii slovar' russkogo iazyka*, vol. 2: P-S (Moscow: Gos. izdat. inostrannykh i natsional'nykh slovarei, 1959), p. 725. Special thanks to Milyausha Zakirova for pointing out the etymological significance of this word as I began this project.

⁵⁴³ This was in line with earlier provisioning policies. See, for example, Osokina, *Za fasadom “Stalinskogo izobiliia,”* p. 99.

⁵⁴⁴ Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation*, pp. 107–110.

⁵⁴⁵ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 920266, d. 1, ll. 718–929, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, pp. 147–148.

much like the *blokadniki* discussed by Alexis Peri, soldiers seldom perceived their rations in terms of norms.⁵⁴⁶

As in most armies, rations had to keep soldiers functioning while taking up minimal space and weight in their packs or on supply wagons. Colonel Gurov, author of several manuals on marching, declared: “the nutritional value of food does not depend on the quantity, but on its quality. Therefore those products, which contain more calories are assigned for the fighter’s food.”⁵⁴⁷ This logic gave fats and carbohydrates a privileged place in the soldier’s ration. Fats took longer to digest and made one feel full longer, while carbohydrates gave both instant and long-term energy. Both provided a high number of calories per volume. Meat (especially salt pork and sausage) and potatoes were looked upon as ideal ingredients, and bread as simply indispensable.⁵⁴⁸

The range of calories guaranteed to men under arms varied depending on position. A manual for *fel'dshers* (a position that was both medical assistant and health inspector) published on the eve of the war stated that a person in a state of total relaxation needed 1,700 calories, a tractor driver 3,000.⁵⁴⁹ A soldier received between 3,161 (dry rations for soldiers in the field) and 4,063 (a special ration for airmen) according to the prewar norms.⁵⁵⁰ An official history of the rear-area services claimed that soldiers received between 2,659 calories (for soldiers guarding rear-area objects and institutions—including those soldiers in training) to 3,450 (for soldiers at the front) to 4,712 (for airmen) according to the September 1941 norms, while the official medical history of the war cites the range from 3,088 for soldiers in the rear to 4,692 for airmen in the course of the war.⁵⁵¹ Front-line soldiers were to receive 3,505 calories.⁵⁵² It should be noted that this was what was promised, not necessarily what soldiers received. Control over calories became a common part of front-line inspections, which were also supposed to insure balanced nutrition.⁵⁵³

In practice, provisioning officers were often concerned only with calories, ignoring the importance of nutrients. The head surgeon of the 130th (Latvian) Rifle Corps reported immediately after the war that his soldiers had never received the stated norms of complete proteins and vitamins A and C. “We ended up with massive experiments. It turns

⁵⁴⁶ See Alexis Peri, “Queues, Canteens, and the Politics of Location in Diaries of the Leningrad Blockade, 1941-42,” in Wendy Goldman and Donald Filtzer, eds. *Hunger and War: Food Provisioning in the Soviet Union during World War II* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

⁵⁴⁷ S. Gurov, *Boets i otdelenie na pokhode* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1941), p. 11.

⁵⁴⁸ F.G. Krotkov, ed., *Gigiena. Opyt sovetskoi meditsiny v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, vol. 33 (Moscow: MEDGIZ, 1955), pp. 3, 134. A 1940 textbook for food-service workers praised bread for its high calorie content (2,000–2,500 calories per kilogram; i.e., around 1,000 calories per pound) and ease of digestion. I. Ia. Moreinis, *Uchebnik pishchevoi gigieny dlia sanitarno-fel'dsherskikh shkol* (Moscow-Leningrad: MEDGIZ, 1940), p. 126.

⁵⁴⁹ Moreinis, *Uchebnik pishchevoi gigieny*, pp. 28, 203.

⁵⁵⁰ Krotkov, *Gigiena*, p. 139.

⁵⁵¹ Kurkotkin, *Tyl vooruzhenykh sil*, p. 191; Krotkov, *Gigiena*, p. 139. I have not found a direct discussion of why there were such fluctuations in the numbers. Given that the primary ration norms were established in September 1941, when resources were becoming very critical and the Soviet Union was shrinking, I think that it is safe to assume that the wartime reductions in number of calories are a response to shortage.

⁵⁵² Krotkov, *Gigiena*, p. 139.

⁵⁵³ E.g., TsAMO RF, f. 47, op. 1029, d. 84, ll. 23–24, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 381.

out that people can get by with far less of these three necessary nutritional elements for much longer than the norms state," he told his interviewer with pride.⁵⁵⁴

The logic of rations posited soldiers as anonymous biological machines that needed fuel and certain vital nutrients to keep functioning; this attitude is normal for any military and in the sciences. Any system of mass catering imagines a generic body that it will be feeding, ignoring differences in age, sex, and mass that might warrant special attention, not to mention culturally constructed differences that could also be of significance (such as those of Muslim and Jewish soldiers, for example).⁵⁵⁵ This was in line with prewar provisioning.⁵⁵⁶ Like other armies, the Red Army redefined its soldiers' identities by specialization and rank. Who you were to the army depended not on where you were from, which God you prayed to, or what language you spoke, but rather on your rank, specialization, and location, all of which impacted what kind of food you would receive.

Soviet provisioning negotiated the concepts of *prodovol'stvennye normy* and *paëk*. Rations followed several trajectories, up the ranks, from the rear to the front, according to the changing of seasons and climate zones, and finally, soldiers' specializations. Commanders (except the already well-fed airmen), as the *heads* of the military units, received a supplemental ration (*doppaëk*), which included extra meat, cookies, and higher-quality tobacco (amounting to 450 additional calories, or between 3,490 and 4,000 calories total each per day).⁵⁵⁷ Those serving in frigid climates, such as the Karelian Isthmus or Far North, would be offered special rations, such as additional vodka, salt pork, or vitamin C

⁵⁵⁴ NA IRI RAN, f. 2, r. I, op. 223, d. 10, ll. 2–2ob. An earlier interview with a medic in the same unit complained about a major lack of vitamins. See NA IRI RAN, f. 2, r. I, op. 16, d. 4, ll. 68–68ob. Using grains or flour in place of vegetables was a common practice for meeting calorie requirements; it led to various corrective orders, including the May 31, 1943, signal. TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 11, ll. 546–549, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 402. The British Army in World War I acted in much the same manner. See Rachel Duffett, *The Stomach for Fighting: Food and Soldiers of the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp. 58, 146. This excellent work shows that there were a number of other parallels between the British Expeditionary Force and the Red Army, including something akin to subsidiary agriculture (p. 124), mitigation strategies (p. 187), and rations being a collective rather than a personal good (p. 190).

⁵⁵⁵ S. Gurov, *Pokhod i otdykh pekhoty* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1940), pp. 72–73. Gurov acknowledges that age and body-mass are also a factor in calorie use—something that the army's policies did not take into account. In other armies, particularly colonial forces, the maintenance of ethnic and religious custom was critical to organization and discipline. See Tarak Barkawi, "Peoples, Homelands, and Wars? Ethnicity, the Military, and Battle among British Imperial Forces in the War against Japan," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, no. 1 (January 2004): 134–163.

⁵⁵⁶ See Matthew Payne, "The Forge of the Kazakh Proletariat?" in Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, eds. *A State of Nations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 234–235, on how provisioning at work sites created tensions between Kazakh and Russian workers during the First Five-Year Plan.

⁵⁵⁷ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 920266, d. 1, ll. 718–929, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 148: "Mid- and higher level command personnel . . . are to be given for free in norms No.1 and No.2 with the addition of per person per 24 hours: butter or pork fat—40 g., cookies—20 g., canned fish—50g., cigarettes—25 or tobacco—25 g. and matches—10 boxes a month." This weighed in at 450 additional calories according to the official medical history of the war. Krotkov, *Gigiena*, p. 140. The hierarchy of rations had an impact on soldier's language—it became common to refer to strong tea as "general's tea" in the course of the war. Bulatov, *Budni frontovyykh let*, p. 251. As Boris Slutskii recalled, "For almost the entire war our grub [*kormezhka*] was fairly sparse [*izriadno skudnoi*]. . . . The officers' extra *paëk* provoked real envy among the soldiers." Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p. 28.

(154 additional calories).⁵⁵⁸ In winter (from October until April) soldiers were given one hundred extra grams (3.5 oz.) of bread. Those recovering from wounds had a different set of norms and specific food.⁵⁵⁹ The closer to the front a soldier was, the more rations he (or she) was entitled to. Simply put, in risking his (or her) life and thus most directly contributing to the war effort, the soldier earned more resources from the state as citizen, while the extreme physical demands of the front required more energy as a biological machine.⁵⁶⁰ This logic translated into civilian rations, where the more directly the civilian's job contributed to the war effort, the more calories he or she was given. Only those with jobs considered vital to the war effort (Category I workers and ITR) received rations comparable to soldiers at the front.⁵⁶¹ Finally, certain specialized troops received particular kinds of rations. Pilots were given a highly portable ration that included condensed milk and chocolate in case of fatigue, a crash, or unexpected landing. Reconnaissance troops received a special ration (including extra meat, sugar, and vodka) for infiltrating enemy territory, while elite formations like Guards units and Shock Army troops, received additional rations, such as much-coveted white bread.⁵⁶²

In these situations, we see that it is impossible to separate *prodovol'stvenye normy* and *paëk*. Some privileges seemed based on biological needs, others on status. Soldiers at the front needed more energy because they were engaged in strenuous combat, but they also deserved more because they were risking their lives. It seems inevitable that these two understandings would blur with one another; *paëk*, after all consisted of *prodovol'stvennye normy*. Among the items listed under *prodovol'stvennye normy* were tobacco, rolling paper, matches, and vodka—none of which were necessary for physical survival, but all of which were deficit items that carried important social weight.⁵⁶³

The example of special norms for women demonstrates these messy interconnections between a soldier's physical needs and social status. The army, recognizing the female bodies that had entered its ranks, reexamined the norms given to female soldiers. In April of 1943 there was an army-wide order “concerning the increased norm of soap issued to women service personnel,” which increased women soldier's soap ration by one hundred grams (3.5 oz.).⁵⁶⁴ While this order could have been based on ideas of women as either social or physiological beings, another order concerning tobacco was

⁵⁵⁸ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 920266, d. 1, ll. 718–929, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 148; Krotkov, *Gigiya*, p. 140.

⁵⁵⁹ For example, in 1945 one surgeon said that he gave soldiers suffering from gangrene 200–300 grams (6.7–10.1 fl. oz.) of vodka to help their appetite. NA IRI RAN, f. 2, r. I, op. 123, d. 13, l. 2ob. The September 1941 norms also included a special hospital ration.

⁵⁶⁰ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 920266, d. 1, ll. 718–929, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, pp. 149–155. Soldiers received roughly twice the amount of bread at the front as they did in training, and roughly three times the amount of bread given to those in the hospital.

⁵⁶¹ See Goldman, “Not by Bread Alone: Food, Workers, and the State”.

⁵⁶² TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 920266, d. 1, ll. 718–929, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 148; TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 10, l. 276, in *ibid.*, p. 414; Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, p. 10.

⁵⁶³ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 920266, d. 1, ll. 718–929, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, pp. 149–156. There was even talk of including postcards as part of a soldier's ration; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 200, l. 172.

⁵⁶⁴ RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 107, l. 677, in Barsukov, et al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943–1945 gg.*, p. 115.

based more on values than biology. The army also showed more concern for the lungs of its female personnel than the men in its ranks, as there was an official order “concerning the issuance to non-smoking women of chocolate or candy instead of tobacco.” Non-smoking female soldiers were to receive two hundred grams (7 oz.) of chocolate or three hundred grams (10.6 oz.) of coffee instead of tobacco.⁵⁶⁵ This order was possibly intended to do battle with gray markets in the ranks. Non-smoking soldiers deserved something to replace one of the most coveted parts of a soldier’s ration, and leaving them with large amounts of tobacco to exchange could seriously undermine the army’s control over soldiers’ consumption. Gender provided a window for exception to what was otherwise a system based entirely on position and the body as an anonymous biological machine.

As a result of multi-vector norms, as well as the variety of sources from which the army drew provisions, a soldier would receive a wide range of rations, even if this variety was unintentional. Periodically, however, food became nauseatingly monotonous.⁵⁶⁶ Soldiers in the rear were nearly unanimous in their complaints of hunger while undergoing training, so much so that being assigned to work in the kitchen was a much sought-after assignment.⁵⁶⁷ As Grigorii Baklanov, veteran and novelist, recalled: “They fed us there by the rear area norms: you’ll live, but even in your sleep you won’t have sinful thoughts.”⁵⁶⁸ Many looked forward to going to the front as a place where they could finally get enough to eat (and sometimes drink).⁵⁶⁹

The Menu

The menu at the front often impressed those who had been wasting away in the rear.⁵⁷⁰ Whenever possible, soldiers at the front were to be provided with hot, fresh food by field kitchens twice a day.⁵⁷¹ Hot food was to be brought up just before dawn and just after

⁵⁶⁵ RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 105, l. 169, in Barsukov, et al., *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 i iunia 1941 —g.—1942 g.*, p. 285. A similar order was later issued concerning nonsmoking males; see RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 106-a. l. 295, in *ibid.*, p. 368. Some accounts point to this order being fulfilled only briefly; see, for instance, V. I. Galaninskaia, *Budni medsanbata* (Saratov: Privolzhskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1980), p. 11.

⁵⁶⁶ See Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, pp. 29–31, for a detailed account of how rations changed as his unit moved further west.

⁵⁶⁷ Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 53, explained that one could always agree with the cook to get extra food while working in the kitchen.

⁵⁶⁸ Grigorii Baklanov, *Zhizn', podarennaiia dvazhdy* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1999), pp. 47–48.

⁵⁶⁹ Lesin, *Byla voina*, pp. 64–65, 80.

⁵⁷⁰ Temkin, *My Just War*, p. 115. Genatulin, *Vot konchitsia voina*, p. 36: Genatulin recalled an early meal at the front: “Such filling food—buckwheat kasha half filled with meat—we wouldn’t have dreamt of such a thing in the reserve regiment. There was enough food, you could eat for two or three, for those guys, who didn’t make it to this lunch. Some bent over with empty stomachs, others, crippled—they have bigger problems than food now.”

⁵⁷¹ RGVA, f.4, op.11, d.76, l. 70–75, in Barsukov, et al., *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943–1945 gg.*, p. 168; Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, pp. 9–10; TsAMO RF, f. 47, op. 1029, d. 83, ll. 53–55, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 324; Krotkov, *Gigiena*, pp. 145–150. As one might expect, *The Experience of Soviet Medicine in the Great Patriotic War* (the official medical history of the war) presents a very rosy picture that emphasizes the situation from 1943 on, treating the latter half of the war as if it were representative of the war as a whole. It does, however, present interesting details as to the percentage of daily calories per meal and the results of a survey of troops as to which concentrates were tasty and which inedible.

dark with soldiers receiving bread and meat for a cold lunch in the morning.⁵⁷² The soldier's meal was supposed to consist of two dishes—a soup and a porridge—and tea, brought up in twelve-liter thermoses.⁵⁷³ In practice this could be reduced to one dish, often a kasha-based soup.⁵⁷⁴ Cooks were supposed to divide the ration so that every soldier received the same portion of meat in his soup or kasha.⁵⁷⁵ Front-line menus varied greatly, but could become monotonous as one type of soup or porridge became constant.⁵⁷⁶

Red Army veteran and food historian Vil'iam Pokhlebkin noted that priorities during the war ignored assortment in favor of sufficiency and practicality in provisioning: “all production of foodstuffs is concentrated on the maximum expansion of so called basic products, without which not one person in the rear or at the front can exist . . . that being first of all bread and salt . . . [then] meat and fish, fats and vegetables. . . . What kind of meat, which kind of fats—this is all unimportant.”⁵⁷⁷ The state saw categories in terms of meat, bread, grains, vegetables, and so on, without attention to whether the meat was pork or beef or rabbit or fish, or whether it was canned or smoked or fresh or even took the form of powdered eggs.⁵⁷⁸ Meat was meat, fat was fat (and sometimes “meat” too), bread was bread (whether dried into crouton-like *sukhari* or fresh-baked). The Red Army, while the best fed mass institution in the Soviet Union, was not intended to be a space of culinary discovery (although it became one). Provisioning, at least initially and primarily, was concerned with caloric, not culinary, value, although making food tasty had been a goal of prewar Soviet nutrition. Provisioning officers made concessions to taste over pure practicality with the continued use and inclusion of basic spices (bay leaf, salt, pepper, onions, and occasionally garlic) in norms, the only culinary “details” left intact in military provisioning.⁵⁷⁹ In part this reduction to bare minimums was forced on the state because of the logistical nightmare that it faced. Everything from pork to pots was in short supply.

Field kitchens were supposed to service no more than 180 soldiers, but were soon forced to service 300 or more, due to a loss of 7,740 of them in the first year of the war. The kitchens consisted of three pots (soup, kasha, and tea) on wheels, with an oven. They were sometimes so close to the front as to endanger the cook's life (in Lesin's regiment, the first

⁵⁷² Polkovnik D. P. Vorontsov, *Prodol'stvennoe snabzheniie strelkovogo batal'ona i polka v deistvuiushchei armii* (Moscow: Voennaia Akademiia tyla i snabzheniia Krasnoi armii imeni Molotova V.M., 1943), p. 12.

⁵⁷³ Kurkotkin, *Tyl sovetskikh vooruzhennykh sil*, pp. 190; see also TsAMO RF, f. 208, op. 14703 c, d. 2, ll. 339–343, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, pp. 137–138; TsAMO RF, f. 47, op. 1029, d. 83, ll. 53–55, in *ibid.*, p. 324. Early in the war buckets were often substituted for thermoses, with a predictable loss of food. Additionally, the seals on thermoses had yet to be perfected. Krotkov, *Gigiiena*, p. 148. Krotkov's *Gigiiena* pointed out that soups and porridges were ideal for the task of feeding troops in the active army, as they were generally tasty and a hot meal in bad weather was of great importance.

⁵⁷⁴ E.g., TsAMO RF, f. 235, op. 2096, d. 104, l. 9, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, pp. 479–480; Khisam Kamalov, *U kazhdoi zhizn'-odna* (Kazan': Tatknigizdat, 1983), pp. 203–205.

⁵⁷⁵ Vorontsov, *Prodol'stvennoe snabzheniie*, p. 12.

⁵⁷⁶ RGASPI, f. 88, op. 1, d. 958, l. 7.

⁵⁷⁷ Vil'iam Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnia veka* (Moscow: Polifakt, 2000), p. 209.

⁵⁷⁸ An official table of exchange existed to ensure that the soldier received the proper number of calories, regardless of their source. See *Pamiatka voiskovomu povaru* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1943), pp. 14–15. Under this system, 17 grams (0.6 oz.) of powdered eggs were equivalent to 100 grams (3.53 oz.) of fresh meat.

⁵⁷⁹ Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnia Veka*, p. 210; *Vospominania frontovikov. Sbornik No.1* (Moscow: Voennaia akademiia tyla i snabzhenia Krasnoi armii imena Molotova V.M., 1943), p. 16.

man killed was the cook), and sometimes so far away as to guarantee that food would be doled out cold, despite thermoses, at the front.⁵⁸⁰ Cooks were supposed to provide nourishment to their comrades a few hundred meters or a few kilometers in front of them, but their ability to do so varied depending on their skills, the resources available to the rear area, and conditions at the front.

In battle, in echelon, and whenever troops found themselves too far from a field kitchen, two types of ration were to provide them with sustenance: the NZ and dry rations (*sukhpaëk*). The *neprikosnovennyi zapas* (literally “untouchable reserve”; in the British and German armies referred to as “Iron Rations”), or NZ (sometimes referred to as *nosimyi zapas*—“portable reserve”), was supposed to be carried in a soldier’s knapsack at all times, but was to be consumed only upon a commander’s order.⁵⁸¹ However, experience showed that soldiers would sometimes eat them without orders, and commanders sometimes kept reserves under their own supervision (in a special dugout), out of the hands of the soldiers.⁵⁸² The NZ typically consisted of canned or smoked meat, tea, sugar, salt, and dried bread.⁵⁸³ The *sukhpaëk*, often distinguishable only by not being labeled “NZ,” was slightly more generous. It consisted partially of things the soldier could prepare himself, such as concentrated soups and grains, and partially of ready-to-eat items, such as dried bread and canned food. Soldiers complained of both the taste and difficulty of preparing the concentrates issued at the beginning of the war. Preparation was a very serious problem, as the army failed to provide enough dry spirits (alcohol that burned without smoke) to allow soldiers to cook these concentrates, while starting a fire could draw enemy fire and prove fatal.⁵⁸⁴ As the war progressed, dry rations came to resemble NZ more and more, as concentrates were reserved for field kitchens and soldiers were given foods that they could eat as is.⁵⁸⁵

The contents of NZ and dry rations varied dramatically: they could be freshly killed boiled lamb, salt pork, lard, compressed animal fats,⁵⁸⁶ sardines, sausage, or American

⁵⁸⁰ Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 88. Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, pp. 9–10. See also TsAMO RF, f. 208, op. 14703 c, d. 2, ll. 339–343, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 138; NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 223, d. 9, l. 1ob.

⁵⁸¹ *Rukhovodstvo dlia boitsa pekhoty*, p. 45. Vorontsov, *Prodovol'stvennoe snabzheniie*, p. 16. The increased use of dry rations was a lesson the Red Army took away from the Winter War, where more mobile Finnish units could outmaneuver Soviet formations that were tied to roads. RGASPI, f. 74, op. 2, d. 121, ll. 11, 32.

⁵⁸² Antipenko, *Na glavnom upravlenii*, p. 92.

⁵⁸³ Vorontsov, *Prodol'stvennoe snabzheniie*, p. 49. According to norms established in September of 1941, the dry rations consisted of 500 grams (17.6 oz.) of dried bread (*sukhari*), 200 grams (7 oz.) of concentrated porridge, 75 grams (2.65 oz.) of concentrated bean soup, 100 grams (3.5 oz.) of sausage (which could be substituted with a variety of things, from dried fish to cheese), 35 grams (1.23 oz.) of sugar, 2 grams (0.07 oz.) of tea, and 10 grams (0.35 oz.) of salt. Dried bread replaced crackers as a primary foodstuff after the Finnish War. See RGASPI, f. 74, op. 2, d. 121, l. 11.

⁵⁸⁴ TsAMO RF, f. 208, op. 14703 c, d. 2, ll. 339–343, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 138. GARF, f. R5446, op. 43a, d. 8627, l.7. Apparently the failure to provide dry spirits was due more than anything else to a lack of vessels in which to transport them.

⁵⁸⁵ Antipenko, *Na glavnom upravlenii*, p. 92; Kurkotkin, *Tyl sovietskikh vooruzhenikh sil*, p. 206; Krotkov, *Gigiena*, pp. 150–153.

⁵⁸⁶ Slezkin, *Do voini i na voine*, p. 404; Vil'iam Pokhlebkin, *Moya kukhnia i moe menui* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 1999), pp. 278–279.

Spam (ironically referred to as “Second Front”),⁵⁸⁷ depending on what was available.⁵⁸⁸ Canned goods were often unlabeled.⁵⁸⁹ Vil'iam Pokhlebkin remembered different kinds of NZ and sukhpaëk that had been provided to him:

Usually fats were put into *shchi* [cabbage soup] ([or any] soup) and kasha. So whichever type they were in the army, it would be difficult to recognize them, unless, in connection with different extraordinary situations, it came down to giving out *sukhpaëk* or to open the NZ. In this situation the *starshina* [sergeant major]⁵⁹⁰ would give out along with dried bread and sugar a can of *tushenka* [stewed meat] or “fats.” Their character changed in relation to historical and military conditions. In 1942 I received in my dry rations some sort of hard, dingy, yellowish-gray chunks. This was *kombizhir* [“combined fats”]. I saw it for the first time (and of course, ate it up). At the end of 1943 they gave out in the dry ration a can a very white, buttery substance. This was American lard, an artificial fat drawn from the processing of pork fat. It was perceived as a luxury. But at the end of 1944 I received in my dry rations a good-sized 500-gram [17.6 oz.] piece of smoked salt pork. To be exact, it was not peasant salt pork, but smoked, with a pretty brown skin, neat and with a [pleasant] smell. I think that this was from captured German stocks, or maybe, more likely Hungarian, captured in the course of the rout of some large enemy grouping.⁵⁹¹

The food that soldiers received depended on a variety of factors largely beyond their control, factors that blurred the line between meats and fats, but where calories were king. Even foodstuffs like *kombizhir* would be consumed without question in order to stay alive, though among this random assortment of foods, some memorable delicious meals were to be had.

During the war, food was perhaps *the* deficit resource, something that everyone needed. By creating a hierarchy of distribution, the state directly (and logically) ranked whose contribution was most significant to its continued survival, and made providing for those who were risking their lives for the state their first priority. Soldiers were keenly aware of being better fed than their families and sometimes felt twinges of guilt. Ibraghim Gazi wrote his wife and child in October of 1943, “I am very sorry that I can’t help you with anything except money. I wanted to send my ration of chocolate, but they don’t take parcels.” Later, he lamented, “As soon as we get a chance to eat something good, I say: this is for kids, and our children probably don’t have this.”⁵⁹² While soldiers might be racked with guilt, they certainly felt the pangs of hunger less acutely than their families in the rear or under German occupation.

⁵⁸⁷ Antipenko, *Na glavnom upravlenii*, p. 92. It was common for soldiers to joke that the Second Front had finally been opened when they popped open a can of Lend-Lease meat. Collingham, *The Taste of War*, p. 339.

⁵⁸⁸ Sukhpaëk could include a roll with ground beef (Saushin, *Khleb i sol'*, p. 140); fresh boiled meat, salt pork, buttered bread (Antipenko, *Na glavnom upravlenii*, p. 148); concentrated grains (Lesin, *Byla voina*, pp. 100–101); sausage (Loginov, *Eto byla na fronte*, p. 9); canned fish (Kamalov, *U kazhdoi zhizn'-odna*, p. 15); and a variety of other animal products. By the middle of the war, salt pork and sausage seemed the most frequent and sanctioned items, and concentrates were officially removed. Krotkov, *Gigiena*, p. 152.

⁵⁸⁹ Irina Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kënigsberga: Dnevnik voennoi perevodchitsy, 1942–1945* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2010), p. 94; *Instruktsia po ukladke pokhodnykh kukhon* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1942), pp. 18–19.

⁵⁹⁰ Sergeant major; in the Red Army lowest level person responsible for organizing provisioning (of food, clothing, weapons, etc.) at the company, battery, etc., level.

⁵⁹¹ Pokhlebkin, *Moya kukhnia*, p. 278.

⁵⁹² *Pis'ma s fronta 1941–1945 gg.: Sbornik dokumentov* (Kazan': Gasyr, 2010), pp. 81–82.

An Inviolable Camp: Rhetoric, Realities, and Explaining Failures

Well-traveled soldier Boris Slutskii, writing in 1945, described how the state had managed to feed the army: “The cruel anti-theft laws of war, executions of chauffeurs for two packs of concentrates, were necessitated by the famished convulsions of a country that robbed its own rear to fatten its front.”⁵⁹³ This was *realpolitik* of the stomach. However frightful this concept may be (it left children, dependents and the elderly with the smallest rations, which, in extreme situations, such as the siege of Leningrad, dramatically reduced their chances of survival), it fit perfectly with the logic of a sovereign power, the continued existence of which was being threatened by total war.⁵⁹⁴ The state used rationing in such a way as to openly declare which lives were more valuable, understanding the zero-sum equation forced on it by shortage.

One of the clear messages sent by the Soviet state at the front was that the USSR could provide for its men under arms only so long as they stopped retreating. In his November 6, 1941, address to the Red Army (when German troops could see the spires of Moscow through binoculars), Stalin described how the hardships of the war “converted the family of peoples of the U.S.S.R. into a single and inviolable camp, which is selflessly supporting its Red Army and Red Navy,” guaranteeing that “the Soviet rear has never been so strong as it is today”.⁵⁹⁵ As a result of this rhetoric of an “inviolable camp” making sacrifices for the Red Army, any shortages at the front were not the failure of the Soviet system or the people, but rather of dangerous attitudes and more often of specific, identifiable individuals in whom the state had entrusted the sacred task of feeding:

The government allocates enough varied and nourishing foodstuffs for the provisioning of the units of the Red Army and only due to a negligent, dishonest, and sometimes criminal attitude on the part of commanders assigned to the leadership of provisioning, the quality of food and norms of provisioning of fighting men have degraded.⁵⁹⁶

This tracking of failure as the result of corrupt individuals was nothing new and would remain a continuous trope of Soviet discussions of provisioning, even as systematic problems became obvious.⁵⁹⁷

From the very beginning of the war, improvement was sought.⁵⁹⁸ In the course of the war, the failures of the prewar organization of ration distribution became apparent, and were exacerbated by the loss of both agricultural resources and huge numbers of field kitchens as the army retreated. At the same time that the rear was being reformed, fewer troops were assigned there, as the war demanded more and more able-bodied men to fight on the front lines. Many of these rear-area men would be replaced by women. A series of

⁵⁹³ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p. 29. Saushin, *Khleb i sol'*, p. 104: When asked how he liked the food they received at the front, one sergeant said: “It depends. . . . sometimes we like it, sometimes not. This is the front you see. At home they don’t even have this. Things are very rough with food in the rear. We don’t complain.”

⁵⁹⁴ See, for example, Nikita Lomagin, *Neizvestnaya blokada. Dokumenty, prilozheniia. Kn. 2* (St. Petersburg: Neva, 2004), p. 185.

⁵⁹⁵ Stalin, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union*, pp. 22–23.

⁵⁹⁶ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 11, ll. 546–549, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 403.

⁵⁹⁷ See Peri, “Queues, Canteens, and the Politics of Location in Diaries of the Leningrad Blockade, 1941–42,” which traces the same phenomenon in the civilian world.

⁵⁹⁸ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 5, ll. 545–547, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, pp. 90–100; Antipenko, *Na glavnom upravlenii*, pp. 291–300.

orders emanated from the State Committee of Defense (or GKO, Godarstvennyi komitet oborony) centralizing and perfecting the apparatus of the rear area. The aim was to do more with less, and on the whole, these efforts were quite successful.⁵⁹⁹ Despite the constant improvement of organization, including the establishment of rear-area inspections, realizing the type of control over the quality and quantity of food that the GKO demanded was a struggle that would be waged long after the Red Army had moved beyond Soviet borders.

Breakdowns: Their Consequences and Their Culprits

Any breakdown in provisioning had serious consequences. Hunger was devastating to morale. Failures to provide could lead to the impression that the Germans had much better provisioning. One censored letter near Stalingrad stated: “the Germans get chocolate even when they’re encircled, and we sit in the open and have only sukhari.”⁶⁰⁰ Even in the immensely popular and optimistic *Vasily Tërkin* poems, which were widely circulated in print and read on the radio, this suspicion creeps into a duel between Tërkin and a German: “Tërkin knew that in this fight, he was weaker—the worse fed [of the combatants]!”⁶⁰¹ Many soldiers complained about a lack of salt making their food inedible.⁶⁰²

The physical impact of hunger was something commanders could not ignore. Marshal Zhukov is reported to have declared, “A full soldier is worth five hungry ones!”⁶⁰³ Failures in provisioning were cited by Red Army officers as the direct causes of desertion (even among elite units), illness, and in some cases of the breakdown of combat operations.⁶⁰⁴ Soldiers died from various forms of digestive maladies at or on their way to the front, and night blindness due to lack of vitamins (*kurinaia slepota*) became a common malady.⁶⁰⁵ In a meeting of top political personnel of the army, one officer exclaimed that when soldiers were not fed, “What kind of combat effectiveness can you expect from them?”⁶⁰⁶ Wherever breakdowns occurred, culprits needed to be found and punished.

Orders throughout the war would decry the indifference of provisioning officers toward fulfilling the letter of Soviet law. The issue of proper distribution faced two challenges: indifference and greed. Much more disturbing was the practice of *razbazarivanie*, --meaning “squandering,” but often used to refer to the treatment of

⁵⁹⁹ Antipenko, *Na glavnom upravlenii*, p. 289; RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 99, ll. 128–143, 146–147, 151–152, in Barsukov, et al., *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iunia 1941 —g.–1942 g.*, p. 97; RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 67, ll. 164–66, in *ibid.*, pp. 195–196; RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 65, l. 396–397, in *ibid.* p. 71; RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 70, ll. 149–150, in *ibid.*, p. 213; RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 70, ll. 251–252, in *ibid.*, pp. 213–214. Stalin threatened to stop sending reinforcements to fronts that failed to meet the targets of these orders. RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 65, ll. 396–397, in *ibid.*, pp. 392.

⁶⁰⁰ TsA FSB RF, f. 14, op. 4, d. 913, ll. 149–150, in Zhadobin, et al., *Stalingradskaia epopeia*, p. 383.

⁶⁰¹ Tvardovskii, *Vasilii Tërkin*, p. 72.

⁶⁰² E.g., Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, p. 60.

⁶⁰³ Quoted in Antipenko, *Na glavnom upravlenii*, p. 299.

⁶⁰⁴ Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 82; TsA FSB RF, f. 14, op. 4, d. 943, l. 327, in Zhadobin, et al., *Stalingradskaia epopeia*, p. 379; Chekhovich, *Dnevnik ofitsera*, p. 73; NA IRI RAN, f. 2, r. I, op. 28, d. 30, l. 10.

⁶⁰⁵ E.g., TsA FSB RF, f. 14, op. 4, d. 777, l. 40–44, in Zhadobin, et al., *Stalingradskaia epopeia*, p. 259–260. RGASPI, f. 84, op. 1, d. 84, l. 2.

⁶⁰⁶ RGASPI, f. 88, op. 1, d. 958, l. 3. See also Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 146. TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 9, ll. 394–395, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, pp. 237–241.

provisions “as personal property.”⁶⁰⁷ Stalin’s 1943 warning from the Kalinin Front declared:

Many commanders and provisioning officers do not investigate the safety of provisions; they have forgotten, that the state entrusted them with a most important valuable. There are among them such people, who, using their authority, dispose of ration stocks as if they were their personal property, illegally expending foodstuffs, and in so doing damaging the Red Army and the security of the fighting men.⁶⁰⁸

Early in the war the draconian laws concerning the theft of socialist property, developed during collectivization, were reiterated, and speculation was to be dealt with by military tribunals.⁶⁰⁹ Despite the consequences, officers (both front-line and provisioning), having more or less total control over resources on the ground, would sometimes utilize what during the war had become *the* form of currency for their own profit. As one provisioning officer told his colleagues in January of 1943, “The fighter could be full. But why doesn’t he get all of his food? We came to a definite conclusion—starting from the DOP [Divisional Exchange Point]—people steal [*voruiut*] and when food gets to the kitchen—they steal there too.”⁶¹⁰

This ubiquitous theft, while considered to pale in comparison to graft under the old regime, included cases of illegal trade in foodstuffs as well as of officers throwing unsanctioned feasts using the soldiers’ (and the state’s) rations; the latter problem became worse around holidays.⁶¹¹ Theft by commanders was considered such a scourge that there was even talk of separating commanders from general provisioning, creating a separate system of provisioning for them alone. However, it was decided that feeding commanders separately from their subordinates would mean “they would just stop looking in on the troops.” At the same time, it was also understood that commanders often had guests (delegations from the rear, journalists, and so on) whom they needed to feed.⁶¹²

A few cases of theft (or scapegoating) within a unit could have a ripple effect and send men at the top and bottom of the rear area into eminent peril for treating communal property as personal property. At best, a tribunal or punishment battalion meant humiliation; at worst—death. For example, in May of 1944, on the 3rd Belorussian Front, one Private M., a cook, was sent to a punishment battalion for two months for hiding 5.25 kilograms of meat and 4.9 kilograms of flour; a Lt. L. went before a military tribunal for the illegal use (most likely as currency) of a variety of luxury items (including sugar, meat, and

⁶⁰⁷ See TsAMO RF, f. 47, op. 1029, d. 83, ll. 53–55, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 322; TsAMO RF, f. 239, op. 2294, d. 167, ll. 115–120, in *ibid.*, p. 570.

⁶⁰⁸ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 11, ll. 546–549 in *ibid.*, p. 403.

⁶⁰⁹ RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 98, ll. 210–214, in Barsukov, et al., *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iyunia 1941 g. –1942 g.*, pp. 11–13. It is interesting to note that in the instances I have found, those guilty are not seen as German agents, but merely as self-interested criminals.

⁶¹⁰ RGASPI, f. 88, op. 1, d. 958, l. 10. This problem continued throughout the war. See RGASPI, f. 84, op. 1, d. 86, ll. 223–230. David Samoilov recorded in his diary how one commander demonstrated this point graphically when soldiers complained that they didn’t receive their sugar ration. “You say that the *starshina* steals sugar? Of course. But you can consider this sin to be simply part of human nature [*pervorodnyi*].” He had the men in a long formation pass a chunk of dirt from one end to the next. When only a tiny portion got the other end he said: “How many hands did it pass though? And you see how much is left. The same thing happens with your sugar.” Samoilov, *Podennye zapisi*, p. 164.

⁶¹¹ See GARF, f. R5446, op. 46a, d. 7395, l. 27–28. RGASPI, f. 88, op. 1, d. 958, l.13.

⁶¹² RGASPI, f. 88, op. 1, d. 958, ll. 11–13.

fish); the head provisioning officer for their army, a Guards Major General, was removed from his position for allowing these abuses under his command.⁶¹³

Conversely, hoarding resources could be a necessity for periods when provisions could not make their way from the rear to the front. L.P. Grachev, a provisioning officer on the Volkhov Front, recalled that he had set aside resources for a rainy day, which allowed for the successful development of an operation near Novgorod. His commanding officer, who found out about this only after it was clear that the operation would be successful, reminded him, “They shoot people for that!” but never brought it up again.⁶¹⁴ This was not the only time Grachev recalled a superior hinting at the possibility of execution, and such constant pressure undoubtedly impacted the way in which provisioning officers approached their task.⁶¹⁵ It appears that the difference between an illegal misappropriation of foodstuffs and the wily maintenance of resources “off the books” was circumstantial. Clearly, hoarding could be forgiven, or even encouraged by the exigencies of the war. Incompetence or greed, however, could not.

Incompetence and greed haunted the issue of both quality and quantity, either leading to the destruction of resources or their unlawful redistribution. Cases of uneven distribution abounded, as did incidents of simply ignoring proper storage and distribution.⁶¹⁶ Food was left to rot or to be consumed by rats, or left unguarded to be stolen by hungry soldiers and civilians. For example, a report from the Transcaucasian Front in January of 1943 noted the “extreme carelessness” and “unsanitary conditions of Division Exchange Points” in which “grain is stored in heaps on a dirty floor” and “400 tons of potatoes were ruined,” yet no one was brought to answer. Under the difficult conditions of armies on the move, provisioning officers were forced to find new places to create warehouses during every advance and retreat, often in places utterly ravaged by war.⁶¹⁷ Inspections frequently found both field kitchens and canteens serving military personnel (including Moscow canteens that fed the staff of the People’s Commissariat of Defense!) dirty and under-supplied.⁶¹⁸ Sometimes vegetables were boiled without being peeled, ruining them.⁶¹⁹ A fel’dsher was supposed to test all food before it was served to soldiers,

⁶¹³ TsAMO RF, f. 241, op. 2618, d. 12, ll. 131–133, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, pp. 591–593.

⁶¹⁴ Grachev, *Doroga ot Volkhova*, p. 241. This situation is quite similar to those described by Stephen Kotkin at Magnitostroi, in which cooked books and creative misplacement of resources were common. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, pp. 55–61.

⁶¹⁵ Grachev, *Doroga ot Volkhova*, pp. 230–231.

⁶¹⁶ E.g., TsAMO RF, f. 208, op. 2563, d. 47, ll. 212–214, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, pp. 258–261; TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 9, l. 527, in *ibid.*, pp. 261–262; TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 9, l. 696, in *ibid.*, pp. 291–292. RGASPI f. 88, op. 1, d. 958, l.15.

⁶¹⁷ Antipenko, *Na glavnom upravlenii*, p. 125, discusses the difficulty of finding a standing building on liberated territory to set up the rear in 1944, and how this led to significant wastage of grain.

⁶¹⁸ E.g., TsAMO RF, f. 208, op. 2563, d. 47, ll. 212–214, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, pp. 258–261; TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 9, l. 696, in *ibid.*, pp. 291–292, TsAMO RF, f. 47, op. 1029, d. 83, ll. 53–55, in *ibid.*, pp. 321–325; RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 73, ll. 299–301, in Barsukov, et al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iyunia 1941 g.–1942 g.*, pp. 372–374; RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 75, ll. 38–40, in Barsukov, et al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943–1945 gg.*, pp. 24–26; RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 75, ll. 41–46, in *ibid.*, pp. 26–28; RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 75, ll. 52–54, in *ibid.*, pp. 29–30; RGVA, f. 4, op. 12, d. 107, ll. 307, in *ibid.*, pp. 70–71.

⁶¹⁹ RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 75, ll. 38–40, in Barsukov, et al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943–1945 gg.*, pp. 24–25.

and the results of these samplings were to be carefully recorded in a book that traveled with the field kitchen or canteen. Inspectors often complained that these books were nowhere to be seen, while a *fel'dsher* could be held responsible for an impractically large area.⁶²⁰ Soldiers could be given raw food with no way to prepare it, or worst of all, simply given nothing.⁶²¹

All of this spoke to a violation of the state's obligation to its soldiers, who were quite conscious of their duties and those of the state. Wherever the state noted that the *paëk* was not being received, Soviet power was quick to find the culprits and ameliorate the situation. In Stalin's admonition to the Kalinin Front on May 31, 1943, the army was to retroactively make good what it had failed to give fighting men for up to five days of food stuffs and up to fifteen days of luxuries (tobacco, soap, vodka, etc.).⁶²² These obligations took on a wider scope as the war reached its turning point, as the state promised not only to provide calories, but to emphasize taste.

Improvement

By 1943 the state demanded very high quality rations, and standards sometimes contradicted the logic of provisioning more generally. Vil'iam Pokhlebkin noted that the categories used by the army to apportion foodstuffs were dramatically simplified and made no appeal to variety. As a result of this "came the 'era' of the potato, or pea, and suddenly the 'macaroni period' or continuously only oats or pearl barley"—whatever was on hand was whatever was going to be served.⁶²³ As the war progressed and the Red Army's fortunes changed, these "eras," alongside the tendency to switch one type of product for another (such as egg powder for meat, potatoes or grains in place of anything else, and so on) became suspect and inexcusable.⁶²⁴

By 1943, the army began placing greater emphasis on who was cooking. Alongside the call for better and more varied ingredients, the army sought to improve the skills of cadres doing the cooking in three ways. The first was finding professional chefs who were already serving in the army (many of whom were in combat roles). The second was replacing men with women, as Stalin's order had called for the "preparation of the necessary number of women cooks for the active army by 1 September 1943."⁶²⁵ This served a dual purpose of infreeing men to serve combat roles and providing what were presumed to be innately more skilled cadres (based on gendered assumptions) to provisioning.⁶²⁶ Finally, the army showed that it was taking cooking more seriously by

⁶²⁰ On distances covered by *feld'shers*, see, e.g. Vera Vasil'ievna Sokolova (Moskvina), Interview by Ilya Vershinin, *Ia pomniu*, <http://www.iremember.ru/content/view/302/88/1/4/lang,en/> (23 March 2010); Moreinis, *Uchebnik pishchevoi gigieny*, pp. 193, 199–200, 206–208.

⁶²¹ E.g., RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 71, ll. 472–475, in Barsukov, et al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iiunia 1941 g.–1942 g.*, pp. 273–275.

⁶²² TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 11, ll. 546–549, Veshchikov, et al. *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 404.

⁶²³ Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnia Veka*, p. 209. See also "Pshennye dni," *Krasnaia zvezda*, June 8, 1943.

⁶²⁴ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 11, ll. 546–549, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 402.

⁶²⁵ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 11, ll. 546–549, in *ibid.*, p. 404.

⁶²⁶ Antipenko, *Na glavnom upravlenii*, p. 322, states that 75 percent of the cadres in provisioning were women.

propagandizing good cooks and shaming bad ones in Red Army publications.⁶²⁷ Skilled cooks received medals and orders.⁶²⁸ A special badge was created for “Excellent Cooks” in 1943, furthering their prestige, and intensive training courses were held in 1943 to train new (mainly female) cooks.⁶²⁹ According to Vil'iam Pokhlebin, this led to a period of experimentation and untying of the hands of military cooks that would ultimately alter the face of postwar Soviet culinary traditions.⁶³⁰

This spirit of innovation was not merely a phenomenon of the front line. Lend-Lease food from America required cooks to come up with new ways to use unfamiliar products, such as Spam, Vienna sausages, and deviled ham. In 1944, a special manual was created on how to read the labels of Lend-Lease products and prepare them.⁶³¹ Those further up the chain of command made constant efforts to improve rations and find new ways to stretch the finite resources of food. At the initiative of provisioning officers, soldiers often were assigned to agricultural work in areas to their rear. Beyond this, provisioning officers experimented with “vegetarian days,”⁶³² specialized foods for those in hospitals,⁶³³ foraging for and utilizing wild herbs,⁶³⁴ frozen foods (especially potatoes), and various types of foods that could be prepared in the rear and given to troops at the front. In one particularly innovative moment, F. S. Saushin, a provisioning officer on the Kalinin Front (after May of 1943), described how meat dumplings (*pelmeni*) were air dropped frozen to troops caught in encirclement.⁶³⁵

Food was an object that could turn rhetoric into a material reality. With rations, failure or success was physically apparent: soldiers could literally *feel* when the state was not holding up its end of the bargain. The state had promised to feed its soldiers and to punish those responsible for any failures in provisioning. This was a promise that the state intended to keep despite tremendous losses in every type of resource imaginable. As battlefield successes began to show the army's worth, as well as to return (often heavily damaged) resources to the state, a new set of expectations emerged, which led to greater demands on the part of the soldiers. Political and provisioning officers encouraged soldiers to speak honestly with them about how they were being fed and whether they had enough. At a conference for propagandists and agitators in 1943, a new key method of agitation was

⁶²⁷ RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 75, ll. 94–96, in Barsukov. *et al.*, *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943–1945 gg.*, p. 38. See also “Krasnoarmeiskaia kukhnia,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, April 11, 1943.

⁶²⁸ RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 71, l. 472–475, in Barsukov. *et al.*, *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 i iunia 1941 g.–1942g.*, p. 274.

⁶²⁹ Kurkotkin, *Tyl vooruzhenikh sil*, p. 203.

⁶³⁰ Pokhlebin, *Kukhnia veka*, pp. 212, 227, 230–231; Saushin, *Khleb i sol'*, p. 59, agreed that cooks were taking the initiative and demonstrating greater confidence from 1943 on.

⁶³¹ *Novye vidy produktov, postupaiushchikh na dovol'stvie Krasnoi Armii* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1944) also included information on the new concentrates the army had developed.

⁶³² These were days soldiers were given extra potatoes, bread, grains, and sugar instead of meat. Soy flour was used to compensate for the lack of protein. See *Pamiatka voiskovomu povaru*, p. 4. When asked how they liked this type of provisioning, one *starshina* stated: “The troops have come to really love the second vegetarian day . . . and all of them as one say that if on that day they could get a piece of meat, too, there would be nothing more to wish for” (Antipenko, *Na glavnom upravlenii*, pp. 213–214).

⁶³³ Antipenko, *Na glavnom upravlenii*, p. 131, describes specially raising rabbits in the rear to feed soldiers in hospitals.

⁶³⁴ TsAMO RF, f. 217, op. 1250, d. 183, l. 188, in Veshchikov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 417.

⁶³⁵ Saushin, *Khleb i sol'*, pp. 44, 59–61.

discussed: “We should have taught agitators to start with *makhorka* [soldier’s tobacco]: Is there enough of it? Have you eaten today? Every agitator—the new and old — should start with this.”⁶³⁶ Military psychologists also discovered strong correlations between morale and being well-provisioned.⁶³⁷ One commander told war correspondent Vasilii Grossman: “The worse the front, the more food reminds you of peacetime.”⁶³⁸ In conversation with the soldiers, agitators and provisioning and political officers learned how important hot food, tea, spices, and a smoke could be to men risking their lives in defense of the state. Indeed, the party-state showed a great deal of attention to the conditions soldiers lived under, muddying the oft-repeated assumption that Stalin and his associates viewed Soviet citizens solely as cannon fodder, a means to an end.⁶³⁹ Soldiers’ food and living conditions (*byt*) more generally were important enough to garner the attention of the most powerful people in the Soviet Union.

Pots and Spoons: Eating and Drinking in the Red Army

Conditions and Improvisation

The state had mandated that soldiers should be served a hot meal at least twice a day, with a cold course to be given out between them. While efforts were increasingly made to achieve this, the contingencies of war meant that even if the food was fresh and hot when it was ladled into thermoses, the soldiers did not always receive it warm. As Mikhail Loginov, a platoon commander on the Kalinin Front recalled, after the ten-kilometer round trip to the field kitchen, his soldiers brought back “cold soup, cold kasha and cold tea. There is nothing and nowhere to heat up the food—neither dry spirits, nor firewood, and anyway, to start a fire at the front is forbidden. The enemy would notice and immediately bombard us.”⁶⁴⁰ Hot food was often an unrealizable goal, with field kitchens servicing three hundred or more men at a meal sometimes too far away to provide troops scattered over a wide front with food that was still hot. Posting kitchens close to the front endangered them with bombardment and capture. In the chaos of the front, some field kitchens ended up delivering themselves to the enemy.⁶⁴¹ The men sent for food could be killed, the thermoses destroyed.⁶⁴² During successful offensives, troops could outrun their rear area services, and were sometimes left to live on what they could capture (sometimes so successfully that they had no need to replenish their stocks).⁶⁴³

⁶³⁶ “Soveshchaniie nachalnikov otdelov agitatsii i propagandy Politupravlennii frontov i okrugov,” *Propagandist i agitator Krasnoi Armii*, no. 5–6 (1943): 22. With the introduction of *edinonachaliie* (the end of the dual command system of commissar and commander), political officers were encouraged to make surveillance of the material situation of soldiers, especially food, their top priority. See RGASPI, f.88, op.1, d.958, l.1.

⁶³⁷ Benjamin Zajicek, “Scientific Psychiatry in Stalin’s Soviet Union: The Politics of Modern Medicine and the Struggle To Define ‘Pavlovian’ Psychiatry, 1939–1953.” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2009), pp. 153–154.

⁶³⁸ Grossman, *Gody voiny*, p. 362.

⁶³⁹ RGASPI f. 88, op. 1, d. 958, ll. 1–17.

⁶⁴⁰ Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, p. 9. See also NA IRI RAN, f. 2, r. I, op. 223, d. 9, ll. 1–1ob.

⁶⁴¹ Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, pp. 33–34.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

⁶⁴³ TsAMO RF, f. 67, op. 12001, d. 5, ll. 202–217, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 36; Boris Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik: Dnevnik, rasskazy* (Moscow: ZAO Izdatel'stvo Tsentpoligraf, 2010), p. 65; and Tvardovskii, *Vasilii Tërkin*, p. 73. Indeed, part of the reason for the increased

Making do in the absence of resources is part of the experience of military service everywhere, and the Red Army was no exception. Soldiers' rations could not help but reflect the situation the army found itself in at any given time. Sometimes, the issuing of luxuries was a sign of utter disaster: as one soldier remembers, in Sevastopol', days before its surrender to the Germans, he was given champagne because there was simply nothing else to drink.⁶⁴⁴ Another soldier recalls that in the Caucasus Mountains, he and his paratrooper comrades subsisted on chocolate.⁶⁴⁵ When matches became a rarity, soldiers "lived as in the times of [Hans Christian] Andersen," improvising "devilish contraptions" of flint, broken file, and wick.⁶⁴⁶

The need to improvise touched even the most everyday act of eating. Making do was a necessity in a world without chairs, tables, napkins, and other trappings of civility. The soldiers took their food in conditions that were quite different from the kitchens and canteens of the civilian world. Tvardovsky's hero *Tërkin* recalls how soldiers' new habits are inexcusable in "heaven"—the civilian world as exemplified by a rear-area hospital:

In heaven you can't eat off your knee
Only from the table
And no one in heaven can
Run to the kitchen with their mess tin
And you can't sit in your threads
And mangle bread with a bayonet.⁶⁴⁷

Eating in the active Red Army was something that was done wherever the food found its consumers—in bunkers, mud-filled trenches, woods, bombed-out cities, and along dusty roads.⁶⁴⁸

The calculations done in the rear concentrated on the body, not the psyche, and many soldiers felt that provisioning officers failed to take into account the extreme conditions under which they were living. Mansur Abdulin, serving near Stalingrad, mused:

Irregular food, chronic lack of sleep, hunger, constant physical overload. . . . We drink dirty water, from melted dirty snow from dirty mess pots. . . . How did we suffer through this? The mind can't conceive of it! I repeat, the conditions of foxhole life in the steppes near Stalingrad were very difficult. This is without mentioning the threat of death hanging over your head every minute.⁶⁴⁹

Conditions on the front could be extreme, and even when food was ample, soldiers suffered from nerves and exhaustion. At times, they found it difficult to eat even when there was ample food, as Mikhail Loginov, a platoon commander on the Kalinin Front recalled: "From no man's land a little wind blows, bringing the slightly sweet smell of corpses, filling the

emphasis on food in 1943 was the fact that the army was going on the offensive, and provisioning would become increasingly difficult as it moved forward. RGASPI f. 88, op. 1, d. 958, l. 2.

⁶⁴⁴ Grigory Efimovich Zamikhovskii, Interview by Grigory Koifman, *Ia pomniu*, <http://iremember.ru/krasnoflotsi/zamikhovskiy-grigoriy-efimovich/stranitsa-3.html> (10 November 2013).

⁶⁴⁵ Boris Tartakovskii, *Iz dnevnikov voennykh let* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 2005), p. 50.

⁶⁴⁶ Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 37. See also *Vospominaniia frontovikov*, p. 8. Here supply officers discuss tying strikers and flint to soldiers' rain capes.

⁶⁴⁷ Tvardovskii, *Vasilii Tërkin*, p. 124.

⁶⁴⁸ M. G. Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1985), p. 40.

⁶⁴⁹ Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, p. 40; Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, p. 10, recalled that "For civilians this isn't a bad ration, but in the trenches, for *frontoviks*, it's a bit small. The cold, damp, sleepless nights and nervous tension take a lot of energy. Soldiers don't get enough sleep and don't eat enough, and so they want to sleep and eat all the time."

trench. We have trouble breathing and a few get nauseous and throw up. Dinner is brought up in thermoses, but I can't look at the meat or kasha. I give my portion to the soldiers, and myself have only bread and cold tea from my canteen."⁶⁵⁰ Stress and trauma both created a greater physical need for sustenance and complicated the body's ability to consume. Some soldiers could shrug off the sights and smells of the trenches, but others could not eat under such conditions, thus subverting the science of provisioning.

During the first two years of the war, when the situation with meat in the army was critical, soldiers and resourceful cooks found a solution on the battlefield.⁶⁵¹ Boris Slutskii remembered how: "In the first spring of the war, when supply became unlikely, we came to eat horse meat. We killed healthy horses (illegally); I can still remember the sweet, sweaty smell of soup with horse."⁶⁵² Numerous accounts and archival documents recall how horsemeat became a common source of protein at the front as soldiers cut off from supply found themselves eating their four-legged comrades killed in battle.⁶⁵³ Lesin recalled how in April of 1942, horsemeat was the main source of food for him and his comrades.⁶⁵⁴ At first this idea disgusted him: "To him, a Tatar, *makhan* [slang for horsemeat] is the same as pork to a Russian. We all have a taste for horsemeat now . . . We ate it without salt. It was appetizing all the same. We ate without bread, a second or third pot-full."⁶⁵⁵ Military translator Irina Dunaevskaia initially described soldiers mocking Kazakhs who ate horse, but later noted that she and a comrade were "lucky" when a shell killed a horse, and they ate "makhan (there is no other way than this Tatar word that this is called at the front)."⁶⁵⁶ Horse carrion (*propastina*), was of course of questionable quality, but as Surgeon Vera Malakhova noted, it was something "we ate all the time."⁶⁵⁷

Given the unequal distribution of rations along the front, units that were worse off than those around them could get a bad reputation for their love of horseflesh. A report filed after an inspection of the 50th Army (on the Kalinin Front, where Saushin, Lesin and Loginov served) noted that Colonel Samsonov admitted his division had eaten 175 of its horses:

The situation in this division has gotten so bad, that the 116th Division has become known throughout the units of the army. For example, Lt. Bychkov in the 10th Army's 385th Rifle Regiment stated in our interview about the possibility of moving into the area of the 50th Army—be careful, don't leave your horses standing around, because the "Samsons" will eat them right away.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁰ Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, p. 10.

⁶⁵¹ As to the crisis with meat, see Zotov, *Pishchevaia promyshlennost'*, p. 128; Saushin, *Khleb i sol'*, p. 115–116; and Pokhlebin, *Kukhnia vekha*, p. 209.

⁶⁵² Slutskii, *O dugikh i o sebe*, p. 29.

⁶⁵³ E.g., RGASPI, f. 88, op. 1, d. 958, l. 2.

⁶⁵⁴ Lesin, *Byla voina*, pp. 85, 89, 99, 102, 149–150.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁶⁵⁶ Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kënigsberga*, pp. 158, 296.

⁶⁵⁷ Malakhova, "Four Years a Frontline Physician," pp. 209–211; Yakupov, *Frontovye zarisovki*, p. 30, describes "soldiers shish-kebabs" of artillery horses on the cleaning rods of guns, while Abdullin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, p. 22, recalls his bread ration being given to horses to keep them alive, while he himself, p. 59, experimented with (and almost died from) eating *kombikorm*, a concentrated horse fodder.

⁶⁵⁸ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d.9, ll. 394–395, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 237.

Horses were not part of paëk, and their consumption could be both demoralizing and counterproductive. But in the darkest days of hunger, they soon found their way into the soldier's pot as an expedient way to make up for what the state could not provide.⁶⁵⁹

Troops sometimes resorted to theft (even on the front lines) as a means of insuring survival. This sort of theft could undermine unit morale, as when a group of former convicts stole all of a unit's food. On the other hand, it could bring a unit closer together as they put their needs above those of the army at large.⁶⁶⁰ The state had taken very harsh measures to discourage theft, but for people enduring prolonged hunger and possible starvation, the risks seemed worth taking.

Yet theft, or the perception of thievery, could destroy bonds within a unit, so a means of fair distribution of rations was key to morale. At the front, exact measurements of food, especially the multiple components of dry rations, proved impractical. Some *starshiny* found their own way out of this, using magazines and discs from weapons as ersatz weights, a practice noted and condemned by *Krasnaia zvezda*, the army's daily newspaper.⁶⁶¹ However, the most common arrangement in order to ensure fairness in the distribution of rations was a system found in many armies throughout history:

Bread, sugar and meat are divided into portions and spread out on a *plash-palatka* [rain cape]. One of the soldiers turns to the side and the one who divided the rations points to a portion and asks:

“Whose?”

The soldier turned to the side names any name.

With this sort of division no one is offended.⁶⁶²

Such a system ensured that any inequality in rations was an act of god, rather than an act of nepotism or ill will. This maintained a sense of fairness at the lowest level of ration distribution, and kept disputes over what was probably the most valuable commodity to a minimum.

Eating from the Same Pot

⁶⁵⁹ Less depressing examples of making do come from Nikolai Chekovich (*Dnevnik ofitsera*, pp. 47–48), who wrote home about fishing with hand grenades, and Yakupov (*Frontovye zarisovki*, p. 73), who recalled that on the Dnepr men ate fish that had been stunned by German shelling.

⁶⁶⁰ See Izo Davidovich Adamskii, Interview by Grigory Koifman, *Ia pomniu*, <http://iremember.ru/minometchiki/adamskiy-izo-davidovich.html> (10 November 2013); Meir Faivelevich Toker, Interview by Grigory Koifman, *Ia pomniu*, <http://iremember.ru/svyazisti/toker-meir-fayvelevich.html> (10 November 2013). See also TsA FSB RF, f. 14, op. 4, d. 418, ll. 19–20, in Zhadobin, *et al.*, *Stalingradskaiia epopeia*, pp. 246–248. Theft and begging were often forced on soldiers who for one or another bureaucratic reason found themselves outside of the responsibilities of one or another provisioning officer—i.e., those whose paperwork were not in order or found themselves on the territory of another unit.

⁶⁶¹ “Dolg voennykh khoziastvennikov,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, July 4, 1943. It is worth noting that the *starshina* was a figure often derided and assumed to be corrupt. See, for example, Viktor Astaf'ev, *Prokliati i ubity* (Moscow: Terra, 1999), p. 109: “although Shpator never drank, smoked and was a totally unselfish person—all the same no one believed this, because *starshini* are all swindlers, boozers and womanizers, so he must be such.”

⁶⁶² The *plash-palatka* was a soldier's piece of equipment that served as both a rain cape and half of a tent. Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, p. 9–10. Anatoly Nikolaevich Muzhikov, Interview by Bair Irincheev, *Ia pomniu*, <http://iremember.ru/minometchiki/muzhikov-anatoliy-nikolaevich.html> (November 10, 2013), discusses the occasional envy this caused, while Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, pp. 6–8, recalls that his comrade divided up their rations and was trusted to do so.

Eating in the Red Army was a collective activity that could strengthen bonds between the diverse men and women in the ranks. It was a time of rest, when soldiers took stock of their situation, remembered home, got to know each other, and replenished their physical strength.

While soldiers seemed to always want more to eat, situations where food was ample were not necessarily occasions for celebration. The strict ratios of products to soldiers proved difficult to fulfill as casualties mounted on the front, as the head of provisioning of the 1st Belorussian Front, N. A. Antipenko, recalled:

In the course of an operation, as we all know, troops take casualties. Their computation is always behind—a more detailed account comes only significantly later. There are fewer people, sometimes one half or one third of the original number, but the higher authorities continue to send food for the entire unit. Therefore, a soldier in the course of an offensive received unlimited food.⁶⁶³

This sudden abundance could be less than a joyous occasion, as one soldier recalled:

There was no one living around. Near the morning the cook crawled up with thermoses of vodka and boiled horse. But there wasn't anyone to drink up or eat. It fell to me to drink a large cup of vodka for everyone.⁶⁶⁴

Moments of rest and feeding actually underlined the losses that a unit had suffered, as those who remained consumed the portions of their absent comrades.⁶⁶⁵ A passage from the autobiographical novel *Naveki deviatnadsatletnii* (Forever Nineteen), written by a veteran, captures this moment eloquently:

Only after he swallowed, did he look at what he was eating. In his mess pot was thick, yellow pea soup. And with this spoon, with his eyes closed, he mentally held a funerary feast for those, who today were no longer with them. They were still here, all the same, they could stumble into the kitchen at any moment, sit in the sun.⁶⁶⁶

Eating was when you realized that you were alive, a visceral moment that separated the living and the dead.⁶⁶⁷ As a result, army food could evoke strong emotions and potent memories, and, as we see from this quotation, could create the sense that those who had fallen were near.

A sense of communality was supported by the most quotidian details of provisioning. Soldiers were supposed to receive two dishes yet they were issued only one mess pot, and given that shortage was a general rule, there were often many fewer pots than soldiers.⁶⁶⁸ Red Army pots came in two styles. One was a copy of the German mess-tin issued in both world wars, which was a kidney shaped aluminum pot with a bail-like handle and a shallow top that doubled as a cup.⁶⁶⁹ The other was a simple round pot of varying depths with a bail handle but no top. The mess pot was not entirely the soldier's

⁶⁶³ Antipenko, *Na glavnom upravlenii*, pp. 148–149.

⁶⁶⁴ Genrikh Zinov'ievich Kats, Interview by Grigorii Koifman, Ia pomniu, <http://iremember.ru/razvedchiki/kats-genrikh-zinovevich.html> (10 November 2013).

⁶⁶⁵ Temkin recounts that he had been counted dead, a mistake no one noticed until an “extra mouth” was found in his unit; Temkin, *My Just War*, pp. 117–118.

⁶⁶⁶ Grigorii Baklanov, “Naveki deviatnadsatletnii,” in *Voennye povesti*, p. 280.

⁶⁶⁷ Abdullin, *160 Stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, p. 134, describes a touching moment in his memoirs where the smell of kasha and act of eating is when he realizes that, somehow, he has survived.

⁶⁶⁸ As late as August of 1944, Khrulev complained that there was a deficit of 2.7 million mess-tins at the front. GARF, f. R-5446, op. 46a, d. 7161, l. 2.

⁶⁶⁹ This model was deemed more useful. TsAMO RF, f. 208, op. 14703 c, d. 2, ll. 339–343, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 137.

and not entirely the state's, much like the food that was consumed in it.⁶⁷⁰ The pot was issued by the state, but it was one of the few items of a soldier's kit that seemed to belong specifically to him or her (if there were enough to go around). It was not uncommon for soldiers to decorate their pots with their name, a place where they had served, or the name of a friend or random acquaintance. Lev Yur'evich Slezkine carved the names of two Estonian women he met before the war onto the side of the pot he carried through most of his service "in memory of a pleasant, romantic meeting."⁶⁷¹ By carving names, initials, places, and dates into government-issued items, soldiers turned an anonymous piece of metal into a deeply personal item that recorded parts of their biography.

Mess-pots served not only for consuming and occasionally preparing food; they could also be used for individual washing. As one female soldier recalled, "Mess-tins! We had them for food, to wash our clothes in, to wash up ourselves with—everywhere mess-tins!"⁶⁷² One soldier informed his correspondent that he was using the bottom of his mess-tin as a desk.⁶⁷³ Many soldiers lacking vitamin A suffered from night blindness, which created serious problems on long marches under the cover of darkness. In this case, banging a rod on the mess-pot of the man in front enabled the blinded soldier to complete night marches.⁶⁷⁴ A soldier's mess-pot was something like a room in a portable home, serving as dining room, and sometimes as kitchen and shower. However, as all activities in the army took place in the company of others, the soldier shared the pot with his or her comrades.

When food was doled out to soldiers, one pot was filled with soup, the other with kasha.⁶⁷⁵ Soldiers would eat in pairs, as Gabriel Temkin remembers:

We ate from one *kotelok* (mess tin), using approximately the same size wooden spoons. We would eat by turns, I a spoonful and then he a spoonful, slowly, as becoming among comrades. Having finished the soup or kasha, we would lick clean our personal spoons and put them back in place, where they were customarily kept—behind the top of the right or left boot. Front-line soldiers would sometimes, in panicky retreats, throw away their heavy rifles, but never their spoons.⁶⁷⁶

⁶⁷⁰ Several documents speak to the attention paid by the state to shortages of pots and spoons, including orders to manufacture them locally. See TsAMO RF, f. 47, op. 1029, d. 83, ll. 53–55, in Veshchikov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, pp. 321–325; TsAMO RF, f. 233, op. 29302, d. 6, ll. 15–18, in *ibid.*, p. 419. Anatolii Genatulin, *Strakh* (Moscow: Sovietskii voen, 1990), p. 25, describes spoons and mess pots being taken from the dead by their surviving comrades.

⁶⁷¹ Slezkin, *Do voiny i na voine*, p. 347.

⁶⁷² Golubkova Iudif' Vladimirovna, Interview by Artem Drabkin, Ia pomniu, <http://www.iremember.ru/content/view/385/85/1/3/lang,en/> (14 March 2010). See Malakhova, "Four Years a Frontline Physician," pp. 199, 204–205.

⁶⁷³ Gamilzhan Valiev, *Soldat khatlar* (Yar Chally, 2000), p. 57.

⁶⁷⁴ Tokarev, *Vesti dnevnik na fronte zapreshchalos'*, p. 137: "We moved only after sun down, so that enemy planes wouldn't spot us. . . . So a company is marching in the dark, and on the side of the road a chain of 'the blind' being led by somebody who can see. Later they didn't form a separate column, as we found a simpler way to ease the march of the 'blind men.' Every 'blind man' was given a cleaning rod and placed behind someone who could see. From time to time the 'blind man' would bang his cleaning rod on the mess pot hanging off the pack of the 'seeing man' in front of him. In the night all you could hear was the quiet ring of cleaning rods against mess pots."

⁶⁷⁵ Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, p. 9.

⁶⁷⁶ Temkin, *My Just War*, p. 104.

Such an arrangement helped to build a sense of comradeship, as soldiers of different ages and ethnicities would often find themselves eating from the same pot.⁶⁷⁷ Nonetheless, the soldier still had at least one item that was exclusively his, and in many ways the mark of a front-line soldier—the spoon that he was even less likely to give up than his rifle.

Spoons

Very little of what soldiers carried belonged to them. Their clothes were the property of the state. When they went to a bathhouse to wash up, they were not guaranteed to get their own set of underwear back. Their weapons also belonged to the state, as did the food they ate. However, the spoon was something that the individual soldier owned. Draft notices told inductees to bring a spoon, a cup, towel, and change of underwear.⁶⁷⁸ Given that the towel and underwear would soon be worn out, the spoon and cup were among the few items from the civilian world that soldiers would carry throughout their service. Spoons were frequently individualized with initials and artwork, and are often the only way to identify soldiers whose remains are found today. The spoon could be wooden or metal, a traditional Russian triangular spoon or an oval soup spoon. German and Finnish folding spoons were also popular, as they were easily carried and their handles doubled as forks. Some soldiers made their own spoons out of scraps found on the battlefield, such as downed planes.⁶⁷⁹ In one case, an officer found craftsmen from among his soldiers, took them from the front line, and put them to work carving spoons for soldiers in need.⁶⁸⁰ Spoons were a frequent item in government supply orders throughout the war: in the third quarter of 1942 alone, 1.9 million wooden spoons were ordered.⁶⁸¹

The spoon was the only utensil a soldier was expected to have; all of his or her food was designed to be eaten either with a spoon or bare hands. As such, the spoon became a mark of a real soldier. Vera Malakhova, a front-line surgeon, recalled an embarrassing moment near Odessa. While joining a group of soldiers sitting down to a meal, she realized that she lacked something the men around her all possessed: “Well, why don’t you eat? ‘I don’t have a spoon,’ I answered. ‘What sort of a blankety-blank are you? Just what sort of soldier are you? Why don’t you have a spoon?’”⁶⁸² Even the *sukhpaëk* could not be consumed without a spoon, meaning a soldier reduced to a minimum carried a spoon and a rifle. The soldier’s spoon helped to separate the military experience from the civilian world. In a letter home in 1939, Lev Slezkine describes eating in a café “like troglodytes, looking with tender emotion at knives and forks (in the barracks we eat only with spoons).”⁶⁸³ Spoons were the implement of individual consumption and a deeply prized, rare piece of personal property. Yet every aspect of the soldier’s *paëk* could be treated as if it were personal property, and not only by corrupt commanders.

Currencies, Rituals, Substitutes, and Valuables: Tobacco, Tea, Vodka, Water, and Bread

⁶⁷⁷ Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, p. 24.

⁶⁷⁸ “Mobilizatsionnoe predpisanie (oborot),” Soldat.ru, <http://www.soldat.ru/doc/original/original.html?img=mobpredpis&id=2> (Accessed 25 January, 2014).

⁶⁷⁹ Kats, Interview.

⁶⁸⁰ *Vospominaniia frontovikov*, p. 7.

⁶⁸¹ RGASPI, f. 84, op. 1, d. 83, l. 172.

⁶⁸² Malakhova, “Four Years a Frontline Physician,” p. 201.

⁶⁸³ Slezkin, *Do voini i na voine*, p. 328.

Food became a tradable commodity under conditions of extreme scarcity. People receiving rations throughout the country were often willing to part with durable goods (such as clothing and jewelry) for consumables (such as bread, meat, and vodka). As one war correspondent recorded in his diary in January of 1943, “The modern form of payment is vodka and bread.”⁶⁸⁴ Exchanges, especially of “luxury” items, were very common at the front, as Boris Slutskii recalled: “In the trenches there was a lively exchange business! Tobacco for sugar, a portion of vodka for two portions of sugar. The prosecutor struggled with this barter in vain.”⁶⁸⁵ Boris Komskaa, a mortar man, recorded in his diary that he exchanged a watch (a particularly valuable item that he had taken from a German soldier whom he shot) for food while lying in a field hospital.⁶⁸⁶ These types of exchanges both highlighted the rituals of consumption that took place in the army, and allowed those who did not drink or smoke to participate in or profit from them by either exchanging their portions of tobacco and alcohol or giving them away.⁶⁸⁷ These coveted items were not only potential commodities, but also consumables that were used collectively.

“Let’s smoke one together, comrade!” was the chorus to a popular wartime song.⁶⁸⁸ Tobacco was considered to be so important that the provisioning officer of the Kalinin front was flown to Moscow to procure it in the spring of 1944 and ordered not to return without *makhorka*. He did this despite orders not to send delegations from the front to beg from manufacturers.⁶⁸⁹ Tobacco was such an integral part of military culture that the state was dedicated to providing its soldiers with smokes despite a union-wide reduction to 25 percent of prewar production.⁶⁹⁰ Smoking, a communal activity that was often experienced as a different form of time, brought soldiers together in moments of rest and was often accompanied by sugary black tea.⁶⁹¹

Tea, which, according to a nutrition textbook from 1940, was “almost without nutritional value” was to be given to soldiers *hot*, twice a day, and manuals reminded soldiers that it was preferable to water.⁶⁹² Some aspects of the soldier’s ration were clearly

⁶⁸⁴ Aleksandr Ustinov, “‘Zavtra uedem v armiiu’: Iz frontovogo dnevnika fotozhurnalista,” *Rodina*, no. 6 (2011): p. 23.

⁶⁸⁵ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p. 29.

⁶⁸⁶ Komskaa, “Dnevnik 1943–1945 gg.,” p. 30.

⁶⁸⁷ Koshkarbaev, *Shturm*, p. 109. The author tells of an Uzbek soldier in his platoon who would divide his vodka ration among his comrades.

⁶⁸⁸ A. Lukovnikov, *Druz’ia-olnopolchane: Rasskazy o pesniakh, rozhdennykh voinoi, melodii i teksty* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1985), pp. 32–33.

⁶⁸⁹ Saushin, *Khleb i sol’*, pp. 87–93; the quality of this tobacco was very poor, and it was referred to by even those sending it to the front as “*feliton*” – given the purplish smoke it created, which was much like the purplish ink used in the Soviet Union. As to the order forbidding delegations in both 1941 and a repeat order in 1943, see RGVA f. 4, op. 12, d. 98, ll. 507–508, in Barsukov. *et al.*, *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iyunia 1941 g.–1942 g.*, p. 48; RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 75, ll. 16–17, in Barsukov. *et al.*, *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943–1945gg.*, pp. 18–19. However, it appears that appealing to the center for items in serious deficit was a standard part of how provisioning worked. A front seemed more or less invisible to the center while its provisioning was in order, and became visible in moments of crisis.

⁶⁹⁰ Zotov, *Pishchevaia promyshlennost’*, p. 483.

⁶⁹¹ On cigarettes and relaxation, see Richard Klein, *Cigarettes Are Sublime* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), especially chapter 5, “The Soldier’s Friend”.

⁶⁹² Moreinis, *Uchebnik pishchevoi gigieny dlia sanitarno-feldsherskikh shkol*, p. 146; S. Gurov, *Boets i otdelenie na pokhode* (Moscow: Voenzidat, 1941), p. 22; TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d.9, l. 696, in Veshchikov, *et al.*, *Tyl*

aimed at psychological, rather than nutritional benefits and were invested with important social meaning. Tobacco and tea were useful stimulants; the latter, served warm, could save men dying of frostbite. Tea was a particularly good delivery system for sugar and quick calories, something that has contributed to its global popularity.⁶⁹³ Both caffeine and nicotine could enliven men psychologically numbed by the lack of sleep that accompanied hard fighting and long marches. They also leant themselves to ritualized, habitual use.⁶⁹⁴ Vodka, a depressant, could calm the nerves of men who had seen ghastly sights.

Vodka had only recently returned to the Red Army soldier's ration, the experience of the Finnish War having shown its value in staving off frostbite and death by exposure. Still, its distribution was constantly modified and a cause of concern.⁶⁹⁵ In the spring of 1943, Colonel Dulov, commanding the 146th Rifle Division from Tatarstan, wrote to his representative in the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, Comrade Dinmukhametov, about which gifts from home were useful and which were better left in the Republic:

I have a request. If you are going to send us packages, do not send vodka, it is issued by the order of the People's Commissar. Extra vodka sent by you is exactly that—extra and is used by many commanders to satisfy excessive personal needs, which creates an unhealthy mood and a number of other consequences coming from this. Instead of vodka, it is better to send other gifts, especially foodstuffs, leather, etc.⁶⁹⁶

More so than any other component of the soldier's ration, vodka presented a potential threat that required careful regulation. A drunken soldier was a danger to himself and others, more likely to steal, harass civilians, be rude to his superiors and subordinates, and die foolishly.⁶⁹⁷ In any army alcohol could pose a serious problem, as numerous accounts attest. As a result, vodka rations were constantly being re-regulated and the issuing of extra rations censured.

Beginning with the Finnish campaign, one hundred grams (3.4 fl. oz.) of vodka were issued in winter.⁶⁹⁸ On August 25, 1941, one hundred grams of 80-proof vodka per day was introduced for all soldiers on the front line, pilots, and technical support troops at aerodromes. Vodka was to be given out only to those persons who earned it by risking their lives. It was also to be guarded and accounted for with vigilance. Dispensation depended on a monthly application with details as to the number of troops in a unit and the amount

Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg., p. 291; TsAMO RF, f. 47, op. 1029, d. 84, ll. 23–24, in *ibid.*, p. 381; Krotkov, *Gigiena*, p. 39.

⁶⁹³ Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (Penguin: New York, 1986), pp. 108–109, 114, 122.

⁶⁹⁴ See *ibid.*, pp. 110, 122, on the ritualization of goods.

⁶⁹⁵ RGVA, f. 4, op. 14, d. 2737, ll.58–70, in N. S. Tarkhov, ed., *“Zimniaia voina”: Rabota nad oshibkami (aprel'–mai 1940 g.): Materialy komissiy Glavnogo voennogo sovieta Krasnoi Armii po obobshcheniu opyta finskoi kompanii* (Moscow-St. Petersburg: Letnii sad, 2004), p. 118; Antipenko, *Na glavnom upravlenii*, p. 149; RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 65, ll. 413–414, in Barsukov, *et al.*, *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iunia 1941 g.–1942 g.* 73; RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 70, ll. 548–549, in *ibid.*; RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 71, ll. 191–192, in *ibid.*, pp. 252–253; RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 73, ll. 154–155, in *ibid.*, 365–366; RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 75, l. 51, in Barsukov, *et al.*, *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943–1945gg.*, p. 28; RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 75, l. 649, in *ibid.*, p. 145.

⁶⁹⁶ NART, f. R-3610, op. 1, d. 327, l. 40.

⁶⁹⁷ See Genatulin, *Strakh*, pp. 19–22, on what it felt like to go into combat having drunk a double ration of vodka, and Komsii, “Dnevnik,” pp. 27–28, on the results of an assault led by a drunken officer.

⁶⁹⁸ RGVA, f. 4, op. 14, d. 2737, ll. 58–70, in Tarkhov, *“Zimniaia voina,”* p. 118.

consumed.⁶⁹⁹ This was not the last word on vodka. By mid-May 1942, vodka became an inducement to fight, as only “units successfully advancing” were to be given vodka—and two hundred grams (6.8 fl. oz.) of it, twice the amount previously given to the army at large. Meanwhile, their comrades received one hundred grams of vodka only on revolutionary holidays.⁷⁰⁰ The distribution of vodka on those holidays remained the most consistent aspect of vodka use in the Red Army. Within a month, the May order was replaced by a new rule giving one hundred grams to all troops engaged in offensive operations and on revolutionary holidays. This latest order also noted that it was illegal for officers to use their rank to drink vodka whenever they pleased, and called for greater vigilance in securing vodka at the front.⁷⁰¹ By November 13, 1942, the rules changed yet again: everyone under fire would receive one hundred grams per day; reserves would receive fifty grams (1.7 fl. oz.), and those serving in the Caucasus would receive fortified wine in place of vodka. This order also established limits per front for the period from November 25 till December 31, 1942, amounting to anywhere between 364,000 and 980,000 liters by front and 5,691,000 in the army as a whole, with 99,000 going to the 7th Separate Army and 1.2 million liters of wine being issued to the Transcaucasian Front.⁷⁰² Finally, in May of 1943, the army returned to the principal of offensive operations and holidays being the only times a soldier earned his hundred grams.⁷⁰³

The state’s approach to rationing vodka rested on the notion that it could manage the delicate balance between calming nerves and inducing drunkenness. Soldiers, however, disposed of their rations in various ways. Some women soldiers reported never having received a vodka ration; others noted that they gave theirs away.⁷⁰⁴ Among Muslim soldiers, several accounts mention believers giving their vodka to their comrades.⁷⁰⁵ Trade and gift-giving disrupted the state’s attempt to manage soldiers’ use of vodka

By its nature alcohol was potentially dangerous. Mansur Abdullin recalled the catastrophe that ensued when Red Army soldiers discovered an intact distillery abandoned by the Germans in retreat:

How could you take a distillery and not get tight? That seemed unnatural. What a cursed self-hypnosis! . . . Many of our guys “tied one on” . . . and thirty fascist tanks with flamethrowers came at us full speed ahead. . . . It is painful to remember. Sober, on stable

⁶⁹⁹ RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 65, ll. 413–414, in Barsukov. *et al.*, *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iiunia 1941 g.–1942 g.*, p. 73.

⁷⁰⁰ RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 70, ll. 548–549, in Barsukov. *et al.*, *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iiunia 1941 g.–1942 g.*, p. 228.

⁷⁰¹ RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 71, ll. 191–192, in Barsukov. *et al.*, *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iiunia 1941 g.–1942 g.*, pp. 252–253.

⁷⁰² RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 73, ll. 154–155, in Barsukov. *et al.*, *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iiunia 1941 g.–1942 g.*, pp. 365–366.

⁷⁰³ RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 75, l. 649, in Barsukov. *et al.*, *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943–1945gg.*, p. 145.

⁷⁰⁴ Nina Ivanovna Kunitsina, Interview by Artem Drabkin, *Ia pomniu*, <http://iremember.ru/letno-tekh-sostav/kunitsina-nina-ivanovna.html> (Accessed 10 November 2013), and Klavdiia Andreevna Deriabina (Ryzhkova), Interview by Artem Drabkin, *Ia pomniu*, <http://iremember.ru/letchiki-bombardirov/deryabina-rizhkova-klavdiya-andreevna-letchitsa-po-2.html> (Accessed 10 November 2013). See also Slezkin, *Do voini i na voine*, p. 401, concerning his distaste for vodka.

⁷⁰⁵ E.g., Koshkarbaev, *Shturm*, p. 109.

feet, you can orient yourself and maneuver. Many people who had heroically fought perished in the sticky flames.⁷⁰⁶

Similar accounts abound in the second half of the war. Drink offered one of the few escapes for men under severe stress. While obviously unwise from a self-preservation standpoint, “tying one on” for men who had no ability to make long term plans and who could be killed despite their best efforts to survive may have made sense despite the presence of the enemy. Access to alcohol only increased as the war continued, as Red Army men came to the wine cellars of East Central Europe.⁷⁰⁷ Once this happened, it became increasingly difficult to control the consumption habits of Red Army men.⁷⁰⁸

The ambiguities of vodka as doled out by the state had a peculiar effect, according to Pokhlebkin: “by 1945, the use of vodka, which had been low-class and forbidden suddenly became very prestigious among the mid-level leadership . . . and refusing your allotted portion of spirits was already understood as an element of opposition and disloyalty.”⁷⁰⁹ Who, after all, would refuse part of their paëk?

The state did not plan to provide soldiers with water. A moderately active male needs around three liters of water per day to remain hydrated. Most soldiers would have needed more. Getting fresh water at the front was an immensely difficult task, to which poet Aleksandr Tvardovskii alluded in the opening of his poem *Vasily Tërkin*:

From a well,
From a pond,
From a water pipe,
From the impression of a horse shoe,
From a river, anyhow,
From a brook, from underneath ice—
There is nothing better than cold water,
As long as the water is water.⁷¹⁰

Soldiers were issued half-liter canteens and were supposed to bring their own mugs upon mobilization. The canteen, however, often suffered from several shortcomings. In order to economize on precious aluminum, the material used for both canteens and parts of planes, the army began manufacturing glass canteens. A report concerning equipment in the first three months of the war concluded: “The canteen in and of itself is convenient, but the glass ones are very fragile and the aluminum ones are too few and expensive to make.”⁷¹¹ Glass canteens would continue to be manufactured as a stopgap measure. Even though metal

⁷⁰⁶ Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, p. 105.

⁷⁰⁷ See Slutsky, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p. 30, Temkin, *My Just War*, p. 197, and Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, pp. 144, 169, 187, 199, for further anecdotes concerning alcohol at the front.

⁷⁰⁸ Some diarists record an increase in drinking in 1945. See, for example Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 204–205, 234, 236; Inozemtsev, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, pp. 199, 208–209, 226.

⁷⁰⁹ Vil'iam Pokhlebkin, *Istoriya vazhneyshikh pishchevykh produktov* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2001), p. 272.

⁷¹⁰ Tvardovskii, *Vasilii Terkin*, p. 5.

⁷¹¹ TsAMO RF, f. 208, op. 14703 c, d. 2, ll. 339–343, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 137. See also Krotkov, *Gigiiena*, p. 92: “During the war all front and army sanitary inspectors unanimously demanded the replacement of glass canteens with metal canteens, most significantly aluminum, which resists well the influence of high and low temperatures, does not shatter on the march and while advancing and is almost three times lighter than glass”; see also *ibid.*, pp. 118–119, for special instructions as how to keep canteens from freezing and thus bursting.

canteens were supposed to become the norm, over 4 million glass ones were ordered in the third quarter of 1942 and 5 million in the third quarter of 1943 alone.⁷¹²

The army published norms for hydration as well as recommendations on what, when, and how to drink.⁷¹³ It was estimated that every soldier consumed 10–15 liters of water a day, drinking 3–4.5 liters and using the rest for preparing food and cleaning.⁷¹⁴ Medics were responsible for testing all water sources, which were to be clearly marked as potable, useful for coolant, and so on, and manuals diagrammed and described a variety of purification methods that soldiers and medical personnel could devise.⁷¹⁵ In practice, water was not something that the army could always provide, and soldiers were officially tasked with finding or digging their own wells and building their own filtration systems.⁷¹⁶ The army discouraged soldiers from drinking water, as there was no way to ensure that water found would not prove harmful or lethal, given the presence of rotting corpses, living humans who needed to answer the various calls of nature, and a retreating enemy who was known to poison wells. However, troops often had to drink untested water, as the front line moved rapidly forwards or backwards or units became encircled. This could lead to creative ways of avoiding illness: “we drank the peaty muck after we ran it through gauze.”⁷¹⁷ Occasionally, soldiers just took their chances, drinking from ditches or wherever else they could find water.⁷¹⁸ Thus the importance of tea in the paëk: issuing tea ensured that soldiers would be drinking water that had at least been boiled.⁷¹⁹

There was a certain ambiguity about water as an object of provisioning. It was outside of the paëk, but it was also as a necessity. Water was to be scavenged, but not trusted, preferably converted into something else. Nonetheless, this non-issue liquid became a way for making up for extreme shortages of food, as Boris Slutskii recalled: “Not just Kazakhs and Uzbeks, but heads and commanders of MPVO [Local Anti-Aircraft Defense] in the artillery regiment added many liters of water to their kasha—so that at

⁷¹² RGASPI, f. 84, op. 1, d.83, l. 173; GARF, f. R5446, op. 44a, d. 9410, l. 13. There were constant problems with realizing these orders. For example, the Georgian SSR made 50,000 instead of its allotted 175,000 canteens for the Transcaucasian Front, citing the need to produce wine bottles (it was also supplying wine to units of that front); GARF, f. R5446, op. 44a, d. 9410, l. 28.

⁷¹³ See Krotkov, *Gigiena*, pp. 49–50, 110–111, and Gurov, *Boets and otdeleniie na pokhode*, p. 23.

⁷¹⁴ *Nastavleniie po polevomu vodosnabzheniiu voisk* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1941), p. 6.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 71.

⁷¹⁶ While *The Experience of Soviet Medicine in the Great Patriotic War* describes a very well-developed system of supplying water at the front, it admits that “troops supplied themselves with water for the most part independently, from those sources on the territory they were located or the area of combat. Krotkov, *Gigiena*, p. 44. While the history describes a system of purification using chlorine and several methods of filtration, I have found few references to these by participants in the war, including memoirs by provisioning officers. See “Glava III: Vodosnabzheniie voisk,” in *ibid.*, pp. 36–121; *Nastavleniie inzhenernogo dela dlia pekhoty (INZh-43)* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1943), pp. 7, 227–231.

⁷¹⁷ Maria Zinov'ievna Bogomolova, *Memoirs*, at Ia pomniu, <http://iremember.ru/svyazisti/bogomolova-mariya-zinovevna-2.html> (Accessed 10 November 2013).

⁷¹⁸ Koshkarbaev, *Shturm*, p. 158. The author recalled drinking from a ditch in the ruins of Berlin: “The water in the ditch was dirty, but cool and had a refreshing effect; standing up to my waste in the water, I scooped it up by the handful and greedily drank it. I was instantly relieved.”

⁷¹⁹ Gurov, *Boets i otdelenie na pokhode*, p. 23. This manual also proscribes specific times and amounts to drink while at rest on the march.

least something would slosh around in the belly.”⁷²⁰ A dismayed report from the starving winter of 1941 on the Leningrad Front noted this practice as well: “soldiers, in order to increase the size of liquid dishes [soups or kasha] add water to their mess-tins, which significantly reduces the taste and assimilability of the food.”⁷²¹ Despite the army’s attempt to control completely what soldiers consumed, at times what they ate and drank was entirely beyond its control and often a reaction to failed attempts at provisioning. Water all too often took the place of a soldier’s “daily bread.”

Bread was a highly valuable and emotionally charged component of a soldier’s ration. A regiment (at full strength just over three thousand soldiers) would eat 2.6 tons of bread a day.⁷²² Whether freshly baked in mobile field ovens or dried for long-term use, bread made up half of the calories in a soldier’s ration, was officially considered “the primary foodstuff,” and, at 500–800 grams (17.6-28.2 oz.), was the largest portion of rations by weight. The wide gap in bread rations was one of the most palpable examples of the hierarchy of foodstuffs between the front and rear. In Russia, as in the West, bread occupied a psychological and cultural space symbolizing sustenance writ large.

At the front, soldiers’ obsession with bread could seem absurd. Saushin recalled two instances of the close relationship soldiers had to bread. The first came from the dark times of 1941, when, after a prolonged period of being cut off from supply, soldiers received their rations. While crouching under fire, one man “held his rifle in one hand and a half loaf of bread in the other. It was uncomfortable for him to bend to the earth, and when necessary lie down and rise again. . . . ‘Drop the loaf, you’ll get yourself killed!’ I yelled to him. . . . The Red Army man stopped for a second, and with surprise and fear looked at me. ‘But it is bread! Don’t you understand Comrade Commissar, bread.’ . . . It seems that for him it was easier to take death than to throw away the leftovers of his loaf.”⁷²³ Saushin also recalled that during an inspection, General Shcherbakov, the head of the Political Department of the Red Army, was disturbed by how thinly the men sliced their bread. A soldier responded: “It’s bread Comrade General! The thinner you slice it, the more there is. You see it’s worth its weight in gold.”⁷²⁴ On the Leningrad front, there was reluctance to give the men their bread ration in one lump sum—they ate it too quickly, leaving themselves without provender.⁷²⁵ Gabriel Temkin recalled that the young soldiers in his platoon were glad to be in the army as it was the place one could find bread and that they would save it for last as “bread is good by itself,”⁷²⁶ However, due to the need to extend supplies in the army,

⁷²⁰ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p. 29. See also Muzhikov, Interview, and Yakupov, *Frontovye zarisovki*, p. 30, who is more laconic and optimistic: “When you are hungry you drink a lot. You scoop out some clear rain water from a puddle with your helmet.”

⁷²¹ TsAMO RF, f. 217, op. 1305, d. 17, ll. 37, 38, in Veshchikov, et. al, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 197.

⁷²² F. G. Krotkov, “Problemy pitaniia voisk v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voini,” *Voprosy pitaniia*, no. 3 (1975): 6. Vorontsov, *Prodol’snvtnoe snabzheniie*, pp. 24–25.

⁷²³ Saushin, *Khleb i sol’*, p. 53.

⁷²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁷²⁵ TsAMO RF, f. 217, op. 1305, d. 17, ll. 37, 38, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 197.

⁷²⁶ Temkin, *My Just War*, p. 115.

bread was not always bread. One soldier complained that in 1941 “They gave us 600 grams [21.2 oz.] of bread, but it wasn’t bread, it was a watery sticky mass.”⁷²⁷

Paëk: Discontent and Subversion

Soldiers often complained about their paëk. The soldier with whom Gabriel Temkin shared his mess-tin grumbled: “Two things . . . bread and tobacco, should be distributed according to needs, and not according to the silly equal stomach principle. Take bread, the food most important for a human being. Is it fair to give somebody, a big guy like myself and a small guy like you—no offense, Gavryusha—the same daily paëk?”⁷²⁸ Appetites, metabolisms, and differences in body mass were outside the scope of paëk, to the resentment of some soldiers.

Station was a key factor determining what those in the service received. The paëk did not always seem fair, and interest in how comrades of other ranks or branches of service ate speaks to the moral economy of provisioning. Boris Slutskii recalled how enlisted men envied the rations received by officers.⁷²⁹ When the army was approaching Berlin, a soldier in Rakhimzhan Koshkarbaev’s platoon jokingly described pilots as “devilish aristocrats” for receiving cookies and chocolate while infantrymen had “forgotten the taste of sugar”:

I am thinking about the future, Commander. When the war ends, and they start to write its history, some good for nothing descendant will put it into their head to define the extent of participation of a branch of service in battles by how well they were fed. And it turns out, that the poor infantry didn’t play any role. Just try and prove later, that you trudged through half of Europe with your stomach.⁷³⁰

As we see from this quotation, soldiers tended to see rations in terms of paëk, and not norms. Was a pilot risking his life any more than an infantryman? Why did he deserve more and better rations than cannon fodder? Even if he needed more calories to fulfill his task, why did a pilot get them in the form of scarce cookies and chocolate? The fact that the state used calories and scarce goods as a measure of worth made these questions all the more sensitive.

Within a unit, hierarchies and sympathies could create a situation that reinterpreted paëk. One machine-gunner recalled how “A skilled, experienced machine gunner was always respected in the battalion. The *starshina* would organize an extra hundred grams [of vodka], and the cook wouldn’t forget you, because you are the main firepower of the rifle company, and even if everyone runs away, you don’t have that right, you have to cover the retreat.”⁷³¹ Platoon commander Mikhail Loginov purposefully sent newly arrived soldiers to the field kitchen so that they could get something extra to eat.⁷³² Lieutenant Rafgat Akhmtiamov shared his officers’ rations with an old friend who was an enlisted man under

⁷²⁷ Kats, Interview. According to *The Experience of Soviet Medicine in the Great Patriotic War*, reducing the moisture in bread was a goal throughout the war; Krotkov, *Gigiena*, pp. 172–175.

⁷²⁸ Temkin, *My Just War*, p. 104. The spelling of “paëk” has been changed to Library Of Congress format in this quotation.

⁷²⁹ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p. 28.

⁷³⁰ Koshkarbaev, *Shturm*, p. 81.

⁷³¹ Abram Efimovich Shoikhet, Interview by Grigory Koifman, Ia pomniu, <http://iremember.ru/pulemetchiki/shoikhet-abram-efimovich.html> (Accessed 10 November 2013).

⁷³² Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, pp. 9–10.

his command.⁷³³ Khisam Kamalov (in an autobiographical novel) describes how an artillery battery would send the soldier who knew how to flirt with the (female) cook to get their rations, as she would pour them a thicker soup.⁷³⁴ Romance, or simply the maintenance of norms between the sexes at the front, often involved food.⁷³⁵ Interaction between the sexes was just one of many ways in which understandings of food as something more than calories interfered with the state's mission of nutrition.

Early in the war soldiers began to challenge the calorie principle of provisioning, and as the war dragged on and they were forced to live through "epochs" of one or another foodstuff that had been stock-piled, they began to complain about repetitive food. Pearl barley porridge was known as "shrapnel," and one prosecutor mused that the common expression denigrating women soldiers who lived with commanders, *PPZh, Pokhodno-polevaia zhena*, or "portable front-line wife," was allowed to enter into common usage because it distracted soldiers from a more demoralizing phenomenon—*PPS, postoiannyi perlovyi sup*, or "eternal pearl barley soup".⁷³⁶

Ethnic Difference and Military Cuisine

Complaints about rations occasionally arose from the way in which provisioning utterly (and, given severe shortages and the state's aims to limit the power of religion, logically) ignored the identities of some of the men in the ranks. The Great Patriotic War was the first conflict in which large numbers of several traditionally Muslim ethnic groups (Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Tadjiks, Turkmen, and others) were mobilized into the Red Army. Culinary practices within the army often varied dramatically from what these men had eaten in the prewar world.

The meeting of different ethnicities at the front could lead to an expansion of culinary horizons, as Uzbeks ate borsch for the first time and Ukrainians ate *plov* (pilaf). Vil'iam Pokhlebkin claims that the war introduced many people from east of the Urals to the potato for the first time.⁷³⁷ One Azerbaijani draftee (who would die defending the Brest' Fortress) complained on the eve of the war, "I can't eat the local food".⁷³⁸ Nikolai Inozemtsev made several references to the *chebureki* (fried meat, cheese, or potato pies common in the North Caucasus and Crimea) that his comrade Akhmetov made on special occasions.⁷³⁹ An article from the newspaper *Za Rodinu* describes how a Yakut, Ukrainian, and Russian all prepared national dishes for their comrades.⁷⁴⁰

⁷³³Akhtiamov is Frolov, ed. *Vse oni khoteli zhit'*, pp. 61–62.

⁷³⁴ Kamalov, *U kazhdogo—zhizn' odna*, pp. 203–204

⁷³⁵ E.g., Bair Irincheev and Artem Drabkin, "*A zori zdes' gromkie*": *Zhenskoe litso voiny* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2012), p. 108.

⁷³⁶ Pyotr Fyodorovich Bazhenov, Interview by Iu. Trifonov, *Ia pomniu*, <http://iremember.ru/pekhotintsi/bazhenov-petr-fedorovich.html> (Accessed 10 November 2013); Yakob Aizenshtat, *Zapiski sekretaria voennogo tribunala* (London: Overseas Publication Interchange, 1991), p. 116. Soldiers also complained about yellow pea soup. See NA IRI RAN, f. 2, r. I, op. 16, d. 1, l. 126ob.

⁷³⁷ Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnia veka*, pp. 227–228. As Collingham reminds us, "Potatoes became the food of the Second World War." Collingham, *The Taste of War*, p. 70.

⁷³⁸ Kotenok, et al., *Poslednie pis'ma s fronta*. 1941, pp. 31–32.

⁷³⁹ Inozemtsev, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, pp. 107–108, 195. Interestingly, Akhmetov was a Crimean Tatar who was not deported, but served through the end of the war.

⁷⁴⁰ Petrov, ed., *Frontovaia pechat' o voynakh iz Yakutii*, pp. 40–41. They all turned out to be variations of dumplings.

Paëk could bring together or alienate soldiers from different ethnic backgrounds. The Red Army's Political Department was particularly disturbed when some soldiers refused to share tobacco with anyone other than their co-ethnics, interpreting this act as a danger to the "Friendship of the Peoples," the rhetoric of harmonious coexistence among the many ethnicities of the Soviet Union, which served as a cornerstone of the Soviet system.⁷⁴¹ Top political officers also discussed the importance of tea for some ethnicities in 1943: "Things are bad with hot tea. This question is particularly sharp in non-Russian units. Uzbeks and Kazakhs especially love tea. If one of them gets a medal they all go to drink tea with him. But here we hit the question—where can they drink tea?"⁷⁴² Some commanders improvised places for their Central Asian comrades to drink tea. One officer recalls how he and his men greeted a new column of soldiers from Central Asia:

We tried to cheer them up in at least some way. We carved out a pavilion, called it a *chaikhanoi* [tea house] and even procured some *pialy* [Central Asian style tea cups] for tea time! We had in the division a DOP [Division Exchange Point], its director was a homeboy from Georgia. He gave Mel'kadze [a Georgian] a small sack with rice and carrots. The cook boiled *plov* with horsemeat for the soldiers. You cannot understand now, how happy our comrades in arms—Kazakhs and Uzbeks—were at that moment.⁷⁴³

Another officer was less sympathetic to the culinary habits of those under his command, noting that "They grew up in a different climate, a different attitude towards life, a different mentality. We were fed with whatever was on hand, for example, borscht with pork. They spit it out, didn't eat it. I don't think they all did this, some ate it."⁷⁴⁴ Given, the ubiquity of hunger, such behavior could seem criminal. In the army everyone was forced to eat things that they found less than appetizing, but for some, the food available challenged fundamental conceptions of themselves, which could occasionally lead to choosing hunger over betraying deeply held beliefs or to eating unfamiliar foods that their bodies did not always accept.⁷⁴⁵ Even as provisioning improved and the army began to emphasize variety and such amenities as tea houses, offering an alternative to pork, as could be expected, was not something that interested the state. The war instead "taught" people how to eat anything.⁷⁴⁶

From Hunger to Feast

⁷⁴¹ RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 85, l. 60.

⁷⁴² RGASPI, f. 88, op. 1, d. 958, l. 7.

⁷⁴³ Adamskii, Interview.

⁷⁴⁴ Mikhail Fyodorovich Borisov, Hero of the Soviet Union, Interview by Artem Drabkin, *Ia pomniu*, <http://iremember.ru/artilleristi/borisov-mikhail-fedorovich-geroy-sovetskogo-soiuz-artillerist.html#comment-963> (Accessed 10 November 2013).

⁷⁴⁵ Astaf'ev, *Prokliati i ubity*, p. 82, described how Kazakhs in his unit slowly came to eat pork, first soup, then meat. All of this began when the most senior soldier among the Kazakhs, Talgat cried: "'*Saitin algyr!* [The devil take you!] Eat it all! Eat! Allah permits it because of the difficulty of the moment. You'll get weak, you'll be like them,'—he pointed his spoon to the crowd of *dokhodiag* [an insulting term for those suffering from starvation], waiting for their food. Giving in, crying, the Kazakhs ate the soup with pork. Eating their full, they cried out '*Astaprala!*' and ran from the table to corner of the canteen to vomit." *Dokhodiagi* are discussed in more detail by Rebecca Manley. See Rebecca Manley, "Nutritional Dystrophy: The Science and Semantics of Starvation in World War II" in Goldman and Filtzer, *Hunger and War*.

⁷⁴⁶ Genatullin, *Strakh*, pp. 11–12.

By mid-1943, the organization of the rear area became noticeably better and the resources available to the army, richer.⁷⁴⁷ Aleksandr Lesin's diary is marked by constant references to food and hunger in 1942, but by the summer of 1943 food is not what is on his mind and is rarely mentioned through the end of the war. Rafgat Akhtiamov, who had written his parents several times in 1941 and 1942 asking to send food, wrote home in 1943: "Don't worry about me. Now all is well with food."⁷⁴⁸ When soldiers mention food in interviews and memoirs, 1943 (and occasionally 1944) is remembered as the year in which quality and quantity noticeably improved.⁷⁴⁹ This trend continued, raising expectations among the troops. As an artillery officer interviewed in March of 1945 stated,

We are fed very well, as guardsmen. . . . We have enough to smoke. People have become so finicky, that they say: "I don't want a pig, I want suckling pigs, goose." There is enough of it there. People have gotten so fat that they are like peaches. So much free time, *narkomskiiye sto gramm* ["the People's Commissariat of Defense's hundred grams"—a slang term for vodka], and we have a good appetite.⁷⁵⁰

In a similar vein, Vasily Grossman noted in 1945: "Soldiers don't eat issue food—pork, turkey, chicken is their fare. Among the infantry rosy, plump faces have appeared, which never happened before."⁷⁵¹ Beginning in January 1945, troops were allowed to send packages home to their families, from five to fifteen kilograms (11–33 lbs.) per month, according to rank.⁷⁵² The situation of 1941 had been reversed on all fronts.

With this new abundance came new responsibilities. Lesin called for the public execution of anyone stealing from the local population in Latvia, specifically citing that the army was now so well fed.⁷⁵³ By the end of the war, food had become sufficient enough that it could be wasted, as Slutskii recalled: "In the winter of 1944-1945 all around the infantry overran kitchens, knocking mountains of kasha into the dirty snow—even though in the kasha they heaped six hundred grams of meat per person, and not thirty seven and a half grams of noble egg powder."⁷⁵⁴

Conclusion

The Great Patriotic War was both expected and unexpected by the Soviet peoples and the party-state that mobilized them. It had been propagandized before the war as a

⁷⁴⁷ Slutskii states that this had to do with the Red Army reaching "full, sly [*lukavaia*] Ukraine, which the Germans had not succeeded in totally robbing." Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p. 29.

⁷⁴⁸ N. S. Frolov, *Vse oni khoteli zhit*, pp. 38–39, 43, 63.

⁷⁴⁹ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p. 30. This is not to say that there were no problems with food after 1943, as a variety of sources attest (e.g., TsAMO RF, f. 240, op. 2824, d. 123, ll. 62–65, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, p. 471), but generally the picture becomes more pleasant, and no one expects to go hungry for long periods of time after this shift. Saushin, *Khleb i sol*, p. 121, noted that the rise in expectations was palpable from the perspective of those provisioning. It should be noted that soldiers could still land in tight spots where provisioning was impossible. A political officer in the elite 8th Guards Rifles Division, recalled that in March of 1945, when his unit was cut off in Courland, for "18 days people had nothing to eat, we ate horsemeat, crow." NA IRI RAN, f. 2, r. I, op. 28, d. 33, l. 12.

⁷⁵⁰ NA IRI RAN, f. 2, r. I, op. 30, d. 23, l. 4.

⁷⁵¹ Grossman, *Gody voiny*, p. 444.

⁷⁵² RGVA, f. 4, op. 11, d. 78, ll. 491–498, in Barsukov, et al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943–1945gg.*, pp. 344–345.

⁷⁵³ Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 287.

⁷⁵⁴ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p. 30.

conflict that would take place on enemy territory with little loss of Soviet lives and resources. Instead, the Soviet state and peoples were confronted with a total war that saw immense loss of territory and life, one in which hunger and deprivation spread far and wide throughout the Union. The conflict that ensued saw the state press its resources to the limit and experiment with spreading thin reserves as far as possible while trying to maintain total control over the most fluid and easily consumable of those resources—paëk.

The way that the Bolsheviks imagined the war could not be divorced from resources, especially food. Nazi planning imagined the Soviet space as a place of extraction; occupation policies made these imaginings into reality. Placing food near the center of its concerns, the Soviet state reexamined its relationship with its citizens, categorizing those defending it on a higher plane under conditions in which the possibility of starvation was very real. The implementation of this relationship created hierarchies, which stated in quantifiable terms whose life (or function) the state valued above others. While many aspects of provisioning would be reconsidered, these hierarchies remained intact and were indeed refined in the course of the war, as a variety of elite formations and specializations saw privileges added to their status. In addition to creating new hierarchies, invested with real benefits, this system had the potential to efface identities that had existed before being drafted into the army.

The army as an institution was not interested in accommodating the culinary norms of the variety of peoples who comprised its ranks; it was concerned with the much more vital function of keeping people fed. Muslims would be issued lard or salt pork or stewed pork alongside atheists and Orthodox Christians. In dire straits, Russians would learn to eat horse from their Turkic comrades. If the cook of a unit happened to be Uzbek, men from European Russia might find themselves eating *plov* (with horse) for the first time. The army became a place where large numbers of men and women from a variety of ethnic and regional backgrounds came to share something like a common culinary culture. Despite the fact that provisioning was so localized, everyone in the army was likely to have received similar portions of *shchi*, borsch, and kasha. Everyone experienced the same periods of feast and famine, shared while dipping their spoons into the state's pots. They would use similar tactics to survive when the state failed to provide and reinterpret paëk in ways that better suited them. It would be nearly impossible for these soldiers not to appreciate how much better their rations were than those of their families in the rear. The shared experience of suffering and improvisation, alongside the shared experience of feasting and victory, is part of what made the Great Patriotic War such a central event in Soviet history. Food could unite and divide men and women in the ranks.

By the war's end, the abundance enjoyed by the army came from a much better organized apparatus with access to more and more resources.⁷⁵⁵ And while the state would continue to draw on local resources wherever they went (which could potentially alienate the locals, especially once the army stepped onto foreign territory), the army began to play an important role in feeding civilians as it advanced into friendly, neutral, and then enemy territory.

Everywhere it went, the army established a monopoly on foodstuffs, and in areas ravaged by war, the army was often the only source of provisions for both civilian and

⁷⁵⁵ Graft remained a problem late in the war, however; see, e.g., GARF f. R5446, op. 46a, d. 7395, ll. 20–21, 26–28. Holidays in particular were periods when officers illegally used rations for banquets.

military personnel. In Berlin, in the course of May of 1945, the Red Army was feeding two million of its own soldiers and four million German civilians.⁷⁵⁶ The concern for quality as well as quantity was immediate: Antipenko recalls being censured for providing ersatz coffee for the residents of Berlin at the end of the war.⁷⁵⁷ The Red Army fed entire enemy cities, incorporating enemy civilians into military provisioning via ration cards.⁷⁵⁸ Once the provisioning system was fully functioning, the mutual obligations of *paëk* came to encompass former enemy civilians and prisoners of war. In return for recognizing the Bolshevik's monopoly of sovereignty, former enemies were provided with sustenance.⁷⁵⁹ The army had come a long way from the dark days of 1941–1942, and its ability to provide for an organization of such scale moving so quickly was truly phenomenal. In the course of the war, despite failings, the state demonstrated its ability to feed its army and later its enemies, thus extending its sovereignty into East Central Europe and reaffirming it in the everyday lives of its citizens.

⁷⁵⁶ N. A. Antipenko, *Front i tyl* (Moscow: Znanie, 1977), p. 59.

⁷⁵⁷ Antipenko, *Na glavnom napravlenii*, pp. 283–285.

⁷⁵⁸ TsAMO RF, f. 236, op. 2719, d. 76, ll. 62–65, in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.*, pp. 674–675.

⁷⁵⁹ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p. 30: “When in Budapest and Vienna field kitchens doled out a kasha ration [*paikovaia kasha*] to the locals, this wasn’t just because of pity towards our little enemies [*vrazheniatam*], not just because it was impossible to gorge yourself in front of the starved children of a blockaded city, but because of the plenty which had come to rule among the provisioning officers.”

Chapter 4 Cities of Earth, Cities of Rubble: The Spade and Red Army Landscaping

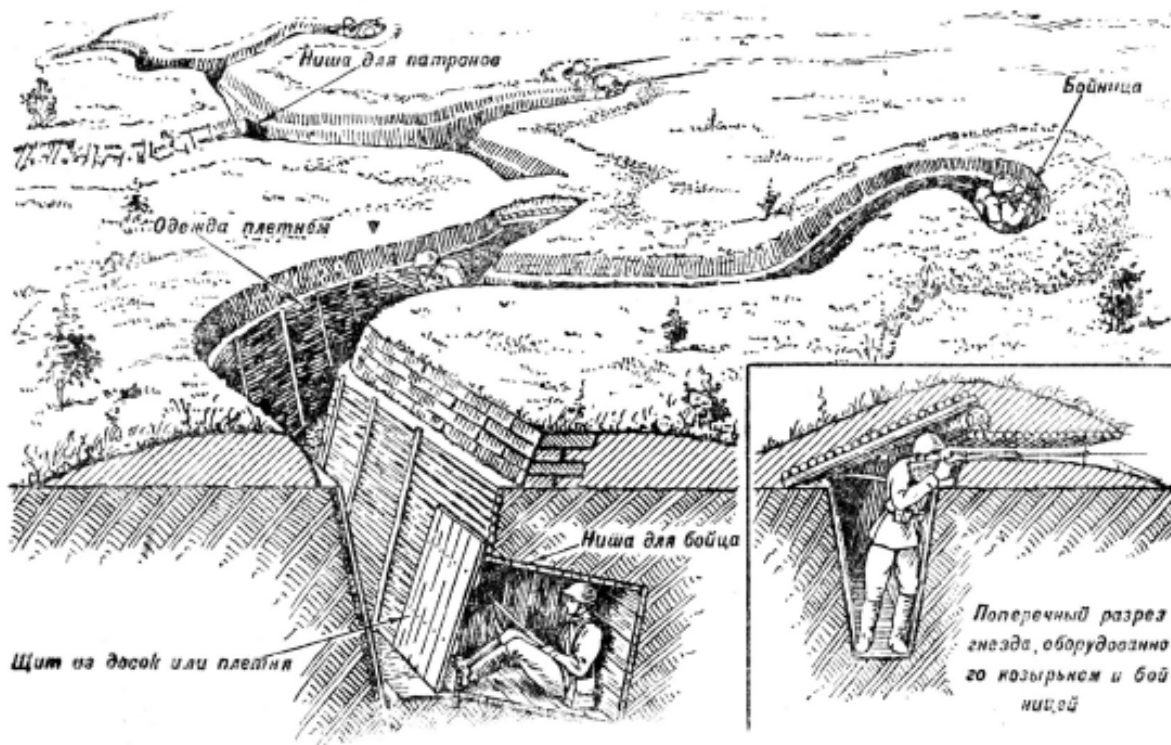


Рис. 23. Усовершенствование окопа на стрелковое отделение

The city-like space of the trench.⁷⁶⁰

Introduction

Arriving at the front in 1941, Valentina Chudakova, who would later command a machine gun platoon, was pleasantly surprised by the visible presence of order:

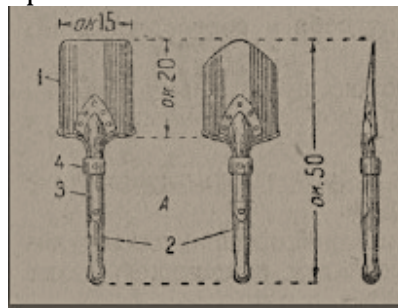
I had no idea what the front was like. Or rather, I thought that everyone shoots at each other day and night, comes together in hand-to-hand combat, runs and hides wherever they find a spot... I was pleasantly surprised: here there was absolute order. What can I say—a real earthen city like that of some ancient settlers. The main trench, that's the central street, and from there to the front and the rear are side streets and dead ends. On the side streets, leading to the direction of the enemy, there were all sorts of things—pillboxes, wood and earth fire positions and caponiers, covered foxholes... In the side streets headed towards the rear

⁷⁶⁰ From D. Ushakov. *Voenno-Inzhenernoe Delo. Tret'e, ispravlenoe izdaniie* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1939), p. 42. The caption reads "A finished trench for a squad." This includes niches for ammunition and soldiers with a shield against shrapnel, a trench supported by wicker fencing and soldiers firing through fully covered loopholes.

dugouts were hidden under snow-covered roofs. No commotion, no fighting—silence... I whistled: “Well see how they’ve worked! Mama-infantry sure has dug in!”⁷⁶¹

Her intuition that the front would be a space of chaotic violence was not far from the mark – it was indeed the potential for destruction that led to the creation of the organized, essentially urban space that so impressed her. These cities of earth would be built everywhere along the front in response to the cities of rubble that modern weapons could create. This world was made possible by the spades the soldiers carried.

During the Great Patriotic War, survival at the front was virtually impossible without the help of an ancient hand tool: the spade. As the main periodical for army agitators stated in 1943 “war consists mostly of labor. The spade and axe are now in as much demand as the submachine gun.”⁷⁶² The idea of the spade as a loyal friend became a major trope of military propaganda, continuing beyond the war. That a banal and humble object should receive such attention is telling. The spade was the key to soldiers’ reading, shaping, and using of the landscape. Soldiers in the Great Patriotic War were reported to move about twice as much earth as soldiers in the trenches of the First World War.⁷⁶³ The soldier’s small spade was an anonymous object, standard to everyone, and manuals taught soldiers to dig trenches according to a regular plan, yet Red Army personnel would come to excavate highly personalized spaces.



The soldier’s spade, a commonly reproduced image from manuals.⁷⁶⁴

Red Army men and women turned a wide, open field of fire into a narrow, constricted and sometimes even cozy series of trenches, where they could more effectively kill without being killed. The technique of moving earth was what could spare people from the advanced technologies of artillery, aviation, tanks and machine guns. Soldiers marched from trenches they had dug to spaces they would turn into trenches. Excavations were to be carefully camouflaged. Soldiers dramatically altered the landscapes they inhabited and constantly attempted to recreate some aspects of normal life in the extensive system of trenches they created with spades. These men and women built an almost urban environment in a variety of settings, spaces with an almost total lack of privacy and with the threat of death constantly hanging over them. Indeed, dead soldiers were often interred in the foxholes they or their comrades had dug. In short, a small, relatively primitive object

⁷⁶¹ Valentina Chudakova. *Chizhik-ptichka s kharakterom* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1980), p. 114. Chudakova was not alone in remembering the trenches as something like an ancient city. David Samoilov made similar comments. Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, p. 204.

⁷⁶² S. Gliazer. “Lopata—vernii drug soldata,” *Bloknot agitatora Krasnoi Armii*. 1943:14, pp. 14-17; pp. 15-16.

⁷⁶³ P. Mozgovoi, “Lopata—podruga i zashchitnitsa boitsa,” *Bloknot agitatora Krasnoi Armii*, 1942:4, pp. 18-20.

⁷⁶⁴ Taken from *Nastavleniie po inzhenernomu delu dlia pekhoty (Inzh-P-39)* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1939), p. 8. Hereafter *Inzh-P-39*.

and the labor it allowed were central to the experience of millions of people in one of the most technologically advanced military conflicts in world history.

Despite the massive, impersonal nature of the Second World War, it was often experienced as something intimate and even small-scale. Years after the war, soldier turned author Grigorii Baklanov wrote that “[f]or a soldier, the front is whatever faces his foxhole.”⁷⁶⁵ While soldiers would receive rumors and official information from all over the front and rear, the immediate front, which they viewed through the even narrower perspective of the trenches they built, was the world that they experienced. It was a world that they had largely built themselves, using their own spades and bodies as measures. Soldiers’ individual foxholes added up to a front of such a giant scale that it required explanation and interpretation to understand.

War leads to abstractions that have very concrete results. All territory – both around the world and at the immediate front – is divided into “friendly”, “enemy” and the liminal “neutral”. The consequences of this division are very real for the soldier and form the understanding of space by which tactical and strategic decisions are made. At the front being on enemy or neutral territory means that your life is directly in danger, while being on friendly territory provides a (very limited) degree of safety.⁷⁶⁶ Commanders envisioned territory in terms of maps on which they often manipulated objects or drew where they thought their troops were positioned. (Reliance on telephones through much of the war meant that this was often conjecture, as artillery fire cut lines or troops became cut off from their headquarters). The crisp space of the map, although enhanced by constant reports and smaller, detailed maps provided by subordinates, could reflect the landscape faced by soldiers but captured little of the experience of those occupying the real terrain that it represented. The dirt and confusion of the battlefield was not and could not be part of these abstractions. Many commanders took tours of frontline positions to understand what exactly their men (and women) were up against, and higher-ranking officers often made use of aerial photography and other forms of reconnaissance.⁷⁶⁷ On tour at the immediate front line and indeed more often than not in the bunker where he made decisions, the commander was confronted with realities that were not expressed on the two dimensional world of the strategic map with red and blue lines dividing the real estate into “ours” and “theirs”.

Twentieth century warfare dramatically changed the meaning of maps and the ability to construct them. Aerial reconnaissance had given opposing armies the ability to see movement far behind the lines, while mechanized warfare, particularly tanks and planes, extended the understanding of the front deep behind the front lines. The Red Army

⁷⁶⁵ Baklanov, “Piad’ Zemli,” *Voennye Povesti*, p. 326.

⁷⁶⁶ This of course was nothing new. See Ross Wilson’s masterful study of the Western Front in WWI. Ross J. Wilson, *Landscapes of the Western Front: Materiality During the Great War* (New York/London: Routledge, 2012), p. 136. The parallels between the experience of the British Army in WWI and the Red Army in WWII are striking, especially considering the dramatic difference between the two societies from which these armies were drawn. As will be clear throughout this text, aspects of the experience of the Great War were recreated (e.g. trenches, domesticating the front), but the particularities of the Red Army (a high level of surveillance, dramatic shortages, a much more heterogeneous force that included men, women, old, young and all nationalities in the same units) made the subjective experience of Red Army soldiers very different. Not to mention that the motivation and stakes of the war in 1941-1945 were much more concrete than those of 1914-1918.

⁷⁶⁷ Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 224; Chekalov, *Voennyi dnevnik*, p. 35.

determined the “front strip” [*prifrontovaia polosa*] to be a space a few dozen kilometers behind its lines, and sometimes issued orders to drain this space of civilians.⁷⁶⁸ Movement that would have taken weeks even in the First World War could now be a matter of days or even hours. The shocking advance of the German Blitzkrieg in 1941 and its repetition in 1942 left hundreds of thousands of soldiers “encircled” in enemy territory. Red Army soldiers cut off from supplies and information surrendered, died in combat, or escaped from enemy territory.

There were real consequences to being on enemy territory. Many soldiers recorded carrying a grenade for themselves, in order to avoid capture, or wrote of comrades who shot themselves, rather than fall into enemy hands.⁷⁶⁹ Those who had escaped encirclement and liberated POWs faced filtration by State Security organs, while postwar documents often included a question concerning whether one had been on occupied territory during the war.⁷⁷⁰ This filtration made sense, as the Germans did actually send agents through the line in Red Army uniform, but for loyal soldiers who had just come from concentration camps or fought through encirclement, this was just one more agony in their ordeal.⁷⁷¹ Millions of soldiers found themselves separated from family that had remained on enemy territory, waiting years to hear of their fate. Thousands of soldiers; neighbors, friends and family were executed by the occupying authorities while others were sent to Germany to work as slave laborers. Time spent on enemy territory could taint one’s biography, leading to suspicion for years after the war.⁷⁷² Your location on a map could fundamentally alter your life trajectory, even if, like many soldiers trapped in encirclement, you had no idea where you were actually located. One thing was certain, anyone left out in the open could be easily killed.

A Deadly Environment, or, Cities of Rubble

In the interwar years technologies of the Great War became even deadlier. Tanks and planes were faster, better armored, and packed heavier cannons, dramatically expanding the space of the battlefield. Hand grenades and machine guns had become more efficient, portable and plentiful, while submachine guns, a novelty in the First World War, became a common weapon. Soldiers could be observed and injured more efficiently than ever before. Anything that could be seen could be killed.

The new potentials for killing dramatically changed the way that soldiers experienced the landscape. This new experience was often uncomfortably visceral, as

⁷⁶⁸ E.g. TsAMO f. 132a, Op. 2642, D. 13 ll.131-134 in A.M. Sokolov and Iu.N. Semen, et al., *Stavka VGK. Dokumenty i materialy. 1942 god. T. 16 (5— 2). Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia* (Moscow: TERRA, 1996), p. 430. See Atabek, *K biografii voennogo*, p. 117. Atabek records the guilt that soldiers often felt forcing civilians to leave their homes. These civilians were evacuated both for their own safety and to clear the front line of potential enemy agents.

⁷⁶⁹ E.g. Inozemtsev, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 37.

⁷⁷⁰ See Chapter 1 of this volume for details on the process of filtration.

⁷⁷¹ For two thorough and thought-provoking discussions of encirclement, see the work of Amnon Sella and Roger Reese. Sella, *The Value of Life in Soviet Warfare*, pp. 102-109; Reese, *Why Stalin’s Soldiers Fought*, pp. 60-100.

⁷⁷² Boris Runin, *Zapiski sluchaino utselevshego* (Moscow: Vozvrasheniie, 2010). The author of this autobiography used being in encirclement as a device to describe not only his ordeal escaping encirclement in 1941, but also the precarious position of anyone who attracted the attention of the NKVD.

soldiers came face to face with the capacities of new technology to kill and maim. Corpses were rendered unrecognizable, as one female soldier wrote another: "I lost my beloved black-eyed Sashka. I couldn't find his head. I gathered the remaining pieces of meat and buried them with my own hands..."⁷⁷³ A particularly traumatized veteran of the Leningrad Front recalled in his posthumously published memoirs that: "...when a person next to you is ripped to shreds, when you are soused in his blood, his insides and brains are strewn over you – this is enough in peace-time conditions to make you loose your mind."⁷⁷⁴ Many soldiers witnessed the damage that shells and bullets could do to the human body before they got to the front. The terrible experience of shelling could place unbearable strain on soldiers. As one veteran confided in his diary:

It is true that sometimes, when bombs and shells are falling too often and too thickly, that it doesn't so much frighten as much as oppresses, and you think: "Eh, the devil take it. Wouldn't it be better if they hit us, so that our suffering would be over!" Especially when this atmosphere continues several hours in succession or even all day.⁷⁷⁵

The individual soldier understood how vulnerable he was at the front, it was graphically demonstrated on the bodies of the fallen and carved into the landscape.

The Germans dropped 148,478 bombs on the city of Leningrad alone. While numbers of this scale are abstract, the effect of a few bombs on a small pieces of real estate held by a few dozen soldiers were quite palpable.⁷⁷⁶ As Viktor Astafiev, veteran-turned-writer, described a bombardment as follows: "it seemed as if now, this minute, the earth was shifting or had just shifted its axis."⁷⁷⁷ Soldiers witnessed the destruction of the landscape and the bodies of those inhabiting it. While this experience was universally unnerving, the ways in which they experienced this destruction changed depending on the direction the army was travelling.

Early in the war, soldiers underwent the shock of destruction as they retreated through towns and cities, often harassed by German aviation, which enjoyed total domination. Often this destruction reached far into the rear. Captain Kronrod, the editor of a frontline newspaper, described his unit's arrival near Stalingrad as follows:

Only ruins spread before our eyes. It was a somber prelude to what would follow. The soldiers, of course, asked how this happened. Imagine the station Mikhailovskaia-Sereb'iakova... at which we disembarked! This is a large place, there are a lot of different industrial complexes, a huge grain elevator, and then some sort of sand plants. When we arrived, first of all you were covered with horrifying soot and cinders of burning grain. From all of the huge station only the platform remained, ruined metal was strewn all around, ruptured cisterns lay about. From this picturesque platform our echelons disembarked.⁷⁷⁸

Soldiers usually felt powerlessness and a sense of shame in front of civilians, who they could not protect and who would more often than not remain on territory that the enemy would occupy. In total war, Red Army soldiers were also encouraged and ordered to destroy anything that could be of use to the enemy, often leaving local civilians without the means to live, but Soviet attempts to wage a campaign of scorched earth paled in

⁷⁷³ Atabek, *K biografii voennogo pokoleniia*, p. 252.

⁷⁷⁴ Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, p. 49.

⁷⁷⁵ Kovalevskii, "Nynche u nas peredyshka..." p. 71 (entry from February 29, 1944).

⁷⁷⁶ This figure is cited on monuments scattered around the center of St. Petersburg, where the damage done by the Germans to landmarks such as St. Isaac's Cathedral and the Anichkov Bridge has been left unrepaired.

⁷⁷⁷ Astafiev, *Prokliaty i ubity*, p. 311.

⁷⁷⁸ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 34, ll. 1-2.

comparison with those of the Germans.⁷⁷⁹

As the fortunes of war changed, so did the ways in which Red Army soldiers witnessed the destruction of the landscape and its inhabitants. When an area became the center of a protracted battle, undamaged structures became captivating, as one division commander recalled at Stalingrad:

For the first time in 156 days I crossed the Volga on the 26th of February. I was in front with some commanders. When we approached the village of Krasnaia Sloboda, the first thing that caught our eyes was a whole house with an intact frame. Smoke was coming out of the chimney of this house. We were so used to ruins, that seemed so normal to us, that an intact little house was a remarkable phenomenon and attracted our attention. We even stopped, looking at this surviving house.⁷⁸⁰

During the retreat soldiers often felt themselves helpless victims and bystanders. When the Red Army began to retake territory, as early as December of 1941, soldiers became both liberators and witnesses to much more systematic destruction than shrapnel and strafing could accomplish. As the army moved westward, destroyed villages became an everyday sight. The consequences of failing to defend territory became sickeningly clear. Innumerable diaries, letters home and memoirs noted the inconceivable destruction that the retreating Wehrmacht left in its wake, as Vasilii Chekalov, an artillery officer, recorded in his diary in May of 1943:

Retreating through the corridor, the Germans burnt settlements to the ground. In some places fire turned out to be too weak. They blew up peasant huts as if they were the walls of a fortress. The strength of the explosion scattered piles of bricks and disfigured household items, threw logs into the trees.

There is no one around. For eighteen months the Germans systematically destroyed the local population. They drove out the last villagers with their retreat.

Russian lands to the south of Lake Il'men' have been turned into a giant pile of embers, scattered with graveyards and the individual graves of German soldiers.⁷⁸¹

Soviet authorities were keen to use the ruins of former villages as a pedagogical tool to convince Red Army soldiers that their cause was just. In 1942, an article in the widely circulated *Agitator i Propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, discussed how soldiers came to realize the level of destruction visited by the enemy. When confronted with ruins, they asked an agitator:

Where did all the cows and sheep go? Why were the houses and mangers burnt? Where did all the people who lived here go? The Germans ate the livestock. The Germans burned the village. Germans drove the women, children and teenagers into back-breaking slavery...⁷⁸²

Boris Komskaa recorded in his diary on October 1st 1943, that in the village of Shablykino, where he saw only graves and chimneys, the following sign was posted: "Here was a regional center. It was thoroughly looted and burned by the Germans. Fighter, remember and avenge!"⁷⁸³ The planting of such signs and special rituals surrounding them were part of a conscious state policy to motivate soldiers.

"Meetings of Vengeance" became a common genre of agitation where soldiers were gathered around graves or destroyed villages and told of the horrors that the Germans had

⁷⁷⁹ See Chapter 3 of this volume.

⁷⁸⁰ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 4, l. 16.

⁷⁸¹ Chekalov, *Voennyi dnevniki*, p. 300.

⁷⁸² N. Rubinshtein, "Zametki ob agitatsii," *Propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1942:14, pp. 43-48; p. 47.

⁷⁸³ Komskaa, "Dnevnik 1943-1945 gg." p. 33.

visited upon Soviet people. By May of 1943, the main propaganda publication of the army reported that 80% of personnel in the active army had attended at least one of more than a thousand such meetings.⁷⁸⁴ These meetings were part of a network of propaganda aimed at convincing soldiers to risk their lives and do the hard labor necessary to win the war. To appreciate how important such propaganda could be, one must reflect on the fact that many soldiers were hostile to the regime and/or came from remote regions that did not feel the direct threat of destruction by the invaders.⁷⁸⁵ Face to face meetings with survivors of destruction and witnesses of Nazi atrocities, set in the ruins of towns and villages and by the graves or corpses of victims of the occupational regime had a tremendous effect on soldiers, as political agitator Guards Major Akai Neuspbekov recalled: "This meeting as a form of political education justified itself. The reinforcements we received that summer from Kazakhstan saw such ruins, German villainy, that this meeting impressed in them hatred of the German barbarians."⁷⁸⁶ The letter of Tatar soldiers from the 1st Ukrainian Front to their faraway homeland told of the horrors they had seen and the rage they felt:

We have fought our way through the lands of Ukraine and seen with our own eyes the monstrous acts carried out by the Germans in the occupied zones. The land of Ukraine was drenched in blood and tears. It freezes the heart and causes one's blood to run cold when we see thousands of old men, children and women, torn to pieces and thrown in ditches and wells, when we see mountains of ash where wonderful Ukrainian cities and towns once stood.⁷⁸⁷

Ritualized vows, using the similar language, often followed meetings of vengeance and turned the tragedy of death and destruction into an epic event, motivating soldiers to carry the struggle forward and move all the more quickly advance, as every day of occupation meant more women raped, towns destroyed and fellow citizens humiliated and murdered.

By 1943, the site of destroyed villages became so ubiquitous that Chekalov confided in his diary: "I've had my fill of wandering through other people's destroyed huts".⁷⁸⁸ Lt. Kiselev, also an artilleryman, wrote in his diary: "I say 'villages', but you see they remain only as geographical notions, they've all been burned to the ground by shot and shell."⁷⁸⁹ What soldiers witnessed led many to greater hatred of the enemy, something the army could not always control.⁷⁹⁰ Yet discipline was key to surviving in this deadly environment.

Every move soldiers and the army as an organism made was aimed at masking their march from aerial and land observation. A Red Army manual on marching reminded soldiers that:

The development and technical capabilities of contemporary aviation are such, that any movement of troops in day light in certain regions is impossible. Therefore a march must be completed predominantly at night or under conditions of limited visibility.⁷⁹¹

⁷⁸⁴ V. Olizerenko, "Mitingi mesti," *Agitator i Propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1943:9-10, pp. 28-32; p. 29. As Karel Berkhoff has pointed out, the solid basis in reality for the claims of Nazi atrocities was increasingly clear by the middle of the war. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*, p. 133.

⁷⁸⁵ See e.g. NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 28, d. 33, ll. 6-6ob.

⁷⁸⁶ See e.g. Ia. Gertsovich, "Vospitaniie nenavisti," *Propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1942:19-20, pp. 33-35.

⁷⁸⁷ *Pis'mo tatarskomu narodu ot tatar-boitsov 1-go Ukrainского fronta* (Kazan': Tatgosizdat, 1944), p. 4.

⁷⁸⁸ Chekalov, *Voennye dnevniki*, p. 124

⁷⁸⁹ Kiselev, "Voina i zhizn' v predstavlenii 20-letnikh frontovikov (iz moego dnevnika)," p. 1012.

⁷⁹⁰ See Chapters 5 and 6.

⁷⁹¹ Gurov, *Boets i otdeleniia pokhode*, p. 53.

Soldiers were also instructed to leave no trace of their presence.⁷⁹² Night became a time of increased activity for soldiers not only on the march, but while in the trenches as well, and the routes soldiers travelled had many peculiarities.

While soldiers would cover long distances by trains or trucks, and certain types of troops (cavalrymen, artillerymen, tankers and motorized riflemen) rode, rather than marched to the front, most soldiers travelled on foot. The roads they travelled often spoke of the lack of infrastructure or remoteness of their fronts. Chekalov frequently complained of the state of roads in his diary, and recalled how thaws and rains combined with soldiers' boots could soon turn any road into a sea of mud: "Again I walk along woodland paths risen like dough by rain and kneaded by thousands of Red Army feet."⁷⁹³ In dry weather, roads were plagued by dust clouds, an occurrence so common that scouts were trained to judge the size and type of enemy formations by the dust cloud a column raised.⁷⁹⁴ One soldier recalled how dust covered everything on the road:

Not only people, but all military hardware looked as if it had been painted one color – a whitish ochre. The sand dust covered everything with a thick coat: the clothing and face of a soldier. Only the eyes shined. The sand got into the mouth and crunched between teeth. And on top of this merciless heat...⁷⁹⁵

In winter, thousands of soldiers trudging the same path could turn it into an icy slough. The mere presence of so many soldiers turned roads into highways and these paths came to resemble the thoroughfares of major cities, as a veteran of the Leningrad Front recalled:

I observed strange, remarkable vignettes on the road near the front. Lively like an avenue, it had moved in two directions. Towards the front travelled reinforcements, food and weapons were delivered, tanks moved. Away from the front the wounded were hauled. And along either side there was hustle and bustle.⁷⁹⁶

The "hustle and bustle" included the issuing of rations, trade among soldiers and burying the dead. As the war progressed the army became more motorized and its highways increasingly organized. Impressive organization of military highways was noted by war correspondent Petrov: "There are no traffic jams, an awful blight in modern warfare. Traffic is arranged so that bottlenecks are never felt." He went on to note that despite the busyness of front-line highways, they were practically invisible.⁷⁹⁷ However, highways were not the only means of travel for soldiers.

As an old saying by General Suvorov, re-popularized during the war, declared: "Wherever a deer can pass, so can a soldier."⁷⁹⁸ Soldiers were expected to be able to cross any obstacle, even rivers, under their own power. Deep rivers were crossed either on issue boats, by improvising rafts, by holding on to logs pulled by comrades on the other shore or even by stripping and using their *plashch-palatka* as a waterproof flotation device for their

⁷⁹² *Posobiie komandiru i boitsu strelkogo podrazdeleniia* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1942), p. 32; Gurov. *Boets i otdeleniie na pokhode*, p. 9.

⁷⁹³ Chekalov, *Voennye dnevniki*, p. 145.

⁷⁹⁴ *Pamiatka boitsam-razvedchikam v osnovnykh vidakh boia* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1943), p. 23.

⁷⁹⁵ Yakupov, *Frontovye zarisovki*, p. 23

⁷⁹⁶ Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, p. 37.

⁷⁹⁷ Evgenii Petrov, *Frontovoi dnevniki* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1942), p. 25.

⁷⁹⁸ "Boets pomni". Listovka from NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. XIII Z7, op. 4, d. 71; *Bloknot agitator*, 1943:15, p. 20, another, less glamorous version stated "Wherever a nanny-goat has passed, a Russian soldier will also pass."

equipment and swimming across.⁷⁹⁹ Crossings could be a particularly terrifying experience, as soldiers often lost all of their clothing and equipment and faced the added danger of drowning.

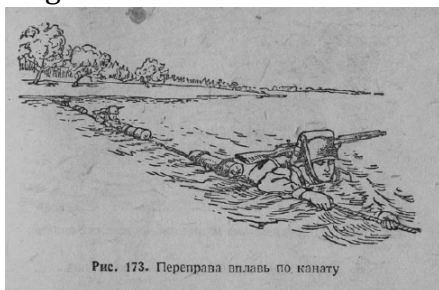


Рис. 173. Переправа вплавь по канату



Рис. 174. Переправа вплавь на поплавах из плащ-палаток

Two methods of crossing a river.⁸⁰⁰

Fronts stopped wherever two armies could not dislodge each other from their position, something that often depended on climate and terrain. This meant that if the front stopped in a swamp, mountains or deep in the woods, soldiers would have to travel to them. If roads did not exist, it was the job of soldiers to build them, or carry the supplies (bullets, shells, grenades, rations) that would normally be transported to them.⁸⁰¹ Given that the soldiers officially already carried an average of 24 kilograms, the need to carry supplies and sometimes manhandle artillery pieces created an even greater burden on often exhausted and undernourished people.⁸⁰² Yet roads could also be very dangerous, leaving soldiers exposed and were also prime targets for mining.

The Wehrmacht was known to generously sew mines, particularly in retreat. Manuals warned soldiers of the tricks the Wehrmacht used and explained how to disarm mines.⁸⁰³ Chekalov recorded in his diary that:

On the paths of retreat the Germans are trying to sow death: they mine roads and paths, bunkers and surviving buildings. Machinery doesn't enter Zaluch'e, and people move with caution. Time and again – just like some dry grass – the treacherous whiskers of mines fall underfoot. They look at first glance like inoffensive pieces of twisted wire.⁸⁰⁴

Mines were utilized not only in retreat, but also on the battlefield, where combined with barbed wire they dramatically limited soldiers' ability to move and avoid fire.⁸⁰⁵

On the battlefield, every movement soldiers made was determined to avoid enemy detection and fire to stay alive. Red Army personnel mastered the arts of crawling “*po-plastunski*” (an extremely low belly crawl) so as to keep their rear ends below machine gun

⁷⁹⁹ *Nastavleniie po inzhenernomu delu dlia pekhoty (Inzh.-43)* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1943), pp. 189-190. Hereafter *Inzh. P-43*.

⁸⁰⁰ From *Inzh. P-43*, pp. 189-190.

⁸⁰¹ *Inzh. P-43*, pp. 171-180.

⁸⁰² S.G. Gurov, *Inzhenernoie obespechenie boevykh deistvii pekhoty. Vzvod. Rota. Batal'on* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1939), p. 10. One veteran recalled that his men, serving in a mortar unit, carried no less than 48 kilograms. Abdulin, *Iz vospominanii soldata*, p. 14.

⁸⁰³ E.g. *Inzh. P-43*, pp. 154-168.

⁸⁰⁴ Chekalov, *Voennye dnevniki*, p. 299.

⁸⁰⁵ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 13-b, l. 95: “I have to say that the Germans have a particular tradition of setting up their front. As a rule, they have first a minefield. The number of rows of mines depends on the importance of the region. Mines are always set up in a chessboard pattern, and then wire obstacles, which also are set up in accordance to the importance of the sector. More than three rows never ever happens. This is considered to be a lot....”

fire and their weapon out of the dirt, running in short bursts and navigating rows of wire and mines. Soldiers had to avoid the natural instinct to crowd together under fire, keeping a distance of the often-isolating interval of 6-8 paces from their neighbors.⁸⁰⁶ Orders to move on the battlefield gave landmarks for soldiers to use as orientation.⁸⁰⁷

Landscapes were instantly divided into sectors of fire with clear points of orientation. Trees and churches were no longer features of rural life, but points for zeroing in on the enemy.⁸⁰⁸ War correspondent Evgenii Petrov wrote:

There is no beauty during war... now this naked, oblong hill, which had just been lilac in the shadows of the dawn and was lit up by the sun has become lemony and shining – in essence no longer a hill. This is height number so-and-so. You can see Smolensk from it, and stubborn fighting has been going on for two weeks to possess it. And that Russian birch, standing by the road, - its not a birch at all, but a lone tree. That's how its marked on the map. And the creek – not a river but a front line. And the edge of the forest – not a glade, but an excellent position to set up a fire base.⁸⁰⁹

As Victor Nekrasov's avatar Yuri explained to his sweetheart while on an idyllic stroll, all he could think about was where he could best place machine guns. When she took offence, he responded: "It's just habit. I now look at the moon from the perspective of its expediency and usefulness."⁸¹⁰

Soldiers became cartographers themselves. "Fire maps" or "reference cards", a small map using the landmarks chosen by the commander of a unit or a weapon crew, were a regular part of the duties of junior commanders, machine gunners, artilleryists, anti-tank gunners and mortar men.⁸¹¹ These maps were a graphic representation of the soldiers' need to make rational use of the landscape to kill with maximum efficiency, and every soldier was obliged to know the points of orientation.⁸¹² These maps were arranged with a clearly marked North-South orientation, indicated landmarks from right to left with range clearly indicated and scaled as accurately as possible. Neighboring units, the disposition of the enemy and the maximum arch of fire from the flanks of the unit were all indicated. For example, see the exemplary "reference card" of an infantry platoon from training materials. One can see the use of points of orientation such as "Or[ienteer].1 – dark bush, 400m", "Or.2 – yellow bush 200m", "Or.3 – mound 800m" and "Or. 4-5 – birch tree 700m". The location of neighboring units, the enemy and significant parts of the landscape (e.g. "unnamed river") are also noted as are rough locations of the



⁸⁰⁶ BUP-42, p. 19.

⁸⁰⁷ *Pamiatka komandiru strelkovogo otdeleniia* (Moscow: Voenizdat 1943 – 27.4.43), p. 20.

⁸⁰⁸ BUP-42, pp. 14-15, 226-230.

⁸⁰⁹ Petrov, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, pp. 29-30.

⁸¹⁰ Viktor Nekrasov, *V okopakh Stalingrada* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literature, 1990), pp. 58-9.

⁸¹¹ Every soldier was supposed to learn a fairly eloquent language of symbols representing types of soldiers and equipment. See BUP-42, 258-267. The Russian term for this was "ognevaia otchetnaia kartochka", which was often shortened to either "ognevaia kartochka" or "otchetnaia kartochka."

⁸¹² *Pamiatka boitsu pekhoty v oborone* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1943), p. 4. A certain feature of the landscape could be assigned as a mark to open fire as well.

squads under the author's command.⁸¹³ These documents were signed and dated down to the hour, and served as a key for anyone to use the stretch of ground in front of them to cause maximum damage to the enemy. They represented a sort of technical expertise where junior commanders graphically demonstrated their technical mastery, often including azimuths necessary to hit their targets. These maps provided information to commanders further in the rear and to units relieving others at the front. The reference card allowed anyone to take the place of a commander and exploit weapons available to maximum effect. This was yet another example of how soldiers and commanders reduced an unmanageably complex landscape into a set of clear, rationalized vectors to serve a very narrow purpose.⁸¹⁴

Junior commanders, scouts and observers also constantly recorded and often mapped changes in the enemy's disposition, the planting of mines, etc. and copied their own Fire Maps to be sent to their higher ups. Scouts engaged in nighttime raids to capture enemy soldiers. The possibility of capture could make a soldier's knowledge about his (or her) trench system a liability for his comrades. Whether they were recording maps or simply travelling through the maze of tunnels they had dug, soldiers learned quickly to orient themselves. Soldiers came to know their section of the line expertly, but lack of knowledge of their vicinity or dramatic changes brought about by weather or bombardment could have catastrophic effects, as soldiers could wander into enemy territory or be mistaken by their own soldiers for the enemy.⁸¹⁵

Every piece of real estate gave advantages to one side and hindrances to the other. Commanding heights allowed an army to use artillery and machine guns more effectively. Controlling a road kept supplies and reinforcements rolling freely. Access to a body of water could provide transport and drinking water. An enemy stopped in the open steppe near a town or forest that provided cover was at an obvious disadvantage. In battle, any hill or remnant of a building could become a strong point that men and women died attempting to take. Every advantage in topography or adept usage of the landscape meant better chances of survival for your soldiers and more chances to kill the enemy. Navigating and surviving this environment required very specific skills and even once they were mastered, miseries were inevitable.

Towards the end of the war, military translator Boris Suris reflected on the awful conditions faced by soldiers across the river from his bunker. His description summed up the twin miseries of danger and the elements faced by those at the front:

What's it like for the soldier on the other shore of the Oder? He sits in a shallow foxhole, which he only just carved into the cursed dam, exploding bullets keep clicking against the parapet. To the right of the brick factory two machine guns cut ceaselessly, artillery beats with a hurricane of blasts. Cold, wet as a dog since last night. They didn't bring up anything to eat all day – just nibble on a crouton [*sukhar*']. Or doze off, if you can, crouched in a heap, switching off with your partner.⁸¹⁶

Survival at the front meant killing and not being killed yourself. In such a deadly environment, soldiers of all branches of service became heavily reliant on their spades,

⁸¹³ BUP-42, p. 227.

⁸¹⁴ BUP-42, pp. 14-15, 226-230.

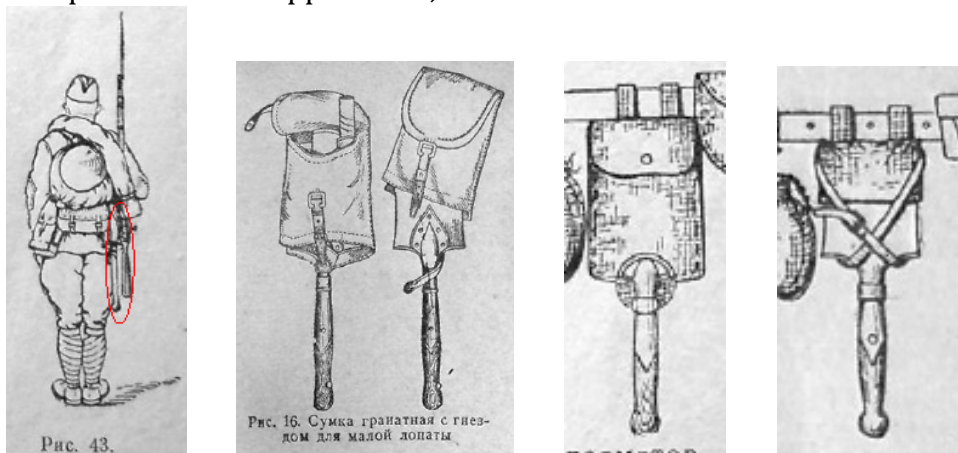
⁸¹⁵ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 14, l. 52. This problem was often complicated by the presence of soldiers who didn't understand Russian.

⁸¹⁶ Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 254.

which allowed them to craft safety in the earth.

“The Spade – The Soldier’s Loyal Friend”, or, Cities of Earth

“The Spade” constantly referred to as “The Soldier’s Loyal Friend”⁸¹⁷, dangled off the belt near their right buttock. It was, after the rifle, the most important item to their survival.⁸¹⁸ A thin sheet of metal 20cm long and 15 cm wide, drawn over a 30cm handle, the spade could have a square or sharp head. It was the soldier’s task to sharpen, clean and oil it as soon as his work was done.⁸¹⁹ Shortages of spades plagued the army, and even in the third quarter of 1944, when supply was at its height, only 80% of the active army had spades.⁸²⁰ Due to wartime shortages, both the spades and the covers which held them were simplified, spade covers eventually became entirely skeletal or multipurpose carriers (e.g. with a pocket for carrying grenades) and spades themselves redesigned to use less metal.⁸²¹ Despite the spade’s modest appearance, soldiers would create whole cities with it.



Images of spade carriers from a manual for soldiers’ equipment.⁸²²

Kliment Voroshilov declared: “A commander and fighter is not prepared, if he has not mastered the spade, has not become accustomed to use it with the same skill as a spoon at the table.”⁸²³ Soldiers were expected to begin digging immediately if they stopped anywhere where they might have to fight. Digging was a way of making a claim to any territory, even a few hundred meters, taken from the enemy. This was of particular importance to an army that trained to be very aggressive and had retreated deep into its own territory. Unlike most other armies, Red Army soldiers were trained to dig under fire, lying down while observing the enemy with their rifles an arm’s length away.⁸²⁴ They were

⁸¹⁷ S. Gliazer, “Lopata–vernyi drug soldata,” *Bloknot agitatora Krasnoi Armii*, 1943:14, pp. 14-17.

⁸¹⁸ *Instruktsiia po ukladke*, p. 39.

⁸¹⁹ *Inzh. P-43*, p. 8. It was also recommended to wipe condensation off of it.

⁸²⁰ *RGASPI f. 84, op. 1, d. 91, l. 256*.

⁸²¹ *Instruktsiia po ukladke*, p. 17.

⁸²² *Instruktsiia po ukladke*, pp. 17, 34, 39, 42.

⁸²³ P. Mozgovoi, “Lopata–podruga i zashchitnitsa boitsa,” *Bloknot agitatora Krasnoi Armii*, 1942:4, pp. 18-20.

⁸²⁴ Biomechanically, this is highly unusual. Wartime manuals by other armies and post-war biomechanical studies do not include a digging-while-lying down option. I believe that the Red Army did this because of its dedication to taking and holding territory, an obsession which could be disastrous, such as during the refusals in 1941 and 1942 to retreat in order to avoid encirclement.

instructed to find a space that provided good fields of fire and that would be easy to conceal. Eight to ten minutes, a soldier dug a rifle pit in which they could lie down.⁸²⁵ The spades that soldiers carried were impossible to use standing until one had dug themselves into the earth. The position one had to dig in was unnatural and uncomfortable: in full kit, the soldier was to keep his body and head as close to the ground as possible and thrust his legs into the ground to give him force.⁸²⁶ When soldiers were lucky, they might be issued larger implements that were carried with their unit's headquarters, but this was largely the province of combat engineers and artilleryists.⁸²⁷ Under extreme circumstances, civilian labor could be mobilized to dig massive networks of anti-tank ditches, a practice that was common near Leningrad, Moscow and Kursk.⁸²⁸ Outside of enemy observation, this could be done kneeling, but training assumed that soldiers would be digging primarily under fire.



Рис. 24. Прием подрубания дерна



Рис. 26. Наблюдение за противником при работе

Images of a soldier removing sod and observing the enemy while digging.⁸²⁹

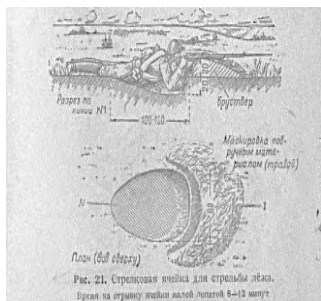


Рис. 21. Стрелковая ямочка для стрельбы лежа. Размер на сторону ямочки малой глубины 6-12 метров

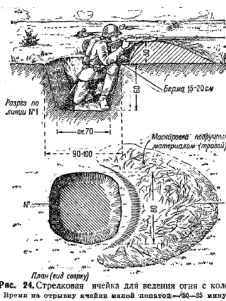


Рис. 24. Стрелковая ямочка для ведения огня с колена. Размер на сторону ямочки малой глубины 6-12 метров

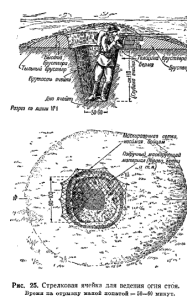
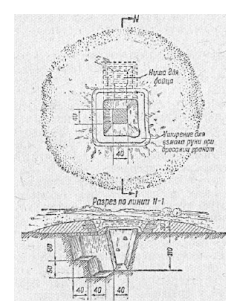


Рис. 25. Стрелковая ямочка для ведения огня сидя. Размер на сторону ямочки малой глубины 6-12 метров



The deepening of a trench from lying down to standing⁸³⁰

Army manuals stated the time necessary to dig a breastwork out of everything from sand to snow and the thickness of breastwork needed to stop a bullet from a machine gun at a hundred meters and measured how many hours it would take for one man to dig it.⁸³¹ In an abstracted “average” soil (likely black earth), a soldier was expected to dig a camouflaged hole in which they could fire while standing in an hour.⁸³² This structure had the advantage of providing 360 degrees of fire, while “protecting the soldier against the fire

⁸²⁵ *Inzh. P-43*, p. 33.

⁸²⁶ *Inzh. P-43*, pp. 32-36.

⁸²⁷ *BUP-42*, pp. 235-257, *Inzh. P-43*, pp. 8-9, 33-39.

⁸²⁸ See forthcoming dissertation by Daniel Giblin. *Digging for Victory: The Stalinist State's Mobilization of Civilian Labor for the Battle of Kursk*. UNC Chapel Hill.

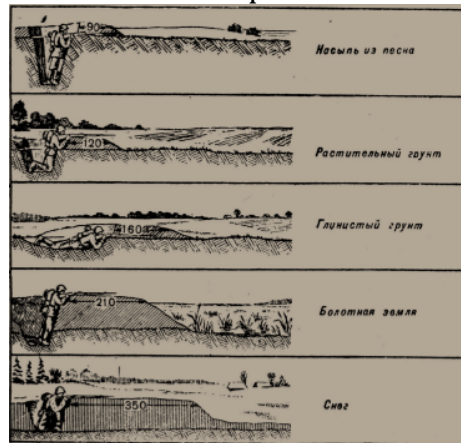
⁸²⁹ From *Inzh. P-43*, pp. 35-6.

⁸³⁰ From *Inzh. P-43*, pp. 33, 38, and *Inzh-P-39*, pp. 33, 35.

⁸³¹ *Inzh. P-43*, p. 10.

⁸³² *BUP-42*, p. 252.

of aviation and tanks passing over the trench.” It was extraordinarily narrow, providing just enough space to stand and wield a weapon.



Breastworks from different materials with their required thickness. From top to bottom sand (90cm), topsoil (120cm), clay (160cm), swamp (210cm) and snow (350cm).⁸³³

Manuals gave detailed instructions on how to dig an ergonomically informed, user-friendly foxhole. This included a special side step for getting out of the trench and throwing grenades, as well as a niche to fire from.⁸³⁴ Specialized two person foxholes for machineguns and anti-tank guns, special foxholes for mortars and artillery pieces as well as special sniper foxholes were also described. All of these specific structures were given with dimensions in manuals, and soldiers were supposed to use their spades (conveniently 50cm long, with elements that measured 15, 20 and 20cm) as a means to measure their excavations.⁸³⁵ Manuals noted that the time required to dig any object using a soldier’s standard spade was double that of a full sized sapper’s shovel.⁸³⁶ These manuals were, as one veteran commander told a group of writers in Moscow: “the bible of a commander.... they are a work of art. Regulations are the generalized, condensed, compressed essence of battlefield experience, gained at the cost of many failures and victims. They are written in blood.”⁸³⁷ These manuals provided a boiled-down essence of necessary survival skills that still required interpretation, personal experience and constant revision (often provided by military newspapers and journals). They were universal in their prescriptions, but flexibility was, ironically, part of this universality.

If the state couldn’t make land uniform, it could hold its soldiers to a uniform standard. While specialized tips were given as to how to construct a fighting position in mountains, swamps, the steppe and snow, these structures posited an average person and ignored differences in height, age and gender that could be significant. Mansur Abdulin reflected that: “Even I, a 19 year old miner, used to heavy labor from a young age, have moments when I can’t go on. What is it like for those who have just finished 9th or 10th grade? Or those who never did manual labor?”⁸³⁸ Older, less well fed or inexperienced

⁸³³ Ushakov, *Voенно-Инженерное Дело*, p. 26.

⁸³⁴ *Inzh. P-43*, p. 40.

⁸³⁵ *Inzh. P-43*, pp. 8, 37-47.

⁸³⁶ *Inzh. P-43*, p. 10.

⁸³⁷ Momysh-uly, *Psikhologiya voini*, p. 19.

⁸³⁸ Abdulin, *Iz vospominaniia soldata*, p. 14.

soldiers could take more time to dig. An older soldier, who described himself as an “unreformable member of the intelligentsia” described his early experiences digging as follows: “With great difficulty I dug myself a fox hole, taking thrice as long as any other soldier.”⁸³⁹ For the tall or the short, trenches could prove too deep or too shallow. However, as one article that highlighted a short soldier’s endeavors to make a trench his own stated: “...blame your parents for giving birth to one so small as you. But the trench is as it should be, dug by one measure, by regulations. You are the boss here now, make yourself at home.”⁸⁴⁰

Soldiers’ shovels moved the sand of the Karelian Isthmus, stones of the Caucasus Mountains, black soil of Ukraine, marshes near Leningrad, permafrost near Murmansk and shattered concrete of Stalingrad and Berlin. They helped forge the fencing or corduroy-like log work that would take the place of a trench in swamps, which Dunaevskaia described in her diary: “The ground is swampy, and we take our places in a log framework, which neither defends nor saves from either shrapnel or the cold. Our bunks are made of the same logs.”⁸⁴¹ Spades also moved snow. While manuals and newspaper articles dealt with the differences of terrain that soldiers might face, the neat, uniform and geometrical illustrations they contained did not capture the fact that digging was a complicated, filthy business.⁸⁴² Spring mud was virtually impossible to dig into and as such is ignored, but with enough wood a drainage system could be built to make such a situation livable.⁸⁴³ Manuals posited homogenous soils with little mention of rock, roots and all the little things that can make digging hell. No mention was made of how soldiers were supposed to keep themselves from becoming utterly filthy while creating and then navigating a claustrophobic space made of soil. While the manual proscribed specific periods in which each type of earthwork could be accomplished, soldiers without the proper training might waste time, while many soldiers felt no need to entrench and avoided such work.⁸⁴⁴ Like any manual, these texts simplified reality to teach people how to accomplish a task, and judging by how the enemies of the Red Army perceived their earthworks, these manuals served their purpose.

Many soldiers had received minimal training before arriving at the front, and while most recruits would have come from a peasant background, being familiar with physical labor including digging, the specific types of landscaping and building that they had to do differed dramatically from the tilling of crops and building of peasant dwellings. Sod houses were sometimes built in emergency situations by peasants and workers (most notably in periods of housing shortage at Soviet construction sites), but the demands that everything be invisible and impervious to enemy fire made these new structures unlike anything that most of these people (save perhaps miners and plumbers) had ever built. Regardless of their background, men and women in the service came to share in the ubiquitous tasks of excavation.

⁸³⁹ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 71, d. 15, ll. 1-2.

⁸⁴⁰ V. Kaplin. “V transhee,” *Gvardiia*, 15 June 1944, p. 2.

⁸⁴¹ Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, p. 204, Irina Dunaevskaia. *Ot Leningrada do Kënigsberga*, p. 296. Life in semi-frozen swamps could be nearly as deadly as the enemy, see Lesin, *Byla voina*, pp. 97-98.

⁸⁴² E.g. A. Shnyrkevich, “Oborona v gorakh Severnogo Kavkaza,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, 03 September 1942, p. 2; V. Shterenberg, “Okopyvaniie v stepnykh raionakh,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, 24 September, 1942, p. 2.

⁸⁴³ *Inzh. P-43*, pp. 102-104.

⁸⁴⁴ *BUP-42*, pp. 252-257.

Once a soldier finished their fighting position, he or she was supposed to dig at least three more “reserve positions” then lines of communication connecting all of this. They had to be zigzag to provide protection from shrapnel and fighting positions should the line be overrun. Their depth depended on the amount of time soldiers had to dig them, so men and women might crawl on their belly, hands and knees or walk fully upright between positions.⁸⁴⁵ After communication trenches, soldiers began building secondary positions to fire from, something of key importance to machine guns, mortars and anti-tank guns which were prime targets of enemy artillery, mortars and snipers.⁸⁴⁶ Finally, soldiers dug false trench systems. They were also responsible for building obstacles to stop enemy infantry and tanks, including barbed wire, “hedgehogs” anti-tank ditches, etc.⁸⁴⁷ Still later, they built bunkers, warehouses, wells, observation points, anti-tank ditches and all manner of structures.⁸⁴⁸ Tankers and drivers dug earthworks to conceal their vehicles. Every soldier was “not just a warrior, but the builder of his own fortress...”⁸⁴⁹ who “should transform any locality into an ally”⁸⁵⁰.

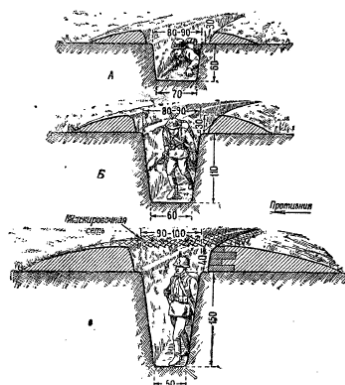


Рис. 37. Ходы сообщения.

А — для перемещения; Б — для движения согнувшись; В — для движения во весь рост (полный профиль).
Время на строительство и ходы сообщения одним бойцом саперной роты: для перемещения — 30 минут, для движения согнувшись — 45 минут, для движения во весь рост — один час.

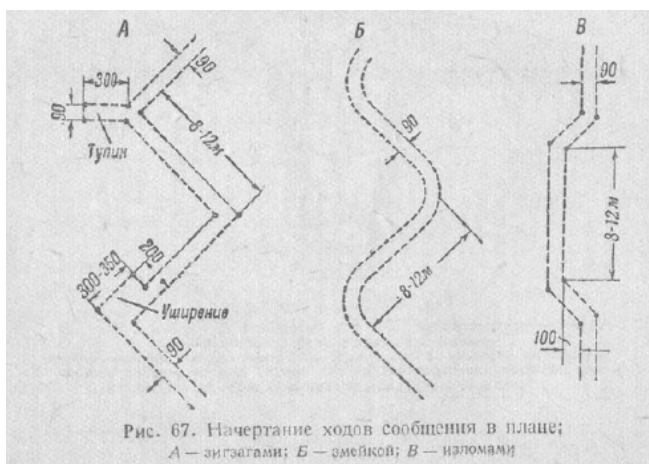


Рис. 67. Начертание ходов сообщения в плане:
А — зигзагами; Б — змейкой; В — изломами

Communication trenches, view from the trench (*Inzh. P-39*, p. 52) and from above (*Inzh. P-43*, p. 78).

A soldier was never finished digging and building. All structures had to be impervious to enemy fire – both from bullets and bombs. This meant reinforcing trenches and dugouts with several layers of wood or other materials improvised from whatever was at hand; e.g. trees, munitions boxes, peasant huts or destroyed apartment blocks.⁸⁵¹ Manuals included detailed descriptions of which thicknesses of wood to use and how to manufacture standard components for trench construction.⁸⁵²

⁸⁴⁵ *Inzh. P-43*, pp. 27, 75-80.

⁸⁴⁶ *BUP-42*, p. 237.

⁸⁴⁷ *Inzh. P-43*, 132-154.

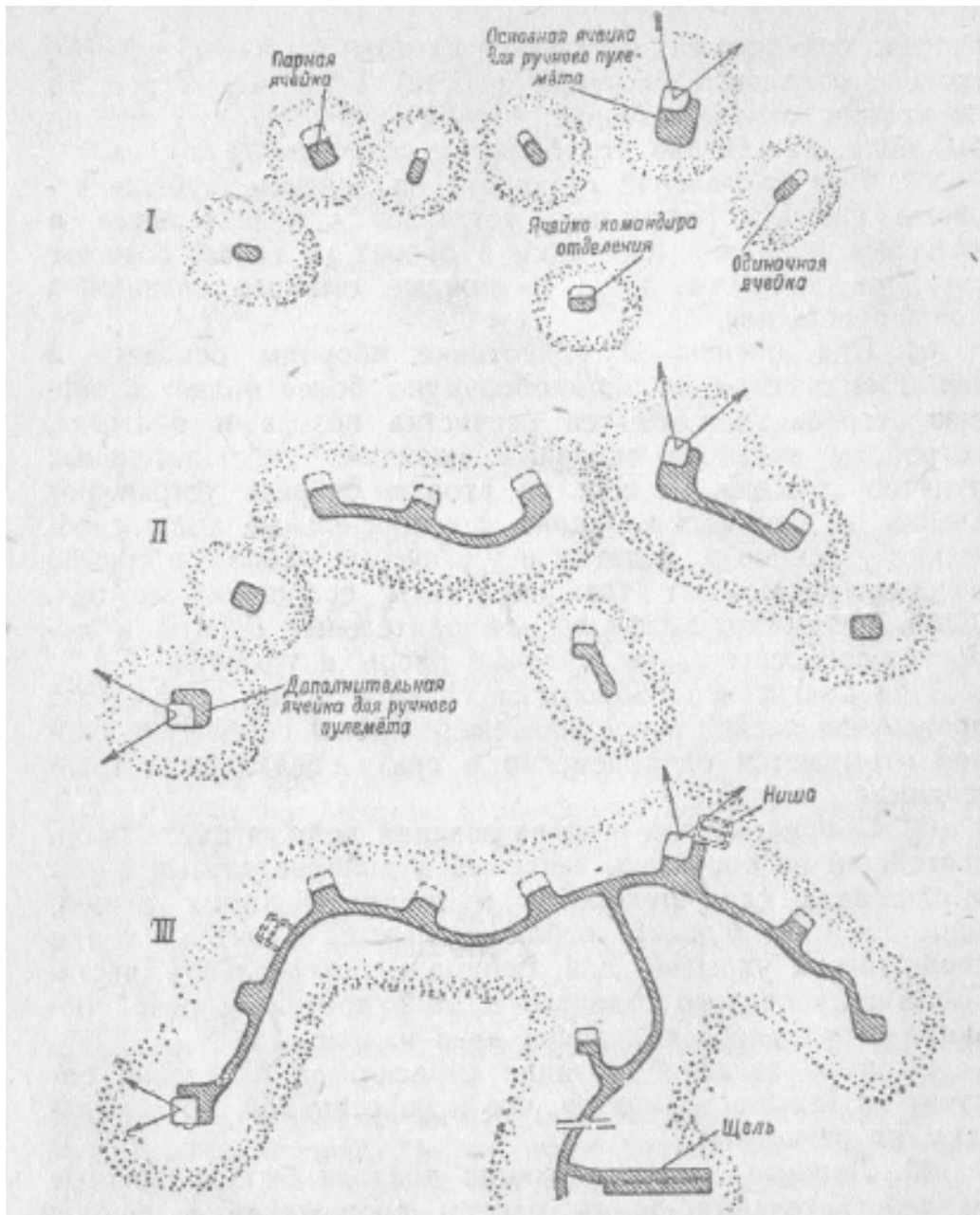
⁸⁴⁸ *BUP-42*, pp. 235-257; Ushakov, *Voennoe inzhenernoe delo*, p. 26.

⁸⁴⁹ Gliazer, “Lopata-vernyi drug soldata”, pp. 15-16.

⁸⁵⁰ Mozgovoi, “Lopata-podrugа i zashchitnitsа boitsа,” p. 18.

⁸⁵¹ *Inzh. P-43*, pp. 12-13.

⁸⁵² *Inzh. P-43*, pp. 12-15.



The evolution from foxhole to trench. *Inzh. P-43*, p. 27.

All of this effort only worked if soldiers were on their guard. By regulation, most soldiers would be relaxing in their bunkers while a few stood watch, coming out only to defend their position or attack the enemy.⁸⁵³ Often snipers or groups of observers provided this cover during the day. While allowing the majority of soldiers to rest, this meant that one soldier's drowsiness or inattention could get his or her comrades killed, wounded or captured. This meant that soldiers caught sleeping were often humiliated or severely punished for their infractions. Some soldiers recorded witnessing executions of those who

⁸⁵³ Grossman, *Gody voiny*, p. 408; *BUP-42*, p. 49.

had slept at their post in their diaries and memoirs.⁸⁵⁴ Even those who were on guard were often so poorly trained or lax in discipline that they did not fulfill guard duty properly. Soldiers were to know a sign and call sign (based off a geographic location and a piece of equipment starting with the same letter), but reports and memoirs often point to more informal ways of controlling territory. Sometimes pickets were not placed.⁸⁵⁵ Veteran Grigorii Pomerants recalled that soldiers almost never acted by regulations and seldom knew their call sign.⁸⁵⁶ A report from April of 1944 showed that the rear area was rife with people who didn't fulfill regulations, talking with unknown persons and letting civilians walk freely through the areas they were supposed to guard.⁸⁵⁷ Indeed, calls for vigilance remained a constant aspect of military propaganda throughout the war. But a lack of vigilance was not the only way in which soldiers lessened their own chances of survival.

Red Army soldiers were often found at the front without helmets. On the one hand this was due to shortage, as large numbers of helmets were lost in 1941. As with everything else, the army recycled helmets, taking from the wounded and dead and from rear to front, to give to the living directly in combat. Yet a significant number of soldiers remained without helmets. One 1942 study from the Leningrad Front found 83.7% of a sample of soldiers with head wounds were not wearing helmets.⁸⁵⁸ As Anatolii Genatulin recalled, many soldiers refused to wear helmets, cracking wise with lines such as "What do I have a government-issue neck in order to carry steel on my head?" As battle approached, many soldiers threw away their helmets:

Many fling their helmets into the grass as if they were useless. When it's hot these helmets heat up as if you slapped a just-forged cauldron on your head, and if you take it off and put it on your pack its still heavy. And later it turns out, that a helmet is a most necessary thing in battle, a sure defense against shrapnel and bullets, as a soldier's head is always visible.⁸⁵⁹

Genatulin uses this passage as an introduction to a story about how everyone in his squad was killed by shrapnel, and he alone survived due to his helmet. However, many soldiers seemed willing to take their chances in order to increase comfort, and helmets were an easy item to steal or pick up on the battlefield.⁸⁶⁰ Others felt that wearing helmets was

⁸⁵⁴ E.g. Indzhiev, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 20.

⁸⁵⁵ Reutova, *Gvardeets*, p. 84.

⁸⁵⁶ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, p. 74.

⁸⁵⁷ TsAMO RF f. 243, op. 2963, d. 26, ll. 85-86 in P.I. Veshchikov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 580-581.

⁸⁵⁸ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 9, l. 158 in Veshchikov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, p. 216. In 1940 a new helmet was designed with a three-pad liner that could be worn over the *ushanka* and required the chinstrap to provide tension in order to be worn properly. One veteran of the Leningrad Front wrote in his memoirs of an entirely different use for helmets. Nikulin, *Vospimaniia o voine*, p. 79: "I threw away my helmet – few people wear them and there are a lot of them lying around. This element of the soldier's kit was used for something entirely different than it was designed for. We usually defecated into helmets, then threw them over the parapet of the trench and shock waves from explosions tossed everything back, onto our heads."

⁸⁵⁹ Genatulin, *Vot konchitsia voina*, p. 76; TsAMO RF f, 208, op. 14703s, d. 2, ll. 339-343 in Veshchikov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, p. 137. A report from 1941 pointed out issues of visibility with the paint used on helmets: "The steel helmet's current paint is highly reflective and also can be pierced by bullets. It is necessary to change the paint." Helmets used by all armies in the war were designed to protect against shrapnel, not bullets.

⁸⁶⁰ Genatulin, *Vot knochitsia voina*, pp. 26, 43.

unmanly.⁸⁶¹ Frequently, propaganda articles linked helmets and shovels as items that could be the difference between life and death.⁸⁶²

The state produced copious propaganda about the utility of the helmet and even offered a bounty to civilians who collected discarded helmets from the battlefield.⁸⁶³ It was not uncommon to run articles in divisional newspapers or leaflets that told the story of how a soldier survived only due to a helmet. Despite regulations and the pragmatic desire to increase one's chances of survival in an endeavor centered on killing, many seemed to believe in their talismans more than in the steel shell the state had provided. The desire for comfort could also lead to laziness, as soldiers avoided the manual labor so key to their survival.

Despite its ubiquity, soldiers often did not appreciate just how important this work was until they had been in combat. As sapper Luzhbin wrote from his hospital bed:

The war taught not just us, sappers, but all ground forces to pay exceptional attention to self-entrenchment. Frontline soldiers always remember the thickness of their breastworks. If during peaceful training in the rear the parapet doesn't have a tangible meaning, at the front its thickness is a question of life and death for soldiers. If the parapet's thickness is normal, losses will be smaller, and, conversely, with a thin parapet we will unnecessarily spill excessive blood.⁸⁶⁴

Failure could be used as a tool to teach others by commanders:

Near headquarters there were two bunkers. Both were hit directly by mortars. In the bunker that was made according to regulations, people survived, and in the bunker, where things were not done properly two Red Army Men were killed. I used this as a form of visual propaganda. We brought soldiers to both of them to see why this happened. This had a very positive result – they started digging in quite well. They made good bunkers and we didn't suffer any casualties.⁸⁶⁵

The perils of laziness were not always clear to soldiers at the front, as we see from official reports and propaganda. Voroshilov noted in a report from May 1942, that soldiers often built fortifications only “to clear their conscience,” neglecting to dig in or creating positions that were difficult to fire from.⁸⁶⁶ Mikhail Kalinin recalled a common retort in an article for agitators: “Why dig foxholes, when in half an hour we won't need them?”⁸⁶⁷ Since soldiers moved often and dug in virtually everywhere they stopped, digging became an endless rhythm of their lives. For those who were unprepared, the front would provide them with ample opportunity to master the spade. For those who did not appreciate the importance of the spade, bitter experience would teach them. Soldiers without spades often felt cheated, as one censored letter during the Battle of Kursk complained:

⁸⁶¹ Gol'braikh, Interview. Gol'braikh disputes this claim, stating that shortage was the real issue.

⁸⁶² E.g. Dotsenko “Kaska spasla menia zhizn',” *Gvardiia*, 17 June, 1944 described how a tiny fragment could kill a man and how his helmet deflected a bullet; V. Pichuzhin, “Kaska da lopata – druz'ia soldata,” *Gvardiia* 28 September, 1944. This article includes a testimonial from a private about how both of these items saved his life.

⁸⁶³ *Frontovoï tovarishch* (Bez mesta: Voenizdat, 1942), pp. 77-78; *RGASPI f. 644, op. 1, d. 28, l. 56*.

⁸⁶⁴ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 1, d. 7, l. 93.

⁸⁶⁵ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 8, l. 52.

⁸⁶⁶ APRF f.3, op. 50, d. 266, ll. 184-188, in Kudriashov, *Voina*, p. 150.

⁸⁶⁷ M.I. Kalinin. “Slovo agitatora na fronte”. *Bloknot agitatora Krasnoi Armii*, 1943:13, pp. 9-13; p. 12.

...the discrepancies have chewed us to death. For example, they say “the spade is the soldier’s friend,” but we went into battle without spades. “We were promised.” We are so fed up with these promises, that we have no faith. We are suspicious of everything.⁸⁶⁸

It became clear to everyone that survival meant digging, even if one wasn’t wearing their helmet.

The man or woman with the rifle or cannon could only survive mechanized warfare with the help of the spade. Soldiers often wrote of their landscaping in their diaries, as one chauffeur complained in the last winter of the war: “The ground had thoroughly frozen, even crow bars break. But we gnaw through it unremittingly. That is a soldier’s duty. And if you don’t bury yourself in the earth, you’ll die like a fly.”⁸⁶⁹ *Krasnoarmeets*, the most widely circulated journal in the army, even ran a story in which Mother Earth promised to protect a brave soldier.⁸⁷⁰ But this promise was made good only through near-endless work not only digging, but woodworking and even some artistry.

Norms were supposed to dictate the density of manpower per square kilometer of front. However, losses often meant that only the skeletal remains of a unit held territory meant for significantly more people. At the front, combat medic Tatiana Atabek recorded: “In our trenches the squads [roughly 8 men-BMS] are 500 meters from each other, and we were taught that by regulations they should be no more than 30-40 meters.”⁸⁷¹ One veteran recalled the phrase “two Russians make a front.”⁸⁷² Hiding their numbers was a major task that provided hours of extra work for soldiers.

The progression of trenches from unconnected dots to a massive network resembling a primitive city was supposed to happen without the enemy catching a glimpse of any of it. Camouflage was a key part of this endeavor, especially given the overwhelming air superiority enjoyed by the Germans in 1941-1942. Enemy planes and artillery could wreak death upon anything they could see. As was repeated in manuals: “The task of military camouflage – is to conceal that which is true and show that which is false.”⁸⁷³ Camouflage was meant not to entirely conceal the presence of soldiers, as it was felt that this would attract the enemy’s suspicion, but rather to deceive the enemy as to the intentions of those in the trenches.⁸⁷⁴ The landscape was to be filled with false clues about what the army was up to.

For the individual soldier, being seen meant being shot at. The trenches were supposed to seamlessly blend into the landscape, not changing its profile.⁸⁷⁵ Every foxhole was to disappear behind some aspect of the local flora, which meant soldiers could find themselves hidden by roses, raspberries, corn, sod or whatever sprung from the ground.⁸⁷⁶ From the first slice of earth a soldier lifted, every effort was to be taken to maintain concealment. This meant that soldiers carefully cleared their fields of fire, gathered brush

⁸⁶⁸ TsA FSB Rossii, f. 41, on. 51, d. 11, l. 286–287, in Zhadobin, *et al.*, “*Ognennaia duga*,” pp. 90-91.

⁸⁶⁹ V.I. Ermolenko, *Voennyi dnevniki starshego serzhanta* (Belgorod: “Otchii krai”, 2000), p. 96.

⁸⁷⁰ A. Simukov, “Kak Kuz’ma s zemlei-matushkoi dogovarivalsia,” *Krasnoarmeets*, 1943:1, p. 14.

⁸⁷¹ Atabek, *K biografii voennogo pokoleniia*, p. 102.

⁸⁷² Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, p. 81.

⁸⁷³ *Inzh. P-43*, p. 15.

⁸⁷⁴ *Inzh. P-43*, p. 16.

⁸⁷⁵ Soldiers were supposed to carry a personal (150X100cm) net to help camouflage themselves at all times. *Inzh. P-43*, p. 18.

⁸⁷⁶ *Inzh. P-43*, p. 68; e.g. Inozemtsev, *Frontovoi dnevniki*, p. 40; Sero Khanzadian, *Povesti i rasskazy*, Avtorizovannyi perevod s armianskogo Reginy Kafrielints (Moscow: Izvestiia, 1986), pp. 155-156.

and cut into sod gingerly to preserve the network of roots that kept the grass alive and gave cover. Commanders carefully chose the grounds and watched their soldiers work from the direction of the enemy. Soldiers eventually dug false positions to attract enemy fire (often using soot to give the impression of depth), fake machineguns and artillery pieces from wood that needed to be both realistic enough to draw attention but also camouflaged enough to seem like the actual object – a real looking machinegun left out in the open might seem too incredible to waste a mortar shell on.⁸⁷⁷ Nets and screens were constructed to place over communication trenches, foxholes, vehicles. When Red Army men opened fire, it was often through a loophole invisible from the enemy's lines, which could feature a camouflaged trapdoor (see embedded image).⁸⁷⁸ As Vasili Grossman recorded in his notebook, the Red Army soldier had "...become so crafty, that not even a professor could think of it. He builds such a foxhole, that you can step on his head and not notice him."⁸⁷⁹

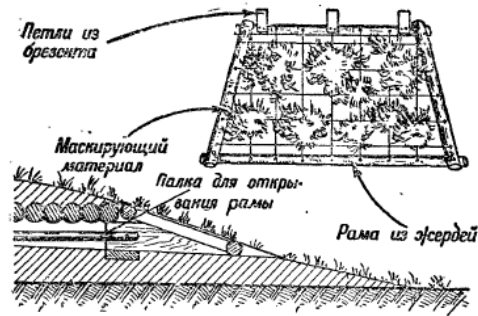


Рис. 58. Устройство поднимающейся рамы бойницы.
Время на устройство рамы из готового материала одним бойцом—20 минут.

As Vasili Grossman recorded in his notebook, the Red Army soldier had "...become so crafty, that not even a professor could think of it. He builds such a foxhole, that you can step on his head and not notice him."⁸⁷⁹

Camouflage required not just labor, but changes in the way soldiers acted. Every move made (whether in the trenches or on the march) was to take the landscape into account and use its features to provide cover. Soldiers were encouraged to choose paths based on which plants best matched the color of their uniform or to move in short bursts from tree to tree or rock to rock. They would also smear their helmets in mud or flour to match the clay or snow of their trenches.⁸⁸⁰ Noise and light discipline became key to survival. This meant concealing smoke and flashes, particularly at night. Nothing could shine or jingle in the soldier's kit and conversation had to be kept quiet and to a minimum.⁸⁸¹ In the steppe, soldiers were instructed to "strictly observe the regime on the battle line, don't show yourself, sit in the ground and secretly observe the enemy. Leave the trench only with permission and only at night."⁸⁸² As we will see, this had a particular effect on the culture of the trenches.

Of course, the enemy was also trying to hide his every move. As an article on observation put it:

The modern battlefield often seems entirely empty. In order to locate a fortified and camouflaged enemy, ceaseless and the most in-depth observation of the smallest signs of the life in the enemy's order of battle is necessary.⁸⁸³

The trenches were also dotted with Observation Points [*nabliudatel'nye punkty*], in which soldiers kept journals of every change in the landscape and enemies disposition. Observers tried to locate minefields, artillery and machineguns. Their field of view was ranged from depths of 400 to 800 meters and used orienteers to determine who was responsible for

⁸⁷⁷ *Inzh. P-43*, pp. 21-23.

⁸⁷⁸ *BUP-42*, pp. 235-257; *Posobiie komandiru strelkovogo otdeleniia*, pp. 80-96.

⁸⁷⁹ Grossman, *Gody voiny*, p. 356.

⁸⁸⁰ E.g. K. Zlygostev, "Umelo maskirovat' ogenevye pozitsii," *Gvardiia*, 20 dekabria 1943.

⁸⁸¹ S. Gurov, *Pokhod i otdykh pekhoty* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1940), p. 53.

⁸⁸² *Frontovoi tovarishch*, p. 70.

⁸⁸³ Ia. Malakhov. "Voiskovoe nabliudeniie," *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*. 1943:15, p. 42-45.

which pieces of ground. Observers wrote journals that were forwarded to their commanders and learned to read the landscape more fluently than other soldiers, sometimes with the naked eye, sometimes with the help of binoculars, periscopes and stereoscopes. Their foxholes started off like any other, but often included more room for multiple observers working in shifts.⁸⁸⁴

The Germans noticed how skillfully Red Army soldiers used their spades, finding a racial explanation: “[i]n instinctual use of location, exemplary construction of positions and skillful camouflage strikingly characterize every Red Army soldier” and that Red Army soldiers were excellent in defense because of their “[i]nborn, mindless submission to fate, lack of initiative, blind obedience from fear of being shot...”. They were also impressed with the speed with which their enemy dug and developed complex defense systems.⁸⁸⁵

Soviet propaganda declared that: “You could say that every blow with a shovel on the battlefield is equal to a well aimed shot. The spade makes a soldier invulnerable, and thus terrifying to the enemy.”⁸⁸⁶ The spade was a soldier’s shield, often carried tucked into the belt in combat, it could be a weapon and occasionally deflected lethal fire.⁸⁸⁷ As a leaflet *Frontovoi tovarishch* [*Frontline Comrade*] published by the Stalingrad Front stated:

If you didn't have time to dig in, defend your head from bullets with the shovel. Place it like a shield, at an angle, and bullets will ricochet off it and past you. Don't place the spade straight – a bullet could go through it. If you suddenly have to move forward, leave your trench and run further. But don't forget your spade! Sharpen your spade against reinforced concrete walls or stones.⁸⁸⁸

Some soldiers went into attacks covering their faces with spades.⁸⁸⁹ The spade was indispensable to soldiers on the battlefield, but the world created by the soldier’s spade consisted of more than just violence, and the spade was more than merely a shield. As one lieutenant put it: “We don’t just wage war at the front, we also live there. The trenches are our home.”⁸⁹⁰

Domesticating the Front

Body

Once soldiers settled into a position for any period of time, they began to concentrate on comfort, starting with the soldier’s foxhole. Mansur Abdulin recalled:

Every burrow is different in shape and volume, since it is dug to the taste and complexion of the builder... A foxhole is a soldier’s place of work, his fire position. But it’s also his home... The passion to improvement is inflamed: he starts to dig out a niche for grenades, another for ammunition, a third for his submachine gun, so it will be at hand. And you want to find a place for your mess pot... A soldier has already made himself at home...⁸⁹¹

⁸⁸⁴ Ia. Malakhov. “Voiskovoe nabliudeniie,” pp.42-45.

⁸⁸⁵ APRF, f. 3, op. 58, d. 451, ll. 111-116, in Kudriashov, *Voina: 1941-1945. Vestnik Arkhiva Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii*. (Moscow: Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 2010), pp. 446-447.

⁸⁸⁶ Gliazer, “Lopata–vernyi drug soldata”, pp. 15-16.

⁸⁸⁷ Chudakova, *Chizhik-ptichka s kharakterom*, pp. 525-526; *Frontovoi tovarishch*, pp. 75-77.

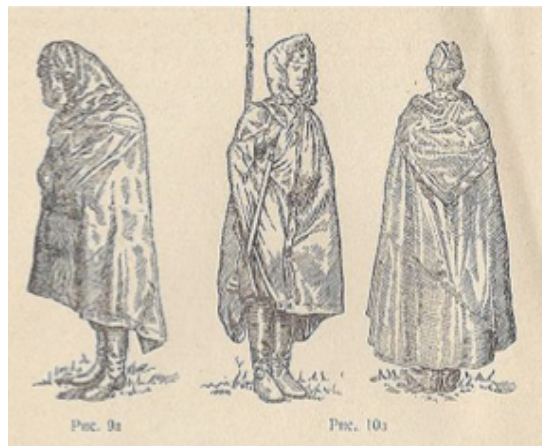
⁸⁸⁸ *Frontovoi tovarishch*, pp. 75-77.

⁸⁸⁹ Grossman, *Gody voiny*, p. 349.

⁸⁹⁰ Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, p. 8.

⁸⁹¹ M.G. Abdulin. *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*. (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1985), pp. 33-34.

Niches for all manner of items – weapons, gasmasks, food and water – came to mark the walls of the trench, which were sometimes even lined with wood.⁸⁹² Once soldiers finished their fighting positions, they began constructing more complicated places to live with the same attention to detail. First they built a small burrow to escape the elements and enemy fire, a place large enough to lie down in, directly in the trench wall. These could be for one or two men, bare earth or lined with boards or branches.⁸⁹³



The first door for any structure a soldier made was the *plashch-palatka*, an ingeniously designed tent portion and rain-cape that was both clothing and an architectural element at once. A veteran of the Leningrad front praised this humble cloth: “the indispensable accessory of the soldier. It defends him from rain and blizzard, and covers him from the sun, and serves as both bedding and tent. And they’ll bury you in it, when your time comes...”⁸⁹⁴ The *plashch-palatka* could be used as a very basic shelter or combined in any number of combinations from a simple one or two man tent familiar to boy scouts to dozens put into a complex tent in the form of a yurt. When not being used as a tent, it could be worn as a rain cape, with one corner buttoning up so as not to be dragged and another being drawn into a hood via two drawstrings. It even featured an opening that soldiers could put their shooting arm through. Lightweight and multifunctional, the *plashch-palatka* was an all purpose item that served as a summer blanket, method of carrying wounded and supplies and makeshift door, roof, camouflage and shroud. Eventually, however, the *plashch* would also serve as sheeting, once soldiers had built more permanent structures. It was, after the spade, the most important object to the soldier’s comfort.

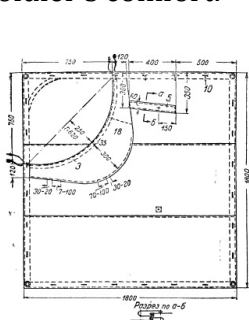


Рис. 15. Палатка на 1 человека

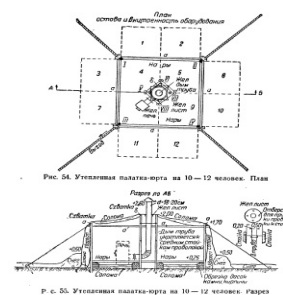


Рис. 54. Угловая палатка-порт на 10–12 человек. План

Р. с. 55. Угловая палатка-порт на 10–12 человек. Разрез

The *plashch-palatka* laid flat, used as a one man and a ten man tent.⁸⁹⁵

If the *plashch-palatka* was a portable house, an element of both architecture and clothing, the spade allowed soldiers to build elaborate shelter wherever they found

⁸⁹² *Inzh. P-43*, pp. 98-101.

⁸⁹³ *Inzh. P-43*, pp. 98-99.

⁸⁹⁴ Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, p. 151.

⁸⁹⁵ *Polevye neoboritel'nye postroiki: nastavleniie dlia voisk Krasnoi Armii* (Moscow/Leningrad: Gosudarsvennoe izdatel'stvo stroitel'noi literature, 1941), pp. 13, 18, 48. *Palatka-plashch nakidka* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1938), p. 26. Accessed via <http://billy-madbull.livejournal.com/611120.html> 09 December 2013.

themselves. The bunkers that soldiers built and inhabited were spaces for rest and recovery, sparsely decorated but with a few touches of home. As one correspondent with the Mints Commission wrote:

The present communication was written in a small bunker – the dugout of the commander of the Chemical Company and his political deputy. The décor: a window the width of two logs without glass on the level of the earth. Two board beds; a small iron oven; a log floor; the door is hung with a double sheet of greased chemical [*protivoipritnoi*] paper. The only decoration on the wall – two sheets of *Frontovaia illiustratsiia* [*Frontline Illustration*- a popular illustrated magazine- BMS]. On the other wall – a submachine gun and a gasmask bag.⁸⁹⁶

Structures like this became ubiquitous at the front, as soldiers adapted to their environment and built structures adapted to their needs and bodies.

This world had its own rhythms and eccentricities. Soldiers often became largely nocturnal, as Boris Marchenko wrote home to his wife in September of 1942: “I try not to sleep at night in general, and sleep it off during the day – it’s better that way. In general it is impossible to answer the question of when I sleep, day and night and neither day nor night. In a word, I’ve gotten used to sleeping in snatches and feel no inconvenience whatsoever.”⁸⁹⁷ Loginov recalled similar patterns, but his soldiers had more trouble adjusting:

We don’t know plates, forgot what hot tea, good books and music are... The most simple every day details of life are beyond our reach. We have a special schedule – there is no difference between day and night. We sleep, not knowing sheets, not getting undressed, at odd moments. And so we never get enough rest and always want to sleep.⁸⁹⁸

Beyond sleep, other conditions were dramatically different. Once soldiers dug in they could become acclimated to the technology that shaped their landscape. Many soldiers learned to tell enemy and friendly planes from the sound their engine made, or the direction of artillery fire by its shriek. Genadii Tokarev recalled: “Very soon we learned to tell by the motor’s sound not only whether or not it was our plane or German, but also what kind: a fighter, a bomber or a scout plane.”⁸⁹⁹ Others learned simply to ignore these sounds, as Aleksandr Chekhovich wrote home to his mother: “the constant whistle of bullet and mortar fire, and even the creak of ‘Katiusha’ and the German ‘mule’ [rocket mortars- BMS] have become normal”.⁹⁰⁰ He would later boast to his mother that he could drink tea under bombardment. Soldiers bragged of their ability to sleep through bombardments or even battle as well as to sleep fully clothed, with grenades and spades hanging from their belts.⁹⁰¹

⁸⁹⁶ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 30, d. 13, l. 4ob.

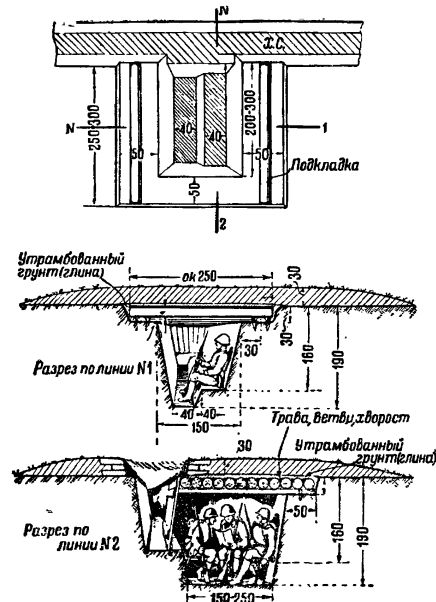
⁸⁹⁷ *RGASPI f, M-33, op. 1, d. 853, l. 129*. (Boris Marchenko’s letter of 22 September 1942).

⁸⁹⁸ Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, p. 8.

⁸⁹⁹ Tokarev, *Vesti dnevnik na fronte zapreshchalos’*, pp. 91-92.

⁹⁰⁰ Chekhovich, *Dnevnik ofitsera*, p. 38.

⁹⁰¹ Grossman, *Gody voiny*, p. 339; Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, pp. 45-46. Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, p. 204.



Small bunkers from manuals.⁹⁰²

While danger could become unremarkable, other conditions could prove unbearable. Lice were a frequent companion in the trenches as were other vermin such as mice.⁹⁰³ The trenches were subject to the elements, as one female sniper recalled:

... awful rain began... I arrived at a dugout, dampness, the dugout is dripping, uninviting, cold and dirty. We always got salt pork, a candle or some sort of fat and we were like primeval people. We had big, *kirzovye* boots, and even though we were on high ground, the water came up to our knees and we stood in water all the time.⁹⁰⁴

A certain level of discomfort was inevitable under these conditions, but both soldiers and the Party strived to create the best living conditions possible.

The environment in which soldiers lived was always of interest to the state, with inspections of the fronts being common. In early 1943, interest in the *byt* of soldiers became a major campaign. A discussion led by A.S. Shcherbakov, head of the Army's Political Section, among top political officers revealed that soldiers were living under unacceptable conditions. Food was stolen and poorly prepared, warm clothing wasn't finding its way to the front and the bunkers in which soldiers lived had major shortcomings. Political officers at the front were deemed to not understand the importance of looking after soldiers' comfort. Those present understood that material conditions and how soldiers relaxed greatly influenced the combat effectiveness of a unit and that "where the barest needs of the fighters are not satisfied – the number of extraordinary events grows. Enemy agents take advantage of this..."⁹⁰⁵ Keeping the city of earth up to code was key to securing soldiers' loyalty and health.

⁹⁰² *Posobie komandiru i boitsu strelkovogo otdeleniia* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1942), p. 86.

⁹⁰³ See Chapter 2 in this volume. Burnazian, *Bo'rba za zhizn' ranenykh i bol'nykh na Kalininskom-1-m Pribaltiiskom fronte 1941-1945*, p. 157.

⁹⁰⁴ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 7b, l. 3.

⁹⁰⁵ *RGASPI f. 88, op. 1, d. 958, l. 5.*

Political officers noted that in some units, bunkers were dug too shallow, forcing soldiers to constantly hunch over.⁹⁰⁶ In others, the bare, clay floors were cold and miserable, while windows remained without glass and a thin rain cape served as the only door. Finally, lighting was cited as a major problem. Soldiers spent a lot of time in their dugouts, the space in which they were to sleep, write letters to and read letters from home, clean their weapons, shave and repair their uniforms and equipment. Some form of artificial lighting was key, and in a few bunkers, soldiers had burned telephone cable to provide light. One soldier colorfully described how when burning telephone cable there was so much soot, that “in the course of an evening so much crawls into your nose that you can’t pick it all out” while a reports to Moscow found that the practice could lead to death from smoke inhalation.⁹⁰⁷

Both soldiers and political officers came to the same conclusion – soldiers should simply improvise lamps from whatever could be found at hand – most often the bodies of these makeshift creations was either the casing of an artillery shell (the 45mm cannon being particularly common) or a can recycled from issue rations. Soldiers used a variety of fuels, sometimes kerosene, animal fat or a mix of gasoline and salt. For a wick, they often cut strips from the end of their woolen overcoats.⁹⁰⁸

Improvisation was key to survival and comfort at the front, and indeed even manuals imply a sort of “Do-It-Yourself” ethic. Comforts and necessities had to be improvised from whatever was at hand, be it artillery shell casings, cans or abandoned civilian houses.⁹⁰⁹ Vasilii Glotov recorded how veterans spent their free time “crafting quaint cigarette holders and cases from whatever they can find – wood and trophy plastic.”⁹¹⁰ Other than smoking accessories, soldiers made lighters, knives and all manner of everyday items. Military surgeon Vishnevskii described one instance of ingenuity:

There’s a highly original wash-stand in the MSB [Medical Sanitary Battalion- BMS]. It is made out of a ration box of American sausages. In the bottom of the box there is a hole and a rifle cartridge is soldered in place. A hollow bullet with a filed down end plays the role of a nipple.⁹¹¹

Other soldier’s described making ovens out of whatever they could find:

Nearby a 76-mm gun was positioned. We asked the troops for a can that had been used for lube and made an oven out of it. We found a piece of old iron, turned it into a tube and put it outside, not too high – level with the ground. It got dark, we struck up the oven, it got warm, you could even heat up soup in a mess-tin.⁹¹²

Everything had to be scrounged and had to function in such a way as to be invisible from enemy lines – the trail of smoke of even a cigarette could draw enemy fire.⁹¹³

⁹⁰⁶ *RGASPI f. 88, op. 1, d. 958, l. 4.*

⁹⁰⁷ “Dnevnik Lutovinina Semena Mikhailovicha” in N.A. Cherepanov, ed., *S veroi v Pobedu. Pis'ma, dnevniki, vospominaniia frontovikov* (Tiumen': Vektor Buk, 2002), pp. 128-174; pp. 131-132; *RGASPI f. 88, op. 1, d. 958, ll. 2-5.*

⁹⁰⁸ Abdullin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, pp. 33-34; Chudakova, *Chizhik-ptichka c kharakterom*, pp. 273-276; Dunaevskaia. *Ot Leningrada Do Kënigsberga*, p. 115.

⁹⁰⁹ Grossman. *Gody voiny*, p. 349.

⁹¹⁰ Glotov, *Vstrechi*, p. 22.

⁹¹¹ Vishnevskii, *Dnevnik khirurg*, pp. 229-230.

⁹¹² “Dnevnik Lutovinina Semena Mikhailovicha,” pp. 131-132.

⁹¹³ Grossman. *Gody voiny*, p. 349.

The political department encouraged units to organize workshops that could repair clothing, and commanders would often try to find various professions – e.g. tailors, barbers or craftsmen to make their lives easier.⁹¹⁴ Self-sufficiency became an increasing priority, touching all aspects of a soldier's life.

Soldiers were expected to find their own wells, yet the state was concerned with hygiene. Soldiers were supposed to bathe every ten days, their clothing being deloused in special rooms. These bathhouses took the form of either a specially constructed bunker with running water and an oven or travelling tents.⁹¹⁵ Being able to wash was a real joy, as it rescued soldiers from lice and the possibility of contracting typhus. However, women often found themselves in an awkward situation, being forced to bathe with men or wait last in line, when they might no longer be any hot water.⁹¹⁶

Outhouses are seldom mentioned in memoirs and absent from manuals, but obviously had a presence. Indeed the few references to urination and defecation among soldiers highlight the lack of privacy in the army. Boris Suris confided to his diary that in his training camp the bathroom was the only place where one could get any privacy.⁹¹⁷ In the field, such privacy was rare, as Irina Dunaevskaia recorded an entire squad, in ranks, peeing in one puddle in the middle of the road.⁹¹⁸ Vera Malakhova recalled the particular suffering of women on the march:

You'd be marching along, exhausted, worn out beyond belief. Suddenly you'd have the urge to go, but how could you? And they [older soldiers- BMS] "saved" us... It was dangerous to go off somewhere, because sometimes there were mines. So the three of them would stand up, turn their backs to us, open their greatcoats wide, and say: "Dear daughters, go ahead, don't be bashful. We can see that you can't march any further." So we would squat and then pee, and sometimes... But otherwise you would have to hold it in, and of course your bowels suffered and all the rest. If you could manage to find some bushes, then you could... Your stomach would hurt, your bladder would be bursting, you simply couldn't march another step.⁹¹⁹

At Stalingrad, one commander couldn't help but chuckle at toilet humor:

Take this for example. Here is war and here you laugh at the same time. Here tanks are coming at you. A guy went to the bathroom around our command point. Before he went to the bathroom, he checked – are they flying, and then slipped into the outhouse."⁹²⁰

Whatever you did in the bunkers, trenches or on the road, chances are you wouldn't be doing it alone and unobserved.

Soul

Red Army units had a special section *SMERSh* (*Smert' shpionam* - "Death to Spies") dedicated to finding spies and traitors in the active army and rear. Known colloquially as *osobisty* ["specials" – as *SMERSh* was also known as the "Special Section" – *osobyi otdel*], these often unpopular men were part of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs

⁹¹⁴ E.g. Tokarev, *Vesti denvnik na fronte zapreshchalos'*, p. 140.

⁹¹⁵ *Instruktsia po rabote pokhodnoi banno-dezinfekstionno-prachechnoi ustanovki (BDPU) Volkhovskogo fronta* (Moscow: Medgiz, 1943); "Polevye bani-prachechnye," *Krasnaia zvezda*. 01 July 1942, p. 3.

⁹¹⁶ E.g. Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrad do Kënigsberga*, p. 187.

⁹¹⁷ Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 34.

⁹¹⁸ Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrad do Kënigsberga*, p. 178,

⁹¹⁹ Malakhova, "Four Years a Frontline Physician," p. 200; Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrad do Kënigsberga*, p. 333. The author describes risking her life to gain privacy, crawling out of the trench to relieve herself at night.

⁹²⁰ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 14, l. 13.

(NKVD), a continuation of prewar surveillance that embedded itself organically in any Soviet institution. *Osobisti* and sometimes political officers recruited soldiers to observe and report back on their comrades, and occasionally to create provocations to see who had doubts, or make surrender to the enemy difficult or impossible.⁹²¹ These men listened carefully to conversations and reported back in detail any anti-Soviet sentiments, conspiracies to desert to the enemy or cases of panic and cowardice. Every unit would send regular reports of “extraordinary occurrences” to the Political Department of the army, and these men, alongside political officers and agitators seem to have been the front line of state surveillance. Gripping and complaining is a norm in any army, but in the Red Army this could lead to serious results, as poet and veteran Boris Slutskii recorded in a poem about a machine gunner:

For three jokes, facts of three,
he will never see tomorrow.
He no longer sows or reaps,
he won't tell a fourth joke.⁹²²

However, soldiers who seemed to be on the verge of surrendering to the enemy could redeem themselves in battle, as the story of Red Army Man “Chechen” reveals. Under investigation for reportedly declaring that the food was so bad he was ready to desert to the enemy and on the eve of the epic battle of Kursk that: “I am already in my sixth year of service in the Red Army, and I’ve had enough of this service. Let someone else serve. The Germans are stronger than us, and our Allies aren’t interested in the USSR winning, so there is nothing to hope for...” He was pardoned when he inspired a group of cowering soldiers to open fire with his “heroic example.” Redemption was possible, but difficult to achieve, and some informants hunted those who would desert to the enemy.⁹²³ This war was in many ways a battle for souls, and the army’s political section sought to reveal to soldiers what was at stake in this war. When one’s life was on the line, the temptation to flee the front or desert to an enemy who bombarded soldiers with pamphlets was palpable.

The creativity shown by some political officers in arranging the free time of soldiers and attempting to influence them could be truly impressive. For example Izer Aizenberg, a regimental agitator, devised an “*agitkult’chemodan*” (“cultural agitation suitcase”) that he compared to an “illusionist’s case”. Aizenberg described the contents of and scuttlebutt around his case:

It works out like this: one group takes a map, hangs it up and starts to trace their fingers around cities the Germans have bombed and where our pilots are bombing. They take an interest in other theatres of the war, ask what is happening in Tunisia and so on. Another group plays checkers, a third reads brochures – riddles and songs, and laugh jollily. Serious brochures are read in the corner. In the case there is paper and envelopes, they take the paper and write a letter home or turn out a combat sheet [*boevoi listok* – a short form of propaganda produced by soldiers themselves- BMS]. There is also a mirror. Sometimes a line forms when you take out this mirror: one comes up to it – “Let me have a look at myself”, another “I’m overgrown, let me have a look”. At the height of this work the agitator

⁹²¹ Tokarev, *Vesti dnevnik na fronte zapreshchalos’*, p. 40; Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 91.

⁹²² Boris Slutskii, *Ia izlagaiu istoriiu...* (Moscow: Pravda, 1990), p. 70.

⁹²³ For a rare and fascinating look at the work of SMERSH informants, see TsA FSB Rossii, f. 14, on. 5, d. 13, ia. 291, 299–309, and TsA FSB Rossii, f. 41, on. 102, d. 268, ia. 159–161, in Zhadobin, *et al.*, “*Ognennaia duga*”, pp. 126-131.

asks for everyone's attention and holds a 10-15 minute discussion or reads an interesting article.⁹²⁴

Captivating props allowed political officers to influence soldiers and explain events on their front and around the world. The state also sent musical instruments (particularly accordions and harmonicas), travelling theatres and musicians and even organized talent shows among the soldiers themselves. The military press encouraged the creation of such mobile libraries and some agitators gathered collections of literature in the languages of "non-Russians" as part of a larger effort to help integrate these soldiers into the largely Slavic culture of the army.⁹²⁵ Even under the primitive conditions of a world constructed by the soldier's small spade the Soviet project of enlightenment and shaping the individual found its place.

Political officers feared that bored soldiers could become a liability, and melancholy would overtake them. As Shcherbakov warned: "If we don't keep him busy, he'll start thinking about how things are at home, how his family is doing, etc.... It is of the utmost importance that the Red Army man in the foxhole and the bunker has something to read."⁹²⁶ Articles in the military press vaunted the patriotic worth of Russian literature, highlighted exemplary texts about the war and provided models for soldiers, such as the Soviet Classic *How the Steel Was Tempered*.⁹²⁷ These efforts met with mixed success and soldiers often complained that they had little or nothing to read to the very end of the war.⁹²⁸ Collective reading of political literature or letters from home became a common pastime, with officers and soldiers encouraged to involve themselves in the private lives of their comrades.⁹²⁹ The world built by the spade had little place for privacy – the battlefield exploits, opinions, love affairs and hygienic practices of a soldier were all exposed to the judgment of and possible surveillance by his or her comrades.⁹³⁰

The particular ambience of the dugout – that intimate relatively safe space so close to death was recorded in songs⁹³¹, interviews and memoirs. As one female scout remembered: "The dugout was very dimly lit with oil wick lamps, filled to the brim with

⁹²⁴ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 16, ll. 73-74.

⁹²⁵ Amanzhalov. *Iz opyta politiko-vospitatel'noi raboty sredi boitsov nerusskoj natsional'nosti v dni velikoi otechestvennoi voiny*; A. Shipov. Bilbioteka agitator tov. Muzafarova. *Bloknot agitatora Krasnoi Armii*. 1943:25, pp. 21-24; Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrad do Kënigsberga*, p. 93. For more on the "non-Russians" see Brandon Schechter, "'The People's Instructions': Indigenizing the Great Patriotic War Among 'Non-Russians,'" *Ab Imperio*, 2012:3, pp. 109-133.

⁹²⁶ RGASPI f. 88, op. 1, d. 973, l. 8.

⁹²⁷ See e.g. L. Timofeev, "Patrioticheskaia sila russkoi literatury," *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1943: 12, pp. 13-20.

⁹²⁸ E.g. NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 30, d. 23, l. 4: "We get front and army level newspapers, we get central newspapers too, but the newspapers lag behind. We don't see any journals, we are sick of it. No periodicals, every once in a while we get *notebooks* [a periodical for agitators]. *Bolshevik* we rarely see, we don't have any historical journals."

⁹²⁹ E.g. A. Shipov. "Patrioticheskoe pis'mo". *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*. 1943:13-14, pp. 38-41. N. D'iakonov. "Zametki o roli ofitsera kak vospitatelia," *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1944:15-16, pp. 25-29.

⁹³⁰ E.g. "Kak deistvovat' v boiu," *Bloknot agitator Krasnoi Armii*. 1942:14, pp. 8-10; Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrad do Kënigsberga*, p. 112; Lev Kopelev. *Khranit' vechno*. T.1. (Moscow: TERRA, 2004), pp. 113-115.

⁹³¹ None more famous than "V zemliake", which begins with a description of a lamp flickering in a tight bunker and climaxes with the singer proclaiming that his love is far away but that "Death is only four steps away." Lukovnikov, *Druz'ia-odnopolchane*, pp. 54-56.

people. You can't imagine how loud it was, and so much smoke that you could hang an axe."⁹³² The bunker was the space where soldiers wrote their loved ones, thought of home and socialized. As Boris Suris recorded in his diary:

Its always jolly and lively at our place, sometimes the operations guys come, saving themselves from the boredom that rules their section, sometimes scouts in white camouflage suits bring a report, sometimes we suddenly get crowded with guests from the neighboring outfit.⁹³³

Boris Slutskii frequently used the bunker as a motif in his poetry, musing on how officers imagined themselves in a Moscow restaurant while sitting in their bunker, or simply reflecting that "No one has forbidden us to live well!" A typical line reads as follows:

And we're alive. We wait for lunch.

And in the meantime, we argue, banter, fool around.

We are glad that we aren't under the rain.

And are used to the fact that we are under fire.⁹³⁴

One veteran even recalled the homey smell of Red Army bunkers as opposed to the stench of German dugouts: "Our bunkers were filled with the tart fumes of *makhorka* [cheap soldiers' tobacco- BMS] and the aroma of bread [*khlebnyi dukh*]."⁹³⁵ Unlike the trenches, where total concentration was needed, the bunker was a domesticated space separated, albeit by a small margin, from the space of killing and dying.

It was also where the state attempted to influence them via agitation and propaganda and finally, where they would share stories about their experiences. Even in the chaotic conditions of Stalingrad, with its near constant combat, a political officer explained that soldiers

...siting in foxholes and dugouts in constant battle, need some relaxation, they need time to relax and let it all out, to get dry, warm, write a letter somewhere, bandy a few words with their comrades... share their impressions. This was also very important: through the exchange of experiences from mouth to mouth fighters helped each other.⁹³⁶

In these tight quarters the sharing of experiences went beyond veteran soldiers instructing newly arrived reinforcements in the tricks to staying alive and becoming a hero. Many urban youth were first exposed to the peasantry that still demographically dominated the country. They might hear different versions of the Civil War,⁹³⁷ folk tales, or entirely different concepts of biology.⁹³⁸ Educated people from good families became friends with professional criminals, sharing stories about their prewar lives.⁹³⁹ Kazakhs or Uzbeks might sing their traditional songs, to the amusement or bemusement of their comrades.⁹⁴⁰ All of the diversity of the country came together in these bunkers, and in the need to while away the sometimes interminable hours between battle and training, their was little else to do but talk, read and write.

⁹³² NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 13-b, ll. 86-7.

⁹³³ Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 67.

⁹³⁴ Slutskii, *Ia istoriiu izlagaiu...*, p. 83, see also p. 63.

⁹³⁵ Kopelev, *Khranit' vechno. T.1*, p. 14.

⁹³⁶ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 2-a, l. 58.

⁹³⁷ Slezkin, *Do voini i na voine*, pp. 420-421.

⁹³⁸ Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, pp. 206-210.

⁹³⁹ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 13-b, ll. 86-7, 104; Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Königsberga*, pp. 71, 137.

⁹⁴⁰ Samoliiov, *Podennye zapisi. T.1*, pp. 177.

Bunkers could be the loneliest places or replace a lost sense of family for the soldier. Viktor Kiselev complained of an every-man-for-himself attitude in his rear area training camp.⁹⁴¹ Irina Dunaevskaia was kicked out of a bunker because her bunkmate “didn’t want to acquire cultured habits,” something she was relieved about, as she was also afraid of acquiring her comrade’s coarse manners.⁹⁴² Her tendency to keep her council would later draw the negative attention of other comrades sharing her bunker.⁹⁴³ For other soldiers, the closeness of the front was a balm to their souls. Veteran Luzhbin wrote in his diary, that close friendship, while not easy to come by, served as both a substitute for families left at home and as a guarantee of combat effectiveness:

Every soldier and commander of our army carries in their heart a burning love for their family, their mother and father. But their families are not at the front and they shift this it onto each other, on their strong, brave and good comrades.... You mourn the loss of a fighting comrade that same as the loss of a passionately loved girlfriend, a first love. And this earnest, gigantic strength of love bonds together a unit with a firm, militant friendship and works true miracles – it brought us victory.⁹⁴⁴

However, not all intimacy at the front was welcome. As I have already described in Chapter One, the bodies of female soldiers were often viewed as the property of commanders. The intimate space of the bunker was where either by mutual affection, continual harassment, or worse, men and women entered into relations. Many soldiers recorded in their diaries the primacy of sex in soldiers’ discussions and that many men doubted that a woman at the front could stay single.⁹⁴⁵ The closed quarters of men and women often led to uncomfortable moments for women, as one girl at the front confided to her diary:

At night, as if an insane dream, I hear impassioned whisperings: “I love you and will never leave you alone. Attempts to embrace and kiss and that moaning prayer to give him my lips. I felt that I had no strength to stop this person... and felt so insulted – I had never been so wronged in all my life – that I wept uncontrollably.”⁹⁴⁶

Other women also reported being sexually harassed in bunkers.⁹⁴⁷ Occasionally, girls⁹⁴⁸, particularly elite status ones such as snipers, were given special accommodations, in what could be jokingly called “the harem.”⁹⁴⁹ Sex at the front could lead to serious indiscipline, such as soldiers who should be on watch having sex. One wry chauffeur noted: “Such a case, it seems, has not been foreseen even by our ubiquitous military regulations. It is necessary, apparently, to add to it: ‘it is forbidden to f*ck sentries.’”⁹⁵⁰ Girls in the army were often

⁹⁴¹ Kiselev, “Voina i zhizn’ v predstavlenii 20-letnikh frontovikov (iz moego dnevnika),” p. 1008.

⁹⁴² Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do K nigsberga*, p. 94.

⁹⁴³ Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do K nigsberga*, p. 112.

⁹⁴⁴ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 1, d. 7, l. 20.

⁹⁴⁵ E.g. Komsii, “Dnevnik 1943-1945 gg.,” p. 60: “They talk mostly about women in their free time. They are great guys, but the war has ruined them quite a bit.” Atabek, *K biografii voennogo pokoleniia*, makes frequent mention to her comrades doubts that she will stay true to her man, and frequent attempts to seduce her. See e.g. pp. 85, 90, 97, 98, 102, 107, 134-5.

⁹⁴⁶ Atabek, *K biografii voennogo pokoleniia*, p. 237.

⁹⁴⁷ See e.g. Nina Ivanovna Kunitsina. Interview by A. Drabkin. *Site Ia pomniu*, <http://iremember.ru/letno-tekh-sostav/kunitsina-nina-ivanovna.html>, accessed 09 December 2013.

⁹⁴⁸ In Chapter 1, I explain that women in the army referred to themselves as “girls”. “Women” implied sexual promiscuity.

⁹⁴⁹ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 3, l. 7ob.

⁹⁵⁰ Kovalevskii, “Nynche u nas peredyshka...” pp. 104-105.

forced to regulate their actions very strictly or risk being seen as sexually available, and many women found it necessary to set strict boundaries immediately.⁹⁵¹

While talk about women and promiscuity was common, many soldiers noted that the presence of women was looked upon fondly as a way of softening the harsh conditions of the front. One commander told the Mints Commission in 1944 that: "At the front, at headquarters, in the hospital and in the trenches our girls are the only pure souls..."⁹⁵² Women in the army often fulfilled traditional gender roles, something that could lead to correctives from the military press:

In a number of units a wholly unnecessary "division of labor" has been established. Girls do the laundry for all soldiers, wash the floors of bunkers and garrisons of men, and men-soldiers start up the stoves in the dormitories of girls. Such a relationship to girl-soldiers weakens military discipline.⁹⁵³

Despite being a breach of discipline, it was precisely these hints of civilian (i.e. "normal") life that caused many soldiers to remember their female comrades fondly.⁹⁵⁴ Any reminder of home could distract soldiers from the hardships and constant danger of the front. These dangers remained inescapable, and those comrades who had made today bearable could be gone tomorrow without a trace or buried without ceremony.

The Dead

The dead became part of the landscape, haunting the memories of friends and leaving unavoidable traces of their existence. Under combat conditions it was often impractical to remove the dead. Loginov recalled a common occurrence: "From no man's land a little wind blows, bringing the slightly sweet smell of corpses, filling the trench."⁹⁵⁵ Nikulin noted an even more macabre experience on the Leningrad Front in his 1942 diary:

A corpse smells intolerably. There are many of them here, old and new. Some are dried and black, like a mummy with shining teeth. Others have swelled as if they are about to burst. They lay in different poses. Some inexperienced soldiers dug themselves a niche in the sandy walls of the trench, and the earth, crumbling from a near by explosion, buried them alive. And so they lay, all curled up, as if sleeping under a thick layer of sand. The picture looks like a grave cut down the middle. Here and there in the trench parts of bodies trampled into the clay stick out – a spine, a flattened face, a hand – all brown in color like the earth. We walk directly on them.⁹⁵⁶

Reports found that soldiers, particularly in the winter months, did not rush to bury their friends, which could lead to fears of epidemics during the spring thaw.⁹⁵⁷ The bodies left on the battlefield could attest to different units that had passed through, particularly if they had distinctive uniforms (such as Naval Infantry), and also attested the length of

⁹⁵¹ See e.g. NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 8, ll. 5, 9, 12ob.-13.

⁹⁵² NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 4, l. 7ob.

⁹⁵³ K. Kniazeva, "Vospitanie devushek-voennosluzhashchikh," *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1944:15-16, p. 23.

⁹⁵⁴ Yakupov, *Frontovye zarisovki*, p. 104.

⁹⁵⁵ Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, p. 10.

⁹⁵⁶ Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, p. 79.

⁹⁵⁷ TsAMO RF f. 208, op. 2563, d. 48, ll. 64-75 in Veshchikov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, p. 239.

battles that traversed several seasons.⁹⁵⁸ These men and women decomposed into the landscape yet left traces of themselves everywhere. Many observers found the attitude of soldiers to the dead unconscionable.

Vasili Grossman, writing about the fate of a corpse that had lain frozen for two days in the winter of 1942, exclaimed:

...No one wants to bury him – laziness. He has bad comrades!... Too often one is forced to observe the approach of reserves to the front, reinforcements passing recent battlefields among unburied dead, scattered all over. Who knows what is happening in the souls of those people, going to take the place of those lying on the snow?⁹⁵⁹

Shortly before Grossman put his rage to paper, an army-wide order had called for the standardization and organization of burial of soldiers, noting that:

The burial of the dead in battle often takes place not in mass graves, but in foxholes, fissures and dugouts. Individual and mass graves are not registered, not marked on maps and not properly formalized.⁹⁶⁰

The order noted that in not providing a proper burial, the army was missing an opportunity to “mobilize the masses of Red Army soldiers for the decisive battle with Germano-Fascist Invaders, to engender in the soldiers hatred of the enemy and the drive to avenge the deaths of their comrades” and that no record existed of who had died or where they were buried.⁹⁶¹ Despite orders to the contrary, many soldiers would come to their final rest in the foxholes and dugouts they had built, unmarked and unknown. Under these conditions, the spade became the tool that committed soldiers’ bodies to the earth.

This continued to be an issue throughout the war, with Mikhail Kalinin telling agitators to “cultivate respect for the dead among Red Army men, to honor them”. Soldiers were supposed to bury their comrades and turn maintenance of the graves over to members of the Young Pioneers (a co-ed Soviet equivalent of the Boy Scouts).⁹⁶² An article in *Krasnaia Zvezda*, the daily newspaper of the army, pointed out that some municipalities had allowed gravesites to become overgrown by as early as 1943.⁹⁶³ One veteran noted how a town swallowed by war disappeared, and with it all knowledge of the mass graves there.⁹⁶⁴ Even when the desire to provide a proper burial was apparent, the logistics of burying so many soldiers so quickly could prove daunting. A report from the Karelian Front described how Burial Teams [*pokhoronnaia komanda*] during a successful offensive dug properly formatted graves with markings rather than in simple pencil, leading to these men falling 20-40 kilometers behind their units.⁹⁶⁵ All valuables belonging to soldiers were to be sent to their families, including medals, which often took the place of remains as families mourned. Exact locations of place of burial (at least in which mass grave their loved one

⁹⁵⁸ Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, p. 56.

⁹⁵⁹ Grossman, *Gody voiny*, p. 334.

⁹⁶⁰ TsAMO f. 32, op. 920265, d. 4, ll. 275-276 in N. I. Borodin, et al., *Glavnye Politicheskie Organy Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine 1941—1945 gg.*, pp. 97-98.

⁹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

⁹⁶² M.I. Kalinin, “Slovo agitatora na fronte,” *Bloknot agitatora Krasnoi Armii*, 1943:13, pp. 9-13; p. 13.

⁹⁶³ L. Zheleznov, “Mogila voina,” *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 21 oktiabria 1943, p. 3.

⁹⁶⁴ Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, p. 76.

⁹⁶⁵ TsAMO RF f. 214, op. 1470, d. 308, l. 340 in Veshchikov, et al., *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 616-617.

lay) were to be provided to relatives.⁹⁶⁶ However, even orders from 1945 sought to correct the failures of those committing soldiers to the earth to properly fulfill their task.⁹⁶⁷

On January 26, 1945, artilleryist Viktor Kiselev wrote in his diary that the attitude toward the dead was both demoralizing and divided ethnic groups:

By the way, to an inexperienced person, it could seem that the losses of the German were minuscule, because their corpses are much fewer than ours. The thing of it is that the Germans have a custom of taking away their dead to bury them in the Motherland. Their soldiers are severely punished if they retreat without taking the body of their commander. And what do we do? Russians have nothing like this respect for the dead, and not for nothing you see so many neglected, uncared for bodies in the fields and on the roads. Every one who walks by wrinkles their nose and expresses their indignation ("why haven't they been buried yet?"), but himself doesn't lift a finger, covers their nose and walks by. And only among *natsmen* [an often derogatory term for national minorities- BMS] (Uzbeks, Kazakhs, people from the Caucasus) do we see this noble custom...⁹⁶⁸

Soldiers might be forgiven for being overwhelmed by the number of their dead comrades surrounding them and wanting to avoid such pungent reminders of their own possible fate. Red Army soldiers had seen, and often later witnessed the destruction of, neatly formatted German cemeteries.⁹⁶⁹ Some claimed that this disparity inspired them to pay more attention to how they buried their own.⁹⁷⁰

Many soldiers put considerable effort into the graves they provided their friends. A Do-It-Yourself ethos was common here as elsewhere. Often only one's closest comrades knew where a soldier had been buried and provided details of burial to a comrade's family.⁹⁷¹ Vasilii Chekalov ordered soldiers under his command to build a monument to a close friend who had been killed.⁹⁷² Tatiana Atabek noticed the considerable effort made by troops in elite technical branches in her diary in March of 1944:

I have noticed that tankers have their own manner of burying their comrades (they use tank tracks as a fence) as opposed to artilleryists, who cordon off their graves with casings from artillery shells. Not far from us two Guards tankers are buried. So that no one could step a foot on the ground near their grave, it is surrounded by the track of their once fearsome tank.⁹⁷³

Graves such as this were much more conducive to the pedagogical role the dead were supposed to play in soldiers' lives. Loginov recalled a "lesson of bravery" when his soldiers stopped for a moment of quiet, ceremonial contemplation in front of the graves of soldiers who had perished a year before.⁹⁷⁴ Nikolai Inozemtsev recorded that at the burial of his close friend (the third to die in the course of a single operation), three salvos were fired at

⁹⁶⁶ Zheleznov, "Mogila voina".

⁹⁶⁷ TsAMO RF f. 243, op. 2963, d. 98, ll. 21-21ob. in Veshchikov, *et al. Tyl Krasnoĭ Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 645-646.

⁹⁶⁸ Kiselev "Voina i zhizn' v predstavlenii 20-letnikh frontovikov (iz moego dnevnika)," p. 1023.

⁹⁶⁹ E.g. TsA FSB Rossii f. 40, op. 16, d. 3, ll. 175-177, in Zhadobin, *et al.*, "Ognennaia duga," p. 102; RGASPI f. 644, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 16-17.

⁹⁷⁰ Reutov, *Gvardeets*, p. 87.

⁹⁷¹ *Pis'ma s fronta 1941-1945gg. Sbornik dokumentov.* (Kazan': Gasyr, 2010), pp. 68-69.

⁹⁷² Chekalov, *Voennyi dnevnik*, pp. 349-350.

⁹⁷³ Atabek, *K biografii voennogo pokoleniia*, p. 113.

⁹⁷⁴ Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, pp. 25-26.

the German lines, realizing Soviet propaganda about using burials to instrumentalize vengeance.⁹⁷⁵

The constant proximity of death and the dead could have a dramatic effect on soldiers' subjectivity. Anatoly Genatulin wrote that he couldn't feel the same depth of feeling for dead at the front, having become used to the dead "my boyish soul didn't so much harden, as much as learned to live with it [death] or became numb." He explained that it was perhaps his youth that didn't allow him to feel for the dead or perhaps "because I was one of them, I was shell shocked and survived by some miracle" that his joy at being alive overtook his pity for those dying around him.⁹⁷⁶ Chekalov recorded a similar feeling: "Death!? I have become so close with it that its blood freezing breath seems normal. It repeats itself everyday in hundreds of variations and tiresomely reminds us of itself. And perhaps this is exactly why you appreciate not only that which is alive, but even the dream of life, of the past."⁹⁷⁷ Soldiers on modern battlefields often became numb to death and indifferent to the dead. The simple ubiquity can explain to a certain extent the indifference of soldiers to the bodies of their comrades, particularly to the anonymous bodies littering roads and battlefields.

Nonetheless, many soldiers feared disappearing into nothingness, as if their lives had never existed.⁹⁷⁸ Reflections on the eternal nature of monuments to soldiers were common both in wartime propaganda and post-war memoir literature. The State would in many ways tie its legitimacy to a cult of the war dead and raise generations of children to venerate mass graves at battlefields that were often a short walk from their homes or schools.⁹⁷⁹ However, during the war itself, the soldier's spade was often all that was available to commit remains to the earth. The scale of events could render both the landscape and human form unrecognizable and turn people into the landscape.

Conclusion

The unimaginable scale of the Great Patriotic War – the level of destruction, number of dead and immense scope of action – is still belied by the fact that soldiers experienced this event on a very local scale. Soldiers built a front that spanned a continent, but everything they did was determined by local conditions – where the commanding heights, little river or easily visible landmarks had more sway over where and how soldiers dug their foxholes than any projections in Berlin or Moscow. Soldiers, using a standard, anonymous and easily portable object, created spaces tailored to their bodies and needs, encompassing all aspects of life and even death. They created a new sense of community in a space that was by necessity practically invisible.

⁹⁷⁵ Inozemtsev, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 218.

⁹⁷⁶ Anatolii Genatulin, "Dve nedeli", *Vot Konchitsia voini* (Moscow: Pravda, 1988), p. 92. Kovalekskii, "Ninche u nas peredyshka...", p. 71, even stated that when a shell missed you and hit someone else, that "...somewhere subconsciously the happy thought flashes that this shell or bomb didn't fall into my little hole."

⁹⁷⁷ Chekalov, *Voennyi dnevnik*, p. 233.

⁹⁷⁸ Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, p. 22.

⁹⁷⁹ See e.g. Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

Chapter 5⁹⁸⁰

“A Weapon is your honor and conscience”⁹⁸¹: Killing in the Red Army

Mansur Abdulin begins his memoirs with a reflection on the first two shots he took at the front: “War, the front is shooting. From mortars, machine guns, submachine guns, artillery pieces... I took my first shot in combat on November 6th, 1942 on the South-Western Front...” His unit, recently arrived at the front was cobbled together from men who had not seen combat. He describes in great detail how he stalked enemy soldiers, then, shaking and sweating uncontrollably, pulled the trigger and missed. A total loss of composure immediately followed, sending him to the bottom of his foxhole on the verge of tears and filling him with self-loathing. He feared that he would die uselessly, “without killing at least one of them” and that his comrades would see him quivering at the bottom of the trench. Then he gathered himself together and coolly took aim, pulled the trigger and saw an enemy soldier crumple like a rag doll. The commissar of his unit arrived shortly thereafter, awarding Abdulin with a signed notebook, inscribed with the date, front, place of Abdulin’s kill and recording that “Abdulin, Mansur Gizatulovich, was the first to open his combat tally [*boevoi schet*], destroying a Hitlerite in honor of the twenty-fifth anniversary of [the] Great October [Revolution].” Abdulin was immediately chosen as the *partorg* of his regiment and wrote his father with pride that he had killed one fascist “for myself, so that it won’t be upsetting just in case [I don’t come home]...”⁹⁸²

Between 1941-1945, millions of other soldiers would be faced with the same moment of truth in which their ability to kill would improve both their chances of surviving and their social standing. Killing was a duty in the Red Army: the inability to kill was scorned and soldiers were encouraged to keep competitive tallies of their kills. The state provided soldiers with uniforms, rations and the means to create shelter in order to use their weapons to defend the country and destroy the enemy.

Yet many soldiers were not up to the task. A few months before Abdulin took his first shot, a battalion commander complained to war correspondent Vasili Grossman:

You have to be very brave to take an aimed shot in battle. Sixty percent of our soldiers have not taken a single shot since the war began. The war goes on because of heavy machine guns, battalion mortars and the bravery of a few individuals. I have decided that in my battalion we should clean rifles before battle, and check afterwards. Didn’t shoot – means that you are a deserter. I am brave enough to say that we have been in a bayonet battle, and look for yourself, we don’t have any bayonets. I am quite afraid of spring, once it gets warm the Germans will chase us around again.⁹⁸³

The Red Army was forced to take undertrained soldiers like Abdulin and turn them into efficient killers, often providing much of the training directly at the front.

⁹⁸⁰ This chapter owes part of its inspiration to the attention to objects shown by Bruno Latour as mentioned in the introduction to this volume. It also builds on the work done by Anna Krylova on the relationship between soldiers and their weapons.

⁹⁸¹ *Frontovoi tovarishch*, pp. 37-38.

⁹⁸² Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, p. 4, 11-13 . A *partorg* was a soldier charged with maintaining the party organization in a military unit after the elimination of dual command and reduction of the role of commissars in the Red Army.

⁹⁸³ Grossman, *Gody voyny*, p. 339.

In the previous chapter, we have seen how these soldiers avoided death. In this chapter we will explore how soldiers used the arsenal of the Red Army to become the agents of death. Killing was celebrated, yet the difficulty of getting men and women to pull the trigger is a problem that all armies were forced to grapple with. Red Army propaganda emphasized the superiority of Soviet armaments, but reminded soldiers that “machinery [*tekhnika*] without people is dead,” weapons without skilled people willing to use them were nothing more than metal and wood. The Red Army put particular emphasis on battle as a great test of wills, repeating that “battle is the greatest test of moral, physical qualities and toughness of a warrior,” a phrase taken from combat regulations and circulated in propaganda texts.⁹⁸⁴ Soviet tactics put heavy emphasis on “close combat” [*blizhnii boi*], engaging the enemy at the closest distance and as aggressively as possible, using bayonets, grenades and close range fire to destroy an enemy softened by artillery and armor. These conditions made combat particularly stressful and failure to pull the trigger fatal.

This chapter is divided into two sections. In Section One, I will examine both the universal and specific problems that the Red Army faced in motivating its soldiers to pull the trigger and coordinating weapons systems. Solutions to these problems, as well as reflections on the experience of combat will follow. Section Two is a detailed inventory of the Red Army’s weapons, an examination of how soldiers used them and an exploration of the social world that these weapons fostered, both in terms of the personal relationships that soldiers had with their weapons and the communities that formed around using different types of weapons. Finally, the conclusion discusses the dramatic improvements related to armaments and the proficiency of their users in the course of the war.

Getting Soldiers to Pull the Trigger

Difficulties

Guards Colonel Momysh-uly was a proficient killer with a great amount of experience training soldiers to fight. In his writings he reflected on the importance of the human factor in getting soldiers to pull the trigger. What he describes is similar to what Abdulin experienced with his first, failed shot:

The fact is that the instinct of self preservation has two sides: the first causes a person to run to save themselves, the second causes a person to attack and defend themselves for the same purpose. I believe that we have to develop this second side of a person, to push him to defend, to attack. The self preservation instinct forces you to kill another person, and this is much harder than to die yourself. Can you find among civilians a person who could kill someone? His hands will shake and he just cannot do it, but a soldier can.⁹⁸⁵

Around the same time, S. L. A. Marshall, who interviewed thousands of combat soldiers in the US Army in the Pacific and European Theatres of Operations, was finding that the vast majority of soldiers claimed to not have been able to pull the trigger in combat, even when faced with life-threatening situations. While Marshall’s findings have been challenged and it appears likely that he overstated his case, they do fit well with descriptions from the beginning of the war from the Red Army, such as those cited above. Effective killing required training that would make the process of pulling the trigger mechanical and the

⁹⁸⁴ N. Rubinshtein, “O voinskoi vospitanii boitsa Krasnoi Armii,” *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1942:19-20, p. 22.

⁹⁸⁵ Momysh-uly, *Psikhologiya voyny*, p. 42.

fostering of sentiments that would overpower the taboo against killing and the desire to flee from the dangers of the battlefield. Soldiers needed to master their weapons and be psychologically prepared to use them against other human beings. This is a process that requires considerable time and resources, both of which were in short supply from the war's first month.⁹⁸⁶

The summer of 1941 was an unmitigated disaster for the Red Army. The loss of trained soldiers and their arms left the army in a very sad state. (See Chapter 1 for a summary of losses during the war.) Historian Anna Krylova dubbed the loss of tanks, planes, artillery and automatic weapons the "demechanization" of the Red Army.⁹⁸⁷ Alongside this demechnization the army went through a period of what I would call "deprofessionalization": the regular [*kadrovaia*] army that began the war had effectively ceased to exist. As a result, the war would be waged overwhelmingly by new draftees and reservists, most of whom had little or no experience. The difference between many of these soldiers and civilians was merely that the former wore uniforms and carried rifles. These two processes fundamentally shaped the experience of service in the Red Army and contributed to the lopsided losses suffered by the Red Army in the first year and a half of the war.

The Soviet Union lost its regular army and with it much of its most developed territory. This meant that there was virtually no time to train new soldiers in the desperate need to stop the German onslaught. In 1941, new, accelerated guidelines were issued for training Red Army personnel. These guidelines provided a month of training from the time that soldiers were inducted to their being sent to the front. Building skills from the individual soldier to the coordination of a battalion, this program covered everything from taking apart and putting together a rifle to how to decontaminate after exposure to poison gas. Rifleman were to receive 66 hours of marksmanship training and 17 hours of hand to hand combat training, while more specialized troops were to receive over 90 hours of weapons training and about half as much hand to hand combat training.⁹⁸⁸ Lack of professional cadres was something that the Bolsheviks had been dealing with since they came to power, and in many ways, the experience of the soldiers was similar to newly minted factory workers during the first Five Year Plan, as they learned on the job and worked much less efficiently than trained cadres. The important difference here was that learning on the job at war inevitably leads to much higher casualties.⁹⁸⁹

The training system devised in 1941 assumed that soldiers would be given time to acclimate and finish their preparation at the front, serving in special training units before being sent into combat. However, often there was no time for any of this and they were thrown into battle not as a unit but as individuals with minimal training and without time to form a cohesive, functional unit. Military psychologists frequently point to the

⁹⁸⁶ See S.L.A. Marshall, *Men against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command* (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 2000), pp. 54, 71, 78; Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society Revised Edition* (Back Bay Books: New York, 2009), pp. 18-36; Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face to Face Killing in 20th Century Warfare* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 64.

⁹⁸⁷ Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, pp. 30, 175-183.

⁹⁸⁸ *Programmy uskorennoi boevoi podgotovki strelkovykh podrazdelenii* (Moskva: Veonizdat 1941). V.I: p7; V.II: p. 5.

⁹⁸⁹ See e.g. David L. Hoffmann, *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow 1929-1941* (Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 73-82.

importance of a rooted community that meets a soldier's basic social needs and that it is frequently the desire not to let down one's buddies that allows soldiers to kill and commit other acts necessary to the realization of war aims.⁹⁹⁰ An order from March 16 1942 complained that the Military Districts [*voennye okruga*] charged with training soldiers as replacements for units already at the front were failing to properly prepare these soldiers, concentrating instead on forming new whole units. Once these soldiers reached the front, they were often improperly used as "faceless marching replacements": "Instead of absorbing reinforcements into units that have been sent into the division's reserve and give the divisions time to assimilate these replacements, armies and fronts send these reinforcements into battle from the march, and in so doing cause a greater number of needless losses and making these reinforcements worthless." This order called for the reduction in new units formed and a new system of taking units off of the line to receive and assimilate replacements before being bled white. In practice however, soldiers continued to be sent into combat as "faceless marching replacements."⁹⁹¹

Soldiers often failed to master the basic skills necessary to survive in their month of training. Reports from the first months of the war noted that soldiers "have not been trained to have the necessary faith in the power and potency of their arms."⁹⁹² A wide variety of sources attested to the disastrous effects that a lack of training was having on the abilities of soldiers. Not only were many incapable of effectively using their weapons, they also were ignorant of the skills necessary to survive at the front – crawling, running and digging.

Even during the largely successful winter offensive of early 1942, Oleg Reutov lamented that a battalion of the enemy (roughly 1000 men) was holding back his division (full strength 13,000, at this point likely a mere third of that number).⁹⁹³ This situation did not improve as the winter turned to spring. In his report on the failings of the 5th Army's spring 1942 operations, General Samsonov noted that the infantry in that army were inactive, refusing to attack, leading tanks to be destroyed and artillery to do most of the fighting. As a result, the technical branches suffered staggering losses. This was due to lack of communication between the various branches of service but also due to the lack of training and discipline among infantrymen. As Samsonov noted:

A significant portion of the reinforcements did not know how to use their weapons, particularly grenades. It is impossible to say that the five days of training in the division's rear was adequate. This is one of the reasons that the median number of bullets used by one active rifle in March was equal to 2.5 a day.⁹⁹⁴

Samsonov went on to note that half of the battalion and company commanders had been with the unit less than a month and a significant number of command vacancies were filled by whoever was available, even rank and file soldiers. As a result:

[C]lose combat is poorly organized... Artillery fire is not used by the infantry to support its attack, they go into assault disorganized – as a crowd, at full height, without firing, as small

⁹⁹⁰ Wm. Daryl Henderson, *Cohesion: The Human Element in Combat* (National Defense University Press: Washington, DC: 1985), pp. 10, 13-15, 19, 22-23; Grossman, *On Killing*, pp. 150-155.

⁹⁹¹ RGASPI f. 644, op. 1, d. 24, ll. 160-161.

⁹⁹² APRF f. 3, op. 50. d. 263, ll. 145-153, in Kudriashov, *Voyna*, p. 60.

⁹⁹³ Reutov, *Gvardeets*, p. 68.

⁹⁹⁴ APRF f.3 op.50 d.266 l.82-99, in Kudriashov, *Voyna*, p. 142.

groups that appear on the battlefield abruptly as noticeable groups, creating a convenient target for the enemy to open fire on..⁹⁹⁵

These suicidal frontal assaults would become the cornerstone of the racialized image of a mindlessly advancing horde popularized by Germans and then later largely accepted by Americans during the Cold War.⁹⁹⁶ These problems haunted the army through 1942, as a General at Stalingrad noted during the November counter-offensive:

[W]eak use of all of the power of infantry fire; the infantry as before continue to hope that all tasks will be solved by the artillery; the weak training of the rifleman, weak ability to run... there were incidents, when artillery decided missions by itself, without coordinating with infantry commanders. For example, the artillery hit some house, let loose a mass of fire on one house, and the infantry didn't attack that house. In general the artillery acted well during the whole operation....⁹⁹⁷

As we will see, artillerists would complain about the infantry and infantrymen about artillery throughout the war. Disorganization would also continue to be an issue, but never as severely as in 1941 and 1942, when Chekalov, an artillery officer recorded in his diary: "Analyzing what has happened, I must admit that our main scourge is disorganization, that and the lack of order and discipline. We aren't so much suffering from enemy fire, as much as from our own disorganization."⁹⁹⁸ Many of these men and women were still civilians in uniform, who had not mastered the basics of soldiering, or even how to use their weapons, let alone the more complicated coordination of weapon systems to accomplish their goals. These civilian-soldiers were often not prepared to pull the trigger and had not developed the initiative necessary (e.g. how to dig and camouflage a position that would allow them to effectively use their weapons) to survive and kill at the front while those commanding them were unable to organize and utilize the troops and weapons in their care.⁹⁹⁹

This lack of skill was compounded by a shortage of arms, machinery and ammunition that would have been crippling even for well-trained troops. The Red Army lost not only millions of soldiers in 1941 and 1942, but also the planes, tanks, artillery and weapons that they had been manning. Of 40 divisions being formed in 1941, only 10 had their full complement of weapons, with 21 having only training weapons and 9 without any arms whatsoever.¹⁰⁰⁰ Despite orders to send replacements to the front only with a full complement of arms and equipment, a number of accounts point to soldiers not receiving weapons until they reached the front, sometimes without enough to go around. Aleksei

⁹⁹⁵ APRF f.3 op.50 d.266 l.82-99, in Kudriashov, *Voina*, p. 142. Marshal Voroshilov, inspecting troops undergoing training around the same time, noted that these issues were not being addressed. Soldiers did not know how to crawl, run, dig or throw grenades properly, and were not learning to coordinate with other branches or even in groups larger than a platoon (about 40 men). AP RF f. 3, op. 50, d. 266, ll. 184-188, in Kudriashov, *Voina*, pp. 150-153. A report on the status of training and reserve units from October of 1942 found similar results, and also that the experience of the war was not being integrated into training. RGVA f. 4, op, 11, d. 72, ll. 482-485, in A. I. Barsukov, et. al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iyunia 1941 g. —1942 g.*, pp. 318-320.

⁹⁹⁶ For an excellent treatment of the crystallization of these stereotypes, see Ronald M Smelser and Edward J. Davies, *The Myth of the Eastern Front: The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Roger Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought*, pp. 153-155.

⁹⁹⁷ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 11, l. 16.

⁹⁹⁸ Chekalov, *Voennyi dnevnik*, pp. 187-188.

⁹⁹⁹ RGVA f. 4, op, 11, d. 72, ll. 482-485, in A. I. Barsukov, et. al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iyunia 1941 g. —1942 g.* p. 319.

¹⁰⁰⁰ APRF f. 3, op. 50, d. 264, ll. 144-147, in Kudriashov, *Voina*, p. 76.

Shtin, a political officer, described the extreme stress of being unarmed at the front at the war's beginning:

The newly arrived replacements burn with a desire to fight, demand weapons. I have nothing to give them. My heart is ready to break. I can't explain the cause of this outrage. I feel that somewhere there is treason, and worst of all, much panic.¹⁰⁰¹

Shtin's soldiers received rifles shortly thereafter, but rifles alone were not enough to fight with. General Samsonov's report on the failed spring offensive noted that infantry units had been reduced to less than a quarter of the number of automatic weapons assigned by regulations, greatly curtailing their ability to fight and maneuver.¹⁰⁰²

Even more dramatic were the losses in planes, tanks and artillery.¹⁰⁰³ This meant that many soldiers ended up serving in the infantry despite being highly trained.¹⁰⁰⁴ Soviet tactics and strategy relied on coordinated infantry-tank assault with air and artillery support (not unlike "the *Blitzkrieg*"). In the absence of these technical means of waging war, just as in the absence of trained cadres, soldiers were unable to function in the ways demanded of them. Assaults that would have been effective with heavy bombardment and armor presence became suicidal, and the enemy's overwhelming advantage in planes and armor meant that infantry and artillery soldiers could be strafed with near impunity and were forced to deal with fully intact enemy armor in close combat.

Often the tanks, artillery, machine guns and even rifles in the hands of skilled soldiers could not be used to their full effect due to shortages of ammunition. One infantry commander stated the simple truth in his diary in August of 1941: "At war ammunition is a soldier's life."¹⁰⁰⁵ Artillerists and army commanders frequently complained about their inability to fulfill missions and advance due to a lack of shells, which were often referred to affectionately as "nuts" or "cucumbers."¹⁰⁰⁶ This problem would never fully disappear, as bad roads could lead to serious difficulties in delivery of ammunition, particularly artillery shells, even after scarcity ceased to be a major issue.

The situation in the army was desperate in the first two years of the war, and indeed it seemed constantly on the verge of collapse. Yet as Baklanov's protagonist Major Ushakov in "*Mertvye sramu ne imut*" put it: "From experience he had long ago come to know the simple truth: if you were to add up all the defects and shortages, it becomes clear that it is impossible to wage war in this situation. Though wage war they did."¹⁰⁰⁷

Solutions

The Red Army was forced to deal with the universal issues of motivating men to kill in a specific situation of severe shortage. Training that automates the actions central to killing, observation by superiors in combat, valorizing successful kills, propaganda that dehumanizes the enemy and sanctions the failure to kill are common strategies that are

¹⁰⁰¹ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 2, d. 3, l. 4ob.

¹⁰⁰² APRF f. 3, op. 50, d. 266, ll. 82-89, in Kudriashov, *Voina*, p. 142.

¹⁰⁰³ For a masterful description of this process and its meaning to the morale and experience of Red Army soldiers, see Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, p. 176-179.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Danil Granin, Lev Slezkin and Boris Komsii all shared this fate.

¹⁰⁰⁵ NA IRI RAN f.2, r.3, op. 14, d. 2b, l. 11.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Chekalov, *Voennyi dnevnik*, p. 84; Kiselev, "Voina i zhizn' v predstavlenii 20-letnikh frontovikov (iz moego dnevnika)" p. 1017; Yeremenko, *Dnevnik*, p. 176 нет боеприпасов = нет продвижения, Lesin diary

¹⁰⁰⁷ Baklanov, "Mertvye sramu ne imut," *Voennye povesti*, p. 134.

used to motivate soldiers.¹⁰⁰⁸ The Red Army used all of these methods in ways that reflected Soviet culture and the conditions of the war.

As we have seen in Chapter One, Soviet soldiers were subjected to a very strict disciplinary regime that employed threats of terror against soldiers and their families. Soldiers were expected to turn their arms on those among their comrades who failed to fulfill their duties. Nonetheless, discipline often remained lax in an army filled with untrained and half-trained soldiers facing what looked like imminent defeat. While the threat of violence from their own comrades may have had a greater presence in the Red Army than of the armed forces of their allies, terror was clearly not an effective substitute for training.¹⁰⁰⁹

Soviet troops received a significant amount of their training at the front, something acknowledged by print material aimed at providing resources to train soldiers. In part, this was an effort to integrate the lessons being learned at the front as quickly as possible, but the main goal was to remind commanders that it was their duty to turn whatever cadres they were given into effective soldiers.¹⁰¹⁰ As we will see later, this state of affairs led to a sort of classroom atmosphere on the battlefield.

Certain types of weapons and tactics lent themselves well to undertrained soldiers while others forced the unwilling to take part in killing. The submachine gun, which was manufactured in increasing numbers as the war continued, forced a soldier to be aggressive in its use and relied on relatively simple tactics – one had only to close ground with the enemy as quickly as possible. Weapons crews were also more likely to fire due to the combination of pressure exerted by the group and dissipation of culpability for killing among all of its members.¹⁰¹¹ Finally, the Red Army reinstated a seemingly antiquated tactic as a way to get more soldiers firing and impress them with the power of their weapons: the volley. A volley is when all soldiers fire simultaneously, thus making the failure to fire very conspicuous and again dissipating any potential sense of guilt among the entire group. The volley could also offset slightly the disadvantage the army faced in terms of automatic weapons, particularly when used at close range.¹⁰¹² Most importantly, the volley was seen as a way to stave off panic in an ambush and give soldiers confidence in their weapons.¹⁰¹³ All three of these cases – the submachine gun, the crew-served weapon and the volley, underlined the importance of observation by superiors as a way to pressure soldiers into doing their part, and its counterpart – peer pressure. As Abdulin put it, “at war, to be ‘like everyone else,’ that is not worse than others, is sort of like confirming your own

¹⁰⁰⁸ Grossman, *On Killing*, p. 146, Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 75.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1969), p. 56 expresses very succinctly that terror is in fact the opposite of power: “Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power’s disappearance.” Roger Reese has effectively argued that terror was an ineffective means to motivate soldiers to fight. Reese, *Why Stalin’s Soldiers Fought*, pp. 151-175.

¹⁰¹⁰ See Chapter 1.

¹⁰¹¹ Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 75; Grossman, *On Killing*, p. 153; Marshall, *Men Against Fire*, p. 57. notice that this is exactly what Vasilii Grossman’s interviewee said at the beginning of this chapter.

¹⁰¹² L. Lubiaugan, “Zalpovy i ogon’ pekhoty,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, August 27, 1943; Bek, *Volkolamskoe shosse*, pp. 232, 240.

¹⁰¹³ RGVA f. 4, op. 12, d. 106, ll. 8-16, in A. I. Barsukov, *et. al.*, *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 i iunia 1941 g. —1942 g.*, p. 324-325; G. Morozov, “Deistvitel’nost’ ognia v boiu i mery dlia umen’sheniia poter’,” *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1943:12, p. 44.

value as a person (*polnotsennost'*)."¹⁰¹⁴ The army needed to convince its soldiers that killing was the norm and failure to do so the abnormality.

Propaganda had to persuade soldiers of their individual responsibility to kill, the power of their arms and the vulnerability and contemptibility of the enemy. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Nazis provided ample material for their own demonization. Soviet propaganda focused on what Nazi victory would mean, what occupation had wrought and the personal responsibility of the soldier to stop the Nazis. These materials graphically depicted with words and images rapes, murders, pillaging and destruction committed by the Nazis, while either implying or explicitly stating that Red Army soldiers were complicit in these crimes by retreating and leaving these populations vulnerable.¹⁰¹⁵ The only way to redemption was through killing. As the very popular and evocative poem "If you value your home (Kill him!)" graphically described, "She, who you were too bashful to kiss / That you loved so" would be "taken by force – in agony, in hate, in blood" by three Germans. The author incited the soldier to make the enemy's mother, rather than his own cry over a corpse and told:

If the German was killed by your brother,
if the German was killed by your neighbor,
It's they who are taking revenge,
And there can be no justification
To hide behind another,
For another's rifle to avenge
You have to kill the German yourself,
So kill him now.
As many times as you see him,
So many times kill him!¹⁰¹⁶

Only through killing with your own weapon could you save the honor of your beloved and avenge the deaths of those near to you. The incantation of strong emotions reaching catharsis in the act of killing was a well developed theme in wartime propaganda. In a short story "I take vengeance" a widower sees the image of his raped, murdered and mutilated wife every time he kills a German, while in another short story, "Tin-Tinych" a mild mannered schoolteacher becomes consumed by rage:

He bayoneted that vile creature with terrifying strength. For everything. For private Danilov [a fallen comrade – BMS], for his students, for flowers, for the fishermen in Astrakhan, for the steelmakers in the Urals, for the teachers in Saratov, for Donbas miners, for all Soviet people, for life on his native soil, onto which crawled this loathsome fascist beast!¹⁰¹⁷

Killing was not only a way to expiate former sins or prevent catastrophe, it was also the only way to ensure your own survival. Killing also reified membership in the Soviet community; the school teacher's act of violence is dedicated not only to his fallen comrade, but also his students and even flowers. As soldiers came to bear witness to the deaths of their comrades and see the real crimes that the Germans had committed, the desire to stay

¹⁰¹⁴ Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, p. 5.

¹⁰¹⁵ E.g. Pavel Nilin, "Sovest'," *Krasnoarmeets*, 1942: 10, pp. 8-10.

¹⁰¹⁶ Konstantin Simonov, "Ubei ego," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 18 July, 1942.

¹⁰¹⁷ Elena Kononenko, "Tin-Tinych," *Krasnoarmeets*, 1943:1, pp. 6-8. Aleksandr Chernenko, "Ia mshchu! (rasskaz gvardeitsa)," *Krasnoarmeets*, 1942:20, p. 6.

alive and the thirst for vengeance came together in ways that made killing essential.¹⁰¹⁸ Even practices that had been frowned upon earlier, such as blood brotherhood and blood-vengeance, which were common in the Caucasus, were turned to the war effort. Blood brotherhood could take the form of soldiers exchanging bullets dipped in blood while vowing to defend and if need be avenge each other, while blood vengeance, a practice that had before led to years of feuding, embedded the call to kill Germans into the ancient customs of soldiers from ethnic enclaves, appealing to personal pride and their sense of themselves as both men and representatives of a particular people.¹⁰¹⁹

“I have killed a German, and you?” was a common propaganda trope in 1942.¹⁰²⁰ The tremendous social pressure to kill was cemented by adapting to war aims a Soviet institution developed under Stalinism – shock work. Shock work made competition imperative as teams and individuals attempted to outdo each other in over fulfilling work quotas. At the front this was adapted to the *schet*, *boevoi schet* or *schet mesti*, which could be translated as “body count / score,” “battle tally” or as “balance of vengeance.” The *schet* was simply a tally of the number of enemy soldiers and enemy machinery that a soldier, tank or weapon crew had destroyed. The state even adapted the shockwork tactic of material awards of several hundred rubles for the destruction of tanks. Artillery pieces displayed their *schet* in the form of a black tank with the number of destroyed tanks written in white on the inside shield of the cannon.¹⁰²¹ Units or individual soldiers would sometimes compete for a higher *schet*, and the opening of one’s *schet* was considered to be the moment when one became a real soldier. Soldiers were sometimes provided with space for their *schet* in propaganda materials (in one document four clean pages were set aside for “My *schet*. How many Germans I have killed”).¹⁰²² This was a translation of attrition tactics into an everyday activity of killing the enemy and without a *schet*, one was not a complete person. The *schet* was how one translated hatred of the enemy into productive action; the cool-headed counterpart to rage at what the enemy had done.¹⁰²³

While all armies kill, the Red Army had a particular obsession with killing as a goal and was less squeamish than most about declaring it. This is not to say that the Red Army was *a priori* more bloodthirsty, but Red Army soldiers had borne witness to a myriad of atrocities and their particular military culture was not interested in camouflaging the language of killing.¹⁰²⁴ Many armies employ a variety of euphemisms in both official

¹⁰¹⁸ Amir Weiner, “Something to Die For, A Lot to Kill For: The Soviet System and the Brutalization of Warfare,” in George Kassimeris, ed., *The Barbarisation of Warfare* (Hurst: UK, 2006), pp. 114-115.

¹⁰¹⁹ G. Lomidze, “Druzhiba, skreplennaia krov’iu,” *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1944:18, p. 44.

¹⁰²⁰ *Frontovoi tovarishch*, pp. 89-91; *Metkuiu puliu v serdtse vraga* (Bez mesta, bez idatel’sstva), p. 34.

¹⁰²¹ RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 71, ll. 320-322, in Barsukov, et al. ., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iiunia 1941 g. —1942 g.: Dokumenty i materialy*, pp. 264-265. Shock work was most effective when it included a material stimulus, so this is a direct translation of shock work practices to the front. See Hoffmann, *Peasant Metropolis*, p. 99.

¹⁰²² *Frontovoi tovarishch*, pp. 89-91. Some have noted that the obsession with *schet* led to a dramatic over-counting of casualties inflicted on the enemy, as multiple units could claim having downed the same plane or destroyed the same tank. See e.g. Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, p. 129.

¹⁰²³ As Joanna Bourke has pointed out, body counts and a certain pleasure at killing the enemy are normal tropes in modern warfare among English speaking cultures as well. Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, pp. 20-24.

¹⁰²⁴ While the repressive organs often used euphemistic language, the military used terms such as kill, perish, die and destroy quite freely in press, reports and personal correspondences.

rhetoric and common speech to describe violence.¹⁰²⁵ In the Red Army, euphemism was seldom used to discuss dying or killing, and in fact killing the enemy was a goal even more central to the army's propaganda than holding or regaining territory, particularly in the desperate summer months of 1941 and 1942. As Momysh-uly wrote to his mistress in the war's final spring: "the results of our actions are measured not by kilometers, but by the numbers we destroy... True, while I am in awe of those who force the enemy to flee, it is better still to dictate your will – to force him to fight, not to let him run but to destroy him, so that he can never wage war again..."¹⁰²⁶ Like many professional soldiers, Momysh-uly had come to enjoy combat, and he expended significant effort in examining the thoughts of those in battle, providing a guide for soldiers to learn to kill and authors to describe the process.

Combat: Thoughts in Battle

As Momysh-uly and Abdulin have both explained, soldiers in combat often struggled with fear, which could be the source of either breaking under pressure or acts of heroism. According to Momysh-uly:

Overcoming the feeling of fear, a warrior feels himself at ease (relatively, of course) among a multitude of dangers, believes in the strength of his weapon, and rationally, cold-bloodedly, prudently acts on the battlefield. Sometimes blistering with the feeling of boiling hatred for the enemy which he has suffered, forgetting even of self preservation, he throws himself into danger and overcomes it [danger].¹⁰²⁷

Soldiers in combat were ideally supposed to be calm and collected with occasional explosions of righteous anger leading them to heroic feats. This was the ideal set forth in Soviet propaganda being echoed by a combat veteran who was often critical of how official texts portrayed battle and the soldier's psyche. An iconic wartime song, "Holy War" ["*Sviashchennaia voina*"] had as its chorus "Let righteous rage boil over like a wave."¹⁰²⁸ Other observers of their own sensations in combat described a variety of feelings from an intense lust for life under fire¹⁰²⁹ to a fatalism tempered by excitement¹⁰³⁰ or claimed that they were simply too busy to feel fear.¹⁰³¹ Marchenko, a high school principal from Odessa, wrote to his wife: "It has been my lot to live through quite a bit. But you somehow numb your nerves, ignore almost everything around you, to lose your feeling of danger and fear."¹⁰³² The heroism that soldiers were supposed to show could also manifest itself in a

¹⁰²⁵ John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: Penguin, 1978), pp. 320-322; Scary, *The Body In Pain*, pp. 65-68.

¹⁰²⁶ "Na voine rozhdatesia samaia sil'naia liubov'...": Perepiska V.P. Stroevoi n B. Momysh-uly 1944-1965 gody". *Kinovedcheskiie zapiski*, 2005:72: pp. 50-85, 56.

¹⁰²⁷ Momysh-uly, *Psikhlogiia voini*, p. 48.

¹⁰²⁸ Lukovnikov, *Druz'ia-odnopolchane*, pp. 12-14.

¹⁰²⁹ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 1, d. 7, l. 41: "Just think: by what miracle are we alive? In an instant you think: death is better than being crippled. And I have to admit, in those moments, when life is hanging by a thread and that can break at any moment, you only want to live – frantically, such a burning thirst for life, a thirst that you don't experience in everyday life."

¹⁰³⁰ Pomerants, *Zapiski gedkogo utenka*, p. 136.

¹⁰³¹ Tokarev, *Vesti dnevnik na fronte zapreshalos'*, pp. 169-170. "I am often asked, is it frightening to be in combat? I would say this: at times – yes. Battles in an offensive are very quick. And there is so much to do, that there is no time to be frightened. After a battle its even difficult to recall all of the details. But before battle you are in an anxious state. Oppressed by the unknown..."

¹⁰³² RGASPI f, M-33 op. 1 d. 853 l. 337 (Marchenko Boris).

strange indifference. Some soldiers swore uncontrollably rather than yell patriotic slogans in the heat of battle, and at times this could serve as a way of identifying comrades on dark, smoke filled battlefields.¹⁰³³ Just as there were a wide variety of people, there were a wide variety of reactions to battle. But for many, battle was enjoyable.

Lev Slezkin described the mix of fear and pleasure he experienced while fighting in a tank in a letter home to his mother:

Sometimes I wonder what I am doing. People jump out from a foxhole in front of my machine and run, run and I cold-bloodedly take aim as if it were training, cut them down with a machine gun, and when they fall I am happy. Or they set up a long antitank gun, a cannon – and you have one thought: faster, faster, and if the black smoke of an explosion takes its place – I am happy. My cause is just, noble, but regardless of the cause and how long I am doing this, I have become accustomed to it – this risky business [*azartnoe zaniatiiie*], as opposed to the down time between battles, where time passes without purpose.¹⁰³⁴

This is a fully integrated soldier, someone who had been fighting for years, describing how enjoyable the act of killing could be and the underlying truth of combat – the necessity to kill the enemy before he kills you. That a member of an intelligentsia family could speak so casually of killing to his mother far from the front lines speaks volumes to the place that this action had taken in Soviet culture in the course of the war. Soldiers described their time out of combat as times of boredom, while moments before battle or when they were under fire but unable to do anything, as terrifying.¹⁰³⁵ Battle brought a certain clarity of purpose to seasoned soldiers, where, with their weapons, they were active agents able to determine both their own fate and that of the country.

Like athletes, many described battle as simply a series of tasks in an extremely high stakes game. As Major General Skvortsov, a division commander at Stalingrad, recalled in an interview in 1943:

During battle you don't think about life or death, but rather you only think about how to complete your mission. We are military people. We are presented with a mission and the duty of every patriot is to not think about personal interests, but to think about the interests of the people, Party, government, I don't think that there are people who could be indifferent to life and death. Moments happen when it just can't enter your mind, the idea that you could be killed or wounded falls away – there is no time to think about it...¹⁰³⁶

Whether out of patriotism or love of the game, proficient soldiers came to see combat as a series of tasks to be performed – buildings to be captured, cannons to be destroyed, enemy soldiers to kill – in order to win.¹⁰³⁷ However, for much of the war, this was a highly uneven contest.

Given the tremendous advantages the German forces initially enjoyed in terms of air support and armor and the lack of arms and training of most Red Army troops, tanks and

¹⁰³³ Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, p. 46; Mansur Abdulin, *Iz vospominanii soldata. Rasskazy* (St. Petersburg.: "Del'fa R.A.," 1995) p. 11, Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kënigsberga*, p. 129.

¹⁰³⁴ Slezkin, *Do voiny i na voine*, p. 468.

¹⁰³⁵ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 11 l. 5ob. (Bernshtein Liudmilla Mikhailovna): "During battle, when you are busy, you fear nothing, but when you... lay like a fool with nothing to do at the bottom of a hole – your knees shake."

¹⁰³⁶ NA IRI RAN, f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 12, ll. 32-33.

¹⁰³⁷ See e.g. Chekalov, *Voennyi dnevnik*, pp. 149-152; G. Makhmutov, "Iz voennogo dnevnika 1941-1945 godov," *Gostinyi dvor*, 2005:16, pp. 79-80.

planes could cause panic even in small numbers at the beginning of the war.¹⁰³⁸ Propaganda materials into 1944 noted that green troops reacted very strongly to planes, tanks and artillery.¹⁰³⁹ Reutov reflected on experiencing bombardment and strafing: “You can’t break a strong-willed person with planes and mortars, but the heavy moments leave their trace.”¹⁰⁴⁰ Soldiers were trained to fire at planes with all the weapons at their disposal, even rifles, in what may have been an activity aimed more at giving them a sense of agency rather than pragmatic results. As for tanks, a special term, “tankophobia” [*tankoboiazn*] was coined to denote the special panic tanks elicited. Tanks could be destroyed but this required strong nerves. As Afanasii Svirin, head political officer of the 308th Rifle Division told the Mints Commission in May of 1943, tankophobia was liquidated by letting soldiers shoot at sheets of iron with antitank weapons to see their power and by showing soldiers how to survive an encounter with a tank: “we managed to pass tanks over the soldiers sitting in the trenches and the soldiers became convinced of the safety of sitting in a narrow hole, after which they got out and threw grenades.”¹⁰⁴¹

The advanced technologies of the 1940s certainly made combat more terrifying, but an experienced soldier ultimately knew that these monstrous machines were operated by humans who could be killed and that fleeing the battlefield merely reduced one to a defenseless target.¹⁰⁴² Standing one’s ground was the only chance one had, even if it was grimly slim. In order to advance or hold on to territory, soldiers needed to have confidence in themselves and their weapons, something seasoned commanders understood very well. This is why Abdulin’s kill, which opened this chapter, was treated with such fanfare – he had proven that the enemy was killable. This was of the utmost importance for the untested units of the rebuilding Red Army. A similar logic motivated the use of volley fire and the following statement by Major Nikolai Berestnev in 1945:

I came to the conclusion that if a person doesn’t shoot, then he is already demoralized. When a person shoots, it seems that he gains more strength. Even when you can’t see the enemy, shoot 2-3 times and some internal strength rises. I ordered everyone emphatically to open fire as we closed with the enemy.¹⁰⁴³

Waging war had a strong psychological component, but this mental aspect was intimately tied to the physical tools of the soldier – the various weapons at his or her disposal.¹⁰⁴⁴ Overcoming fear and the taboo of killing was a process that every soldier had to pass through individually, and not everyone managed to pull the trigger. Some soldiers could pull the trigger on the war’s first day, others would be unable to in May of 1945. Many paid for their inability to kill with their own lives. Battle required soldiers to overcome common psychological boundaries and extreme stress in order to use their weapons effectively and survive.

¹⁰³⁸ Grossman, anecdote about trophy tank...

¹⁰³⁹ APRF f. 3, 0-. 50, d. 263, ll. 145-153, in Kudriashov, *Voina*, p. 60; N. D’iakanov, “Zametki o roli ofitsera kak vospitatelia,” *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1944:15-16, p. 26.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Reutova, *Gvardeets*, p. 54.

¹⁰⁴¹ NA IRI RAN f.2, r.1, op. 71, d. 2, l. 1ob.

¹⁰⁴² Momyshev-uly, *Psikhologiya voyny*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁴³ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 201, d. 1, ll. 3-3ob.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Both Red Army veteran Guards Colonel Momyshev-uly and US military psychologist Lt. Colonel Dave Grossman agree that much of war is posturing and the parade is actually an extension of combat. See Momyshev-uly, *Psikhologiya voyni*, p. 40; Grossman, *On Killing*, pp. 5-17.

Frontline Learning

Given the intense interest in the soldier's psychology and the need to train at the front, the battlefield was often treated as a classroom. Soldiers and commanders were constantly reminded to expand their skills and knowledge at the front, through reading, informal sharing of experiences and seminars. Commanders were supposed to hold a meeting before a battle in which they inspected all weapons and equipment with an eye towards demonstrating the power of Soviet arms. They were then supposed to assemble their soldiers on the eve of an attack in which they "remind the soldiers of their oath, of the great liberating mission of the Red Army, show our dominance over the defensive enemy, give the fighter practical advice of how to conduct themselves in battle, remember the heroes of prior battles, call them to new feats and vengeance in the upcoming battle with the hated foe."¹⁰⁴⁵ These meetings could also include veteran soldiers sharing useful information on how to survive and stories of the terrible things that the enemy had done.¹⁰⁴⁶ During battle, soldiers were encouraged to observe and learn, while immediately after seminars were held to discuss what had worked and what had failed, but also to praise heroic soldiers and shame those who had failed to do their duty.¹⁰⁴⁷ Survivors who had made mistakes or shown cowardice were publicly humiliated, while the death of those who had shown fear or incompetence were used to teach the living. Regimental agitator Fritz Ottovich Nedra, told the Mints Commission in late 1942 about one such lesson:

One soldier told about another soldier whose rifle didn't work, using his actual name. They told him many times, that you need to clean the rifle, but he didn't follow this instruction. In one battle his rifle failed. He crawled back to get a different rifle and he was killed while doing so. Everyone else dug in and survived, but he was killed. You see he shows what discipline means.¹⁰⁴⁸

In these meetings the worth of individuals to the collective was based on effective killing. This had more than simply social dimension of moral economy: the failure of others to kill could lead to you (and your family) being killed. These meetings helped offset the lack of training that soldiers received and create a greater sense of community based on the effective use of arms.

Indeed, the ability to coolly operate a weapon and a masterful knowledge of arms was what made a real soldier. Even political officers, whose primary mission was to explain the meaning of events and inspire soldiers, were increasingly expected to be masters of the weapons their unit used, as Shcherbakov complained at a meeting of high ranking political officers in July of 1942, that often the commissars of a unit didn't know their tools:

We ask, how is it that you have fought for a year, and you don't know elementary things. Why don't you, the commissar of a tank brigade, know such basics [as the caliber of the cannon, thickness of armor, type of motor in the tanks they use -BMS]? How are you going to train soldiers, communists to fulfill their roles in combat. Bravery alone is not enough, you have to have knowledge as well.

¹⁰⁴⁵ N. D'iakanov, "Zametki o roli ofitsera kak vospitatelia," pp. 28-29.

¹⁰⁴⁶ "Kak deistvovat' v boiu (beseda komvzvoda A. Panova s mladshimi boitsami)" *Bloknot agitator Krasnoi Armii*, 1942:14, pp. 8-9.

¹⁰⁴⁷ G. Morozov, "Deistvitel'nost' ognia v boiu i mery dlia umen'sheniia poter'," *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1943:12, p. 44; D'iakanov, "Zametki o roli ofitsera kak vospitatelia," pp. 28-29; N. Rubenstein, "Zametki ob agitatsii," *Agitator i Propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1942:14, p. 47-48.

¹⁰⁴⁸ NA IRI RAN f.2, r. II, op. 16, d. 4, l. 31.

The problem of ignorance could be blamed in part on poor training materials, the result being that commissars, commanders and soldiers had to “figure out for themselves” any new piece of equipment, “And while they figure out for themselves, we lose more people than we had to, and machinery too.”¹⁰⁴⁹

Mastering weapons was everyone’s responsibility. Only via the skillful use of arms could the country be saved and greater mastery would mean less loss of life. In his May 1 1942 address to the people of the Soviet Union, Stalin exhorted soldiers of all branches of service: “Study your weapon to perfection, become experts in your work, strike the German fascist invaders until their complete annihilation.”¹⁰⁵⁰ Each of these weapons served a special purpose and each granted a soldier a particular station in the army.

Weapons: The Tools of the Trade

The Red Army’s arsenal consisted (with very few exceptions) of weapons that were effective, easy to use and easy to maintain.¹⁰⁵¹ Soldiers were, as Anna Krylova has pointed out, “partners in violence” with their weapons. The particular type of killing soldiers were supposed to do, who their intended targets were and the tactics used, depended on which weapon a soldier was using.¹⁰⁵² Different types of combat gave prominence to different types of weapons; urban environments gave primacy to grenades and arms that could be easily wielded in tight spaces, while open fields favored tanks and artillery.¹⁰⁵³ Soldiers were encouraged to use their fire to kill, but also as a means to gather information about the enemy (getting the enemy to shoot back and reveal information about themselves) and a means to undermine their morale (intermittent fire at night meant that the enemy could never truly relax).¹⁰⁵⁴ In all environments the careful coordination of specialists wielding a variety of weapons was key to victory, as the combination of artillery and armor allowed soldiers with lighter weapons to close with the enemy and destroy him at close range. Some of these weapons had been in service since the end of the previous century, others were developed during the war to fill niches discovered on the modern battlefield.¹⁰⁵⁵

While comprising an integrated system, the major branches of service; infantry, artillery, cavalry, armor, sappers and signals; all played different roles and used different tactics on the battlefield. Soldiers in signals were tasked with the establishment and maintenance of communication between commanders and units, mostly through telephone but also via radio. Sappers sowed and cleared enemy mines, built and destroyed roads and

¹⁰⁴⁹ RGASPI f. 88, op. 1, d. 948, ll. 3-5.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Stalin, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union*, p. 55.

¹⁰⁵¹ Dunn, *Hitler’s Nemesis*, pp. xviii-xix.

¹⁰⁵² Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, pp. 30-31, 173-203.

¹⁰⁵³ M. Protsenko, “Osobennosti boia v naseleennom punkte,” *Agitator i Propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1941:17-18, p. 51.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Morozov, “Deistvitel'nost' ognia v boiu i mery dlia umen'sheniia poter',” p. 43.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Please note: I will not touch upon pistols, anti-tank rifles, flamethrowers or knives. This is because pistols were the purview of either commanders or soldiers who had a different primary weapon, which is more or less true of knives as well. Flamethrowers were an irregular weapon deployed in special situations by highly trained chemical troops, meaning that I have found very few accounts by their users and that they are at the periphery of most soldiers’ experience. Anti-tank rifles (PTRD, PTRS) were giant rifles with two man crews that engaged tanks at close range, using their rifles and anti-tank grenades. I have not written about them separately as their experience would be between that of machinegunners and artillerymen.

bridges and concrete bunkers, and built a wide variety of structures. The cavalry conducted reconnaissance and deep raids into enemy territory, assaults in pursuit of a fleeing enemy, and was sometimes used to compensate for a lack of armor. Artillery was tasked with destroying enemy tanks and softening enemy positions to allow the infantry and armor to take territory and destroy the enemy. Tanks were used to assault enemy positions, both providing transport and a screen for the infantry. The infantry was tasked with taking and holding territory and was the largest, most maneuverable (horses can't negotiate barbed wire and tanks need constant resupply of fuel) and in many ways most universal branch of service. Every soldier had their own weapon and some were assigned to crews with their primary task being to service a larger weapon (e.g. cannon, machine gun, tank), using their personal weapon only in emergency situations or once the enemy closed in.

Weapons could be divided into two major categories, personal and crew-served, which encompassed very different ways of fighting and social organization. Personal weapons (rifles, submachine guns and grenades) were used by soldiers in coordinated units, but ultimately soldiers operated their own weapon and pulled the trigger (or failed to do so) as individuals. Crew served weapons (machine guns, mortars, artillery and tanks) could not be effectively operated by one individual and required significantly more training and coordination to use. While all soldiers lived and killed (and sometimes died) collectively, the crew-served weapons dictated a different set of relationships than those of soldiers who primarily used individual weapons, and it was very rare for a crew to fail to open fire. Soldiers developed significant emotional attachments to both types of weapons and defined their status and culture relative to the type of weapon they used.

Relationships with weapons

The personal weapons a soldier carried came to feel like an extension of the body. As Loginov mused, "our hands seem alien without a rifle, submachine gun or grenade in our grasp."¹⁰⁵⁶ These tools in many ways came to define their users, determining one's station on the battlefield and place within the complex social world of the army. Not surprisingly, these weapons were imbued with meaning by both the state and soldier from the moment a rifle or submachine gun was placed in a soldier's hands or a crew received their tank or artillery piece.

Great symbolic importance was attached to the moment a soldier received his or her weapon. Often accompanied by the Military Oath (see Chapter 1), a soldier was supposed to kiss his or her weapon and pledge that they would use it to effectively destroy the enemy. The weapon was the object most closely tied to a soldier's responsibility to the state and was the object with which he or she defended it. While these weapons were mass produced, they carried with them a story that made them more than simply assemblages of metal and wood. Soldiers often received "named weapons" with long histories that had been used by a soldier in the same unit accompanied by solemn ceremonies such as this model given from a propaganda pamphlet, as a wounded veteran gives his submachine gun to a new ("non-Russian") arrival:

"Repeat after me," said Savushkin. "I, Akhmetov, Kerim, Guardsman of Morozov's regiment, accept the sub-machinegun of wounded Guardsman Savushkin, Timofei, that he took from the hands of the hero and squad leader Paramonov Petr, who was killed by the enemy.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, p. 9. See Scarry, *Body in Pain*, p. 67 on this as well.

Paramonov killed 114 Germans with this weapons. Savushkin killed 121 Germans with it. I vow not to release this weapon from my hands until the complete victory over the enemy. If I am wounded, I will give this sub-machinegun, with the permission of my commander, to trusted hands that are capable of maintaining the honor of our Guards weapon.”... In this regiment the passing of honorable guards weapons [from soldier to soldier] has become a tradition. This is a good tradition and would not be bad to spread it to all regiments.¹⁰⁵⁷

By 1944, a similar ritual had made its way into the regulations of armor formations. Every time a tank crew received a new machine or an old machine received a new crew, a parade was held in which the commander of the tank read aloud the serial number of the tank, names of crew members, followed by a celebratory march, sometimes with representatives of the factory that had built it present.¹⁰⁵⁸ We see in both cases the spiritual force that a weapon was supposed to carry and the obligations it embodied, both vertical (state-soldier) and horizontal (between comrades). The ubiquity of the *schet* as the means of fulfilling this obligation is also telling, as fantastically high numbers are cited to inspire a sense of inadequacy among those who had not killed several score of the enemy. Other propaganda cited the serial number of the weapon either as a form of remembrance (e.g. “This rifle N. 1591-VB remains as a memory of Gazarov”¹⁰⁵⁹) or a way of shaming irresponsible soldiers (e.g. “Rifle N. 61823,”¹⁰⁶⁰ a short story about a rusty, abandoned rifle as the ultimate shame of a soldier).

A soldier’s fate was tied to their weapon bureaucratically, as well as rhetorically. The serial number of whatever weapons were issued to a soldier were recorded in the *Red Army Booklet* (see Chapter 1), and loss of a weapon was tantamount to treason. As an article for political officers reiterated in 1941: “anyone who allows a weapon to fall into enemy hands willingly or unwillingly becomes a traitor and betrayer.”¹⁰⁶¹ Soldiers could be executed for losing their weapons, but this was often unnecessary, because a soldier without a weapon became a “defenseless target.”¹⁰⁶² Even wounded soldiers were to keep their weapons and actively participate in combat until evacuated, and medics were under strict orders to carry both the soldier and his or her weapon from the battlefield.¹⁰⁶³ Every day in the army was supposed to begin and end with an inspection, a ritualized checking of all of a soldier’s equipment and documents. Special attention was paid to the condition of a soldier’s weapon, with punishments and public humiliation meted out to those with dirty, rusty or non-functioning pieces.¹⁰⁶⁴ A soldier’s relationship with their weapon occupied a central place in wartime propaganda, where the other side of hating the enemy was affection for the instrument used to destroy him. The successful prosecution of the war and the survival of the soldier hinged on the soldier coming to love their rifle, machinegun or tommy gun. Every weapon had its own “caprices” and veterans felt uncomfortable with a weapon they had yet to fire, a true soldier knew all the eccentricities of their rifle,

¹⁰⁵⁷ Nikolai Bogdanov, *Beregi oruzhie, kak zenitsu oka* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1942), pp. 19-20.

¹⁰⁵⁸ *BUBiMV-44*, pp. 164-166.

¹⁰⁵⁹ “Moia vintovka,” *Bloknot agitatora Krasnoi Armii*. 1943:19, pp. 23-25, p. 24.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Bogdanov, *Beregi oruzhie, kak zenitsu oka*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁶¹ P. Burlaka, “Kak zenitsu oka, berech’ beovuiu tekhniku i vooruzehniie,” *Propaganadist Krasnoi Armii*, 1941:19, p. 7

¹⁰⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁶³ *BUP-42*, p. 28.

¹⁰⁶⁴ I. Stepanenko, “Utrennie osmotry i vechernie proverki,” *Krasnaia zvezda*. 14 July 1943.

machinegun or cannon.¹⁰⁶⁵ Propaganda tracts spoke of a bond that even went beyond death, as in one case soldiers tried to take the rifle from the hands of a dead comrade “but the soldier’s hands had grown into the rifle. So the soldiers buried their comrade with his rifle.”¹⁰⁶⁶

These prescribed bonds of affection seem to have found resonance among veterans. Weapons could serve as tokens of close affection, as one commander recorded in his diary on meeting a friend who grew up in the same orphanage: “Such joy! We embraced, kissed and talked about our childhood and all our friends and comrades. When we parted ways, we exchanged weapons in honor of our friendship.”¹⁰⁶⁷ Anna Krylova has pointed out that many female soldiers described their weapons as living beings or close friends.¹⁰⁶⁸ This phenomenon was widespread among both male and female soldiers. Some soldiers dedicated parts of their memoirs to their weapons, sometimes mourning them as though they were alive.¹⁰⁶⁹ War correspondent Vasily Grossman recorded that “a cannon after battle is like a living, wounded person. The rubber on its tires is torn apart, parts crumpled and shot through with shrapnel.”¹⁰⁷⁰ Many soldiers discussed their weapons in interviews, diaries or letters home. One soldier wrote in his diary that his submachine gun was “bored from idleness.”¹⁰⁷¹ A sniper told the Mints Commission: “I know my rifle well, clean it all the time. I don’t let sand build up, like some others do. This is my faithful friend – my rifle, she defends me all my life. I even really love my sniper rifle.”¹⁰⁷² Tender words for one’s weapon were very common, and many soldiers wrote home about their arms, using terms of friendship or even romantic love. One soldier wrote home that he had met “a pretty special someone”¹⁰⁷³ - his PPD submachine gun. Love for weapons found its way into soldierly folklore, with ditties such as: “A wife gets love and affection, And a rifle gets cleaned and oiled [*Zhene – liubov’ i laska, A vintovke – chistka i smazka*].”¹⁰⁷⁴

Soldiers could have close connections with any weapon from a pistol to a howitzer. However, a crew served weapon tied together the experiences of many soldiers and often outlived them as crew members were killed and wounded or the weapon damaged and repaired. Aleksandr Kosmodem’ianskii, a tanker, wrote home to his mother that although his crew had been scattered he was happy to receive “my own old fighting machine, tested in battle, all wounded and shot through, diligently patched together in field workshops. Not for nothing has she fallen cleanly into my hands, and now she won’t get away from me, she’s going to Berlin...” He also mentioned in several letters his refusal to use other types of tanks.¹⁰⁷⁵ Despite being mass-produced and ubiquitous, these weapons felt very personal to those who wielded them. One artilleryman described the odyssey of his howitzer to the Mints Commission immediately after the war:

¹⁰⁶⁵ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 16, d. 1, l. 210b. Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, pp. 251-252.

¹⁰⁶⁶ *Frontovoi tovarishch*, p. 46.

¹⁰⁶⁷ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 14, d. 2b, l.31.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, pp. 250-251.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Faiziev, *Ognennye versty*, pp. 158-169.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Grossman, *Gody voiny*, p. 422.

¹⁰⁷¹ Indzhiev, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁷² NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 16, d. 1, l. 75.

¹⁰⁷³ RGASPI f. M-7, op. 1, d. 6387, l. 118.

¹⁰⁷⁴ David Samoilov. *Podennye zapisi*, p. 180. See also Indzhiev *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁷⁵ RGASPI f. M-7, op. 2, d. 650, ll. 87, 97, 139. This is famed partisan Zoia Kosmodemianskaia’s younger brother. He died in March of 1945 in battle in Germany.

My cannon is a 120mm howitzer, model 1938. We received her on September 3, 1941. My cannon took part in all of the battles for the duration of the division's offensive. Until October of 1942 I was a gunner [*navodchik*], and then I commanded the gun. The crew changed after almost every action [*pereplet*]. I was wounded twice, but didn't go to the hospital. Only once for seven days was I in the hospital... Our howitzer is still intact because we took good care of her and her metal is good. We make sure that the shells are clean, because otherwise the barrel can swell. True, the cannon caught it many a time, 4 or 5 times she was repaired in the artillery master's, but they never had to do an overhaul... My cannon took 10,620 shots, travelled 4,413 or 4,613 kilometers.¹⁰⁷⁶

This soldier could not tell his experience of the war separately from that of his weapon, indeed information about his cannon overtakes his own biography in his narrative and overshadows his comrades. It seems that his relationship with the tool of his trade had proven more lasting than those with his brothers in arms. These tools could inspire such strong emotions because soldiers' very lives, and the fate of the country, relied on their effective usage.

Weapons as tools I: Individual Weapons

All weapons needed to be used in coordinated efforts to be effective. The most basic building block of this endeavor was the infantry squad of 8-12 soldiers. Infantry tactics required coordinated fire as soldiers covered the advance of their comrades to destroy the enemy. The formations used by Red Army were open (at an 6-8 step interval between soldiers) and soldiers trained to quickly go from a "snake" (column used to advance, hiding numbers from the enemy) into a "chain" (a line of battle), in a way that was somewhat reminiscent of 19th Century mass-infantry formations.¹⁰⁷⁷ The squad centered around the machinegun, with most soldiers carrying rifles.

Rifles

In 1941 posters called men and women to arms in the defense of the Motherland. In virtually all of these images, the weapon being shouldered is the Mosin-Nagant Rifle M.1891/1930. Between 1941-1945, the Soviet Union produced roughly 12 million Mosin-Nagant Rifles and carbines.¹⁰⁷⁸ The *trekhlineika* ["Three Line Rifle"], and its shortened cousin the carbine, were carried by the vast majority of soldiers serving in the infantry, cavalry, artillery, sappers and NKVD during the war. A bolt-action rifle 166 cm tall, weighing 4.5 kilograms unloaded with bayonet attached, having an effective range of 800 meters and with a five-round magazine, it fired a 9.5 gram, 7.62mm caliber bullet at 865 meters per second.¹⁰⁷⁹ A soldier was expected to take 10 aimed shots a minute and carried between 100 and 170 rounds of ammunition.¹⁰⁸⁰ This rifle was the updated version of the

¹⁰⁷⁶ IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 30, d. 32, l. 1-1ob.

¹⁰⁷⁷ *BUP-42*, pp. 19, 39-48.

¹⁰⁷⁸ John Barber, Mark Harisson. *The Soviet Home Front 1941-1945: A Social and Economic History of the USSR in World War II* (London: Longman, 1991), p. 180.

¹⁰⁷⁹ *Nastavlenie po strelkovomu delu (NSD-38)* (Alma-Ata, 1941), pp. 120-121. V. Glazatov. *Vintovka i ee primenienie* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1941), p. 4 A bullet could travel up to 3,500 meters with enough force to kill a person, but was inaccurate beyond 800 meters. Further than 800 meters only heavy machineguns and artillery were used.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Glazatov. *Vintovka i ee primenienie*, p. 5; *Instruktsiia po ukladke, prigonke, sborke i nadevaniiu pokhodnogo snariazheniia boitsa Krasnoi Armii* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1941), pp. 13-14.

model 1891 rifle (the bayonet and site had been modified), and reflected what had become the world standard for infantry weapons during the First World War – bolt-action rifle with a five round magazine. Remarkably simple to operate and easy to keep clean, the Mosin-Nagant was a fine anti-personnel weapon, but those carrying them would come to feel outgunned by the tanks, planes and sub-machine guns that came to shape the battlefields of the Great Patriotic War.

Prior to the war a modern semi-automatic rifle, the SVT-40 [Samozariadnaia vintovka Tokareva obr. 1940 g.] was developed (the weapon with which Abdulin made his first kill) and nearly became the primary weapon of the Red Army.¹⁰⁸¹ However, it was found not to be sufficiently hardy, as one general reported soldiers complaining that the SVT-40 was “inadequate for combat conditions due to the complexity of its construction, unreliability and inaccuracy.”¹⁰⁸² This weapon likely proved a particular challenge to less mechanically inclined peasants and was unusually flimsy for a Soviet weapon. The SVT-40 violated the simplicity of design that was the hallmark of Soviet arms and was relatively quickly taken out of production. Simple, reliable, battle-tested weapons were favored.

The Mosin Rifle, as the most common weapon and one with significantly less firepower than many others, held a special place in wartime propaganda, and many short-form works sang the praises of this simple weapon. For example, the article “My Rifle” from 1942, after listing many weapons in the Red Army’s arsenal declares:

But in all the vast arsenal our Russian rifle occupies the most honored place. It is as if she carried the glory of our Russian arms with her. For more than half a century this rifle has served the Russian warrior. In the steppe, mountains, desert, at sea, in burning heat and fierce frost she works with equal precision and without a hitch.¹⁰⁸³

Soldiers were encouraged to think of themselves as part of a proud tradition, carrying a weapon that had been tested in battle over decades and in every condition. Its universality mirrored that of the infantry. They were also taught to think of the rifle as a weapon that, in the hands of a skilled soldier, outclassed more modern arms. The well-placed rifle could be more effective than artillery, and propaganda claimed that the enemy feared the simple infantryman with a rifle most of all:

Awe-inspiring *trekhlineika*. Our rifle is the best in the world. The German soldier is deathly afraid of a brave and skilled infantryman of the Red Army, armed with a rifle and bayonet. A fascist submachine gunner shooting at random can only scare a coward. A real warrior, confident in himself and his weapon, always wins a duel with a sub-machine gunner.¹⁰⁸⁴

The idea of the skilled, smart soldier being able to defeat better armed enemies with his bravery and craftiness was central to Red Army training materials and propaganda. While German soldiers may not have feared soldiers with rifles as a rule, snipers certainly gave them reason to expect death at any moment and keep low in their trenches.

No one proved how deadly the simple rifle could be more than snipers, who became so numerous that they were described as a “movement,” particularly in Stalingrad. Armed with a telescopic site on a regular rifle, these soldiers developed all of the skills of a regular

¹⁰⁸¹ RGVA f. 4, op. 14, d. 2736, ll. 152-172, in N.S. Tarakhova et al., “Zimniaia voina”: *Rabota nad oshibkami*. april'-mai 1940 g. Materialy komissii Glavnogo voennogo soviet Krasnoi Armii po obobshcheniiu opyta finskoi kampanii (Moscow/St. Petersburg: Letnii sad, 2004), p. 183-184

¹⁰⁸² D.N. Bolotin, *Sovietskoe strelkovoe oruzhiie* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1983), p. 68.

¹⁰⁸³ “Moia vintovka,” p. 23.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Bogdanov, *Beregi oruzhiie, kak zenitsu oka*, p. 6.

riflemen to an extreme degree, becoming masters of camouflage, expert marksmen and demonstrating a great deal of personal initiative. Stalin exhorted all riflemen to imitate the sniper.¹⁰⁸⁵ These men and women saw their enemy very clearly, silently stalking them, sometimes sitting motionless for hours at a time. Exemplary of the voluntarism and lack of professionalism in the Red Army, snipers often became specialists only at the front and at their own initiative.¹⁰⁸⁶ Snipers received a special status, with significantly higher pay and a raise in ranks that recognized skill without giving them additional responsibilities.¹⁰⁸⁷ With a *schet* numbering in the hundreds, often including enemy officers and the crews of enemy weapons such as machineguns and mortars, a successful sniper proved that with training and initiative, the soldier with a rifle could become a predator, “hunting” enemy officers and soldiers and able to kill better armed men.¹⁰⁸⁸

Snipers were also socially important, as they demonstrated that anyone could become an effective killer by mastering the most everyday weapon, regardless of race or nationality as both women and national minorities were prominently represented in Soviet propaganda that featured snipers. Poems, such as Dem’ian Bednyi’s *Semen Nomokonov*, celebrated how native peoples of Siberia, hunters in civilian life, became excellent snipers. In his poem, published in the Red Army journal *Krasnoarmeets*, Bednyi praised “the wild Tungus” Sniper Nomokonov, friend of the Russian people, who had a stick with over 320 tallies in his boot – one for each German he had killed:

No, not in vain was he born in the harsh taiga
Where he hunted beasts the way his ancestors used to
Where he himself learned to hit a squirrel with a single shot...
So as not to ruin the hide, to keep it saleable
Where he chased bears, where he gained a reputation as a valiant hunter
among the most gallant hunters
His countryman the hunters-Tungus.¹⁰⁸⁹

Those snipers drawn from the ranks of prewar hunters demonstrated the state’s desire to utilize specialized skills from a soldier’s civilian life. Snipers were often expected to teach their skills to other soldiers, and the passing of skills from one sniper to another often involved either a Russian teaching a “non-Russian” or a “non-Russian” veteran sharing his skills with his co-ethnics.¹⁰⁹⁰ Sniping gave both “non-Russians” from some of the most remote regions of the Soviet Union and women a chance to prove themselves through effective killing. Both the “non-Russian” and female sniper became stock characters in Soviet propaganda during the war and continued to be important in the way that the war is remembered.

Propaganda and the army used the sniper in a variety of ways. Sometimes attraction to a female sniper as a challenge to beat her *schet*, adapting the general tenet that only

¹⁰⁸⁵ Stalin, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union*, p. 55.

¹⁰⁸⁶ See, e.g. NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 26; NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 103, d. 6, l. 8ob.

¹⁰⁸⁷ RGASPI f.644 op.1 d.34 l.203; *Sbornik zakonov, postanovlenii pravitel'stva i prikazov NKO po voprosam prokhozheniia sluzhby i forme odezhdy lichnogo sostava Krasnoï armii* (Moscow: NKO, 1946), p. 52. A sniper held the rank of *yefreitor* (corporal) and could rise to the rank of Sergeant and up to 200 rubles a month in pay (regular soldiers received 11 rubles 20 kopecks).

¹⁰⁸⁸ *Metkuii puliu v serdtse vruga*, pp. 3-5.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Dem’ian Bednyi, “Semen Nomokonov,” *Krasnoarmeets*, 1942:21, p. 16.

¹⁰⁹⁰ NA IRI RAN f. 2 r. I, op. d. 6, ll. 1-2, 8ob.

those who distinguish themselves in battle would be touched by women after the war.¹⁰⁹¹ The sniper after a successful kill became a frequent image in the military press, meant to inspire soldiers to expand their *schet*.¹⁰⁹² Snipers were so important because they demonstrated the full potential of a soldier armed with the most basic weapon. The fact that many of them were both autodidacts and teachers who fostered several students made them all the more ideal. Through snipers, more than any other type of soldier, the *schet* found its realization. Indeed, snipers frequently participated in socialist competitions to kill more enemy soldiers, just like workers at construction sites over-fulfilling norms during the Five Year Plans.¹⁰⁹³ Snipers were capable of covering a retreat or destroying a decisive target in combat.¹⁰⁹⁴ The sniper was fully conscious, in a time when consciousness required killing.

The Bayonet

Red Army tactics were very aggressive, and like most other armies, and the ultimate symbol of aggression and fighting spirit was the bayonet.¹⁰⁹⁵ It was said that “the bullet clears the way for the bayonet” and that a rifle wouldn’t shoot straight without the bayonet attached.¹⁰⁹⁶ The use of the bayonet was closely connected to soldierly psychology, as soldiers were trained to maintain eye contact with and come head on at an enemy they intended to bayonet. Any sign of weak will, even turning slightly, would lead to death.¹⁰⁹⁷ The bayonet was considered to be an integral part of the rifle, and as such was to be carried affixed to the rifle at all times, either erect in battle position or inverted. Other armies provided a scabbard for bayonets. *Combat Regulations of the Infantry [Boevoi ustav pekhoty]* adopted in November of 1942, declared that a major objective of soldiers was “to close with the enemy, attack him and destroy him in hand to hand combat or take him prisoner.”¹⁰⁹⁸ These aggressive tactics made sense given the massive advantage that the Germans enjoyed at the beginning of the war – planes, tanks and artillery all became much less useful when soldiers were engaged in melee. However, bayonets were inconvenient to carry and the form of Soviet bayonets (a cruciform needle) made them useless as everyday tools, and even in close combat many soldiers didn’t use them or even threw them away.¹⁰⁹⁹ When war correspondent Grigorii Pomerants was asked to wage an “ideological battle” with soldiers discarding their bayonets, he recalled that only once had his division used the bayonet:

In all other cases, when I asked soldiers and officers what actually happened in hand to

¹⁰⁹¹ Kononenko, “Devushki v shineliakh,” p. 22.

¹⁰⁹² e.g. G. Samarov, “Udachnyi den’,” *Krasnoarmeets*, 1943:1, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹³ Elena Konenko, “Devushka v shineli’,” *Krasnoarmeet* 1943: 12, pp.20-22, GARF f. P-7523 op. 13 d. 66 ll. 66-69, see also *V boiakh za Rodinu* (Bez mesta: Izdaniie gazety “Ataka”, 1942), p. 48; “over two and a half months – from 15 Spetemeber through 1 December 1942, then snipers of our unit have killed 742 hitlerites.” The top 10 snipers were said to have killed 51-106 in that period and 2-7 within the last week.

¹⁰⁹⁴ G. Morozov, “Snaipery v boiu,” *Agitator i Propagandist Krasnoi Armii* 1942:14, pp. 26-29.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Bourke, *An Intimate History Of Killing*, pp. 42, 79.

¹⁰⁹⁶ “Pogovorki russkikh soldat,” *Bloknot agitatora Krasnoi Armii*. 1943:15, p. 20. “Deistvitel'nost' ognia v boiu i mery dlia umen'sheniia poter’,” p. 42.

¹⁰⁹⁷ *Frontovoi tovarishch*, pp. 68-69; Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, p. 142.

¹⁰⁹⁸ *BUP-42*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁹⁹ For example one interviewee told the Mints Commission: “By the way, bayonets were useless in Stalingrad and everyone threw them away.” NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 4, l. 11ob

hand combat, one and the same story was heard: the Germans kept firing until the advancing line got up close (a few dozen meters); and then something in them broke. They threw down their weapons, threw up their arms, and were killed with the butts of rifles, point-blank fire. In any event, the first 15-20 minutes no one took prisoners... Bayonets were unnecessary for this slaughter [*rasprava*], so they threw them away... Riflemen are walking dead, and no one wanted to think about the fact that in three or six months you'll need a bayonet or a gas mask. Today... they are just extra weight and so they threw them away.¹¹⁰⁰

We see here how the call to hate and destroy the enemy could interfere with discipline (more on this in Chapter 6). Even when soldiers showed the aggression that the bayonet was supposed to manifest, they chose to use other tools to kill. Soldiers in most branches of service had to carry all of their equipment on long marches, so items such as bayonets, helmets and gasmasks, all of which cost the state money and all of which could save one's life were often discarded for comfort's sake. This became such a problem that a new carbine was issued in 1944 with a swiveling bayonet that could not be removed. The adoption of the M. 1944 carbine shows how the inability to police soldiers' behavior led to the redesign of the army's primary weapon.¹¹⁰¹

The bayonet continued to have iconographic and mythological importance, even after soldiers discarded them. The central monument to victory on Moscow's Poklonnaia Gora would take the form of a massive bayonet over 141.8 meters tall – ten centimeters for every day of the war. Bayonets also continued to be featured prominently in posters late in the war, and the impressive looking knife-like bayonet of the SVT-40 explains its continued appearance in propaganda posters even after it had been taken out of production. The bayonet was an important symbol, even if it was impractical to use.

Submachine guns

On the opposite end of the spectrum from the bayonet were sub-machineguns, which had no place for a bayonet, encouraged aggression based on firepower rather than hand to hand combat and were immensely popular among soldiers.¹¹⁰² These were small, handheld automatic weapons that used pistol ammunition (significantly shortening their range) and had either a 71 round disc or (introduced later) a 35 round "horn."¹¹⁰³ The Red Army, at the insistence of Marshal Voroshilov, was initially reluctant to adopt these weapons, thinking them only suitable for police units due to their short range, however, the 1939 "Winter War" with Finland showed Red Army commanders the necessity of these arms, as Finnish troops with submachine guns often proved highly effective at tying down larger Soviet formations.¹¹⁰⁴

¹¹⁰⁰ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, p. 116, see also "O russkom shtyke," *Bloknot agitatora Krasnoi Armii*, 1944:4, pp. 30-32. Killing POWs in the heat of combat is something common in modern warfare, as Bourke's work attests. Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 135.

¹¹⁰¹ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, p. 116. The army went over to carbines rather than rifles due to the fact that they were engaging at short distances and a carbine is much easier to use in the confined spaces of trenches and destroyed cities than the longer rifle.

¹¹⁰² Soldiers frequently requested these weapons, see e.g. Temkin, *My Just War*, p. 112 and Koshkarbaev, *Shturm*, p. 123.

¹¹⁰³ Bolotin, *Sovietskoe strelkovoe oruzhiie*, pp. 117, 125

¹¹⁰⁴ RGASPI f. 74, op. 2, d. 121, l. 5. Bolotin, *Sovietskoe strelkovoe oruzhiie*, p. 114. Yeremenko, *Dnevnik*, p. 144.

The three major submachine guns used by the Red Army were the PPD-40, PPSH-41 and PPS-43. The PPSH-41 and PPS-43 were the most heavily employed and represented significant achievements in design. Using stamped, rather than machined parts, these weapons could be produced in massive numbers, with over 6 million being produced in the course of the war.¹¹⁰⁵ They were also very easy to clean and maintain and designed with their users in mind – the PPS-43 was a specially adapted submachine gun for troops in confined spaces (tank crews, scouts, etc.) and adapted a German-style folding stock and even greater economy of production, being developed in blockaded Leningrad.¹¹⁰⁶

The army introduced a sub-machinegun company into every infantry battalion in October of 1941.¹¹⁰⁷ Sub-machine gunners were better compensated and more elite than regular soldiers and used special, aggressive tactics – often being used as an initial force to scout and soften the enemy, take and hold important objects or launch counterattacks. They would advance in either a circular or “T” formation, leaving their own flanks open and attempting to break through enemy lines. They were also used to create the appearance of an attack to distract the enemy. These soldiers engaged at close range, 200-300 meters, and were considered to be indispensable in taking trenches.¹¹⁰⁸ One general wrote in his diary: “Submachine guns don’t have a bayonet, but they strike further than a bayonet, they are indispensable in hand-to-hand combat, but you need to remember that in order to strike there has to be ammunition (without bullets a submachine gun becomes a stick).”¹¹⁰⁹ The PPSH-41 and PPS-43 allowed troops with less training and underfed soldiers to level the playing field with more firepower. These weapons ultimately came to be the iconic weapon of Red Army soldiers, appearing prominently on posters, monuments and in film.

Grenades

Known popularly as “pocket artillery,” hand grenades, which emerged as a critical weapon during the Great War after years of having been relics, would become (alongside submachine guns) *the* key tools in urban and trench warfare.¹¹¹⁰ A wide variety of grenades – “defensive,” meaning that you couldn’t throw it further than it exploded and needed something to hide behind to use it; “offensive,” meaning it could be thrown further than its blast radius; and anti-tank grenades – were all found in soldiers’ pockets, pouches and hanging off of belts.

Soldiers were supposed to carry between 2 and 6 grenades on their belts, although many carried several times that. During the Battle of Stalingrad, grenades became the key weapon according to many observers. Chuikov, commander of the 62nd Army, told the Mints Commission: “In these battles our soldiers came to love the ‘Fenia’, that’s how they called the grenade [F-1]. In these street battles hand grenades, submachine guns, the bayonet, knife and spade are put to use. The Germans can’t take it.”¹¹¹¹ One of his Division

¹¹⁰⁵ Glantz, *Colossus Reborn*, p. 192.

¹¹⁰⁶ Bolotin, *Sovietskoe strelkovoie oruzhiie*, pp. 118-120, 126-128, 134. They also had chromed barrels, which made them much easier to keep clean.

¹¹⁰⁷ RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 66, ll. 104-105, in A. I. Barsukov, *et. al., Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iiunia 1941 g. —1942 g.*, p. 107; RGVA f.4, op. 11, d. 66, ll. 183-183, in *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹¹⁰⁸ *Deistviia roty avtomatchikov v boiu* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1942).

¹¹⁰⁹ Yeremenko, *Dnevnik*, pp. 258-258

¹¹¹⁰ P. Lymarev, “Bei vraga granatoi,” *Bloknot agitatora Krasnoi Armii*, 1943:13, 19.

¹¹¹¹ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 2a, l.5ob.

commanders, Batiuk, told the Mints Commission in January of 1943: “Now we beat off all attacks exclusively with grenades, don’t even fire. Let them get closer and hit them. Now we have few people and every soldier has his own nest, they get up to 40 grenades and sit calmly, aren’t afraid of anything.”¹¹¹² Grenades were a favored weapon at night and in confined spaces and had the added benefit of not giving away the position of the user. They allowed one well entrenched soldier to hold off a much stronger foe and one soldier concealed in foxhole could destroy an enemy tank.

However, grenades were somewhat terrifying to use, as Abdulin recalled:

... it turns out that you have to throw a grenade with skill. Holding it in your hand for two seconds! If you through it without holding it, then the Germans can throw it back. And you have to throw it like this: pull the pin, then take off the safety and hold a sizzling grenade two seconds, and then throw it. It explodes like shrapnel in the air over the heads of the Germans... It was terrifying to take off the safety and wait for those two seconds... What if the workers made a mistake putting it together and it goes off earlier?!¹¹¹³

Grenades could be thrown 15-40 meters according to manuals. Their explosions could kill people and destroy machinery within a radius that varied from 15-200 meters.¹¹¹⁴ Even more terrifying to use were the “burning bottles” (Molotov Cocktails), that were issued, alongside specially designed grenades, to soldiers to fight tanks.¹¹¹⁵ These came in two forms: one with an ampule, which ignited the liquid as the bottle broke against the target; the other filled with liquid “KS,” a napalm-like substance that reeked of rotten eggs and ignited on contact with the air. These were supposed to be excellent anti-tank weapons as the burning liquid would seep into equipment and telescopes, burning the engine, ordnance and crew, while smoke would blind the enemy. However, these weapons were often as dangerous to the user as to the intended target. They were so combustible that they had to be carried in special crates filled with earth.¹¹¹⁶ Platoon commander Tokarev recalled in his memoirs: “... you had to treat them with great caution. I saw once how our soldier burned like a torch... We used this mixture out of necessity, not out of its great effectiveness.”¹¹¹⁷ “Burning bottles” exemplified the improvisational, barebones ethos of the army, where glass and fuel crudely combined were used to destroy precision machinery, all at great risk to the soldier using them.

¹¹¹² NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 4, l. 2.

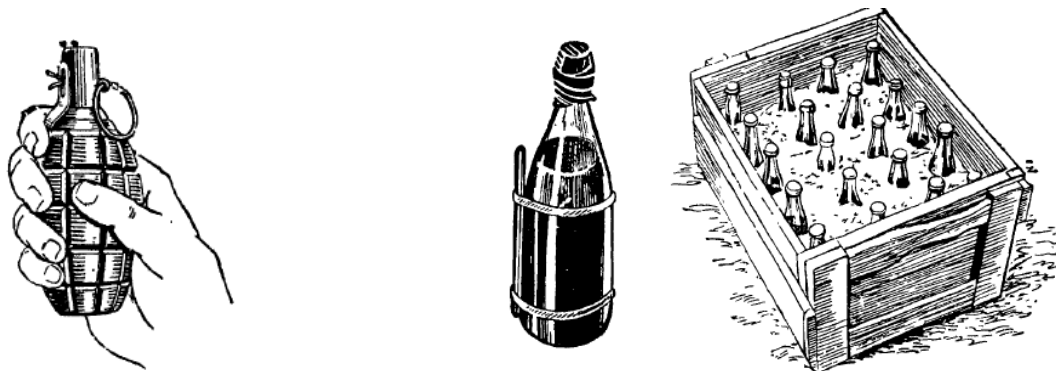
¹¹¹³ Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, pp. 81-82.

¹¹¹⁴ *Nastavlenie po strelkovomu delu Ruchnye oskolochnye i protivotankovye granaty i zazhigatel'nye butylki* (Moscow, Voenizdat, 1946), p. 6.

¹¹¹⁵ “Molotov Cocktails” were actually coined by the Finns during the 1939-1940 Winter War. To fight Red Army tanks, the Finns, who were in dire straits similar to those of the Red Army fighting the Wehrmacht, filled bottles with fuel. This worked effectively when soldiers could close with tanks and separate them from the infantry, which the Finns excelled at. These were called “Molotov Cocktails” in reference to the Soviet Foreign Minister, and bombs dropped on Helsinki by the Soviet Air Force became known as “Molotov Baskets.”

¹¹¹⁶ *Nastavlenie po strelkovomu delu Ruchnye oskolochnye i protivotankovye granaty i zazhigatel'nye butylki*, pp. 87-94.

¹¹¹⁷ Tokarev, *Vesti dnevnik na fronte zapreshalos'*, p. 173.



The F-1 Hand Grenade and Burning Bottles, shown in a crate of earth.¹¹¹⁸

Soldiers were encouraged to sacrifice themselves, trading their lives for the destruction of enemy soldiers and machinery, and clearly trading one's life for a tank was considered to be a life well spent. A vivid example of this trope in action is the story of Red Army sailor Pankikak, whose "burning bottle" was struck by a bullet, turning him into a human torch. Rather than attempt to extinguish the flames, he ran at an enemy tank, setting it ablaze and killing the crew. This event was immortalized in a poem by Demian Bednyi and later by a monument in Volgograd:

A burning torch, the avenging warrior,
 Didn't roll in the grass,
 [Or] seek reprieve in the swamp:
 He burned the enemy with his own fire!
 They will write legends about him,
 Our immortal Red Sailor!¹¹¹⁹

Like much of wartime propaganda, this poem promised immortality in return for self sacrifice and posited that the most terrifying weapon in the Red Army was the super-human will of the soldiers wielding even such obviously improvised weapons as burning bottles.

The close range tactics that army had developed meant a great deal of risk and close combat. In order to reduce German advantages in planes, armor, artillery and automatic weapons, soldiers were encouraged to get in close with grenades, sub-machineguns and bayonets. This meant that an unsuccessful attack would leave the stranded and wounded at the mercy of the enemy, prompting many soldiers to carry a spare grenade for themselves in order to avoid the ignominy and torture of capture.¹¹²⁰ The hand grenade was a tool that could be wielded effectively by skilled soldiers, but could become fatal to the user if unlucky or untrained. It also came to symbolize the ethos of self sacrifice as a weapon that could be used to avoid the shame of capture and one that was often semi-suicidal to use, especially against tanks.

Grenades and "burning bottles" were indispensable, yet disposable, something that could only be used once, like bullets, they stood at one end of soldiers' relationships to weapons as tools. Bullets, grenades and shells were all indispensable, they could mark the

¹¹¹⁸ *Nastavlenie po strelkovomu delu Ruchnye oskolochnye i protivotankovye granaty i zazhigatel'nye butylki*, pp. 46, 93.

¹¹¹⁹ Dem'ian Bednyi, *Nesokrushimaia uverenost'* (Moscow, Goslitizdat, 1943), p. 24.

¹¹²⁰ E.g. Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, pp. 19-20.

difference between life and death. They were not, however, something a soldier would form an attachment with, nor an object that helped build a sense of community.

Weapons as tools II; Crew-Served Weapons

The other end of the spectrum was occupied by crew-served weapons, everything from machine guns and mortars to artillery and tanks, which were objects built to last and requiring the cooperation of two or more soldiers to operate. If infantry soldiers dug their own, individual position first and slept in bunkers that could be down the line from their fighting position, weapons crews dug a multi-person fighting position around their weapon and excavated their living space nearby, often creating a bunker that was both living space and a combat position.

A weapons crew was in constant contact, the men and women comprising it came to know each other extremely closely and function as one organism in an arrangement that included a clear hierarchy but with an intimacy that belied the structure of ranks. A crew could demonstratively distance newcomers, regardless of rank, in the ways that they ate together or in their sleeping arrangements.¹¹²¹ Crews also often forced very different individuals to spend endless amounts of time together. Soldiers could come to rely completely on each other in an exchange of competencies and favors, as a less literate soldier might ask for help writing home, while a soldier who was good with his hands could become an indispensable favorite.¹¹²² Whoever these people were and whatever social arrangements they negotiated, their lives were organized around the weapon that they serviced.

Machineguns

Older, larger automatic weapons continued to be the nucleus of infantry and cavalry formations and important secondary weapons for tanks and armor. The Red Army used a variety of machine guns, but the two most prominent were the DP-28 [*Ruchnoi pulemet Degtiareva obr. 1928g.*] and various iterations of the Model 1910 Maxim Machinegun, affectionately called "Maksim." The DP-28 was a handheld automatic rifle with a 47-round disc. One soldier could operate it, but a second was assigned to carry ammunition. The infantry squad was built around the light machinegun, however the small capacity of its magazine meant that it was often ineffective.¹¹²³ The Maxim, while old and heavy, held popular associations with the heroes of the Civil War, particularly Chapaev, and was a weapon that many soldiers had fantasized about using since their childhood. The crew of a Maksim was at least two and as many as five soldiers, most of whom carried ammunition and supported the weapon.

The machinegun was a key tool that fulfilled a number of tactical roles. wielding the heaviest firepower of the infantry squad, a weapon that had the capacity both to kill and to limit the movement of enemy soldiers by pinning them down. Manning the main weapon of the squad and machine gunners, like snipers, were specialists with higher rank and compensation than regular soldiers. They would be significantly better compensated and climb the ranks for acts of heroism without necessarily having the responsibilities of that

¹¹²¹ Baklanov, *Voennye povesti*, p. 196. See Chapter 4 for a more in-depth discussion of this.

¹¹²² Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, pp. 205-208, 213; Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, p. 6.

¹¹²³ Bolotin, *Sovietskoe strelkovoe oruzhie*, pp. 161-162.

rank.¹¹²⁴ With these privileges came extra work and responsibilities. Each machinegun required its own fire card (see Chapter 4) and at least three reserve positions as machineguns were a primary target of the enemy.¹¹²⁵ At night, the vulnerable flanks of a unit were covered by its machineguns.¹¹²⁶ The *Combat Regulations of the Infantry* reminded machine gunners that: “A well-functioning machine gun is unassailable for enemy infantry. Therefore machine gunners fight to the end, under any conditions, even in encirclement, sacrificing themselves.”¹¹²⁷ Their significance was not always merely material, as one commander recalled: “The machine gun played an important role not only in combat, but I would say psychological help for soldiers: when a machinegun rattled, everyone’s mood was elevated, everyone started to actively engage and thus didn’t let the German infantry enter our lines.”¹¹²⁸ The machinegun was one of the weapons that made numbers less significant than training, nerve and skillful use of terrain in modern warfare.

Artillery and Mortars

Another piece of heavy equipment were mortars and artillery pieces. Conventional artillery was nowhere near as portable as “pocket artillery,” and required many more soldiers to use. Red Army defensive tactics called for the luring of the enemy as close as possible and striking a crushing blow at point-blank range. In offensive operations, artillery was to provide a shield of fire for infantry to advance behind, suppressing the enemy and destroying vital targets such as tanks, machineguns and enemy artillery. All of this required coordination by a team of soldiers who aimed, loaded and serviced the weapon, often while under fire from the enemy and sometimes in exposed positions.

The smallest artillery piece, the 50-mm mortar, had only a two-man crew that lived like infantrymen, while most artillery was serviced by 5 or more soldiers. Within the crew there was a hierarchy from soldiers whose task it was to simply carry ammunition to the soldier who aimed the piece and the sergeant who commanded it.¹¹²⁹ The peer pressure and group nature of their actions, as well as the generally higher level of training they received, meant that artillerists were much less likely to fail to pull the trigger. The fact that they were often aiming at larger objects (tanks, houses, etc.) rather than individuals also helped to make their kind of killing more abstract.

Artillery was both an antipersonnel and anti-machinery weapon. Special small caliber artillery was designed to defend against enemy aircraft. Mortars, which fired at a very high angle, allowing their use at short range, killed and demoralized enemy infantry and damaged bunkers. Artillery pieces ranged from the 45mm gun, assigned to infantry regiments, to massive howitzers firing shells over 200mm, including both armor-piercing shells and high explosive shrapnel which could render the human form unrecognizable. Artillerists needed to make advanced algebraic calculations, exploiting the landscape to fire with extreme accuracy, as the number of shots they could make from one position before the enemy zeroed in on them was limited. The crew of a larger mortar (82mm or 120mm)

¹¹²⁴ *V Pomoshch' agitatoru (Tadzhikgosizdat, 1942)*, p. 101; RGASPI f. 644, op. 1, d. 34, ll. 104-105.

¹¹²⁵ *Pamiatka komandiru pulemetnogo otdeleniia* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1943), pp. 15, 28.

¹¹²⁶ *Pamiatka komandiru pulemetnogo otdeleniia*, p. 21.

¹¹²⁷ *BUP-42*, p. 76.

¹¹²⁸ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 71, d. 7, l. 22.

¹¹²⁹ The *navodchik*, or soldier who aimed the piece, was a sought after position because it was easy to gain praise serving as one. NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 30, d. 1, l. 120.

or artillery cannon was commanded by a sergeant who was responsible for the actions of all crew members, with a gunner [*navodchik*] who aimed the piece, a loader, and one or more carriers who job it was to bring ammunition. In addition, every unit was supposed to have several replacement soldiers available to take the place of losses, which would inevitably ensue as artillery was a primary target of enemy fire.¹¹³⁰

Specialized tank-destroying artillery units engaged enemy tanks in a deadly game of peek-a-boo, allowing enemy tanks to get as close as possible in order to destroy them. Soldiers serving in anti-tank artillery formations received a number of privileges, including a special patch on their sleeve, marking their elite status.¹¹³¹ As Guards Captain Bolotskii told the Mints Commission in March of 1945, this required great calmness in the presence of steel monsters:

As soon as the enemy appears we let them get as close as possible. We can hit an open position from a kilometer or a kilometer and a half away. If it's a small tank, or a medium tank, we can destroy it. A powerful tank we can't hit at that distance, so we let them close in to 100, 120, 75 meters. The most important thing here is the composure of the gunner, of the crew... He waits till its 75 meters away and then hits it.¹¹³²

Strong nerves were required to use their tactics, and there was no real option of retreat.

The artillery was largely immobile on the battlefield, at most having a few reserve positions to maneuver between. Artillerists were nothing without their guns and forbidden from retreating without them. As Captain Bolotskii mentioned: "We take heavy casualties. The Germans call us 'dead men' [*smertniki*]. We can't leave the battlefield. Of course, no one can leave, but people run away. It's easier for an infantryman. We can't leave in any event [because of their heavy equipment – B.M.S.], so they sent us to the more dangerous places."¹¹³³ This image of artillerists holding their ground against enemy tanks, defending to the last man, emerged during the war and became a major trope in postwar popular culture (e.g. Bondarev's *Goriachii sneg*). Increasingly as the war continued, artillery which had been horse drawn became motorized, either by the replacement of horses with trucks or by artillery with *samokhodki*, self-propelled guns (called tank-destroyers in the US Army) which are essentially artillery pieces mounted on a tank chassis.¹¹³⁴

Tanks

Soviet tankers were reminded that the monstrous vehicles they drove were originally devised as a solution to the problem of the machine gun during the First World War. Tanks allowed for the destructions of strong enemy positions and could provide a screen against small arms fire for infantry. By the Second World War, tanks had developed into rapid moving, heavily armored behemoths that carried not only automatic weapons their antecedents wielded, but also cannons. Tanks changed the face of warfare in the Second World War, with German *Blitzkreig* tactics deepening the space of the front and

¹¹³⁰ *Boevoi Ustav Artilerii RKKA Chast' 1. Kniga 1: Voiskovaia artilleriia*. (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1938).

¹¹³¹ ¹¹³¹ RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 71, ll. 320-322, in Barsukov, et al., *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iiunia 1941 g. —1942 g.: Dokumenty i materialy*, pp. 264-265. These privileges included double pay for commanders, a rank one above the norm for crew members, and a guarantee to be returned only to their unit after being wounded.

¹¹³² NA IRI RAN f.2, r. I, op. 30, d. 23, ll. 1-1ob.

¹¹³³ NA IRI RAN f.2, r. I, op. 30, d. 23, ll. 1-1ob.

¹¹³⁴ Dunn, *Hitler's Nemesis*, pp. 150, 196-203,

allowing for rapid movement that would have been physically impossible in the previous war. The successful use of tanks required extremely well trained personnel to crew them and coordination with other arms (particularly infantry and sappers) to prevent the isolation and destruction of friendly tanks by anti-tank weapons and enemy tanks.¹¹³⁵

Tanks were divided into light, heavy and medium and were crewed by 2-5 soldiers. We are going to concentrate on the most iconic tank of the war, the T-34, which is often described as the best tank of the war due to the economy of its manufacture and combat effectiveness.¹¹³⁶ A medium tank, the T-34 weighed 28.5 tons, could travel up to 50 km/hr, carried over 700 liters of diesel fuel, a crow bar, a saw, an axe and two spades. The tank also carried a radio, fire extinguisher and medical kit. Armed with a 76-mm cannon, 71 shells, three DP machineguns with 1890 rounds of ammunition, 20 F-1 grenades and their own personal weapons, the tank was a veritable mobile fortress.¹¹³⁷ Other tanks featured heavier or lighter armor and armaments and could travel faster or slower.

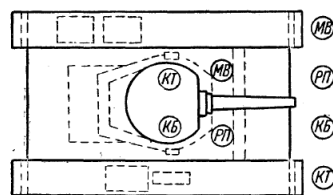


Рис. 1. Размещение экипажа в танке и при построении у танка

The T-34, three-quarter view and diagram of crew placement in formation and in action.¹¹³⁸

A tank crew consisted of, depending on the size of their machine, a commander, turret gunner [*komandir orudiia, bashner, or zariazhaiushchii*], mechanic-driver, radio operator and (depending on the size) assistant gunners and mechanics. The commander was responsible for controlling the tank and keeping it provisioned and functional, with specific tasks assigned to each member of the crew – the turret gunner kept track of shells, loaded, aimed and fired the cannon; the radio operator kept the radio in order, communicated with other tanks and operated a machine gun, the mechanic-driver drove the tank and maintained the engine, air filter, and tracks.¹¹³⁹ It is estimated that about a quarter of tank losses were due to mechanical failure, so keeping these machines running was clearly a full-time job.¹¹⁴⁰ In order to operate this behemoth, the crew had to function like an organism, each soldier answering for their part of the system that kept these giants running. Using a tank was difficult business. Closed hatches in combat meant that visibility was extremely limited. Gunners often had to aim while moving rapidly over uneven terrain, solving trigonometric equations under fire. They were encouraged to use machine gun fire or several shots to zero in on their targets, with the mechanic-driver observing where the

¹¹³⁵ *Posobie dlia boitsa-tankista*, p. 1; RGVA f. 4, op. 12, d. 106, ll. 112-122 in A. I. Barsukov, et. al., *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iunia 1941 g. — 1942 g.*, pp. 334-337.

¹¹³⁶ In general, the Red Army used three chassis for all of its armored vehicles, greatly simplifying manufacture, maintenance and repair. Dunn, *Hitler's Nemesis*, pp. 119, 121.

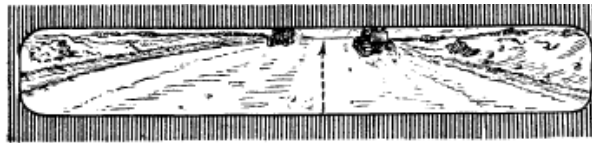
¹¹³⁷ *Tank T-34 v boiu* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1942), pp. 1-6.

¹¹³⁸ Images from *Tank T-34 v boiu*.

¹¹³⁹ *Boevoi Ustav Bronetankov'ikh i Mekhanizirovannykh Voisk Krasnoi Armii, Chast' 1 (tank, tankovyi vzvod, tankovaia rota)* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1944), pp. 14-25. (Hereafter *BUBiMV-44*)

¹¹⁴⁰ Dunn, *Hitler's Nemesis*, p. 150.

shot or shell landed (much the way a sniper team worked).¹¹⁴¹ The mechanic-driver had to constantly keep in mind the type of ground they drove on, as swamps could swallow tanks and muddy ground leave them immobile.¹¹⁴² He or she also had to be prepared to use the tank as a giant battering ram, whether to crush enemy weapons, ram through buildings or flatten enemy soldiers.¹¹⁴³ Tank crews needed to keep in constant communication with other tanks and surrounding units, using radio, flares, flags and hand signals to maintain contact.¹¹⁴⁴ The commander had to control all of these processes and ensure that the tank fulfilled its mission, whether that be to arrive at a given place at a given time or destroy an enemy artillery battery.



The view from inside the tank, through gunner's sights and the driver's periscope.¹¹⁴⁵

Successfully using a tank required the ability to read maps, read terrain, make judgments about soil consistency and coordinate efforts with engineers whenever a large swamp, river or lake was encountered.¹¹⁴⁶ Tankers had to frequently leave the confines of their tank in order to reconnoiter, climbing trees, crawling forward and gathering as much information as possible before returning to the confines of the tank, where only a few periscopes and slits allowed the crew to see the outside. Indeed, vision was so limited, that every crew member was responsible for watching without pause a certain portion of the 360 degrees around the tank.¹¹⁴⁷ When used together, a platoon of tanks functioned exactly as an infantry squad, just one made of giants. Tanks maintained an interval to ensure maneuverability, covered each other, and deployed from columns into battle formations just like human soldiers. The turret even moved back and forth while on the march, like a giant head.¹¹⁴⁸ Tanks also provided transportation for infantry and engineer soldiers, being exactly the right size to take a squad and having special handles for riders.¹¹⁴⁹ These soldiers provided cover and maneuverability, but also required crews to move carefully so as not to crush them and provide support if these soldiers got pinned down.¹¹⁵⁰ As soon as the tank stopped anywhere, the crew took stock, replenished supplies, made repairs and then began a series of new tasks, including the gathering of information, digging a position for sleeping (often under the tank) and setting up a forward position to guard the tank. A tanker's work was never done.

¹¹⁴¹ *BUBiMV-44*, p. 68; *Posobie dlia boitsa-tankista*, pp. 72-83.

¹¹⁴² *Posobie dlia boitsa-tankista*, p. 118.

¹¹⁴³ *Posobie dlia boitsa-tankista*, pp. 7, 127; Grossman, *Gody voiny*, pp. 315-316.

¹¹⁴⁴ *BUBiMV-44*, p. 63; *Posobie dlia boitsa-tankista*, pp. 198-201.

¹¹⁴⁵ *Posobie dlia boitsa-tankista*, pp. 94, 122.

¹¹⁴⁶ *Posobie dlia boitsa-tankista*, pp. 145-175.

¹¹⁴⁷ *Tank v boiu* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1946), pp. 42-47; *Tank T-34 v boiu*, p. 31-32, *BUBiMV-44*, pp. 70-72.

¹¹⁴⁸ *BUBiMV-44*, pp. 34-38, 59-61; *Posobie dlia boitsa-tankista*, p. 18.

¹¹⁴⁹ *Boevye priemy tankistov* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1942), pp. 36-41.

¹¹⁵⁰ *BUBiMV-44*, p. 95.

Tanks required a lot of prior planning and information about the enemy to work effectively, and tankers used not only fire maps, but also tank maps that recorded information about the landscape, enemy and points where the tanks were to regroup.¹¹⁵¹ During offensives, tanks destroyed enemy machineguns and artillery, then concentrated on killing soldiers. They were to avoid combat with enemy tanks unless they had a clear advantage.¹¹⁵² On the defensive, tanks could be used as entrenched artillery, a reserve for counterattacks, or a distraction to confuse the enemy.¹¹⁵³ Tanks used without proper reconnaissance were quickly destroyed and in order to take enemy positions, tanks had to maneuver adeptly, travel quickly and use all of their weapons on the move.¹¹⁵⁴ As late as the Autumn of 1942, it was found that many crews had yet to master these skills and armored formation commanders often ended up simply controlling their own tanks rather than controlling their formations.¹¹⁵⁵ Measures were soon taken to improve cadres and reorganize the armored forces.¹¹⁵⁶

The fact that tanks were so difficult to operate, could move so fast and were mobile fortresses presented particular difficulties for the army, and tankers were probably the most vetted branch of service. In October of 1942, a special order to fill the ranks of tank training schools declared that to be a tanker, one had to have distinguished themselves in battle, have at least 7 grades of education, with exceptions to the latter condition made only for those who had already attained the rank of sergeant and won combat medals. A special Commission was to be present to accept or deny these cadres.¹¹⁵⁷ A November 1944 order repeats these requirements, adding that soldiers from the previously occupied territories could only be considered as exceptions, and only if they were members of the Communist Party and Young Communist Organization. Soldiers from Western Ukraine, Byelorussia and Moldova were not to be considered.¹¹⁵⁸

Tank crews had to be educated enough to master a complicated piece of machinery and dedicated enough to be trusted with an incredibly valuable machine that often had to function autonomously. If an infantry or artillery soldier could be forced to fulfill his duty under the watchful eye of commanders, a tank crew was often alone and could easily be stuck on enemy territory, where the will and ingenuity of its members alone could keep a valuable piece of equipment from falling into enemy hands. Tank crews had to know what they were doing and be able to make decisions for themselves.¹¹⁵⁹ There was also no way

¹¹⁵¹ BUBiMV-44, pp. 185-189.

¹¹⁵² *Posobie dlia boitsa-tankista*, p. 46; RGVA f. 4, op. 12, d. 106, ll. 112-122 in A. I. Barsukov, *et. al.*, *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iiunia 1941 g. —1942 g.*, pp. 334-338.

¹¹⁵³ BUBiMV-44, pp. 97-98, 108-113.

¹¹⁵⁴ BUBiMV-44, pp. 94-95.

¹¹⁵⁵ RGVA f. 4, op. 12, d. 106, ll. 112-122, in A. I. Barsukov, *et. al.*, *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iiunia 1941 g. —1942 g.*, pp. 334-336.

¹¹⁵⁶ RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 73, ll. 341-342, in A. I. Barsukov, *et. al.*, *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iiunia 1941 g. —1942 g.*, pp. 379-380

¹¹⁵⁷ RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 73, ll. 53-54, in A. I. Barsukov, *et. al.*, *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iiunia 1941 g. —1942 g.*, p. 338. A few months later there was also a special derective to insure that tankers were used only as specialists, and not sent as replacements to other branches of service. RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 73, l. 340, in Barsukov, *et. al.*, *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iiunia 1941 g. —1942 g.*, p. 378.

¹¹⁵⁸ RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 78, ll. 376-377, in A. I. Barsukov, *et. al.*, *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943-1945gg.*, pp. 328-329.

¹¹⁵⁹ *Tank v boiu*, p. 26; *Tank T-34 v boiu*, p. 37.

to evacuate wounded soldiers from a tank, and the 1944 *Combat Regulations for Armored and Mechanized Troops* stated: "Every soldier in the crew, if wounded, should exert all of their strength and continue fighting."¹¹⁶⁰ Tanks were *the* super weapon of the Red Army in a war that Stalin referred to as a "war of motors,"¹¹⁶¹ and the men who crewed them had not only to be dedicated to the cause to the point of being ready to burn alive for it, but also capable of turning a monstrous collection of metal into a smoothly functioning organism. Perhaps no weapon better demonstrated the adage "technology without people is dead." Indeed the identification of soldier with machine could become so great that in one extreme case a soldier used the blood of a fallen comrade to put out a fire in his tank.¹¹⁶²

Corporate Cultures of Different Arms

Soldiers were encouraged to identify with their weapon and the branch of service in which they served. There were widely accepted nicknames for the various branches of service, as often reproduced in propaganda: "They call the infantry 'the Queen of the Fields,' artillery – 'God of War,' sappers – 'war's workers,' and the signal corps – 'War's Nerves'."¹¹⁶³ The "Queen of the Fields" could also be rendered as the "People's Commissar of the Fields," adapting a Tsarist phrasing to Soviet norms. All of these branches relied on each other to successfully fight, but antagonism was rife as soldiers created more or less exclusive corporate communities. Ivan Yakushin, a cavalryman, recalled an old saying from the Tsarist era that could still be heard in the Red Army: "A dandy serves in the cavalry, an idler in the artillery, a drunkard serves in the Navy, an idiot – in the infantry."¹¹⁶⁴ We will look closely here at three branches of service that were distinct communities and which exemplified modern warfare: the infantry, artillery and armor (tanks).¹¹⁶⁵

The infantry were at once the most universal and often most maligned branch of service. Most soldiers received basic infantry training regardless of their branch of service, as the digging, movement and use of arms emphasized in infantry training were necessary for everyone. As the only branch of service that could independently take and hold territory, the infantry was the largest and in many ways the most important branch of service. Despite this, many authors looked down on infantrymen due to the "outwardly unsightly appearance of the infantry's equipment." Momyshev proclaimed the infantry to be the

fundamental and universal branch of service. The branch of the closest, most cruel and terrible stage of battle. The infantry is capable of conquering and firmly holding territory.

¹¹⁶⁰ BUBiMV-44, p. 92.

¹¹⁶¹ Stalin, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union*, p. 32.

¹¹⁶² NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. 1, op. 120, d. 3, l. 2ob.

¹¹⁶³ A. Strelkov, "Sviazisty v boiu", *Bloknot agitatora Krasnoi Armii* 1943:22, p. 6.

¹¹⁶⁴ Yakushin, *On the Roads of War*, p. 139.

¹¹⁶⁵ I chose not to examine the cavalry here because the primary difference between the cavalry and infantry is that a cavalryman has a sword and horse, the latter of which requires both a massive amount of time to maintain and creates a special relationship between rider and animal. I do not examine combat engineers because of the dramatic variety of tasks they performed – construction of infrastructure, laying and disassembling of mine fields, using explosives to destroy tanks and other objects, etc. These were specialists of a different type who when they did see the type of killing they were doing were pulling the trigger like infantrymen using infantry weapons. The same is true of signal corps soldiers. These were soldiers who could fight as infantry but were primarily tasked with the establishment and maintenance of communication via telephone and radio.

No other branch of service requires such toughness and bravery, almost inhuman effort, exertion, as from the infantryman... Everything he conquers he takes with his own hands, himself, personally, not thanks to “steeds” or “motor.” No one is as deprived of excuses and possibilities to avoid battle, citing a broken machine or lack of preparation, or that he can’t act due to different conditions... In no one else does the natural beauty and that natural ugliness of a person show itself so clearly – his morality, high moral level, indomitable will, incessant energy, bravery, valor, conscience and honor, reason and insanity, truth and lie. In no one are man and beast so harmonized, as in the infantryman.¹¹⁶⁶

We see here a proud infantry officer making claims to his branch of service being the most important, responsible and brave while its soldiers are held up as the most extreme example of all that is human. The most humble and socially low are positioned as not only those necessary to get things done, but also as the most authentic and moral.

With an immense variety of weapons at its disposal, the infantry could serve in a variety of roles, but as we have already seen, needed to be well trained to do so. Given that this was the least technical branch of service, it received the least trained soldiers. The infantry also suffered the heaviest losses and the largest circulation of cadres, which meant that cohesion and the establishment of a community was a problem felt particularly sharply in the infantry. As Lev Kopelev noted, “[p]eople there were more mixed, losses heavier and the soldiers and commanders changed more often, without having time to firm up a real, rooted comradeship.”¹¹⁶⁷

In sharp contrast to the infantry stood the artillery, where Kopelev noted that young officers “...called each other Petia, Valia, Seva, Misha, played chess and battleship, argued about films, soccer, Mayakovskii, love... And at the same time skillfully and heatedly directed artillery fire.”¹¹⁶⁸ The artillery was a much more technical branch requiring mathematical and mechanical skills that were less crucial to the infantry. Also, in the period of *deprofessionalization* and *demechanization*, the artillery was often the most effective branch, as tanks were too few and infantry undertrained. This led to a sense of superiority among many artillerists, that in many ways echoed the stereotypes that Momyshev had enumerated. As artillery officer, Ivan Bykov, told the Mints Commission during the battle of Stalingrad:

I love being an artillerist and wouldn’t trade it for the infantry. Now, at war in particular, the infantry makes an unsightly impression the way it acts. It’s all in habits. A person gains habits under various circumstances. Artillery is a more organized, compact branch of service and so are its members. You see, we and the infantry get reinforcements at the same time. It seems as if these reinforcements are the same, but they are a different breed. Either their system of training is different, or I don’t know. Everywhere you see the difference, from their abilities in battle to the way they act. The infantry has always been and will always be different. Artillery is more developed culturally, its fighting abilities and all other qualities. Two regiments live side by side, artillery and infantry... A person feels less accountability for their actions, and he works on himself less. An artillerist has a rifle, sabre, horse, saddle, accouterments and so on, and an infantryman just has a rifle and a backpack, maybe a spade and that’s it. And he even does a poor job taking care of his rifle.¹¹⁶⁹

¹¹⁶⁶ Momyshev, *Psikhologiya voyny*, p. 11-12.

¹¹⁶⁷ Kopelev, *Khranit’ vechno T. 1*, p. 114.

¹¹⁶⁸ Kopelev, *Khranit’ vechno T. 1*, p. 113.

¹¹⁶⁹ NA IRI RAN f.2 r.1 op. 74 d. 4 ll. 2-3.

As we see from this quote, something similar to a class-consciousness was overtaking soldiers, with those from the more technical branches speaking of the infantry in terms that the middle and upper classes often reserve for the poor.¹¹⁷⁰ The infantrymen are blamed for poor education, a lack of responsibility tied to the poverty of their material culture and being a mass organization with a lower “cultural level.”

Like the infantry, artilleryists often boasted of their high casualties and that they had a higher level of responsibility. As if to counter Momysh-uly, one artilleryist complained that, unlike the infantry, they have nowhere to run. He also noted that they were referred to as “dead men,” while it was common to call cannons “Farewell, Motherland!”¹¹⁷¹ However, artilleryists in particular were encouraged to think of themselves as a cut above the rest, artillery was after all “God of War.”

Artilleryists held a special place in Soviet tactics, being the primary anti-tank force, particularly in the war’s first years. Stalin had a special affection for the artillery and they alone among ground forces received a special holiday during the war: Artilleryist’s Day, starting on November 19, 1944.¹¹⁷² An article from 1944 celebrated Stalin’s genius, care for the army and special relationship to the artillery:

Despite the huge importance of tanks and aviation, Comrade Stalin did not exaggerate their role. The Germans wagered on tanks and planes, underestimating artillery and have been paying dearly for this. Comrade Stalin called artillery “the God of War,” and his valuation has been entirely supported by a whole range of events. He devised the doctrine of modern artillery and artillery offensive.¹¹⁷³

The artillery was both being rewarded for the key role it had played in the war and used to cover up the severe shortages suffered in the first years of the war – rather than admit that the importance of artillery was in part the result of shortages, the lack of tanks and planes early in the war was presented as part of the wise strategy of the Generalissimos. This was a fitting choice, given that artilleryists were likely to be among the few in a division that had long memories, as enough of them usually survived to become part of the *kostiak*, or “backbone” around which units were rebuilt (see Chapter 1), a fact frequently mentioned in interviews.¹¹⁷⁴

Somewhere between the infantry and artillery stood (or rather sat) tankers. The elite status of tankers meant that every member of the crew was supposed to be at least a sergeant, and the commander of a medium or heavy tank was either a Lieutenant or Senior Lieutenant, this meant higher rank, with all of its privileges including significantly more

¹¹⁷⁰ See Kamalov, *U kazhdoi zhizn' – odna*, pp. 7-8. This novel opens with artillery unit complaining to infantry about their slovenly position.

¹¹⁷¹ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. 1, op. 30, d. 23, l. 1ob. “From bitter experience we don’t particularly trust the infantry.” Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, p. 167.

¹¹⁷² In connection with this event, an Issue of *Bloknot agitatora Krasnoi Armii* (1944:28) was dedicated to the artillery in October of 1944. For more on this holiday and how it was maneuvered so as not to interfere with other holidays, see Serhy Yekelchuk, *Stalin’s Citizens: Everyday Politics in the Wake of Total War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 41-42.

¹¹⁷³ E. Burdzhakov, “Zabota Tovarishcha Stalin ob ukreplenii Krasnoi Armii,” *Bloknot agitatora Krasnoi Armii*, 1944:35, pp. 28-9

¹¹⁷⁴ E.g. NA IRI RAN f. 2 r. 1 op. 230, d. 6 l. 1ob. They also make up a major portion of the diarists, memoirists, interviewees and novelists available to researchers (E.g. In my own work Inozemtsev, Kiselev, Baklanov, Nikulin, sometimes Abdulin and Komsii, all served in the artillery).

pay.¹¹⁷⁵ The rank of a tank commander was the equivalent of that of a commander who could lead 40 or more soldiers in the infantry.

Tanks required extensive training and coordination to work effectively but were surprisingly vulnerable. To be in a tank crew meant to burn, literally. Tanks suffered massive casualties, and escaping from a burning tank was part of the job. One veteran casually wrote his mother that two tanks had burnt, while another told the Mints Commission of a comrade who had escaped from 12 tanks before he perished at the front (outside of his tank).¹¹⁷⁶ Early in the war, it was determined by officers at the highest echelons that tanks should be sent to already existing units rather than be used to form new units, as a unit would lose 70-80% of its tanks in 10-15 days of combat.¹¹⁷⁷ Germans investigating destroyed tanks that they captured found that the vast majority were hit within six months of manufacture.¹¹⁷⁸

These facts ran counter to an official image of tanks as virtually indestructible machines, and tankers as knightly figures. The immensely popular “Tanker’s March,” made popular by the film *Traktoristy* (Mosfilm, 1939.) on the eve of the war, spoke only of the remarkable qualities of tankers, not their vulnerability:

Our armor is strong and our tanks fast,
And our people filled with bravery:
In the ranks stand soviet tankers –
Sons of their great Motherland.
Roaring with fire, shining with the sparkle of steel
The machines go into a furious campaign,
When we are ordered into battle by Comrade Stalin
and Voroshilov leads us into battle!

The song continued to promise any enemy waiting in ambush that Soviet tankers would fire first and destroy them, driving their tanks through “woods, hills and water.”¹¹⁷⁹ Much of the folklore produced by tankers themselves focused on their feelings of vulnerability and spoke to a sense of fatalism that belied official culture and more accurately reflected what they witnessed inside their tanks. A well known song, sung in many variations by tankers and self-propelled gunners, spoke of a proud fatalism and affection for both their machine and loved ones:

Motors flare with flame
the turret is licked by tongues
I accept the call of fate
with a handshake...
They take us out from the debris
Carry the carcass out
And volleys from the turret’s cannon
Escorts us on our last voyage...
Farewell Marusia, my darling

¹¹⁷⁵ RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 66, ll. 232-234, in Barsukov, *et. al.*, *Priказы narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 22 iiunia 1941 g. —1942 g.*, pp. 122-123. This order also stated that soldiers who had demonstrated particular competence in training could be bumped up one rank.

¹¹⁷⁶ RGASPI F. M-7, op. 2, d. 650, ll. 87. NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 120, d. 3, l. 4.

¹¹⁷⁷ APRF f. 3, op. 50, d. 264, l. 166, in Kudriashov, *Voina*, p. 84.

¹¹⁷⁸ Dunn, *Hitler’s Nemesis*, p. 150.

¹¹⁷⁹ Ivan Pyrev, dir., *Traktoristy* (Mosfilm, 1939.)

And you, KV [tank], my little brother,
You I will see no more,
I lay with a shattered skull.¹¹⁸⁰

Tanks were fearsome machines cared for by their users, but they could also become giant coffins. The extreme responsibility that tankers had to their machines, which tended to have short lives in combat, led to a great deal of identification with their machines and many to have a long list of comrades who they had seen die in the tight confines of the tank.

Each tank was well identified. Tanks themselves often had a name and a significant story even before arriving in a unit. It was not uncommon for a collective farm or factory or region to collect money to pay for a tank column during the war, often lending the name of the organization that had raised the money to the tanks (e.g. “Kirovets” from Kirovskii zavod or “Battle Girlfriend”, a tank paid for by a woman who later became its driver-mechanic).¹¹⁸¹ Many tanks were also given the name of a historical personage such as Chapaev or Suvorov. Naming tanks gave them an affective connection with either the rear or the reified Russian heroic past. Even unnamed tanks were given a number by the unit commander that was to be displayed from all sides to make tanks identifiable to each other and coordinating units. Soldiers painted their tanks camouflage colors to break up their outline in the summer and whitewashed tanks in the winter. The potential for personalization was quite high, and soldiers came to love their machines, even if they were frequently knocked out of commission and repaired.¹¹⁸²

Tankers, artillerists and infantrymen all lived very differently. Who you were in the army was determined by what weapon you used and how well you used it. The way that your time would be organized, the activities that you engaged in, how well you were compensated and a great deal of social capital was all an extension of the weapon you wielded. As the war continued and soldiers became more and more competent, these differences continued even as the branches began interacting with each other more and more intimately.

Conclusion: The Emergence of a Professional Army and Its Consequences

The experience of veterans, purchased at a steep cost in human lives, was immensely valuable. Just as cadres of workers learned on the job during the First Five Year Plan, so did soldiers at the front. As the crises of 1941-1942 passed, units were increasingly comprised of soldiers who had survived their initial trial of combat, having learned the skills necessary to survive at the front and also of soldiers who had had time to adequately train before being sent into combat. No longer did the army need to buy time and territory with the lives of barely trained soldiers. Pulling the trigger was not the central problem it had once been. By 1943 an officer could tell Vasily Grossman: “The infantry has become accustomed to shooting. Automation has developed, you go into an attack, you fire on the

¹¹⁸⁰ Viktor Kurochkin, “Na voine kak na voine,” *Povesti i rasskazy* (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1978), pp. 88-90.

¹¹⁸¹ “Voennaia istoriia zhenshchiny i ee tanka ‘Boevaia podrug’a” *RIA Novosti*, March 14, 2010 <http://ria.ru/ocherki/20100414/222121628.html> (March 12, 2015).

¹¹⁸² *BUBiMV-44*, p. 202. 30-50cm in height, these letters were written in white during the summer, and red during the winter.

move, however you can.”¹¹⁸³ Beyond simply shooting, soldiers were increasingly showing mastery of their weapons, as the rising number of Guards Units demonstrated.¹¹⁸⁴ Soviet industry was able to produce arms and armaments on a massive scale, providing soldiers with everything that they needed to kill. The Nazis had also provided ample reasons for most soldiers to pull the trigger. As men and women saw destroyed villages and murdered civilians and POWs, the propaganda proscription to allow “noble anger” to overtake oneself and take vengeance became a reality. Soldiers were not only angrier, they were more professional.

By early 1943 General Chuikov could boast that “Stalingrad is the glory of the Russian infantry. The infantry defeated the entire arsenal of German technology.”¹¹⁸⁵ He presented the clear turning point of the war as the triumph of the most basic, motley and overwhelmingly peasant (i.e. backward) branch of the army over the meticulously designed wonder weapons of the Wehrmacht. Other branches were also ascendant. On Red Army Day (February 23) 1943, Stalin declared that the Red Army had become a professional [*kadrovaia*] army.¹¹⁸⁶ Starting in 1943, soldiers were increasingly better trained and armed, as expertise and firepower came to replace manpower.¹¹⁸⁷ The proportion of automatic weapons in the army rose dramatically and soldiers were increasingly diverted to the technical branches as firepower and skill made up for manpower in the infantry.¹¹⁸⁸ Technical formations came to make up a larger part of the army as efforts were made to keep armor and artillery at full strength, often leading to chronically understrength infantry formations.¹¹⁸⁹ The increasing competence of both soldiers and commanders led to lighter casualties.¹¹⁹⁰ The success at Stalingrad provided new tactics and showcased the efficacy of specialized troops such as snipers and sub-machine gunners. As the army turned westward, it was both remechanized and reprofessionalized. The aggressive tactics that had often been suicidal in the first period of the war became effective.

Soldiers noticed increasing coordination between the branches of service during operations.¹¹⁹¹ Beginning in Stalingrad and developing more massively from the Battle of Kursk, new “Storm Units” [*shturmovye otriady, shturmovye gruppy*] played an increasingly important role in combat.¹¹⁹² Mixed groups of the various arms brought together for a specific task (e.g. storming part of a city, capturing an individual height) provided greater coordination. The storm units were the polar opposite of the poorly trained and barely

¹¹⁸³ Grossman, *Gody voiny*, p. 423.

¹¹⁸⁴ F. Gorokhov, “Komandir – dusha boevoi spaiki i sokhraneniia boevykh traditsii chasti,” *Agitator i Propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1943:3-4. pp. 34-36. By February 1943 over 60 divisions, corps and other large units had earned Guards status.

¹¹⁸⁵ Grossman, *Gody voiny*, p. 354.

¹¹⁸⁶ A. Burdzhlov, “Rost Krasnoi Armii v khode Otechestvennoi voiny,” p. 22.

¹¹⁸⁷ Dunn, *Hitler's Nemesis*, pp. 37-38.

¹¹⁸⁸ Dunn, *Hitler's Nemesis*, pp. xxi, 39.

¹¹⁸⁹ Dunn, *Hitler's Nemesis*, p. 39-40, 68; Inozemtsev, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 159; Atabek, *K biografii frontovogo pokoleniia*, p. 98.

¹¹⁹⁰ Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, pp. 211-213; Grossman, *Gody voiny*, p. 423.

¹¹⁹¹ Valentina Chudakova, *Chizhik-ptichka s kharakterom* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1980), c.110-113. Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, pp. 132-133.

¹¹⁹² See e.g. Dunn, *Hitler's Nemesis*, pp. 12-13; TsAMO f. 202, op. 5, d. 1329, ll. 27-28 in A.M. Sokolov, V.I. Fesenko, et al., *Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia. Preliudiia Kurskoi bitvy. T. 15 (4-3)* (Moscow: TERRA, 1997), pp. 140-142.

coordinated units of the first phase of the war. These groups came to redefine how soldiers saw their place and relied on professionalized cadres to succeed. A typical storm group included, according to a 1944 manual:

two rifle squads, 1-2 heavy machineguns, 1 anti-tank rifle squad, 1 platoon of 50-mm mortars, 1-2 cannon, a squad of sappers with plastic explosives, mine detectors, fuel containers and the means to cut wire, 2 flamethrowers, 2-3 medium or 1-2 heavy tanks. The commander of a storm group, is, as a rule, the commander of an infantry platoon.¹¹⁹³

This type of organization depended on highly professionalized cadres who could effectively wield their weapons in a very coordinated manner. This could impact a soldier's understanding of his or her place in the army and foster greater intimacy between soldiers and their commanders. Hero of the Soviet Union Lt. General Koshevoi described the difference in how units functioned in one of the last operations of the war to the Mints Commission:

If you asked him, every soldier knew who you were... He even forgot which company he belonged to. We broke the whole organization, as it had existed before, down. We built a new one, prepared specifically for the mission, which was assigned to the troops. Got all people – sappers, artillerists, signals, staffers, tankers, self-propelled gunners – together, in one unit, so that everyone knew everyone else. This was a hard thing to do. From each commander we demanded, that he would know everyone. He could answer: Ivanov, from Kuibyshev Oblast', wounded twice, trained, poorly prepared for the mission. He had to answer for every soldier.¹¹⁹⁴

These new tactics placed greater importance on the individual soldier, as commanders demanded not only more of him or her but also took seriously the rhetoric of a commander being intimate with their subordinates. The units were often stable groups of professionals, and it was acknowledged that these professionals needed ample and reliable supplies to fulfill their missions.

Soldiers had expanding access to ammunition and fuel. General Antipenko, head provisioning officer for the 1st Byelorussian Front, stated that if you were to take the Battle of Stalingrad as a base level, then by the summer of 1943 the amount of ammunition used daily had increased more than threefold and fuel quadrupled, while by the Battle of Berlin ammunition was being expended at nearly five times the rate of 1942 and fuel over five times.¹¹⁹⁵ Increasing numbers of Guards Units meant that even a significant number of infantry formations would have a chance to create functioning organisms and build camaraderie, as their wounded returned to the same unit. These formations were also better armed and fed.¹¹⁹⁶ Soldiers could not help but notice this change. In 1944 Inozemtsev, who had fought since the beginning of the war, recoded in his diary: "All of this in total seems more like a well organized military parade than war."¹¹⁹⁷ Abdulkaimov wrote in his diary that at the beginning of the war German artillerists were considered artists, and by late 1944: "Russian artillerists... have become skillful directors... forcing German artists

¹¹⁹³ M. M. Kozhevnikov, *Deistviia tankov v sostave shturmovoi gruppy pri atake DOT i DZOT* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1944), p. 12.

¹¹⁹⁴ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 226, l. 25ob.

¹¹⁹⁵ Antipenko, *Front i tyl*, p. 4. Fuel is key not only to keep tanks running, but to bring food and ammunition to soldiers at the front.

¹¹⁹⁶ APRF f. 3, op. 50, d. 311, ll. 13-30, in Kudriashov, *Voina*, pp. 156-157.

¹¹⁹⁷ Inozemtsev, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 172.

to play the final scene of 'Catastrophe'.¹¹⁹⁸ In addition to greater infrastructure and organization, soldiers seemed more willing to kill.

Many observed that soldiers had become obsessed with killing and the tools of the trade. Luzhbin recorded that one of his soldiers told him: "I have already forgotten how to boil kasha, but I know mines very well."¹¹⁹⁹ One sniper confided to Vasili Grossman: "I have become a brutal [*zverskii*] person – I kill, I hate them, as if that is how my life should be."¹²⁰⁰ During Stalingrad the desire to kill seems to have reached the level of obsession, as Ivan Vasiliev, Head of the Political Section of the 62nd Army at Stalingrad told the Mints Commission: "I should say that I didn't see nor hear nor get any intelligence about Red Army men under any battle conditions showing any sort of pity for the Germans. What is more, even if there wasn't anyone to stick with a bayonet, they would stab the dead."¹²⁰¹ At the end of the war Boris Slutskii described the hatred towards the enemy as "not contempt, not spite, but a disgusted hatred, an attitude on the level of regard for frogs and salamanders."¹²⁰² At least for part of the army, hatred went from passion to a sort of disgusted ennui that spoke of the mastery Red Army soldiers attained as they came to enjoy overwhelming superiority in tanks, planes and artillery, as well as a skilled cadres to use them.

Becoming a professional soldier could overshadow all other identities, as Loginov recalled: "Sometimes it seems as if we've always been soldiers, as if we never had a family or childhood."¹²⁰³ When prewar professions were mentioned in propaganda, it was because it directly related to their work at the front (e.g. hunters who became snipers), or to contrast what a soldier had become or to provide metaphors for killing from their prior work.¹²⁰⁴ Millions of people had been taught to kill and plied this trade for years. Soldiers came to terms with the killing they had done without any government program to screen them for psychological trauma or reintegrate them into society. Having weapons training and seeing the results of their use was the norm for men ages 18-50 by 1945. After the war some veterans spent as much of their free time as possible with their comrades, others avoided other veterans and talk of the war.¹²⁰⁵ Some described feeling uncomfortable without a weapon within reach, and mass numbers of arms circulated in the chaotic years after the war.¹²⁰⁶

Weapons themselves took up a new status after the war, as the AK-47 and other modern weapons supplanted wartime arms and the rifles, machineguns, cannons and tanks used during the war began to take their places behind glass in museums and on top of pedestals as monuments. Often tanks and artillery pieces that had played a part in the

¹¹⁹⁸ Izakbai Abdukaimov, "iz frontovogo dnevnika," *S perom i avtomatom. Rasskazy. Frontovye zarisovki* (F.: Metep, 1975), p. 6.

¹¹⁹⁹ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 1, d. 7, l. 62.

¹²⁰⁰ Grossman, *Gody voiny*, p. 387.

¹²⁰¹ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 2a, l. 50.

¹²⁰² Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p. 19-20.

¹²⁰³ Loginov, *Eto bylo na fronte*, p. 8.

¹²⁰⁴ A. Rezapkin "Vspomni-ka svoiu professiiu...," *Bloknot agitator Krasnoi Armii*, 1942:9, pp. 29-30

¹²⁰⁵ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 28, d. 35, l. 8; Anatolii Genatulin, *Nas ostaetsia malo: Rasskazy i povest'* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1988), pp. 10-11: "It wouldn't come to anyone's mind to boast that they fought in the war... The men talked about anything except the war. It was not so much a forbidden topic, but something too fresh. Neither the pain of it had been forgotten, nor the fear of death, the bitterness and the curse..."

¹²⁰⁶ Baklanov, *Zhizn', podarennaia dvazhdy*, p. 77.

liberation of a city became monuments after the war. There was little place for the discussion of the gritty details of what these weapons had done or the difficult process of learning to use them. Instead, what soldiers and their arms had accomplished together, the defeat of fascism, was emphasized. They had learned and plied a new trade, one that was particularly grim and risky, but which they had mastered.

Chapter 6

Trophies of War: Red Army Soldiers Confront an Alien World of Goods

Introduction

On March 29, 1945, Guards Colonel Strukov, Head of the Political Department of Field Operations, 1st Ukrainian Front, described the range of reactions by Red Army soldiers to the Third Reich to a correspondent from the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union. His account focused almost entirely on the soldiers' interactions with *things* and he divided their responses into three groups, providing a fourth (politically correct) response in his commentary. As we will see, Strukov outlined what were the four major responses to alien goods in the course of the war: a sense of inferiority, a sense of superiority, covetousness, and rage, as well as the State's suppression, cultivation or tolerance of these attitudes. As he told his interviewer:

A certain category of people, seeing the external everyday culture, its livability, became enraptured by it. One major directly said that the living conditions in a German village were higher than those of our kolkhozes, and that, therefore, our system lagged behind their culture. The major was, of course, expelled from the party, but they should have explained what the roots of this prosperity were. First of all, Germany was living off the theft of all of Europe; second of all, this is prosperity of the second order. Comfort, cozy things, pictures – this is domestic comfort, but Germans don't have any real aesthetic feeling. They have a lot of pictures, but they are lithographs in rich frames, there are no good canvases. Philistine bourgeois [*meshchanski*] comfort, very closed minded.

Strukov continued, decrying the poor quality of German goods and explaining that historical circumstances had spared Germany the terrible fate of Russia. In part the latter explained the reaction of many soldiers:

Another group of people, a large one, was overtaken by the desire to take vengeance on the Germans, to beat, destroy. One warrior, for example, burned 9 houses down. And when he was reprimanded, he answered: "Do what you want. I will burn 91 more. I promised myself for all their villainy to burn 100 houses." Of course, you can't punish him, but you need to pull him back a bit. They destroy furniture in the same fashion, break and destroy everything.

Finally, there is another, although small group, that has morally decayed. Other troops and officers, seeing nice things, were overtaken by acquisitive instinct. To take as much stuff as possible, put it all in sacks. We had to shoot one military commandant in front of the soldiers. In a month he managed to rape 12 women, and they found 40 gold watches on him.¹²⁰⁷

Between 1941-1945, soldiers of the Red Army, whose modest material culture occupied the last five chapters of this dissertation, were confronted with an enemy who was often better dressed, wealthier and for the first few years of the war more effective. First on the battlefield on home turf, then in neutral or allied territory, and finally in the lair of their foe, Red Army soldiers confronted an alien culture, whose nature often confounded them and whose material world was both attractive and repulsive. For average citizens, this trip abroad was a unique chance to leave (and return to) the Soviet Union, one that

¹²⁰⁷ NA IRI RAN, f. 2, r. X, op. 6, d. 1, ll. 3-4.

came at great personal risk and with a clear objective – to destroy fascism and the Third Reich. What soldiers saw along the way was puzzling. Soldiers not only reckoned with many material objects and institutions that the Soviet Union had purged – they were also left to wonder why people who lived materially so much better than they did had waged a genocidal war against them, in which the German military systematically raped, pillaged and destroyed people and property in the territories it occupied. This experience could both support and undermine official Soviet views.¹²⁰⁸

This chapter discusses how Red Army soldiers confronted the alien material world through the practice of trophy taking. In so doing, it draws on how particular Soviet perceptions of class, criminality and property informed soldiers' understandings of and interactions with alien goods and people). It is divided into four sections. Section One analyzes the term *trofei* and the formal structures and policies developed in the army to control the collection and usage of trophies prior to 1945. Section Two describes the encounter of Red Army soldiers with enemy bodies (living and dead), weapons, machinery, living spaces and personal possessions on Soviet territory, with a brief interlude to discuss how Third Reich occupation policies and the actions of Wehrmacht soldiers impacted the Red Army's culture of trophy taking. Part Three, the largest section, follows the Red Army into Europe, examining how soldiers interpreted their encounter with the bourgeois world. This section also examines changes in trophy policy as well as what types of items soldiers describe taking and destroying, and the rationale behind these acts. Finally, Section Four follows items taken from the Third Reich (and elsewhere) back to the Soviet Union, whether by parcel, whole train car or in the thing-bag of demobilized soldiers.

Trophies could take on a variety of meanings. They were physical proof of victory over the enemy. As one commander told Vasili Grossman: "The enemy's defeat is characterized by prisoners, dead and lost machinery."¹²⁰⁹ In the summer of 1943, a massive display of captured and destroyed enemy machinery filled Gorky Park (Moscow's Central Park of Culture and Relaxation), while in the summer 1944 over 50,000 prisoners of war were paraded through Moscow. In 1945 banners taken from the Third Reich were thrown at Stalin's feet. All three of these acts harkened back to the age of Cesar and were filmed and circulated to allied countries as proof of Soviet triumph. But trophies were not simply markers of victory, they were objects that could be practical. Trophies included food, weapons and vehicles that soldiers could use. They also included objects that could serve as evidence of depravity, such as pornography, photographs or drawings of atrocities or

¹²⁰⁸ A note on historiography. The novelty of this chapter is that it looks at the experience of interaction with the alien world of the enemy from the war's beginning to end and via objects. Previous works have interrogated the end of the war, discussing trophies as simply part of the bacchanalia of 1945. Most authors (e.g. Naimark) have been interested in political or institutional histories, while those who have been interested in cultural history have yet to concentrate on the objects themselves (e.g. Budnitsky, Merridale). Focusing on material culture allows us to interrogate the meaning of trophies to Soviet society more generally and discover what they can tell us about socialist perceptions of property specifically. My intervention is to provide a thick description of how Soviet people perceived, came to understand and interact with the foreign, forbidden world of trophies. Oleg Budnitskii, "The Intelligentsia Meets the Enemy," Merridale, *Ivan's*; Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

¹²⁰⁹ Grossman, *Gody voini*, p. 407.

diaries recording heinous acts.¹²¹⁰ Finally, trophies could simply be objects of desire, rare consumer goods that were prohibitively expensive or simply hard to come by in the Soviet Union.¹²¹¹

Trophies often elicited a combination of attraction and revulsion. From the very beginning of the Soviet project there was uneasiness about material objects and *meshchanstvo* (and its adjectival forms *meshchanskii*, *-oe*, *-aia*), a concept Strukov used in his dismissal of supposed German superiority (“Philistine/Bourgeois [*Meshchanskii*] comfort, very close-minded”). *Meshchanstvo*, which can be translated as bourgeois philistinism, was from the very beginning posited as one of the greatest threats to the Soviet project, something that could corrupt from within as the desire for comfortable living overtook Revolutionary consciousness. Early Soviet culture had often defined itself in contradiction to traditional refinement, although some had been enthusiastic about raising the cultural level of the workers along more traditional lines. Attempts to overthrow bourgeois norms with new, collective and radically different ways of living that could include fundamentally different arrangements of everyday life (no kitchens or baths in newly built housing, relatively free love, mass catering) were a hallmark of this period of experimentation. However, on the eve of the war, many of the trappings of bourgeois culture (the importance of many aspects of traditional gender roles, return of traditional arts and literature, an emphasis on comfort and the return of some accessories of pre-Revolutionary Russian society including summer homes) returned to popular culture and became part of the Soviet way of life.¹²¹² Nonetheless, the traditional peasant society from which most soldiers came was deeply hostile to conspicuous displays of wealth. The level of wealth of Polish *Pany* and German Burgers was shocking to Red Army soldiers, but so was the obsession of these real life *meshchane* [bourgeois philistines] with their things. There was something pathetic about these people, but also something awe inspiring about how well they lived.¹²¹³ That was, of course, until Red Army men realized that they could take or destroy whatever they wanted.

At the heart of this chapter lies a conundrum that has run throughout this work: the question of property. Symbolically, taking possession of and displaying enemy objects was a clear sign of victory, while practically the use of resources secured on the battlefield was vital to the war effort. As with rations, weapons and even soldiers’ bodies, the State attempted to control and regulate the use of everything that was in the hands of the citizen (and those hands themselves). Until 1945, anything left on the battlefield and anything a soldier found was to be treated as state property and as potentially dangerous. As Soviet troops moved beyond Union borders, policy shifted to allow soldiers to send trophies from

¹²¹⁰ Jochen Hellbeck, ““The Diaries of Fritzes and the Letters of Gretchens”: Personal Writings from the German–soviet War and Their Readers,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 2009:10.3, pp. 571-606.

¹²¹¹ E.g. watches, cameras, silk dresses, children’s clothing, radios.

¹²¹² On *meshchanstvo* see Svetlana Boym, *Common Places : Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1994); Katerina Clark, *the Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Vera Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction. Enlarged and Updated Edition* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).

¹²¹³ This same tension had been present when the Soviet Union annexed parts of Eastern Poland in 1939 and was confronted by wealth there. See Jan Gross, *Revolution From Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1988), pp. 28, 46-47.

the Third Reich to their families, and the mail service offered free and discounted monthly shipping rates. This shift from restriction to invitation could be seen as a reiteration of early Bolshevik attempts at leveling through violent redistribution. In 1918, the Party called on working people to “loot the looters”, helping themselves to the possessions of class enemies. Collectivization (1929-1931) was accompanied by the politics of dekulakization, the process of liquidating a class that had been declared criminal and the expropriation of their possessions. In 1945 Red Army soldiers were again invited to loot their enemies, this time keeping what they took. The foe was now identifiable by ethnicity, as the entire German people came to be seen as bourgeois philistines and inherently criminal.

The perceived right to take from the enemy was in many ways engrained in Soviet jurisprudence. The confiscation of all property was part of the punishment not only for capital crimes (such as murder and treason), but could become part of the sentence for a variety of offenses. Soviet law and policy had openly targeted groups before and during the war, leading to the (often unjust) punishment and deportation of categories of people, with the parallel confiscation of all or most of their property.¹²¹⁴ That the nature of German occupation was undoubtedly criminal led many soldiers to see confiscation of property from any German as just.¹²¹⁵ Red Army soldiers brought a particular understanding of property with them to Eastern Europe and the Third Reich, one that rested on government monopoly and the right of confiscation, which the state would mediate and influence via its policy on trophies.

Part 1: Words and Structures

Trophy came to modern languages by way of the ancient Greek term *tropaion*, the practice of demarcating the place of one’s victory using the weapons of the vanquished.¹²¹⁶ While few people are aware of this etymological link, the idea of trophy as proof of victory is firmly ingrained in European culture. The Russian word *trofei* is used slightly differently from its English equivalent, and the units responsible for collecting trophies, the *trofeinye komandy*, had a wide range of competencies. *Trofei*, according to a dictionary published on the eve of the war, was defined as “Spoils taken during a victory over the enemy” and also “A mark or symbol of victory.”¹²¹⁷ In practice, *trofei* came to mean not only things that belonged to the enemy but also all useful things left on the battlefield, including one’s own

¹²¹⁴ See for example, Hachten, *Property Relations and the Economic Organization of Soviet Russia*, p. 307.

¹²¹⁵ The reduction of individuals into categories was a major feature of not only Nazi but Soviet and even anti-Soviet thought. The Nazis desire to destroy whole racial groups found analogies among nationalist partisans who attempted to ethnically cleanse Ukraine. The Bolshevik desire to eliminate “kulaks” as a class and later punishment of whole ethnic groups as “traitor nations” showed that Stalinism took both class and ethnicity seriously. This “gardening state” logic can help explain how Soviet soldiers acted while abroad.

¹²¹⁶ Wolfgang Schivelbush, translated by Jefferson Chase, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning and Recovery* (New York: Metropolitan, 2003), p. 6.

¹²¹⁷ D.N. Ushakov, *Tolkovyi slovar’ russkogo iazika* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo inostrannykh i natsional’nykh slovarei, 1940) p. 809; According to Fasmer, this word entered the Russian language under Peter the Great. Maks Fasmer, *Etimologicheskii slovar’ russkogo iazika. T.IV (T-Iashur)* perevod O.N. Trubacheva (Moscow: Progress, 1987) p. 107.

damaged tanks, abandoned weaponry and even whole cities.¹²¹⁸ Both soldiers and the state could take trophies, although initially the state positioned itself as the sole arbiter of these properties. “*Trofeinyi*”, the adjectival form, could also be used to indicate anything foreign, for example cigarettes given to Ivan by Joe. In short, *trofei* covered everything from scrap metal to weapons to works of art, and the army’s expanding understanding of trophies and what was to be done with them moved roughly in that progression.

Early in the war, the army realized that trophies had been overlooked in military organization. No one was assigned to collect scrap metal and enemy valuables. At the beginning of the war, evacuation of scrap and “trophy goods” became a part of the competency of rear-area services, without a dedicated supporting structure.¹²¹⁹ In the first months of the war, evacuation of Red Army weaponry, machinery and supplies was often unrealizable, as the army retreated and disintegrated, leaving the Wehrmacht with a vast number and wide array of trophies. However, after the victorious Moscow counter-offensive the Red Army faced the task of collecting heretofore-unseen amounts of trophies, a situation which a year later was replayed to even greater effect in and around Stalingrad. These successes would lead to an expansion of the trophy-collecting apparatus.¹²²⁰

The first organized and dedicated teams of soldiers tasked with collecting and evacuating army property, trophies and scrap metal were organized on 29 September 1941 as a way to prevent resources from going to waste. This order created something like a department of sanitation for the army and called for the collection of everything from the battlefield – shell casings, weapons both functioning and broken, machinery that could run, needed repair or should just be scrapped, and everything foreign. Commanders were permitted to recruit local civilians to assist with evacuation and use military transport vehicles returning from the front to carry evacuated goods back. A system was created to sort between those items that would be used by the immediate army directly (being sent to a base in the rear of the army that collected it) and those that should be evacuated further to the rear for repair or greater scrutiny. Trophies, scrap metal and equipment requiring serious repair were all to be evacuated far to the rear, while shell casings, functioning artillery pieces, ammunition were sent to the collecting army’s base for immediate repair, recycling and/or reuse.¹²²¹ As with other resources in the army, the issues of squandering and pilfering were a constant concern, as personnel at every level could have reasons to take or destroy all manner of trophies.

Trophies were categorized as something soldiers should simply collect and send to a higher installation alongside damaged Soviet equipment and seem like an afterthought in an order primarily concerned with evacuating scrap metal and reusable Soviet equipment. Considering that the Soviet Union tottered on the brink of oblivion in the Fall of 1941, this is quite logical – this is an order given by a retreating army with ever diminishing resources.

¹²¹⁸ Yeremenko, *Dnevnik*, p. 217 counted cities among the trophies his front took in Fall of 1943. Geographic titles in honor of cities taken were an honor commonly bestowed on Red Army units, see Chapter 2 “A Personal Banner.”

¹²¹⁹ TsAMO RF f. 2, op. 920266, d. 1, ll. 483-486, in Veshchikov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, p. 94.

¹²²⁰ Kurkotkin, *Tyl sovetskikh vooruzhennykh sil v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 373-384.

¹²²¹ TsAMO RF f. 219, op. 692, d. 1, ll. 352-354, in Veshchikov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 160-162.

By March of 1942, confronted with a massive number of trophies during the Moscow counter-offensive, the army issued a new order concerning the evacuation of useful things from the field of battle. On March 22, 1942 the Government Committee of Defense issued an order “Concerning the Organization of Collection and Evacuation of Trophy Equipment and Scrap of Heavy and Light Metals”, creating groups of soldiers (3 in every division and 8-12 in every front and army) tasked with collecting trophies and scrap, with temporary commands of up to 200 men being established in armies with a massive amount of trophies. Soldiers received premiums for collecting and the army continued to mobilize local civilians as needed.¹²²² Note here the rhetorical shift, giving primacy to trophies.

A year later, after Stalingrad, the army confronted even more trophies. This led to an order reiterating the March 1942 organization of Trophy Commands, but also highlighting that trophies were state property (e.g. captured vehicles were to be apportioned by a specialized section in the front or army, not simply used by those who captured them). Soldiers were also reminded that they could be punished severely for taking trophies, that taking trophies was the same as stealing from the state. This order also put emphasis on regular reporting of trophy evacuation.¹²²³ By April of 1943 a separate Trophy Committee was established, which made the creation of a museum displaying enemy equipment a priority.¹²²⁴

1944, the year the Red Army left Soviet borders, led to another reorganization of the trophy collecting apparatus that was more professional and efficient. Firstly, an order from January 1944 included the cataloging and protection of works of art in the competencies of the trophy teams.¹²²⁵ In April of that year, another fine-tuning of the apparatus took place. Trophy teams were tasked with evacuating everything left behind by soldiers, guarding recaptured objects of national economic interest (e.g. factories) and taking back weapons and equipment in the hands of civilians. They were also tasked with keeping an eye out for new enemy weapons, paying special attention to tanks and planes. This order established a new weapons section that was to safely handle (i.e. make sure that nothing exploded) and repair captured weapons at the level of the division, army, front and entire Red Army. The newly expanded apparatus integrated specialists from different branches of service into the trophy teams, who were to determine the state of various captured equipment. Finally, the trophy teams were included in every form of rationing, including fuel and explicitly allowed the use of all means of transport, including railroads.¹²²⁶ This later version put greater emphasis on weapons but also explicitly included a much wider range of objects under the competencies of trophy teams.

¹²²² TsAMO RF f. 2, op. 795437, d. 9, ll. 229, 230, in Veshchikov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 226-228.

¹²²³ TsAMO RF f. 2, op. 795137, d. 11, ll. 37, 38, in Veshchikov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 300-301.

¹²²⁴ TsAMO RF f. 2, op. 795437, d. 11, l. 380, in Veshchikov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, p. 384.

¹²²⁵ TsAMO RF f. 236, op. 2719, d. 22, l. 18, in Veshchikov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, p. 507. This came to include other cultural valuables, such as the Third Reich’s collection of vintage wines, about which General Yeremenko had information sent to Anastas Mikoyan, the man most associated with the epicurean in the Politburo. Yeremenko, *Dnevnik*, p. 280.

¹²²⁶ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 12, ll. 208-211, in Veshchikov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 585-589.

Trophy collecting units were the army's way of ensuring that all resources left on the battlefield were under the state's control. Service in the trophy teams could be particularly unpleasant for frontline soldiers and some of their functions, particularly the collection of food and equipment from beleaguered civilians, recalled the food detachments of the civil war and collectivization.¹²²⁷ Trophies themselves included not only weapons and vehicles, but salt and grain, all of which soldiers could use or turn over to local civilians without the state's knowledge. Trophy teams were often understaffed and could fall far behind advancing units. Furthermore, frontline units often used enemy equipment and food stores to meet immediate needs, rather than giving them to the state to apportion.¹²²⁸ Conversely, trophy teams could be ordered to help sow grain and repair agricultural equipment at recaptured collective and state farms.¹²²⁹

Despite orders clearly marking everything as state property, soldiers often treated whatever was at hand and could make their lives easier as their property. Red Army personnel were known to tear apart houses for firewood or to help construct their bunkers. They also could steal food from civilians both inside and outside of the Soviet Union.¹²³⁰ Commanders were reprimanded for sending packages of trophy goods home to their families in March of 1944.¹²³¹ During the Battle of Kursk (the largest tank battle in history), the local secret police noticed that abandoned tanks were not being collected by trophy teams and instead were being "dekulakized" (i.e. cannibalized) by Red Army soldiers to repair their own tanks.¹²³² Weapons and other items taken from the enemy were popular among Red Army soldiers and there was often little the state could do to wrest these objects from the hands of those who took them.

There was another reason that the state wanted to control trophies. Trophies had an aura around them; they were things that had belonged to people now dead or in captivity, that had been used against those who took them, or at the very least, been constructed on foreign territory and came from a foreign world. Foreignness was dangerous in the Soviet Union. Even soldiers who were recruited from occupied territories could be referred to as "trophy soldiers" and regarded with suspicion.¹²³³ That the enemy had penetrated so deeply into Soviet territory was both a physical and existential threat to a regime that had promised to protect its citizens from the capitalist encirclement.

¹²²⁷ RGASPI f. M-33, op. 1, d. 853, l. 358. [Marchenko, Boris.]

¹²²⁸ TsAMO RF f. 244, op. 3017, d. 45, ll. 4, 5, in Veshchkirov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 447, 462-463.

¹²²⁹ TsAMO RF f. 233, op. 2342, d. 10, ll. 55-59, in Veshchkirov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, p. 565.

¹²³⁰ TsAMO RF f. 233, op. 2342, d. 10, ll. 47, 48, in Veshchkirov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 521-522; RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 77, ll. 482-484, in A. I. Barsukov, *et al.*, *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943-1945gg.*, pp. 290-292.

¹²³¹ TsAMO RF, f. 2, op. 795437, d. 12, l. 132, in Veshchkirov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 532-533.

¹²³² TsA FSB Rossii, f. 3, on. 10, d. 118, l. 62, in Zhadobin, *et al.*, "Ognennaia duga," pp. 150-151.

¹²³³ Grigorii Pomerants, "Stanovlenie lichnosti skvoz' terror i voinu," *Vestnik Evropy*, 2010:28-29. <http://magazines.russ.ru/vestnik/2010/28/po30-pr.html>; See also Chapter 1 of this volume.

Part 2: Battlefield Trophies, Living and Dead

Red Army soldiers encountered enemy prisoners of war, corpses, weapons, bunkers and equipment on battlefields from the Caucasus Mountains to Berlin. They also confronted what the enemy had done on Soviet territory. These encounters took place on the way to, during or returning from combat where enemy soldiers would be, were or had been actively trying to kill them. What Red Army soldiers saw changed their understanding of who they were fighting, the stakes of the war, and what human beings were capable of. It also set the stage for how Soviet soldiers would act when they arrived as victors in 1944 and 1945 on the territory of the Axis states.

Like other forms of trophies, prisoners were rare in the first months of the war. The first prisoner of war taken by Danil Granin's unit, a hastily organized Home Guard formation near Leningrad, shook Granin and his comrades to their core. They had been assured by prewar propaganda and their political officers that the average German soldier was a worker – a class ally – who would come around to who his real enemies were. The war was supposed to be brief and mostly on enemy territory. Instead, Granin, a Jew, confronted a man whose biography ran perfectly parallel to his own, save for the fact that his prisoner was a *real* soldier, who stood erect, impeccably dressed and clean (in a white shirt!). The prisoner was fanatically certain that his captors would soon be dead and simply ignored them. Granin and his comrades were enraged, but powerless in their shock, they could not even hit this captive.¹²³⁴ These early encounters with confident prisoners took place in an environment where Germans were dropping millions of leaflets on Soviet positions, which often posited the Germans as working class men and natural allies, as friends who would liberate the Russians from a “Judeo-Bolshevik yoke”.

Foreign objects could infect and pollute, and the Germans produced a massive amount of paper for Soviet consumption. *Listovki*, small leaflets that attempted to convince soldiers to surrender, were produced by the Germans not only in Russian, but in a variety of Soviet languages.¹²³⁵ They promised safety and often appealed to racism (anti-Semitism), nationalism or class antagonisms within the army. According to Iakov Aizenshtat, the secretary of a military tribunal, the *listovki* were produced on special paper to make them more attractive to soldiers, who would use them to roll cigarettes.¹²³⁶ Finding a *listovka* in a soldier's possession was considered to be proof of treason, so the *listovki* physically manifested the abstract principal of betraying the state and the people. Surgeon A.A. Vishnevskii boasted in his diary: “we use them [*listovki*] for another purpose entirely,” presumably as toilet paper. However, the head of the Red Army's Political Department complained in 1942: “All we do is collect and burn these *listovki*, but the soldiers read them anyway.”¹²³⁷ *Listovki* were dangerously seductive to soldiers facing unbearable conditions and could announce inconvenient truths, such as the fact that Stalin's own son had been taken prisoner, or simple falsities to demoralize soldiers.¹²³⁸ The war exposed Soviet

¹²³⁴ Granin, *Nash kombat*, pp. 218-220: “in those days the main feeling we experienced was one of offense, outrage.”

¹²³⁵ Schechter, “‘The People's Instructions’: Indigenizing the Great Patriotic War Among ‘Non-Russians,’” p. 111.

¹²³⁶ Aizenshtat, *Zapiski sekretariia voennogo tribunala*, pp. 21-22.

¹²³⁷ Vishnevskii, *Dnevnik khirurga*, p.23; RGASPI F. 88, op. 1, d. 953, l. 8.

¹²³⁸ L. Belousov, A. Vatlin, *Propusk v rai: Sverkhkoruzhiie poslednei mirovoi* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2007), p. 53.

citizens to alternatives, whether in the form of *listovki*, or under occupation, and while by and large these alternatives were worse than Stalinism, for certain groups and individuals the Third Reich offered an opportunity to realize nationalist dreams or political vengeance. While *listovki* were the physical manifestation of foreign corruption and its ability to seduce weak-willed soldiers, the idea of foreign objects as potentially corrupting did not end with them. It would take months of bitter experience to convince many disgruntled Soviet citizens that the Fascists were worse than the Communists, and as we have seen, millions of Soviet soldiers surrendered to the enemy in the first two years of the conflict.

While not everyone realized it, the Fascist invasion presented dangers heretofore unknown to the Soviet regime and people. Planning in the Third Reich viewed Soviet territory as a space to be cleared of inferior people to make way for Germans, using the settlement of the American West as a model. This led to a barbarization of warfare combined with modern technology that facilitated horrendous violence. Soviet citizens were deliberately starved, executed in large numbers and deprived of property.¹²³⁹ Many of the hard-earned gains of Stalin's crash industrialization were rent asunder by the occupying forces. To put it succinctly, soldiers of the Third Reich functioned in an environment virtually without law in which they were encouraged to take and destroy whatever they wanted, to completely ignore the humanity of the people inhabiting the spaces they controlled.

The results of this policy were mass murder, rape and theft. As the Red Army recaptured towns, even those who had suffered greatly under Stalin realized that a victorious Reich meant literal extinction. War correspondent Vasilii Grossman overheard women in a canteen in Stalingrad say "That Hitler is the real anti-Christ, and we used to think that communists were anti-Christ."¹²⁴⁰ The Soviet press had no need to fabricate stories about German atrocities, and spread information about the execution of POWs, the bleeding to death of children to give German soldiers blood, rape and murder of women and a variety of other sadistic acts.¹²⁴¹ As discussed in Chapter 4, soldiers witnessed the aftermath of these acts first hand, recording them for posterity. Nagim Khaiaizov wrote in his diary in August of 1943:

An inveterate murderer can't do what the Germans are doing. History knows examples, when a murderer of the highest caliber, having slaughtered a whole family, has stopped before the cradle of a child in indecision. But a fascist is "brave," he, without thought, will hoist a child up on his bayonet. I have myself seen a child, bayoneted by the Germans.¹²⁴²

These atrocities were mobilized in "Meetings of vengeance," in which soldiers vowed to avenge those whose remains they committed to the earth.¹²⁴³ The press was also filled with calls to kill German soldiers, and tied one's sense of self worth to successful killing of the enemy.¹²⁴⁴ The dead were often the first enemy soldiers that one saw and a satisfying sight for those who had witnessed atrocities committed by the Reich.

¹²³⁹ See, e.g., Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Penguin, 2006), pp. 467, 469, 476-480, 538-549.

¹²⁴⁰ Grossman, *Gody voini*, p.344. The Russian original has a markedly folksy flavor.

¹²⁴¹ See e.g. A. Chepelev, "Krov' nevinnykh", *Krasnoarmeets* 2:1942, pp. 12-13.

¹²⁴² RGASPI f. M-33, op. 1, d. 1085, ll. 35-36.

¹²⁴³ See Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of "Meetings of Vengeance".

¹²⁴⁴ See Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of incantations to kill the enemy.

Enemy dead were a clear sign of victory, a visceral reminder to a soldier who saw them that he or she was alive and those trying to kill him or her was not. Red Army soldiers wrote with pride about killing the enemy. Some said that German corpses looked like so many locusts.¹²⁴⁵ Often, there seemed a sense of pride in having survived, as Boris Marchenko, a High School Principal in civilian life, wrote home on May 1st, 1943:

I didn't know it was so pleasant to kill the enemy. I used to consider the aphorism "an enemy's corpse has a sweet smell" savage, but now I understand... It is pleasant to look at these dead Aryan faces with their long-teeth showing. You see, they stood between you and me and our children... So we need to make more corpses, the sooner our life together will come and inevitable happiness.¹²⁴⁶

Soldiers were often struck by the wealth of things found on the German dead, as Nikolai Nikulin recalled: "What surprising hoarders [*barokhol'shchiki*] these Germans are! Some sort of rags, women's underwear, dishes, rugs, even a delftware toilet. And in their pockets – photographs, letters, condoms, and whole collections of pornographic postcards."¹²⁴⁷ Some soldiers looted corpses for valuables, cutting off fingers to get rings.¹²⁴⁸ While the collection of body parts as mementos seems not to have been practiced by the Red Army, at least one soldier felt that German corpses should be put to some use, a fact he confided to his diary:

On the road lies a fritz, his decomposed head in a steel helmet lies to the side, obviously someone kicked it and separated it from the torso. The remaining teeth in the skull look sharply up. His body is already gone, only the skeleton and uniform remain. A frightful thought came to mind. We could gather these bones and show them at our school. Let the students visually study human anatomy and physiognomy and what comes of this affair. I can imagine the horror of these students at the sight of these remains of a fritz.¹²⁴⁹

This desire to make enemy dead, or at least their things, useful was shared by the general staff. A command given in February of 1943 to trophy commands on several fronts, reminded soldiers to strip enemy dead of everything useful, including underwear.¹²⁵⁰ Cleaning battlefields of corpses was a major priority, as bodies could breed infection and the removal of the dead was both a part of returning to normalcy and a way of erasing the war's toll. As a pamphlet handed out in Stalingrad stated: "We must more quickly bring about sanitary order, clean the city from the bodies of German carrion!"¹²⁵¹ The Germans had left many well-groomed cemeteries in their wake, turning historic sites around the Soviet Union into cemeteries.¹²⁵² These would eventually be removed without a trace at the

¹²⁴⁵ Yakupov, *Frontovye zarisovki*, p. 63.

¹²⁴⁶ RGASPI f, M-33 op. 1 d. 853 l. 259.

¹²⁴⁷ Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o Voine*, p. 103. Nikulin also expressed "great satisfaction" at the sight of a field filled with enemy dead.

¹²⁴⁸ Genadii Tokarev, *Vesti dnevnik na fronte zapreshchalos'* (Novosibirsk, Svin'in i synov'ia, 2005), pp. 113, 169.

¹²⁴⁹ TsMAMLS f. 172, op. 1, d.1, ll. 137ob.-138. A.I. Elkin. "Dnevnik proisshestvii i perezhivanii."

¹²⁵⁰ TsAMO RF f. 232, op. 643, d. 18, l. 236, in A.M. Sokolov, *et al.*, *Preliudiia Kurskoi bitvy: Dokumenty i materialy 6 dekabria 1942g.-25 apreliia 1943 g. Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia: T. 15 (4—3)* (Moscow: TERRA, 1997), 35.

¹²⁵¹ NA IRI RAN f.2, r.XIII-z7, op. 9, d. 19.

¹²⁵² Bair Irincheev, Denis Zhukov, *Palaces Destroyed: Nazi Occupation of Leningrad Region 1941-1944* (St. Petersburg: Avrora-Design, 2011), p. 72, 92.

order of the state.¹²⁵³ Boris Suris, in the aftermath of Stalingrad, realized that he and his comrades “have lost any respect for death. We say ‘croaked [*dohklyi*] Fritz’, we laugh at the sight of German cemeteries with their symmetrical rows of crosses. I saw a soldier peeing on a German grave.”¹²⁵⁴ The scatological marking of formerly enemy territory would not end with this soldier, as we will see. This lack of respect for the dead extended to the living.

While the corpses of enemy soldier brought one closer to victory, breaking the enemy’s will to resist and convincing him to capitulate is a more effective route to victory. As Clausewitz wrote, “artillery and prisoners” were

at all times regarded as the true trophies of victory, as well as its measure, because through these things its extent is declared beyond a doubt. Even the degree of moral superiority may be better judged of by them than by any other relation...the destruction of the enemy by death and wounds appears here merely as the means to an end.¹²⁵⁵

We have already seen this sentiment expressed in the statement “The enemy’s defeat is characterized by prisoners, dead and lost machinery.”¹²⁵⁶ However, relatively few Germans surrendered to the Red Army until Stalingrad as compared to massive numbers of Soviet troops surrendering to the Wehrmacht. This dynamic reversed over time, particularly in 1944 when it became increasingly apparent that the Reich was losing the war.

At Stalingrad, the first major surrender of a German army, German soldiers became trophies in a most literal sense. General Chuikov, commanding the 62nd Army at Stalingrad, recalled that soldiers would refuse to hand prisoners over to other units, unless a commander gave them a receipt for them: “Right there they would give a receipt on a scrap of paper, that this-or-that company or platoon took so many German prisoners. People were satisfied with this. However, if a higher ranking officer didn’t get involved, they wouldn’t give them to anyone.”¹²⁵⁷ Prisoners were a measure of a unit’s success that were easier to count than the dead and who were potentially more useful.

Displaying prisoners was an important act of vindication. A political officer recalled that prisoners they had taken looked so awful, with their soiled clothing and herds of lice, that they were shown to soldiers as a form of “visual propaganda” and soldiers were allowed to ask them questions.¹²⁵⁸ Parades of German POWs through major cities began in Leningrad in 1941 and culminated in the conveying of 57,000 POWs taken during operation Bagration through Moscow (and followed by a demonstrative washing of the street behind them), an event that was filmed and distributed.¹²⁵⁹ High-ranking prisoners were particularly prized, often publicly identified in the media. Most German POWs would spend years in the Soviet GULag system, where they would be put to work rebuilding what

¹²⁵³ A directive from April of 1942 called for the “liquidation” of all enemy graves and cemeteries from reconquered territory and the reburial of enemy dead “far from population centers, highways or the graves of Red Army soldiers and commanders.” RGASPI f. 644, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 16-17.

¹²⁵⁴ Boris Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 72. *Dohklyi* is generally used to describe animals, not humans, in the Russian language.

¹²⁵⁵ Quoted in Niall Ferguson, “Prisoner Taking and Prisoner Killing: the Dynamics of Defeat, Surrender and Barbarity in the Age of Total War”, in George Kasimeris, ed., *Brutalization of Warfare* (New York: NYU Press, 2006.) pp. 128-129.

¹²⁵⁶ Grossman, *Gody voini*, p. 407.

¹²⁵⁷ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 2a, l. 63.

¹²⁵⁸ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 174, d. 2, l. 5.

¹²⁵⁹ *Prokonvorivaniie voennoplennykh nemtsev cherez Moskvu.* (Mosfilm, 1944) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pcMdCkgVAo> (12 May 2014).

they had destroyed. In 1944 General Yeremenko recorded with pride that German prisoners were at work rebuilding Kiev.¹²⁶⁰ To this day in many post-Soviet cities you can find neighborhoods that were built by German POWs after the war.¹²⁶¹

In order to be displayed as a living trophy and put to work as free labor, POWs had to survive the act of being captured. In any war, prisoners of war run the risk of being killed by soldiers still caught up in the ecstasy of battle or simply due to the fact that taking captives put soldiers at greater risk.¹²⁶² Senior Sergeant Vladimir Kukel', a Pole serving in the Latvian Rifle Division, recalled shooting one prisoner who called out for help and then executing a group of surrendering soldiers:

We ceased fire and later – I can't explain how it happened – we took them all out with our rifle butts and bayonets. There was a moment of restraint. Sometimes a person is under such stress that he forgets you can get something out of these prisoners.¹²⁶³

On the battlefield, captives had to be disarmed, searched and escorted to the rear, all of which required manpower under conditions where the enemy remained near. The man who obediently awaits his fate at the moment could take up arms against his captors if the fortunes of battle changed. Weapons being found in the pockets of prisoners could lead to their execution.¹²⁶⁴ Furthermore, the prisoner and his comrades were recently trying to kill their captors and may have killed some of their friends. Beyond the microcosm of the local battlefield, on the Eastern Front, the Wehrmacht waged a genocidal war that gave most Red Army personnel very personal reasons to want to exact vengeance on any Wehrmacht soldier they could get their hands on.¹²⁶⁵ Also, as an army, the Red Army had been humiliated by the Wehrmacht in 1941 and 1942, making the desire for vengeance both personal and professional.¹²⁶⁶

One correspondent from the Kalinin Front wrote Kliment Voroshilov in 1943 that “troops totally refuse to take prisoners.”¹²⁶⁷ Collaborators were often shot on sight.¹²⁶⁸ Even prisoners' attempts to pull at the heartstrings of captors could fall on deaf ears. Junior Politruk Ruvn Amdur recalled at the end of 1942 how perplexed he was at a German prisoner who could explain why he had invaded the Soviet Union only by the fact that he was German and Amdur was Russian. The prisoner eventually pulled out a photograph of his family to plead for mercy, to which Amdur replied: “And we don't have wives and children? You have the right to shoot us?” The prisoner was later executed, having received the explanation: “And I am Russian, and what does that mean? I'll tell you what, for being a German we will shoot you.”¹²⁶⁹ Troops, like Amdur, forced to retreat or move rapidly would

¹²⁶⁰ Yeremenko, *Dnevnik*, p. 239.

¹²⁶¹ E.g. portions of Kirovskii Raion in St. Petersburg, Sotsgorod in Kazan and the city of Oktiabrskii in Tatarstan.

¹²⁶² Ferguson, “Prisoner Taking and Prisoner Killing...”, pp. 132, 151.

¹²⁶³ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, on. 16, d. 36, ll. 154-155.

¹²⁶⁴ Anatolii Nikolaevich Muzhikov. Interview by Bair Irincheev. <http://iremember.ru/minometchiki/muzhikov-anatoliy-nikolaevich/pdf.html> 15 May 2014.

¹²⁶⁵ I deal with these issues at length in chapters 4 and 5.

¹²⁶⁶ Schivelbush, *Culture of Defeat*, p. 8.

¹²⁶⁷ RGASPI f. 74, op. 2, d. 95, ll. 150-151.

¹²⁶⁸ See, e.g. Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapisi*, p. 267.

¹²⁶⁹ NA IRI RAN f. 2, p. I, on. 16, d. 3a, ll. 71, 75-76. It is interesting to note that Amdur spoke “Jewish,” i.e. Yiddish, and was thus able to communicate with his prisoner.

often execute prisoners, as they became a risk and burden.¹²⁷⁰ An officer in the Latvian Rifle Corps recalled at the end of the war:

In the first day we had about two hundred prisoners. In truth, few of those prisoners got to us. In the process of battle it always happens that when soldiers are exasperated [*ozlobleny*], they take few prisoners. Sometime I say: "What kind of scout are you, if you kill prisoners? That's our bread they can give us useful information." The soldier says: "I don't want to listen to you..."¹²⁷¹

Given that Red Army reconnaissance relied heavily on the taking of "tongues" – enemy prisoners – to interrogate, the execution of prisoners was extremely counterproductive. However, many soldiers understood that taking prisoners could shorten the war, as one soldier told the Mints commission:

I never shoot prisoners, because if you shoot at one German, the second won't come over, he'll say that Russians shoot prisoners. Quite the opposite, I would treat them well so that they would understand that the Russian soldier was freeing them from under the German yoke. I trained my automatic on him and went "give me your watch." If they resisted, I killed them.¹²⁷²

This soldier's casual statement that he was ready to kill anyone who resisted alongside his unabashed talk about taking what he wanted from prisoners highlights both the danger and opportunity that prisoners presented.

The state and the soldier wanted different things from prisoners. The state needed information. When prisoners were taken, all of their buttons were removed so that they couldn't run away (their pants would fall down).¹²⁷³ Prisoners were interrogated and could be a source for valuable information.¹²⁷⁴ The state needed intelligence about the enemy's disposition, new technology, mood in the army, etc. To the soldier, prisoners were a source of danger, pride and booty. Because soldiers had total power over prisoners, anything that prisoners had on their person could become a trophy. Many prisoners gladly gave away their now useless money, hoping that they would then be spared the theft of more needed objects such as glasses.¹²⁷⁵ Others gave their belongings to those who had captured them.¹²⁷⁶ The army issued orders not to rob POWs of their personal belongings (in 1944), but prisoners ultimately had little or no recourse if Red Army soldiers began rifling through their pockets.¹²⁷⁷

Watches, which German soldiers had bought or pilfered from all over Europe, became increasingly common after Stalingrad. Boris Komskaa described taking a prisoner during heavy fighting near Kursk:

... I leaned over him and it turned out to be the one I shot, wounded in the head. He shoves a bandage in my face. I didn't wrap him. A healthy Fritz with orders and ribbons. I took his

¹²⁷⁰ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 230, d. 6, l. 4ob.; Genatulin, *Vot konhcitsia voina*, p. 151.

¹²⁷¹ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 223, d. 4, l. 3. Kralichkin, Arkadii Vasil'evich.

¹²⁷² NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 227, d. 15, l. 2ob. Kibal'nyi Vasilii Zakharovich

¹²⁷³ Tokarev, *Vesti dnevnik na fronte zapreshchalos'*, p. 169.

¹²⁷⁴ Ironically, disproportionately by Jews, who were among the most educated ethnicities in the USSR. See e.g. Suris, *Dunaevskaia, Kopelev*.

¹²⁷⁵ Slutskii, *O drugilkh i o sebe*, p. 32.

¹²⁷⁶ Yakupov, *Frontovye zarisovki*, p. 68.

¹²⁷⁷ TsAMO RF f. 2, op. 795437, d. 12, l. 199 in Veshchikov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, p. 583.

submachine gun, searched him. Some one yelled at me, “Take his watch, what are you looking at?” And I thought, “that’s true” and took it.¹²⁷⁸

Shortly after this when Komskii was wounded, he traded the watch to a nurse for extra food.¹²⁷⁹ Watches became a sort of currency, and were an ideal item for soldiers in the field to take as a trophy – they were lightweight and of relatively high value. Galina Golofeevskaia told the Mints Commission how after Stalingrad:

...almost every soldier had more watches than anything else. The Germans had a startling number of watches – both their own and stolen, each had two or three. As a rule, when we would lead a column [of prisoners] the soldiers would take watches before anything else. Therefore every soldier had 8-12 watches. I had 8 watches. On the road I traded these watches. Whatever you took on the road was measured in mess-tins: a mess-tin full of apples – a watch, a mess-tin full of moonshine – a watch, some body also bought some boots for a watch.¹²⁸⁰

Soldiers were willing to part with such hard earned items, because as Major General Maliukov told the Mints Commission: “How much can a soldier take with him? A can of conserves. As they say, in battle even a needle is heavy.”¹²⁸¹ Nonetheless, Komskii, a frontline soldier who traded away his watch in 1943 had acquired “2 bags, 2 pistols, binoculars, a camera” and three more watches a year later.¹²⁸² Trophies needed to be useful for soldiers at the front. And even if only carried for a few days and exchanged for food or drink, much more lasting than most interactions with prisoners was the use of their things.

Prisoners generally remained faceless, implacably alien and temporary, but their former objects could become currency, souvenirs, tools or even a part of Red Army soldiers who took them. Red Army soldiers lived in the bunkers of German soldiers, drank their alcohol, ate their food, smoked their cigarettes and cigars and turned their weapons against them.

Like prisoners, material objects were to be displayed as a sign of victory. Military units recorded the things they destroyed and trophies they took in battlefield reports and tallied them for regimental histories, many of which were compiled during the war.¹²⁸³ Local displays of captured or destroyed enemy technologies were common throughout the Soviet Union, and in the summer of 1943, a display of an unprecedented scale was prepared in Moscow.¹²⁸⁴ 34 enemy planes, 58 tanks and armored transports and 128 cannons were displayed in Moscow Central Park of Culture and Relaxation in honor of Maxim Gorky. Everyday items were also included, showing an interest in every detail of enemy soldiers’ material world. This display had the avowed task of demonstrating that the Red Army was winning and explaining why losses had been so heavy and the tide so long in the enemy’s favor.¹²⁸⁵ A film was made of the display, which emphasized that the Germans

¹²⁷⁸ Komskii, “Dnevnik 1941-1945,” p. 28.

¹²⁷⁹ Komskii, “Dnevnik 1943-1945,” p. 30.

¹²⁸⁰ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 13-b, l. 88. Golofeevskaia, Galina Ivanova.

¹²⁸¹ NA IRI RAN f.2, r. I, op. 104, d. 4, ll. 3ob.-4.

¹²⁸² Komskii, “Dnevnik”, p. 57. The “bags” are likely map cases.

¹²⁸³ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 230, d.3 ll. 2, 12; Yeremenko, *Dnevnik*, p. 297 (on his unit’s trophy collecting in 1945). 130. General Yeremenko fell into a state of depression when his unit was disbanded before it could collect its rightful trophies at Stalingrad.

¹²⁸⁴ Yeremenko, *Dnevnik*, p. 239.

¹²⁸⁵ APRF f. 3, op. 50, d. 561, ll. 10-20, in Kudriashov, *Voina*, pp. 250-256.

had taken trophies from other nations (most notably France).¹²⁸⁶ Over a million people, among them allied, neutral and even Japanese diplomats, saw the display and according to a report filed by Kliment Voroshilov “as a rule” everyone who came was convinced that “if the Red Army was capable of winning victories against the enemy, of capturing and destroying such powerful machinery, then it is undefeatable and the day of victory cannot be far off.”¹²⁸⁷ Seeing a variety of machines that had been designed with the express purpose of killing the people who were looking at them, getting a close look at the same planes that had bombed Moscow and the tanks that had tried to take Leningrad provided material proof of official proclamations that had often rung hollow in the war’s first two years.

Trophies were not simply markers of victory, but served a number of practical functions. Chapter 5 already demonstrated how captured enemy tanks were sometimes used as target practice to show soldiers that these iron behemoths were not invincible. Undamaged vehicles could be put to immediate use. Major General Maslov, commander of the elite 83rd Guards Rifle Division, recalled that in 1944 “[t]he motor pool of our division traded all of their vehicles for trophy [vehicles]” and that at several points his troops ate exclusively captured German fare.¹²⁸⁸

There was a wide array of responses to the Wehrmacht’s things. Grigorii Baklanov recalled how everything in the Wehrmacht was “...thought out to the last detail, so a soldier could fight. Aluminum canteens with broadcloth covers, light submachine guns, without a wooden stock, but a folding one of metal...”¹²⁸⁹ Many soldiers aimed to get German weapons (submachine guns and pistols were particularly prized), and at times local political organs encouraged the practice of maintaining a stockpile of trophy weapons.¹²⁹⁰ Some commanders gave friends engraved captured weapons with “touching” messages.¹²⁹¹ Soldiers even learned to convert enemy mortar rounds for use in a Soviet mortar of a slightly different caliber.¹²⁹² These encounters, improvisations and stockpiling of extra weapons were a double-edged sword for the state. Additional weapons in the hands of soldiers could undermine the state’s power, a preference or affinity for foreign made weapons and equipment threatened Soviet claims of supremacy as could visions of the alternative world that German bunkers offered.

German dugouts and bunkers could be both repelling and alluring. Lev Kopelev, who worked closely with German POWs, recalled the familiar, specific smell of German dugouts and prisoners “the sour-musty smell of wet wool, dry wax, cold tobacco ash, dirty, sweaty underwear, a polluted water closet.”¹²⁹³ Anatolii Soldatov, Deputy Political Officer of the 62nd Army, also described “an unbelievable stench” near the German headquarters at Stalingrad, where German soldiers had used the corridor as a bathroom, leaving piles of feces “up to your chest.” Soldatov complained “Sometimes the Germans could shoot as well

¹²⁸⁶ *Trofei velikikh bitv (Vystavka obraztsov trofeinogo vooruzheniia)* (Moscow: Mosfilm, 1943) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w95csTqt0tI> (15 May 2014).

¹²⁸⁷ APRF f. 3, op. 50, d. 561, ll. 49-50, in Kudriashov, *Voina*, p. 290.

¹²⁸⁸ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. 1, op. 226, d. 2, ll. 8, 12.

¹²⁸⁹ Baklanov, *Zhizn', podarennaia dvazhdy*, p. 53.

¹²⁹⁰ “Ispol'zovat' trofeinoe oruzhiie”, *Gvardiia*, 18 April 1944, p. 1.

¹²⁹¹ Chekalov, *Voennyi dnevnik*, p. 220.

¹²⁹² Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, pp. 36-37.

¹²⁹³ Lev Kopelev, *Khranit' vechno. T.1* (Moscow: TERRA, 2004), p. 14

as us, but we never made a toilet out of a building.”¹²⁹⁴ While this was an extreme case of troops cut off for days, other soldiers described German trenches as full of miasmas, junk or other corrupting influences. Given the German claims to cultural and racial superiority, finding evidence that the enemy lived in filth was great for morale. Sniper Nina Lovkovskaia had a more ambiguous impression: “German dugouts are characterized by horrible filth, all sorts of trash, what won’t you find! This is the absolute opposite of their dwellings in the cities.”¹²⁹⁵ Yet she was also fascinated by the organization present in the bunkers. Others recalled getting lice from German bunkers.¹²⁹⁶ Mansur Abdulin was impressed by the warmth, plumbing and variety of beverages available in an officers’ bunker he and his comrades captured.¹²⁹⁷ Lev Slezkin captured the mix of wonder, envy and rage in describing a captured bunker near Novgorod:

There were all the signs of flight in it. Nonetheless you couldn’t help but notice [*brosaetsia v glaza*] (and how many times!) the difference between our soldierly life style and that of those coming here from far away. Under the table were empty bottles with seductively colorful labels of rum, cognac, French and Spanish wines. In a cardboard box near the door were empty cans and jars of olives, sardines and jam. On the table was a pile of vibrantly illustrated journals with many full pages of beautiful women, tanned bathers, luxurious southern hotels, beautiful landscapes... We don’t envy them. We are surprised. We tell ourselves that those bastards are showing off, but their end is nigh...¹²⁹⁸

Despite Slezkin’s claiming an absence of envy, everything in the bunker was an object of fascination and desire. The fact that the Germans’ comfort came at the price of robbing all of Europe did not make their luxury any less real.

Red Army soldiers were happy to take many of the goodies the Germans left behind, but when the Wehrmacht was in less of a hurry than the soldiers Slezkin and his comrades routed, they would poison and booby-trap whatever they could. Germans mined their own dead, knowing that curious soldiers would hunt for trophies.¹²⁹⁹ They also mined foodstuffs such as barrels of honey and also weapons.¹³⁰⁰ Finally they poisoned wells and food, something the state was keen to underline, as it made all soldiers think twice about taking goods before the state could filter them.¹³⁰¹ The Wehrmacht purposefully left stores of alcohol behind to slow the Red Army’s advance. Control over consumption of spirits was a major problem that would only broaden as the army gained access to the wine cellars and storehouses of Europe. The wealth of food and alcohol that had so impressed many who entered German bunkers could be deadly, but was usually more than hungry and exhausted soldiers could resist. However, not everything that belonged to enemy culture proved appetizing.

On the bodies of Germans and in their bunkers and vehicles, soldiers found a genre of photography that did not exist in the Soviet Union and elicited very strong reactions.¹³⁰²

¹²⁹⁴ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 5, d. 14, l. 81.

¹²⁹⁵ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 7-b, l. 5.

¹²⁹⁶ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 7-a, l. 6ob.

¹²⁹⁷ Abdulin, *160 stranits iz soldatskogo dnevnika*, pp. 67-68.

¹²⁹⁸ Lev Slezkin, *Do voiny i na voine*, p. 484.

¹²⁹⁹ V.P. Kiselev, “Voina i zhizn’ v predstavlenii 20-letnikh frontovikov (iz moego dnevnika),” p. 1023.

¹³⁰⁰ *Inzh-43*, p. 154-168.; Reutov, *Gvardeets*, p. 85

¹³⁰¹ For more on this see Chapter 3.

¹³⁰² See for example the mixed media work by Kharis Yakupov “V nemetskom blindazhe” 1944-1945. Kharis Yakupov, *Heter. Pamiat’. Memory* (Kazan’: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 2002), p.159.

Mansur Abdulin, who was half-Tatar and half-Uzbek, described the reaction of his Uzbek comrade to something they found:

...[naked people in the pose] “69”. To us “illiterates”, it was hard to understand what they were doing. But when we finally discerned and understood, we couldn’t believe our eyes. This provoked a feeling of abhorrence, and my Uzbek friend even vomited... I could barely calm him down, convincing him that for these pictures the Germans didn’t use people, but instead decorated rubber dolls, just for a laugh. That’s how we came to know about pornography.¹³⁰³

Pornography was common in the Wehrmacht, found in the pockets of the dead and prisoners and on the walls of dugouts.¹³⁰⁴ Stalinist mass culture was essentially puritanical, with no place for explicit sex, so these images would have been shocking. Lev Slezkin recalled how a group of soldiers around a fire provoked female Red Army doctors with a card deck of pornographic images. The doctors replied “what a loathsome thing, throw it in the fire” and left. Slezkin explained that these images would have attracted the attention of “women starved” men in the absence of real women, but that the soldiers who had offended living, breathing women were ostracized.¹³⁰⁵ Later, in Germany, observers would notice that Red Army soldiers were particularly impressed with German erotica.¹³⁰⁶ Pornography could repulse or attract soldiers, with the socially acceptable response being revulsion.

Another genre of graphic media found on German soldiers could only disgust and perplex. Many German soldiers had cameras that they used to document their experiences in the Soviet Union. This meant that Red Army soldiers frequently found pictures of massed Red Army prisoners and dead on the persons of German dead and POWs, but also photographs of executions of Soviet partisans and civilians. Occasionally German soldiers were found with trophies taken from dead Red Army soldiers, as one particularly vivid article for agitators attests:

Soviet warriors, advancing into East Prussia found a piece of cardboard with a drawing in the map case of a dead German. The drawing showed a mutilated Soviet girl in Red Army uniform. The drawing had an Order of Glory Third Class with the Serial Number 25254 and medal “For Valor” number 3735311. These decorations belonged to twenty year old Frida Fel’dman, the valiant medic of a rifle company.¹³⁰⁷

Photographs, letters, diaries, drawings and anything else found on prisoners and the dead were used extensively to incriminate them, as Jochen Hellbeck and Karel Berkhoff have convincingly shown. Ilya Ehrenburg became immensely popular among Red Army soldiers by using the German’s own words against them and stoking the passion of Red Army soldiers for vengeance. As the war continued, this sort of propaganda, combined with what

¹³⁰³ Abdulin, *Iz vospominaniia soldata*, p. 21.

¹³⁰⁴ E.g. Inozemtsev, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 144. Inozemtsev describes finding “tons of pornography” among trophies taken in December of 1943.

¹³⁰⁵ Slezkin, *Do voyny i na voine*, p. 489.

¹³⁰⁶ Anonymous, *A Women in Berlin*, (Metropolitan Books: New York, 2005), p. 155.

¹³⁰⁷ “Eë zamuchili zlodei-nemtsy”, *Bloknot agitator Krasnoi Armii* 5:1945, pp. 27-28. These instances were not merely propaganda. Soldiers themselves found the corpses of their female comrades who had been raped and murdered by the Germans, see, e.g. Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 223.

soldiers had seen themselves, crystalized into a hatred of the enemy that would later justify extremely harsh treatment of not only enemy soldiers, but civilians as well.¹³⁰⁸

The desire for revenge was to be paid not only in blood, but in *things* as well. In Tvardovskii's *Vasilli Tërkin*, the title character is given shelter by an old peasant couple while retreating in 1941. In 1944 he comes across the same couple again, after they have survived German occupation and had their prized grandfather clock stolen. Tërkin promises the old lady to bring two new clocks from Berlin.¹³⁰⁹

The Wehrmacht had proven to be vicious foe capable of anything. From the early days of the war "learn from the enemy" was a watchword of Red Army propaganda and actual policy.¹³¹⁰ The Red Army greatly expanded the use of certain types of weapons, consciously examined the German system of decorations and encouraged soldiers to adopt and improve upon enemy ways wherever convenient.¹³¹¹ The Wehrmacht was a model of a successful army to Red Army soldiers. As we will see, the Red Army never reached the Wehrmacht's level of brutality, but it did in significant ways mimic the behavior of its enemies.¹³¹² The soldiers of the Red Army came to Europe with their bitter experiences, vivid memories of what the Germans and their allies had done on Soviet territory, and a Stalinist understanding of the world. Proletarian Internationalism had been rent asunder by the war, and ethnic categories replaced or became muddled with class in meaningful ways as the army entered Europe.¹³¹³

Part 3: The Alien World: The Red Army goes abroad

In the other world

Many Soviet soldiers felt themselves in a foreign land before technically leaving the borders of the Soviet Union. Fighting their way through the Baltics, Western Ukraine or Bessarabia, all territories annexed by the Soviet Union on the eve of the war, Red Army men understood that they were in a foreign land where the locals could be openly hostile and nationalist guerillas still functioned. The wealth of the land and houses could leave quite an impression on those who saw them, as Kovalevskii confided in his diary: "The very rich and beautiful furnishings and decoration of most of the apartments I have seen stick in my memory. There are many of those that I could only have seen in Palace museums or on the stage of good theatres..."¹³¹⁴ Aside from the dramatic difference in standard of living, the customs and languages of these territories were often confusing. However, this territory was still at least formally part of the Soviet Union and soldiers were not expected to change their behavior significantly, as they performed before a domestic audience.

¹³⁰⁸ See, e.g. Hellbeck, "The Diaries of Fritzes and Letters of Gretchens"; Samoilov, *Pamiatnye Zapiski*, p. 244; Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*, pp. 123-125.

¹³⁰⁹ Tvardovskii, *Vasilli Tërkin*, p. 165.

¹³¹⁰ This continued throughout the war, see e.g. "Izuchat' taktiku vruga, sovershenstvovat' nashu taktiku", *Krasnaia zvezda*, 01 marta 1944, p. 1. See also Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, p. 126.

¹³¹¹ See Chapters 2 and 5.

¹³¹² Sometimes even on Soviet territory, see e.g. Reutov, *Gvardeets*, p. 86 who had no issue with taking what he needed from Soviet civilians.

¹³¹³ As Boris Slutskii put it: "There was internationalism, then it became internationalism minus the fritzes, and now the shining legend of about 'there are no bad nations, just bad people and classes' finally crumbled." Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p. 120.

¹³¹⁴ Kovalevskii, "Nynche u nas peredyshka..." p. 79.

As the army moved beyond Soviet borders, new policies emerged. There was an increased emphasis placed on soldiers' and particularly officers' outward appearance and behavior. Babenko, who had previously noted that he and his officers wore regular soldiers' clothing recorded in his diary that: "Here we came to demand that officers and soldiers wore their uniforms strictly according to regulations, because we are in Germany."¹³¹⁵ His notes reflected a general trend in the Red Army's attempt to manage its image abroad. An order from July 1944 noted that some officers

have really let themselves go and cast shame on the honor of the Red Army with their behavior... It is common for our officers to walk around in dirty clothing, without *pogony* [shoulder boards] and so appearing fill the shops, taverns and restaurants of the cities of Rumania and Moldavia, appearing on the streets drunk and conducting themselves in a contemptible manner...¹³¹⁶

Boris Komsii complained to his diary:

The fact that we have entered a foreign land, at that the land of a friendly government, forces us to remake ourselves to a large degree. We need to demonstrate our culture, but swearing thrives. Its an ineradicable evil. Special directives concerning behavior and relations to the local population have been published. Any manifestation of marauding should be harshly punished. But, unfortunately, many of our officers understand too little the importance of this. The question of our behavior on alien territory has yet to be decided.¹³¹⁷

The emphasis on appearance and behavior was unquestionably tied to the need to craft a certain image of the Red Army in the minds of civilians and highlighted both the pride and insecurity felt by Red Army personnel while abroad.

While the Political Department of the army was so concerned with how the outside world perceived its soldiers, it was also influencing how soldiers understood the lands they were entering. Soldiers were warned to be vigilant against local counterrevolutionaries, including leftovers of the White Movement and female spies.¹³¹⁸ The Red Army went to considerable lengths to produce information about the countries it marched through. Brief guides to the history, customs and language of these states and their regions appeared in military print on both a small-unit and army-wide level, with *Krasnaia zvezda* printing small guides to such places as East Prussia, Gdansk, Vienna and Warsaw.¹³¹⁹ Indeed, some soldiers felt a sense of disappointment about how much more they knew about the people they were meeting than their foreign interlocutors knew about the Soviet Union.¹³²⁰

Soldiers were often quartered in the houses of civilians as they moved West, leading to prolonged interactions. P.G. Pustovoit described hours of debate and conversation with a Catholic Priest in Galicia, while Ivan Turkenich wrote his family about how exotic Poland

¹³¹⁵ NA IRI RAN f.2, r.3, op. 14, d. 2b, l. 124.

¹³¹⁶ TsAMO RF f. 32, op. 795436, d. 11, ll. 36-39, in N.I. Borodin and N.V. Usenko, *Glavnye Politicheskie Organy Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine 1941—1945 gg.*, p. 294.

¹³¹⁷ Komsii, "Dnevnik 1943-1945 gg.", p. 58.

¹³¹⁸ V. Ul'rikh, "Byt' bditel'nym vseгда i vsiudu," *Krasnoarmeets* 1945:2, pp. 1-3; "Vyshe partiinuiu bditel'nost'," *Agitator i Propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1944:13, pp. 4-5; TsAMO RF, f. 32, op. 795436, d. 12, ll. 58-62, in Borodin and Usenko, *Glavnye Politicheskie Organy Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine 1941—1945 gg.*, pp. 283-286; TsAMO RF f. 32, op. 795436, d. 11, ll. 36-39 in *Ibid.*, p. 294.

¹³¹⁹ E.g. "Izuchai iazyk protivnika," *Gvardiia*, p. 10 July 1944, p. 2. "Frontoviki izuchaiut inostrannye iazyki," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 13 October 1944, p. 2. For an example of the country summaries, see, e.g. "Vostochnaia Prussia (spravka)," *Krasnaia zvezda* 26 October 1944, p. 4.

¹³²⁰ Slutskii, *O druighk i o sebe*, p. 37.

was: "Here, where we are, I have encountered much of which I only read about. And here, as you know, they live by their own customs. Here you can meet a lord, their workers. Though it's not a life such as ours, but some sort of mess [*nedorazumeniie*]"¹³²¹ Turkenich, who was put in charge of sowing wheat among the Poles, was deeply disturbed by the primitive nature of their agriculture and attitude towards the world: "To talk to the people about these issues [planting] was very difficult, because *their* view of life is totally different, or rather the people have not been raised in our spirit and know only private property and private interests. But I am succeeding in getting them on the right path and already have some good results."¹³²² Former members of the White Movement and their children could await the Red Army with baited breath or fear and were often employed as translators.¹³²³ After the war, regardless of their prewar citizenship, many were treated as Soviet citizens, becoming a sort of trophy themselves.¹³²⁴

As the army moved West, it frequently found places entirely deserted, as locals feared reprisals by the Red Army. An account of the taking of a Silesian city is typical:

You know how terribly our people take vengeance. We took this city, gave it up and went further. I was in three big houses. I simply stopped by, took a look at how the inhabitants fled. In some apartments, for example, the ranges were still hot, the table set, dinner ready. On electric burners water was boiling, a teapot – that was the situation. There were so many carpets, so much rich furniture, pianos. Huge wealth was here.¹³²⁵

The fascination of this officer with the details of everyday life of enemy civilians is typical. As is his understanding of the fear that these civilians felt.

The creature comforts of people living outside the Soviet Union could have a demoralizing impact on soldiers, as Pustovoit wrote in his diary: "It is harder to fight in Poland than on other fronts. The reason for this is moral. When you see this snail's world all the time, this *meshchanskii* coziness, it becomes very annoying."¹³²⁶ The comfort, the very different people with their beautiful houses and "internal emptiness" irritated soldiers who were far from their families and had a hard time feeling solidarity with these bourgeoisie from an alien world. The world outside the Soviet Union was strange and often confusing, a place where soldiers confronted real life *meshchane* and also their things. Many soldiers recorded in their diaries, memoirs and interviews how impressive these things were, particularly once soldiers reached the Third Reich, which had been exploiting the rest of Europe since 1939. Boris Shumileshkii remarked how the high quality and standardization became depressing and oppressive, despite the obvious comfort and quality.¹³²⁷ Tatiana Atabek described in great detail the first German house that she stayed in:

A wealthy estate! A splendid two-story house. Every room has its purpose. An exhibit of beautiful china and porcelain figurines. How beautiful!... Ten types of crystal glasses. A library,

¹³²¹ RGASPI f. M-7, op. 2, d. 1261, l. 9. Turkenich, Ivan Vasil'evich had commanded the famous Young Guards of Krasnodar and died in 1944.

¹³²² RGASPI f. M-7, op. 2, d. 1261, l. 17.

¹³²³ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p. 145.

¹³²⁴ S.V. Karpenko et al., *Mezhdru Rossiei i Stalinym: Rossiiskaia emigratsiia i Vtoraia Mirovaia voina. Russkie bez otechestva* (Moscow: RGGU, 2004) pp. 328-330.

¹³²⁵ NA IRI RAN f.2 r.1 op. 230 d.9 l. 18ob.

¹³²⁶ P.G. Pustovoit, *Pestrie likhi voiny: Dnevnik perevodchika-radorazvedchika* (Moscow: Dialog MGU, 1998), p. 90.

¹³²⁷ Shumelishskii, *Dnevnik soldata*, pp. 133-134.

bedroom, kitchen and bathrooms. Halls, the walls of which are hung with hunter's horns, shotguns, pictures and rugs. They have an organ. On the first floor is a crate of unopened dishes...¹³²⁸

Atabek found repulsive things among this beauty as well. Many "tasteless objects" and a giant Swastika banner that had been hidden away. The wealth of the houses and their former inhabitants was astonishing to Atabek, and she was by no means alone in reflecting on the incredible abundance found in the Third Reich.

David Samoilov was also deeply impressed with the *things* he saw in Germany, but was deeply critical, reflecting in his diary in April of 1945:

Landsberg. A person can become a slave to things. This is an old truth. Perhaps in Russia it was easier to accomplish the Revolution, because "things" were never sovereign there. Never, I think, was there such a minuteness of the everyday [*byt'*], such a predominance of things. Here things are not just objects of everyday life. No! Things instruct, things have their own philosophy, things pompously speak the truth. Oh, flat, wooden, self-assured philosophy of things!... Things are sentimental and self-satisfied. Just like their owners. They were also things in their own houses. And they have been given out for demolition, like their homes, like the most abominable thing in the world – Germany.¹³²⁹

Samoilov went on to decry Hitlerism as the natural end point of burghers and petty-bourgeois philistinism [*meshchanstvo*], the ultimate expression of the self-obsession, hatred and envy that accompanies a self-centered and materialistic view of the world. Samoilov, much like Colonel Strukov, viewed something dangerous and pathetic in the *meshchanstvo* of the enemy, and saw precisely the obsession with *things* and acquisition as part of what had driven the "respectable burghers" to such hideous crimes. Samoilov's understanding, which represents a personal interpretation of the greater Soviet narrative concerning class enemies and the wartime message of narrow-minded, self-obsessed German thieves, still gives class primacy over ethnicity as an explanatory factor. It didn't hurt that *meshchanstvo* had been associated with German ethnicity in classic Russian literature. However, it should be noted that Samoilov was a highly educated Muscovite, who spoke German and would go on to become a major literary figure, so his level of reflection on Germans and their things was deeper than that of many soldiers, who simply understood Germans as their enemies and their *things* as trophies. As we will see, most soldiers found the German world of things much less repulsive and corrupting than Samoilov.

Parcels and the right to take

The Soviet state could be seen as the master trophy taker, it either took or determined who would receive factories, businesses, banks, mines, agricultural concerns and any institution or business of scale. It did so initially not as a form of reparations, but rather because generally the Red Army was the only governing body in any given territory. With the notable exception of the Czech lands, local government officials, whether in the Reich or allied states, fled before the Red Army's arrival. This helped to contribute to a sense of lawlessness that created an ideal situation for looting. The state continued to

¹³²⁸ Atabek, *K biografii voennogo pokoleniia*, p. 239.

¹³²⁹ Samoilov, *Podennye zapiski. T.1*, pp. 217-218. This quote has been slightly reformatted (several paragraphs rolled into one).

maintain a monopoly on large-scale trophies, but it relinquished its control over soldiers' trophy taking in the last months of the war.

In late December 1944, the army dramatically shifted its trophy policy. It was announced that, with the permission of their immediate superior, all soldiers in the active army who were "fulfilling their duties well" would be allowed to send parcels home starting on New Year's Day (which had come to replace Christmas as the main gift-giving holiday in the Soviet Union). Once per month, soldiers were allowed to send home 5, officers 10, and generals 16 kilograms. Soldiers were allowed to send their packages for free, while officers and generals were charged two rubles per kilogram. Packages could even be insured (1,000-3,000 rubles, according to rank). Hundreds of dedicated personnel were added to the Red Army's postal infrastructure to handle the influx of packages.¹³³⁰ A later order laid out further rules for sending parcels to the Soviet Union. In order to send a parcel home, soldiers would have to provide a hard case – either a wooden box or suitcase, leading some units to set up special workshops to provide soldiers with crates.¹³³¹ Soldiers were forbidden from sending weapons, parts of Red Army uniforms, perishables, liquids, medicine, anything explosive, poisonous or flammable, currency, letters or any printed material in the parcels. They were also forbidden from using anything printed in any language as packing material.¹³³²

The details of these orders reveal much about how the Soviet regime perceived foreign goods and how hierarchies had been further reinforced during the war. First of all, the order says nothing about where soldiers were to acquire the items that were to fill these parcels, nor does it provide any geographic limitations as to where a soldier could send parcels from, save for "the active army", which was already beyond Soviet borders. This meant that how many trophies one could take would depend on local conditions, without an army-wide policy that was entirely clear. While in Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Poland there was good reason not to alienate locals, in the Third Reich particularly, and other enemy states such as Rumania and Hungary, soldiers were given carte blanche to take whatever they wanted.¹³³³ Soviet propaganda would explicate the justness of this activity to soldiers, but many were sympathetic to this policy without any explanation. Secondly, this policy privileged officers and generals in a very clear way, doubling and tripling the limits of what they could send vis-à-vis soldiers. Given that this was a rare opportunity to acquire goods, these privileges should not be underestimated. Nor should it be forgotten that this order allowed commanders to decide who could send parcels home, allowing them to use the parcel as a carrot in their personal dealings with their subordinates and give them the possibility to take items as a form of bribery. Finally, and perhaps most curiously at first glance, was the total prohibition on any form of written materials – both soldiers' notes and print of any kind. Of course any print would have been

¹³³⁰ RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 78, ll. 491-498, in Barsukov, *et. al.*, *Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR 1943-1945gg.*, pp. 344-347. A good indicator of the importance placed on this work is the fact that soldiers assigned to the parcel section of the postal service were fed by ration norm number 1 – the same norm given to front line soldiers.

¹³³¹ Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 216.

¹³³² TsAMO RF f. 241, op. 2618, d. 65, ll. 4-5, in Veshchikov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 639-640.

¹³³³ Tartakovskii, *Iz dnevnikov voennykh let*, p. 254. Yeremenko noted in his diary "As opposed to Germany, the Czech population cannot be wronged (*nel'zia obizhat*)." Yeremenko, *Dnevnik*, p. 261.

subject to censorship, which, given the scale of parcel sending and wide range of languages, would have overwhelmed the parcel system (censors were not among the personnel added to the parcel service). This final point illustrates again the very dangerous nature of foreign goods as a potential agent of corruption. The state could accept the acquisition of foreign goods, but the transmission of foreign ideas was inimical.

The state's position on trophies had at long last come in line with that of most soldiers, and indeed the dedication of personnel and infrastructure including railways to what was essentially the transport of trophies to families in the rear went beyond what anyone could have expected. What had been a crime became policy. Boris Suris, who was an astute observer of the parcel policy in practice, wrote in his diary: "This is a natural phenomenon. A soldier has broken into a foreign country and wants to feel like a victor... The justification for marauding is the introduction of parcels. They stole and extorted enough from our country, now we will steal and extort."¹³³⁴ He also noted a rumor that Mekhlis, one of Stalin's representatives at the front, hearing of soldiers held by court martial for looting at the front, berated their commander, stating: "You don't understand a thing about our policy. And what are parcels for? What do you think, the soldier is going to send his dick home?" After this the soldiers were immediately freed and their trophies returned. The Head of the Political Department of Suris' army, realizing during an audit that few soldiers were sending parcels home, declared "What a lousy bunch of occupiers!" Suris himself was ambivalent about this policy.¹³³⁵

Prior to the Red Army's entry into the Third Reich, instances of marauding had occurred, but were looked down upon by soldiers and could be prosecuted. Kiselev noted in his diary, that in the gray zone of the Polish-Prussian border, "the understanding of 'marauding' no longer exists, and if in the Ukraine you could end up in a penal battalion for stealing a stinking goat from your landlady, here nobody will say anything if you steal everything from anyone at all. Who is going to check – German or Pole, rich or poor – here they lived like lords and applauded when Hitler trampled our Soviet land."¹³³⁶ It became clear to all, particularly after the order concerning parcels, that in the Third Reich the rules would be different.

Of course, this policy did not favor everyone equally. Soldiers in poorer countries and rural areas often had less to take, and the difference between the possibilities of combat soldiers and rear-area personnel was dramatic. Boris Suris noted in his diary that a soldiers needed to get permission to send a parcel, gather booty, make a wooden crate and wrap it in sturdy material, find clean paper to write on and go himself to the field post, all of which were difficult tasks for a soldier. In the meantime, "Rear-area guys [*tyloviki*] are excited, it's a holiday on their street."¹³³⁷ Boris Slutskii went so far as to declare that by the Spring of 1945 "a group of professional marauders and rapists" had arisen from among those with "relative freedom of movement: reservists, *starshiny*, rear-area personnel."¹³³⁸

¹³³⁴ Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 227-228,

¹³³⁵ Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 228 Temkin and Kopelev recall similar anecdotes in their memoirs. Kopelev, *Khranit' vechno*, T.1, p. 138; Temkin, *My Just War*, p. 200.

¹³³⁶ Kiselev, "Voina i zhizn' v predstavlenii 20-letnikh frontovikov (iz moego dnevnika)," p. 1032.

¹³³⁷ Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 215.

¹³³⁸ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p. 100. Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin*, pp. 143-144. The author of this diary realized all her assailants were privileged members of rear-area units only when she saw frontline soldiers for the first time, men characterized by being dirty and utterly indifferent.

Many others noted that frontline soldiers were less likely to pillage anything they couldn't eat or immediately use, but that rear-area personnel were known to loot even under fire.¹³³⁹ Despite the disparities, soldiers often felt that this policy was just, even if theft along the way was common. As Suris recorded one soldier saying: "if it gets stolen, than all the same Russia will be richer for it."¹³⁴⁰ Boris Tartakovskii understood this policy as both compensation for all that soldiers had suffered and as a way to help feed families suffering from hunger in the rear. All of the trophies he recalls sending home were traded for food at the market.¹³⁴¹

Red Army soldiers found not only items stolen from all over Europe, but also from the Soviet Union, which added to the sense of justice. An officer interviewed by the Mints Commission recalled: "We found our uniforms and civilian clothes with our labels, our stamps, our Tezhe soap, our chocolate in almost every home."¹³⁴² The Red Army's primary magazine *Krasnoarmeets* ran a story titled "Samovar" that served as a clear and direct justification of the parcel policy. In this story Mitya Riabchenko, whose parents had all of their possessions, including their prized samovar, stolen by one Otto Kesler of the Wehrmacht, fights his way to Lansberg, where he retrieves his parents' samovar from the deceased German soldier's terrified family.¹³⁴³ This allegory was a clear message to soldiers that their plundering was justified, and trophy hunting became a norm. Some political officers even seeing the parcels as a way to motivate soldiers to continue fighting beyond Soviet borders.¹³⁴⁴

For certain soldiers, however, this policy was confusing or became abhorrent. A furious General Yeremenko recorded in April of 1945 how most of the transport in his column was carrying "completely useless things that weigh down transport, for example, tables, stools, beds, bicycles and other non-military property." He ordered his quartermaster to rectify the situation immediately.¹³⁴⁵ Some Red Army personnel felt that stealing was tempting fate or betraying their principles. Nikolai Inozemtsev refused to send parcels home because he felt that it was unlucky.¹³⁴⁶ Other soldiers refused to steal due to past traumas. In the waning days of the war, Junior Lieutenant Rashid Rafikov wrote his father a heartfelt letter concerning his refusal to loot, not wanting to enter the "ranks of the pillagers" and directly citing his father's experience: "... I can't raise my hand to take these things, my heart hurts, and before my eyes I see your difficult existence in the 30s." Citing what was obviously his father's experience of "de-kulakization," Rafikov reflected that despite the horrors he had seen and the many pilfered wares found in German homes, he couldn't "touch these things and cannot send you a present, I hope that you agree with my sentiments. You always told me that wealth is something to be gathered with your own sweat, and if we survive, we can't avoid wealth."¹³⁴⁷ Rafikov was killed in action just over a

¹³³⁹ Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 233.

¹³⁴⁰ Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 235.

¹³⁴¹ Tartakovskii, *Iz dnevnikov voennykh let*, pp. 254-255.

¹³⁴² NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. I, op. 30, d. 23, ll. 2ob-3.

¹³⁴³ L. Nikulin, "Samovar," *Krasnoarmeets*, 1945:9, p. 6.

¹³⁴⁴ Kopelev, *Khranit' vechno*, T. 1, p. 139.

¹³⁴⁵ Yeremenko, *Dnevnik*, pp. 281-282.

¹³⁴⁶ Inozemtsev, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 211.

¹³⁴⁷ Frolov, *Vse oni khoteli zhit'*, p. 83. He continues to describe how the Germans have brought their terrible fate on themselves.

month after penning these lines. He was not alone in this sentiment. Writer Aleksandr Tvardovskii (also the son of a kulak) wrote a similar letter home to explain why he hadn't sent any parcels.

It's strange and shameful to see our *kulturtraegers*, gathering, "organizing" underwear, rags, worn shoes and the like and sending parcels. I don't know how you would take it, with your practicality, if I were to send you children's clothing (a little worn!) or a dress, etc., but I suspect that you would be ashamed of me for it. Such spiritual pain, such contempt for the enemy has burned for four years, that one could come up with such a heart-breaking solution to crown all this with the organization of parcels from German apartments, both occupied and unoccupied.¹³⁴⁸

Tvardovskii found the pilfering of second-hand goods pathetic and shameful. Many observers were frustrated either by the fact that they were looting the poor who had been left behind, as the wealthy people, whom they as Soviet people should hate, had been able to flee, or that they were looting poverty stricken areas.¹³⁴⁹

There was a fear that looting would erode morale in the army and mores after the war. Lev Kopelev's memoirs are filled with trepidation that the army would become exactly like its enemy, while Suris noted in his diary that "the army is disintegrating" as soldiers became obsessed with looting.¹³⁵⁰ The lawlessness that this order could create made many soldiers uncomfortable. Kiselev confided in his diary:

I am not at all attempting to condemn this measure, but here as well you can see many excesses when soldiers are gathering that, which needs to be sent. Often soldiers, without any ceremony, take everything from whoever comes their way. Under the influence of fear before arms they give up everything without a word. Only sometimes an unkind twinkle shines in the eyes of the locals. But this is inevitable. The soldier's soul is elemental, frightful and uncontrollable. The brothers [*bratsy*] have endured much in the dugouts and trenches, and now hold on Germany and all things German.¹³⁵¹

As Kiselev's statement attests, even to those who refused to loot or had reservations about the policy saw what was happening in Germany as unavoidable. Tvardovskii, while regretting excessive cruelty and reflecting that "only now has it become clear, how the Germans conducted themselves in our lands, when we act this way" decided that "it must be admitted that everything accompanying the occupation is almost inevitable, just as it is naïve to think that our occupation, even justified by the fact that it comes later, as an act of vengeance, could happen differently."¹³⁵² Soldiers brutalized by war had been given total power and the right to take whatever they pleased.

Soviet troops soon began learning bits of German, Hungarian and Rumanian. Army newspapers would sometimes print small phrase books with vital terms for combat and basic communication. However, both inside and outside of the ranks, people noticed that Red Army soldiers picked up a different vocabulary very quickly. Alexandra Orme, a Pole who was generally disparaging of the Russians, was surprised by their ability to learn foreign words and whole phrases quickly, integrating them even into conversation among

¹³⁴⁸ Tvardovskii, *Ia v svoiu skhodil attaku...*, p. 344.

¹³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 344; Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 236.

¹³⁵⁰ Kopelev, *Khranit' vechno*, T. 1, p. 56, 136-139; Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 236.

¹³⁵¹ Kiselev, "Voina i zhizn' v predstavlenii 20-letnikh frontovikov (iz moego dnevnika)," p. 1029.

¹³⁵² Tvardovskii, *Ia v svoiu khodil ataku...*, p. 347.

themselves.¹³⁵³ Grigorii Pomerants recalled in his memoirs that a woman he was staying with teased him with the words Russian soldiers knew in German: “ring, watch, bicycle, wine.”¹³⁵⁴

Finally it is worth examining what exactly soldiers were taking. Given the level of devastation in the Soviet Union, virtually anything that could be consumed or traded on the market for food could be a serious boon to families wasting away in the rear. But soldiers tended to concentrate more attention on the durable goods that they sent home or carried with them. Soldiers took different things for different reasons, sometimes as gifts to loved ones, sometimes as a way to make their own lives easier, much in the same way they had been taking trophies since the war’s beginning.

Much of what soldier’s took was what they needed at the moment. Boris Shumishskii took eye glasses.¹³⁵⁵ Tatiana Atabek, a medic, took medical instruments.¹³⁵⁶ A German woman forced to do the Red Army’s laundry noted the creative reuse of an embroidered night stand cover as a handkerchief.¹³⁵⁷ By 1945, almost everyone describes eating mostly trophy food. Enemy warehouses fell into Soviet hands and lead to soldiers eating a wide variety of luxury goods.¹³⁵⁸ In addition to local warehouses, soldiers could generally take what they wanted from the often-abandoned farms they encountered.¹³⁵⁹ Several observers also noticed that they or those around them were gaining weight.¹³⁶⁰ Some smoked cigars constantly, dragging on them like cigarettes and shocking the bourgeois folk who were used to enjoying them.¹³⁶¹ Soldiers also enjoyed almost unlimited access to alcohol (more on this below).

Aside from comestibles, soldiers found other immediate necessities. Clothing was a common item to take. Women in particular were glad to be able to find women’s clothing, including bras and slips, as the army provided only unisex underwear. Babenko described how he sharpened his image in March of 1945: “...they brought me two leather coats, one of which I gave to the division commander Volkovich, and I have to say I took off my wadded jacket and got a proper officer’s look, because it is shameful for the commander of a regiment to walk around Germany in common soldier’s clothing.”¹³⁶² Many soldiers sent or brought back fine European garments. A pregnant Irina Dunaevskaia gathered hard to find children’s clothing for her unborn child.¹³⁶³ Boris Suris wore a pair of SS gloves that he felt were “worthy of being noted” in his diary.¹³⁶⁴ Suits, cloth and even enemy uniforms became common items in parcels and soldiers’ suitcases after the war.

The Soviet Union had extensively censored the public sphere and taken many books out of circulation. This world of print included Russian-language editions of books long

¹³⁵³ Orme, *Comes the Comrade*, p. 232. She noted that they also forgot many of these phrases as quickly as they had learned them.

¹³⁵⁴ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, p. 167.

¹³⁵⁵ Shumelishskii, *Dnevnik soldata*, p. 137.

¹³⁵⁶ Atabek, *K biografii voennogo pokoleniia*, p. 239.

¹³⁵⁷ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin*, p. 224.

¹³⁵⁸ E.g. Inozemtsev, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 208; Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p. 30.

¹³⁵⁹ E.g. Kovalevskii, “Nynche u nas peredishka”, p. 99.

¹³⁶⁰ E.g. Tvardovskii, “*Ia v svoiu khodil ataku...*”, p. 345.

¹³⁶¹ Kopelev, *Khranit’ vechno*, T. 1, p. 140.

¹³⁶² NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 14, d. 2b, l. 122.

¹³⁶³ Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, pp. 369, 374.

¹³⁶⁴ Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 223.

forbidden in the Soviet Union and a wide variety of texts that were outside Soviet orthodoxy from religious texts and political texts to books about sex. Irina Dunaevskaia described a German book that tackled sexual issues “seriously and on an intelligent level.”¹³⁶⁵ These texts were potentially dangerous and while a soldier could bring them home, it was forbidden to send print materials via parcel. Books could also simply burn or be trampled by ignorant or indifferent soldiers.¹³⁶⁶ Many soldiers gladly used trophy paper to write home or keep diaries.¹³⁶⁷ Books could be simply raw material or a highly valued commodity. It was all in the eye of the beholder.

The informal visual culture of the Red Army shifted dramatically as the war entered its trophy-taking phase. Before 1944, cameras were a rarity in the hands of Red Army soldiers, being almost exclusively the purview of war correspondents and the occasional commander. *Krasnaia zvezda* went so far as to run an article decrying the difficulties facing soldiers who wanted to have their image taken at the front.¹³⁶⁸ This was in contrast to the US Army and the Wehrmacht, where many soldiers carried cameras and documented their experiences, also photographing their friends and exchanging snapshots. In the Red Army, soldiers wishing to send their image home or trade keepsake images with their friends had to sit for studio photographers. Conversely, talented soldiers were known to sketch portraits of their comrades to exchange or send home.¹³⁶⁹ Starting in 1944 and particularly 1945, large numbers of cameras fell into the hands of Red Army soldiers, dramatically changing the type of keepsakes that were exchanged. The late introduction of cameras meant that soldiers were often photographed displaying trophies and posing around the ruins of conquered enemy cities.¹³⁷⁰

The sudden wealth of soldiers infused the culture of sharing any little extra such as jam or tobacco to new heights, as soldiers gave lavish gifts to each other. Babenko recorded a present he gave his commander: “After discussion, I, the chief of staff and the Division commander had dinner together and I gave him a beautiful and well crafted accordion as a sign of my love for him, for which he thanked me.”¹³⁷¹ Immediately after the war he recorded gathering his officers together and using his capacity as a commanding officer to give them such trophy goods as motorcycles and bicycles.¹³⁷²

Soldiers appropriated all forms of conveyance, from bicycles to cars, for their personal use. Babenko could only give his men motorcycles because an official order was issued in August of 1944 forbidding the awarding of automobiles to soldiers without the approval of the Soviet Government.¹³⁷³ A much more common, and equally dangerous form

¹³⁶⁵ Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kenigsberga*, p. 376. Elsewhere, while describing a trophy book acquired while still on Soviet territory, Dunaevskaia decried Soviet puritanism and the lack of information about sex available to Soviet citizens.

¹³⁶⁶ Suris, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 235.

¹³⁶⁷ See e.g. Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Kënigsberga*, p. 15, photo insert pp. 224-225.

¹³⁶⁸ “Gde na fronte sfotografirovat’sia”, *Krasnaia zvezda*, 30 iunია 1943, p. 1.

¹³⁶⁹ Yakupov, *Frontovye zarisovki*, p. 44.

¹³⁷⁰ Baklanov, *Zhizn’, podarennaia dvazhdy*, p. 56. He used a photograph taken with his friends at the end of the war to find them thirty years afterwards, sending a photograph taken near Vienna to a newspaper. In the image he prominently displays an SS Dagger.

¹³⁷¹ NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 14, d. 2b, l. 135.

¹³⁷² *Ibid.*, ll. 171-172.

¹³⁷³ TsAMO RF f. 2, op. 795437, d. 12, l. 305, in Veshchikov, *et al.*, *Tyl Krasnoi Armii v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945 gg.*, pp. 613-614.

of conveyance taken as trophies were bicycles. Grigorii Baklanov recalled that soldiers young and old in his regiment became obsessed with bicycles, despite the difficulty of riding in their full kit. Soon however, several soldiers became victims of nighttime accidents on military roads (military cars and trucks generally drove without headlights), which led their commander to drastic action, piling up all the regiment's bicycles and running them over with tractors, "[t]hus ending the bicycle epoch in our regiment."¹³⁷⁴ Trophies changed the way soldiers moved and acted and once they became a threat, could lead to swift action on the part of commanders. However it was only when trophies seemed to endanger the lives of *soldiers* that superiors seemed ready to intervene.

Trophies varied widely, from the immediately necessary or useful to the aspirational and curious. They could be tiny, like pornographic cards or large as motorcycles or even furniture. They could be exotic, such as a short-lived parrot (it repeated "*Heil Hitler*" until shot by soldiers) that Nikulin recalls taking in Berlin, or utterly mundane, such as the spotlessly white chamber pot Temkin saw hanging off a soldier's knapsack.¹³⁷⁵

The sanctioning of parcels gave soldiers *carte blanche* to rob locals, especially Germans, but not all soldiers were interested in trophies. Aleksandr Lesin confided in his diary shortly after the war, that his unit had moved around quite a bit, in part because if left in one place too long unfortunate incidents would occur:

The older soldiers are occupied with trophies. And what about the youth? We don't need any old German junk [*barakhlo*]. We find this to be beneath us. You see we are busy with something else, that we talk about amongst ourselves but there is no way we would write in our diaries... something in us was muted during the war... We waged war and it is entirely understandable, that all energy – physical and other was given to the cause, and now? The energy of youth roars in us, demands release. You see we ended the war not exhausted, but devilishly hungry, inflamed, unrestrained...¹³⁷⁶

In Lesin's unit, while soldiers with families were busy collecting parcels to send home, many younger soldiers sought sexual contact. Lesin's account leaves little to imply that his encounters were anything other than consensual (not writing about or discussing sex was a convention of Stalin's "sexual thermidor"), but other soldiers were explicit about rapes they either witnessed, committed or interrupted.¹³⁷⁷

Lt. Kiselev, wrote in his diary: "As one could expect, our soldiers and officers, not having seen a woman in a long time, threw themselves at them. However you look at this, from any point of view, it is disgusting and shameful."¹³⁷⁸ One soldier complained to a friend that in crossing over from East Prussia to Poland, he could no longer "f..." German girls, as Poles were allies who one had to "respect and love."¹³⁷⁹ Many soldiers described witnessing acts of violence against women, often attempting to save these unfortunates from their attackers.¹³⁸⁰ One soldier explained to Alexandra Orme that: "With us, in the

¹³⁷⁴ Balkanov, *Zhizn', podarennaia dvazhdy*, p. 76.

¹³⁷⁵ Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, p. 189; Temkin, *My Just War*, p. 221.

¹³⁷⁶ Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 350.

¹³⁷⁷ Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 376-391.

¹³⁷⁸ Kiselev, "Voina i zhizn' v predstavlenii 20-letnikh frontovikov (iz moego dnevnika), p. 1032.

¹³⁷⁹ TsGA IPD RT F. 8250, op. 2, d. 6, l. 16.

¹³⁸⁰ Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, p. 190-191; Kiselev, "Voina i zhizn' v predstavlenii 20-letnikh frontovikov (iz moego dnevnika)," p. 1032.

Ukraine, the Germans raped young girls and then shot them, that's what they did. And our fools saw them and learned what to do, but they never shoot them, not even when they are drunk... That, you see, is the difference."¹³⁸¹ Grigorii Pomerants recalled that in a discussion with a Political Officer near Stalingrad, that while his wife was probably sleeping with a German: "Its no big deal. We'll go to Berlin and show those German girls!" Pomerants was shocked by the desire to imitate the enemy, but would live to see it: "At the end of the war the masses were overtaken by the idea that German women from 15 to 60 years old were the lawful prize of the victors."¹³⁸² At least one victim of rape described herself as "We have no rights; we're nothing but booty, dirt. We unload our rage on Adolf."¹³⁸³ As with looting, rape had occurred on Soviet and neutral territory, but was generally censured, and never reached the same scale as on the territory of the Third Reich.¹³⁸⁴

Historians have argued that the epidemic of rapes at the end of the war can be traced back to brutalization, indiscipline, the lack of a leave system in the Red Army, vengeance and the desire to both humiliate the male population and claim total domination over the country.¹³⁸⁵ It has also been noted that the greater the cultural difference between perpetrator and victim, the more brutal these encounters could be.¹³⁸⁶ Most importantly for our purposes is the fact that sex is often one of the most important and visceral means by which power relations are expressed, as Mary Louis Roberts has convincingly shown in her study of sexual interactions between the US Army and French civilians in 1944-1946.¹³⁸⁷ In allowing Red Army soldiers to have their way with German women, the state demonstrated its total mastery over the Third Reich, while in taking control of women's bodies, Red Army soldiers gained a level of mastery over others after years of their own bodies being state property. The war ended precisely as Hitler had predicted – with one society utterly destroyed by the other.

A significant factor in these rapes and a general problem at the end of the war was alcohol.¹³⁸⁸ As Boris Slutskii noted in a conversation with an Austrian doctor that "like many Europeans, he has come to draw the conclusion in his study of Russian culture that a Russian person is good, as long as he is sober."¹³⁸⁹ This doctor had been hiding women from the army and was healing several soldiers who protected the hospital, so he spoke from experience.

¹³⁸¹ Orme, *Comes the Comrade*, p. 74. Throughout her memoirs, Orme notes soldiers describing the horrendous acts they had witnessed in Ukraine, sometimes as a matter of fact, other times as justification for actions.

¹³⁸² Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, pp. 120, 166.

¹³⁸³ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin*, p. 79.

¹³⁸⁴ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, pp. 100-101. In his magisterial study *The Russians in Germany*, Norman Naimark points out that brutalization lead to a higher incidence of rape and that soldiers tended to rape more in cultures that were more distant from theirs. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, pp. 69-70.

¹³⁸⁵ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, pp. 69-71, 114; Jeffrey Burds, "Sexual Violence in Europe in World War II, 1939—1945," *Politics & Society*, Vol. 37 No. 1, March 2009 p. 35-74, pp. 57, 53-55.

¹³⁸⁶ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, p. 70. Some soldiers may not have perceived what they were doing as rape, according to their victims. See e.g. Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin*, p. 57.

¹³⁸⁷ Mary Louis Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2013), pp. 7, 256.

¹³⁸⁸ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, p. 113.

¹³⁸⁹ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p. 97.

Many commanders and soldiers noted that alcohol became a problem at the end of the war, as soldiers gained near unlimited access to stores throughout East Central Europe and Germany. Nikolai Inozemtsev refused to take drunk soldiers with him, while noting that they had access to as much as they wanted to drink.¹³⁹⁰ Babenko recalled smashing bottles to keep his subordinates in line,¹³⁹¹ while Tartakovskii wrote in his memoirs of the need to guard and control reserves of alcohol.¹³⁹² Nikulin recalled in his memoirs:

It was spring and the whole army was drunk. Alcohol was found everywhere in abundance and we drank, drank, drank. At no other time in my entire life did I drink so much alcohol, as in those two months! It might be that the war ended so quickly because we, besotted by wine, forgot about danger and asked for trouble. Explosions, bombardment, fire – and right there is a squeezebox and a drunken waltz.¹³⁹³

Many recall acts of drunken rampage and it became an issue that the army was forced to deal with, instituting much harsher discipline after the war.¹³⁹⁴

But in the war's final months, a spirit of uncontrollable vengeance was in the air that Grigorii Pomerants came to associate with feathers: "Down – the sign of a pogrom, the sign of total free will, that makes you dizzy, that rapes, burns... Kill the German and then take a German woman. There it is, the soldier's holiday of victory. And then place a bottle upside down!"¹³⁹⁵ That the destroyed remnants of an object so closely associated with home and (*meshchanskii*) comfort became for Pomerants the symbol of his comrades' rage is telling. The objects of bourgeois coziness often became the targets of this anger.

Destruction

Boris Komskaa, who had so adeptly collected trophies on the battlefield, and his comrades awoke the morning of January 24, 1945 in an East Prussian town. They had just crossed the border from Poland into the Third Reich the night before. Komskaa recorded in his diary what he and his friends saw in the enemy's lair:

...In the whole village only two houses were burnt down, all the rest were intact. The houses, like all their property [*khoziaistvo*], are highly cultured, city-like. All their belongings were left behind with the exception of clothing and valuables. Furniture, household goods, grain, livestock, dishes, farm machinery, bicycles – were all left in the yard. All of their hatred, all of their thirst for vengeance the fighting men instantly vented on these things. They started breaking windows, mirrors, records, they lit up stoves with beds, tables and dressers...¹³⁹⁶

This is a participant's view of Strukov's mention of the soldiers acting out their desire to "break and destroy everything." The cultured nature of their enemy's homes aroused a visceral response among men and women who had travelled thousands of kilometers of scorched earth to find an enemy whose peasants lived more richly than many Soviet bureaucrats.

Lesin confided in his diary that the first German city his unit reached was

¹³⁹⁰ Inozemtsev, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, pp. 208-209.

¹³⁹¹ *NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. III, op. 14, d. 2b, l. 143.*

¹³⁹² Tartakovskii, *Iz dnevnikov voennykh let*, p. 243.

¹³⁹³ Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, p. 187.

¹³⁹⁴ E.g. Temkin, *My Just War*, p. 221. Discipline became a major topic in *Krasnaia zvezda* in the immediate aftermath of the war, e.g. "Vysoko derzhat' chest' i dostoinstvo sovietskogo voina" *Krasnaia zvezda*, 18 May 1945; "Vnutrennyi rasporiadok", *Krasnaia zvezda*, 23 June 1945.

¹³⁹⁵ Pomerants, *Zapiski gadkogo utenka*, p. 171.

¹³⁹⁶ Komskaa, "Dnevnik", pp. 66-67.

burned and destroyed. Crossing the Polish-German border, not a small number of our soldiers have become unbridled avengers... Many don't have a home, their home was burnt down, their mothers have been shot, their sister or wife or fiancée have been shot. Try and immediately snuff out or even temper the vengeful hatred, when a person is overtaken by the demonic hypostasis of an eye for an eye.¹³⁹⁷

This desire for vengeance could justify the taking of enemy property, rape and a desire to simply destroy anything belonging to the Germans, to make them feel the emptiness that overtook many Red Army soldiers who had lost family and home.

The destruction of property could take on a carnivalesque quality, as soldiers took out their frustrations on the rich housewares of manors and cottages from Poland to Berlin. Alexandra Orme, living near Budapest in the winter of 1944-1945 recalled that soldiers had not only burned all of the furniture they could find, but also destroyed photo albums. She believed that the burning of furniture was not done out of spite, but rather due to ignorance of the value of the furniture. Indeed, familiar items were left untouched: "Kitchen stools were not burnt, although they most certainly must have been easier to chop up; but then the Russian knows what a kitchen stool is, he has them in his own home and so he respects them."¹³⁹⁸ That there could be a symbolic or political dimensions in the fact that those items not marked by *meshchanstvo* (and in this case used by servant rather than masters) were left intact did not occur to Orme. The clash of cultures that she witnessed involved not only destruction, but the marking of territory.

Orme, her servants and her family scrubbed their house furiously once Red Army soldiers left, but she was surprised to find that the W.C. had been left untouched. Instead soldiers had taken an old peasant wardrobe into the yard to use as a latrine, explaining: "We're a cultured nation, not pigs like you. We don't stool in the house we live in."¹³⁹⁹ Aversion to bourgeois ways could also lead to more symbolic scatological acts.

Lev Kopelev recalled that the men in his unit had agreed in advance to "mark their crossing of the border in the appropriate manner": "Having established the exact line on the map, I commanded the men – 'Here is Germany, get out and relieve yourselves!...' This proved to be an emotional moment and men embraced each other afterwards."¹⁴⁰⁰ These actions did not stop at the border. At the end of the war, Nikulin described the two ways in which soldiers marked what had become the symbol of all of the Reich:

Many wrote their names on the Reichstag or thought it their duty to piss on its wall. An ocean was poured around the Reichstag. And the requisite smell. There were different autographs: "We got our vengeance!" "We came from Stalingrad!" "Ivanov was here!" and so on. The best autograph that I saw was located, if memory serves me right, on the pedestal of the statue of the Great Elector. There was a bronze plaque with the genealogy of the great names of Germany: Goethe, Schiller, Moltke, Schliffen and others. It was thickly crossed out with chalk, and lower was written: "I f-cked all of you up! – Sidorov." Everyone, from generals to soldiers, was moved, but the chalk was later erased and the priceless autograph was lost to history.¹⁴⁰¹

¹³⁹⁷ Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 317.

¹³⁹⁸ Orme, *Comes the Comrade*, pp. 44-45, 48. Although as Komsii's statement attests, rage could be as important as keeping warm.

¹³⁹⁹ Orme, *Comes the Comrade*, p. 256.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Kopelev, *Khranit' vechno*, T.1, pp. 102-103.

¹⁴⁰¹ Nikulin, *Vospiminaniia o voine*, pp. 190-191.

Sidorov's autograph, much like the memory of the looting, destruction and urination on enemy property – from cozy couches, to bank vaults to the Reichstag itself – had no place in post-war myth making and official memory.¹⁴⁰² Soldiers would be remembered as ascetic, marble men rather than flesh and blood humans who could be both heroes and participants in acts of marauding.

Exposure

The policy of trophy taking may have served as a sort of erasure of the humiliating memory of 1941, as Lev Kopelev mused about a soldier weighed down with trophies in 1945: "A Recruit from Ryazan, Orlov or somewhere near Moscow is riding around Germany, as if 1941, German trenches at the gates of Leningrad and tanks in Khimki [a suburb of Moscow] never happened, as if Stalingrad and a flag with a Swastika on Mount Elbrus never happened."¹⁴⁰³ For Kopelev this moment of amnesia, made concrete by the previously hapless soldier now travelling Germany as a conqueror, was disturbing. How could everyone forget the humiliating defeats of 1941 and 1942 and begin to conduct themselves in a manner similar to their enemy? However, Kopelev was virtually alone among his comrades with this sentiment.

Soviet soldier's arrival in Europe and their subsequent actions led to three major consequences. The first was a fear that Soviet citizens had become uncontrollable in the course of the war, particularly at its conclusion. Several soldiers expressed trepidation about their ability to control themselves. Nikulin, in characteristically morose manner, described the psychology of soldiers in the wars final days as follows: "Warriors, whose chests were covered with medals but had lost their minds from what they experienced, believed that everything was allowed, everything possible."¹⁴⁰⁴ Nikolai Inozemtsev recorded a conversation in late January 1945:

You know, I don't pity the Germans in the least, let them be shot and do with them what you will. We could never do anything comparable to what they did to us, because that was on the level of the government. But it is offensive that all of these rapes lower the dignity of the army as a whole and every Russian individually. And besides that, this inevitably brings with it the disintegration of discipline and lowers the combat effectiveness of the army. All of these unbridled animal instincts will be very difficult to stamp out.¹⁴⁰⁵

Immediately after the war measures were taken to return harsher discipline and also separate Red Army soldiers from locals.¹⁴⁰⁶

The second consequence was that Soviet people had been exposed to the disease of *meshchanstvo* and all of its glittering objects. As Strukov mentioned, some soldiers saw the wealth of their foreign enemy as proof that the German system was superior to the Soviet. These doubts led to an intensification of propaganda proclaiming the superiority of the Soviet system. Some articles took an economic tack, particularly in regard to Soviet agriculture and the *kolkhoz*, explaining that the Soviet Union could defeat the Third Reich, which had acquired all of the riches of Europe, only because of its superior, socialist means

¹⁴⁰² Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin*, pp. 153 (on using a couch as a toilet), 185-186 (on looting banks and defecating in the vaults).

¹⁴⁰³ Kopelev, *Khranit' vechno*, p. 102.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, p. 189.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Inozemtsev, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, p. 210.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, p. 36.

of organization.¹⁴⁰⁷ But this superiority often took on a spiritual dimension, as the great Russian authors of the past and present united in their hatred of *meshchanstvo*. An article in the army's main political magazine compared German and Russian literature: "It turns out that the creation of ideal of *meshchanskii* comfort by German literature attracted a horde of rapists and child killers, becoming ammunition for Hitlerism... Russian literature did not praise *meshchanstvo*, but quite the opposite, unmasked and castigated it."¹⁴⁰⁸ In the immediate aftermath of the war and a policy that invited soldiers to covet and take the very objects of *meshchanstvo* comfort, the state attempted to inculcate the sort of revulsion that Samoilov had felt in German homes.

This fear of contamination had a physical manifestation as well. In 1944 a monthly medical exam was introduced for all personnel, as well as a medical exam before furloughs, demobilization and returning to the front. The order read as follows: "both at the front and in the rear the rate of venereal infections is growing, especially on the territory liberated from occupation by the Red Army, where a significant portion of the population is infected with venereal diseases, on enemy territory currently occupied by the Red Army, prostitution is highly developed".¹⁴⁰⁹ At the end of the war, a large number of soldiers had become infected with various venereal diseases, and special VD wards became a feature of military hospitals. The corrupting influence of some of the trophies of war required immediate response, while others would lead to vigilance after the war.¹⁴¹⁰ The ability to take was everywhere accompanied by the dangers of contamination.

The state was deeply concerned with whether soldiers would return from Europe with "Athenian pride" or as "Decembrists" and "political westernizers."¹⁴¹¹ However, according to many observers, the wealth and ways of the West repulsed as much as they attracted. Boris Slutskii, a perceptive witness to the effect of Europe on Red Army soldiers, noted that the sight of prostitutes at first fascinated him and his comrades, but that "the initial elation at the fact of free love quickly went away. This was the result of not only fear of infection and the price, but also disdain for the very possibility of buying a human being."¹⁴¹² He and his comrades found other customs, even how people washed, quite repulsive. Soldiers constantly exaggerated the pluses of Soviet life to foreigners, underlining the "justness of life in Russia".¹⁴¹³ Ultimately, Slutskii (who travelled through

¹⁴⁰⁷ P. Belov, "O preimushchestvakh sotsialisticheskoi sistemy khoziaistva", *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1945:19-20, pp. 21-29. As one anecdote put it: "What were the worst things to come out of the victory over Germany? (1) The Red Army saw Europe. (2) Europe saw the Red Army." James Von Geldern and Richard Stites, *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales, Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays, and Folklore, 1917-1953* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 407.

¹⁴⁰⁸ M. Nechikina, "Velikii russkii narod", *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1945:13, pp. 21-29, p. 27.

¹⁴⁰⁹ RGVA f. 4, op. 11, d. 78, ll. 59-60, in Barsukov, *et al.*, *Russkiy arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia: Prikazy Narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR (1943—1945 gg.)*, p. 304.

¹⁴¹⁰ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, p. 97-100; Dunaevskaia, *Ot Leningrada do Konegsberga*, p. 380.

¹⁴¹¹ Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p. 35. Even Samoilov, who viewed himself and his comrades as latter day Decembrists believed that they were "a sort of Decembrists that have come to power, have arrived at the moment of transition." Samoilov, *Podennye zapisi*, p. 226.

¹⁴¹² Slutskii, *O drugikh i o sebe*, p. 36.

¹⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Rumania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and into Austria) noted by the end of the war: “The traditional esteem for foreign things was undermined.”¹⁴¹⁴

This led to the third major result of the Red Army going abroad: a realization that Soviet people were fundamentally different from those of the bourgeois world, an epiphany that often played out through things. We have already seen how pornography, prostitution and other objects could repulse soldiers. This repulsion could often unite the very diverse cadres of the Red Army. As Boris Slutskii recalled: “The campaign abroad united all the nations” serving in the Red Army.¹⁴¹⁵ Uzbeks and Russians could see more in common with themselves than with people of the bourgeois world, and to foreigners “Russian” and “Soviet” were interchangeable. Exposure to foreign lifestyles and manners convinced many soldiers that the Soviet system was superior. As Pustovoiit wrote in his diary in September of 1944: “View on Europe. Much is new here, and the more I encounter it, the more I value everything kindred [*rodnoe*] to me, everything Russian.”¹⁴¹⁶ Red Army men’s initial reactions to allied soldiers could also be alienating, as Nikulin recalled:

We didn't have much contact with the allies. The language barrier got in our way, the prim restraint of the British, looking down on us. The Americans were more easy-going, especially the negroes, who liked us... I saw in Berlin how an American beat in a deadly battle his compatriot – a negro. He beat him like a beast, kicking him with wrought iron shoes in the stomach and face. All this did not dispose us to our allies.¹⁴¹⁷

At the very end of the war, many Red Army soldiers felt themselves like tourists, but as tourists who were very much ready to go home.¹⁴¹⁸

Part 4: Back in the USSR

Red Army soldiers returned to a country destroyed by war with whatever trophies they could acquire. Some lost their trophies along the way, some traded them at flea markets that had become part of the landscape during the war and filled with trophy goods in the war’s aftermath, many of them returned to families that were elated to see them with trophy goods that represented the previously unattainable. But as these soldiers returned home, the rhetoric around trophies was returning to a prewar understanding. An article singing the praises of the “Great Russian People” reminded soldiers that “[h]undreds and hundreds of times Russians have built on ruins – others would not be able to bear this.”¹⁴¹⁹ It also went on to highlight the many selfless acts of Stakhanovites and ordinary Soviet people in creating wealth not for themselves but rather for the greater collective and state. These sentiments cast the policies of trophy taking in a shameful, alien light.

Many soldiers stayed for years in occupation forces in Europe where they witnessed the separation of local civilians from soldiers and very strict controls over soldiers’ behavior instituted by the army. This also included trophies. As the war concluded and soldiers were demobilized, trophies again became the exclusive domain of the state. The military committees of an army or front were permitted to award demobilizing soldiers a

¹⁴¹⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁴¹⁵ Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁴¹⁶ Pustovoiit, *Pestrye likhi voiny*, p. 83.

¹⁴¹⁷ Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, pp. 191.

¹⁴¹⁸ Lesin, *Byla voina*, p. 351.

¹⁴¹⁹ Nechikina, “Velikii russkii narod”, p. 21.

variety of items, including cameras, radios, bicycles, watches, and soldiers could purchase cloth, clothing, dishes and a variety of other household goods for themselves and their families at fixed prices from military stores. All demobilizing soldiers were given a sizable bonus upon leaving the service, with which they could purchase these goods.¹⁴²⁰

The state again established its monopoly over trophies and made some ostentatious displays of its own. During the victory parade in June of 1945, 200 captured enemy banners were paraded and flung in a pile at the feet of the tribune at Red Square.¹⁴²¹ Shortly after the war a series of Soviet films were made on captured color film stock, including *The Fall of Berlin*, which told the official Stalinist version of the war (a story devoid of trophy taking of any sort). Aside from trophies shot in the Soviet Union, captured trophy films (from Hollywood as well as the Third Reich) were also shown both in the Soviet Union and to troops awaiting demobilization throughout Europe.¹⁴²² Joseph Brodsky called these films “the greatest spoils of war” and recalled that they had a tremendous impact on him as a youth.¹⁴²³ In the wake of the influx of non-Soviet goods and films, the emerging Cold War reified the danger of all things foreign.

The post-war period saw a rise in xenophobia, as praise for Western ways and Western goods became a means to assault political enemies and the Soviet Union shut its borders more tightly than ever before. A campaign against “rootless cosmopolitanism” in favor of Soviet patriotism was launched in the early days of the Cold War, making it dangerous to praise and appreciate all things foreign. In 1947 it became illegal to marry a foreigner, making “trophy marriages,” a common aspect of American occupation, illegal. However, all of this did not stop what historian Stephen Lovell has referred to as “trophy westernization,” the continued obsession with Western goods that led many Soviet citizens to search out foreign commodities.¹⁴²⁴

Indeed, people after the war looked very different than those before the war. Postwar fashion was a strange combination of men often wearing their uniforms for lack of something else and the trophy fineries of Europe. Women gained access to Western fashion via both the trophies that they or their husbands sent and books and magazines that could now be purchased. This tendency, which began with the annexation of the Baltic states and Western Ukraine (Lvov and Riga became centers of fashion in the year before the war), was cemented by the influx of clothing and material from East Central Europe. Expensive fabrics became popular and briefly attainable, while even the way women used makeup changed.¹⁴²⁵ The sartorial impact of the war was unmistakable, as men in uniform escorted women who looked like fashion plates from Europe.

Certain types of trophies, particularly weapons and radios, did not draw much attention during the war could become a threat afterwards. Additional weapons such as pistols and knives were ambivalent trophies during the war, a commander could envy and

¹⁴²⁰ APRF f. 3, OP. 50, d. 274, ll. 110-121, in Kudriashov, *Voina*, p. 393-399.

¹⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

¹⁴²² Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany (Second, revised edition)* (New York: I.B. Tarius, 1998), pp. 48-49, 100-101.

¹⁴²³ Joseph Brodsky, “Spoils of War,” *On Grief and Reason: Essays* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1995), pp. 8-11.

¹⁴²⁴ Stephen Lovell, *In the Shadow of War: Russia and the USSR 1941-present* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2010), pp. 288-289.

¹⁴²⁵ Aleksandr Vasil'ev, *Russkaia moda: 150 let v fotografiakh* (Moscow: Slovo, 2009), pp. 337-338. 352-353.

demand a soldier surrender his pistol or dagger, but ultimately the fact that a trusted soldier had expanded means to kill the enemy was not a negative. Once their owners returned to civilian life, however, weapons became a major problem, as crime rates rose and trophy pistols could land their owners in prison.¹⁴²⁶ Nonetheless many soldiers felt uncomfortable without weapons and continued to carry them in their civilian lives.¹⁴²⁷ Radios could be the source of a more existential fear of corruption, as they could be used to listen to Western broadcasts during the Cold War and offered not only returning veterans but later their children a window into the forbidden world of jazz and dissidence.¹⁴²⁸

The very act of trophy collection was used to discredit some highly ranked veterans, most notably Georgii Zhukov, the general most associated with the victory and who had commanded the Moscow victory parade. After having boasted of his accomplishments, he was reduced to command the remote Odessa Military Region. Soon a set of accusations concerning his excessive trophy taking would lead to the confiscation of his trophies, loss of his post and near expulsion from the party. Described as “money-grubbing” and “clearly criminal”, Zhukov stood accused of stealing up to 70 pieces of gold jewelry, 740 pieces of silverware, 30 kilograms of silver, 50 rugs, 320 pelts, 60 paintings, 3700 meters of silk and other items.¹⁴²⁹ Many, but not all of these items were later confiscated, further highlighting the ambiguity of how much of the spoils should be left the individual victor and how much the state.¹⁴³⁰ One of Zhukov’s colleagues, the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Berlin would later be arrested for excessive trophy taking, essentially pilfering what he was supposed to protect.¹⁴³¹ The desire to have the trophies of war could be used against the victors, both highly positioned and of low standing. By the late 1940s, these glittering objects could be dangerous and the story of their acquisition had no place in the mythology of the war.

Conclusion

Unlike the Third Reich, the Soviet Union did not want to suck the areas it occupied dry and depopulate them for resettlement. Rather, the Bolsheviks desired to recreate the world in their image, using the human resources available. As a result of this important difference, trophy taking and use of local resources as practiced by the Red Army never took on a genocidal nature, even if it could be quite cruel. Red Army soldiers plundered as a form of reparations and raped in the absence of punishment, rather than as part of a deliberate policy.

The control and marshaling of resources had been key to Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War, yet trophies existed in a gray zone of resources. Trophies lay at the juncture of several ambiguities; attraction and repulsion, symbolic and functional, state and private; and even when state policy concerning trophies was clear it was often

¹⁴²⁶ Litvin, *800 Days on the Eastern Front*, p. 142.

¹⁴²⁷ Baklanov, *Zhizn', podarenniaia dvzahdi*, p. 77.

¹⁴²⁸ Joseph Brodsky, “Spoils of War,” pp. 5-7; Tartakovskii, *Iz dnevnikov voennykh let*, p. 255.

¹⁴²⁹ RGASPI f. 17, op. 3, d. 2198, ll. 28-29. (<http://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/1002762>) 12 May 2014.

¹⁴³⁰ Khaustov, V. N., V. P. Naumov, and N. S. Plotnikova, *Lubianka: Stalin i MGB SSSR, mart 1946 - mart 1953* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyii fond "Demokratia", 2007), pp. 137-139.

¹⁴³¹ Khaustov, Naumov and Plotnikova, *Lubianka*, pp. 140-148.

subverted or subject to sudden change. The state remained master trophy taker, taking factories, minerals, Nazi scientists and large-scale resources. The state also choreographed ostentatious displays of its trophies. But there was space for soldiers to acquire much of what the state could not provide to the masses – the fineries of *meschchanskii* comfort. Much as the state had left soldiers to fend for themselves at many points in the war, in the war's final months, when soldiers were more than adequately supplied, the state looked the other way and even provided an infrastructure for soldiers to help themselves to whatever they desired. The state in turn, could take back whatever it wanted, whenever it wanted, as the case of Zhukov shows.

Greed was not something that was acceptable under socialism. And it was precisely this aversion to greed which had roots both in Bolshevik ideology and peasant tradition that could make the wealth soldiers saw abroad equally revolting and attractive. At the end of the war, standing in the ruins of a rich apartment in East Prussia or Berlin, few, if any Red Army soldiers doubted either the moral or physical superiority of their ideology and their people. *Meshchanstvo* had been trampled into the dust, while the objects it had given birth to (whether standards emblazoned with the Swastika or bolts of silk) were on their way to the Soviet Union in parcels carefully packed by Red Army soldiers.

Conclusion: Subjects and Objects

This has been the story of a diverse collection of individuals coming together around a set of objects, mastering them and winning a war of epic scale. The narrative has alternated between the personal and the grandiose, and it may be worth our while to revisit the Marxist framework that was common in Soviet society. The Marxist conceptualization of the Soviet project saw the world as divided into objective and subjective phenomena. The massive processes of history were objective and inexorable. The transition from Capitalism to Communism would happen just as the transition from Feudalism to Capitalism had happened, regardless of what any one individual or group tried to do about it.¹⁴³² The subjective component was how these massive changes were experienced by individuals caught up in these processes that were greater than themselves. The war served both to highlight and undermine this logic of history: Soviet victory had always been touted as inevitable, but what individual soldiers did seemed to matter very much in its outcome. Was the individual important? Heroes had been lauded and even retrieved from the dustbin of history to inspire soldiers. Apparently individuals did matter in Soviet society, but the enemy had lost any trace of individuality.

The strange behavior of the enemy seemed to support a Marxist viewpoint even more than the actions of Red Army men. Whoever the Germans had been as subjective individuals, as a collective they were objectively dangerous. The Germans came to be seen as a nation that embodied the dying bourgeois *Geist*. They were obsessed with accumulation to an extent that they had seen fit to rob and murder their neighbors, and even as Red Army soldiers came to see the incredible wealth of the Third Reich's citizens, it was impossible to disassociate this wealth from the murder and destruction that Soviet citizens had witnessed on their way to the Reich. The "objective" process of the violent last throes of capitalism seemed to align very nicely with the "subjective" emotions that the experience of war had aroused. It was also impossible to ignore that the Soviet system had produced the items and fostered the citizens that had defeated the Third Reich. Whether they saw the experience of the war in Marxist terms or not, soldiers emerged from the war as dramatically different people.

More than a Marxist narrative of "objective" and "subjective" experience, this has been a story of *objects* and *subjects*. Specific subjectivities formed around the use of specific objects, as soldiers came to identify themselves with the weapon they wielded, invest meaning in rituals both mundane (e.g. eating together) and extraordinary (e.g. the "Meetings of Vengeance"), and inhabit the idiosyncratic ranks of the army and cities of earth.

The calling together of the Soviet people to defend the state had succeeded for several reasons. The enemy that they fought was clearly worse than the state they were defending, and the state excelled at explaining to everyone except the most intractable enemies of Bolshevism that they had a stake in defeating the Nazis. The Bolsheviks also excelled at crafting objects that were utilitarian, cheap to manufacture and easy to use. They could clothe, feed and arm an army of such tremendous scale, despite tremendous loss of territory, because they did it on the cheap. Everything from *portyanki*, mess tins and

¹⁴³² A.D. Seniavskii, *Literaturnyi protsess v Rossii* (Moscow: RGGU, 2003) pp. 143-147; Hellbeck, "Galaxy of Black Stars", pp. 616,

shovels to submachine guns and tanks were made as simply and cheaply as possible. The army produced the things that worked and dropped those that didn't from production. The only exceptions to this rule of practicality – the introduction of scores of medals in precious materials and the shift to a new uniform in the midst of war – were seen to have had such an important morale component that they outweighed purely materialist concerns. The professional army that emerged in 1943 drew inspiration from both a Bolshevik and ancient past, and its material culture reflected that, wiping away visual traces of the shame of 1941. The items a soldier carried were now literally animated by the often peasant soldiers themselves and seemed to have taken on something of a peasant soul themselves, many items being steeped in simplicity, humble to look at and born of improvisation.

This was in contradistinction to the soulless or even malevolent material world of the enemy. The wealth that soldiers encountered first in German bunkers and later in German homes was seen as corrupt – being the result of stealing (e.g. samovars), a clear sign of moral corruption (e.g., pornography) or simply as a motivating factor in the acquisition of more wealth. The Germans had been portrayed in Soviet propaganda (using their own diaries to incriminate them) as humans who had been reduced to the status of beasts by their greed. Defeating such a base enemy had elevated the status of both Soviet citizens and the Soviet state.

A September 1944 article “Friendship, sealed in blood” spoke of the changes that had occurred in Soviet society in the course of the war. Two of the major changes it noted touched on how soldiers saw themselves and how they saw their country. According to the author, himself a Georgian: “A Soviet warrior of any nationality proudly calls himself a Russian soldier. The word ‘Russian’ has become a symbol of friendship, strength, courage, victory.”¹⁴³³ The uniforms and medals soldiers came to wear had an increasingly Russian flare, the slippages between Russian and Soviet became more and more prevalent and as soldiers went abroad they were seen by everyone as “Russian,” regardless of nationality. But even before they went abroad, soldiers sense of space and self was changing:

The war has immensely expanded the conception of the Motherland among Soviet people. Until now, many of those who are now defending the Soviet land with weapon in hand had only heard and read about the vastness, wealth and diversity of our Fatherland. At war they have seen with their own eyes, measured with their own soldierly tread the unimaginable expanses of the Soviet Motherland.¹⁴³⁴

Before the war, the peasant majority would have had few opportunities to leave their collective farms and explore the expanses of their country.¹⁴³⁵ It is virtually impossible to imagine how else, other than in the army (or perhaps the expansive GULag system) an Uzbek cotton picker and Ukrainian swineherd could come to live together, criminals and intelligentsia could become friends and hundreds of thousands of déclassé people could be ushered into the Soviet fold. It was only in uniform that this travel around the Soviet Union and into foreign territory was possible.

The war transformed people. A Leningrad confectioner would pass through the hell of the Nevsky Bridgehead. A Tatar poet would go from the GULag to command a mortar

¹⁴³³ G. Lomidze, “Druzhba, skreplennaia krov’iu,” *Agitator i propagandist Krasnoi Armii*, 1944:18, p. 42.

¹⁴³⁴ Lomidze, “Druzhba, skreplennaia krov’iu,” pp. 43-44.

¹⁴³⁵ Once passports were instituted, the most likely means of travel for peasants would have been military service, illegal travel to work at a factory, as part of a special delegation of shock workers or party members, or as prisoners sent to the GULag.

platoon, dying from wounds in East Prussia. A forty-year-old Russian peasant who made *valenki* for a living became a machine gunner. One Jewish student became an artillery observer, another a machine gunner. A young Muscovite grandson of an Imperial army general would lose an eye as a tanker. The son of an Armenian and a Georgian who had been repressed in the Great Terror defended the state that had destroyed his family. Russian teenage girls became snipers. The son of a Kazakh herdsman who was arrested as a kulak would lead troops into Berlin, helping to raise the Red Banner over the Reichstag.¹⁴³⁶ In the ranks of the Red Army, these diverse people would be turned into a united fighting force that ultimately won the largest war in history. Future celebrities – including the most popular bard of the 1960s (Bulat Okudzhava) and the most famous Soviet clown (Yuri Nikulin) – and a host of anonymous collective farmers, factory workers and clerks had all worn the same uniform, eaten from the same pots, slept in the same bunkers, fired the same guns and taken similar trophies. Millions of small scale changes had a dramatic impact on Soviet society.

Years after the war, David Samoilov reflected on the transformation the war had brought to the Soviet people:

It was precisely at this moment that the nation experienced a sharp period of its development, when the make up of the people changed dramatically. We still think very little about the role the war played in accelerating the process the we call urbanization... The exit of from the stage of history of the folk-*muzhik* became the grand finale of the peasant tragedy.¹⁴³⁷

Many of those who exited “the stage of history” – whether they were peasants, workers or members of the intelligentsia – found their final resting place in the trenches they had dug. Both those who perished and those who survived were subjected to a specific form of urbanization and modernization in the ranks of the Red Army. Making peasants more urban had been part of the Soviet project from the very beginning. The army provided an urban space in which to mold soldiers, exposing them to propaganda, the wide world of the Soviet Union and the world beyond its borders. Soldiers both experienced the urbanized ranks of the army and saw for themselves Soviet and foreign cities.

Like immigrants to a new city, the generations of people that fought in the war had rubbed shoulders with people from every walk of Soviet life, often living intimately with people very different from themselves in age, nationality, class and experience. This would contribute to an anti-elitism that infuses the memoirs of those who survived, as even encounters with those who could not speak the lingua franca or whose “backward” customs seemed bizarre, it is often more a sense of fascination than condemnation that colors these narratives. After all, they were all reduced to the same set of objects, their everyday lives made uniform in the most literal sense. For those who fought the war, the

¹⁴³⁶ These are all real people: A.B. Priadekhin, Fatikh Karimov, Makar Prianishchnikov (from Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, p. 206), Grigorii Baklanov, David Samoilov, Lev Slezkine, Bulat Okudzhava, Iuliia Zhukova and Alexandra Shliakova (NA IRI RAN f. 2, r. X, op. 7, d. 8), Rakhimzhan Koshkarbaev. (Those without references next to them can be found in the Bibliography).

¹⁴³⁷ Samoilov, *Pamiatnye zapiski*, p. 205. The Red Army had been posited as an institution of modernization in Soviet society from its very inception, see Trotsky’s early writings and Mark von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

massive mobilization that they had participated in was usually described as both their and the state's finest hour.

For the first three decades of Soviet power, mobilization had been the ethos that kept the project going, promising a brighter future for sacrifices today. Under Khrushchev, mobilization began to give way to promises of abundance sooner, rather than later. What had been always on the horizon was now supposed to be just around the bend. If those who fought in the war were fearful of the corrupting nature of foreign goods and prepared to live humbly, but in peace, their children, fascinated by the items veterans had brought back and frustrated that the people in territories that had fought against the Soviet Union (East Germany, Hungary, Romania) seemed richer than Soviet citizens, demanded that the state provide material comfort and plenty. During the Cold War, it became increasingly obvious that the United States did not present the same sort of existential threat as the Third Reich and that the Soviet system was not able to provide as well for its citizens as capitalism, or even neighboring socialist states.¹⁴³⁸ It could be argued that taking these territories into Soviet orbit became dangerous precisely because of this perceived wealth, as Soviet citizens came to covet imported products from the Eastern Bloc. Once the state ceased to promise with any credibility existential and spiritual change, it was left only with objects. The Soviet planned economy could produce for defense, but had neither the flexibility needed for, nor much of an interest in pandering to the everyday desires that a market covets. The Bolsheviks could learn how to make a great, functional tank, overcoat or thermos, but were less capable of making perfume, stylish coats or providing fresh fruit out of season. Coveting fashion and frivolous comfort seemed dangerously close to *meshchanstvo*, the source of the evil that the Red Army had defeated. In this regard the war could be seen as serving a double role; the privations of the current generation paled in comparison to those suffered by the war generation, while the obsessive drive to consume on the part of the enemy (whether German or Yankee) was part of what made them so different from Soviet people.

Victory and fear of the destructive power of war were key to instilling a sense of pride and purpose in Soviet citizens, even as the everyday objects that had been the war's substance began to collect dust in museums. Sometimes anonymously, sometimes as named objects connected to a personal story, what had been the tools of war took their place behind glass in homes and museums around the Soviet Union. Still later these items, from medals to tunics to rifles, became the purview of collectors and dealers, transforming into commodities. Battlefields to this day offer up the material of the war, from humans to tanks to spoons, providing a less well preserved but perhaps more visceral record of the war and those who lived to see neither the full transformation of those in the ranks, nor the collapse of the state they defended.

¹⁴³⁸ Yekelchik, *Stalin's Citizens*, pp. 31-33.

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