

PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE: THE GERMAN DEFEAT IN THE EAST BY 1943

By

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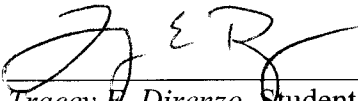
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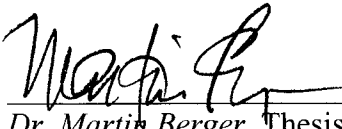
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Tracey E. Drenzo

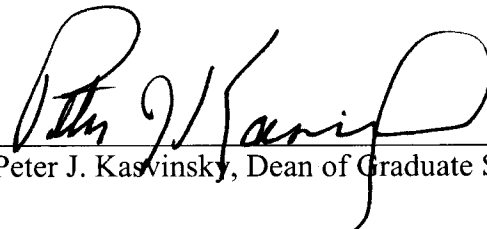
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Abstract

On June 22, 1941 Adolf Hitler, the *Führer* of Germany, launched the greatest military campaign in history when he sent his troops into the Soviet Union. Operation Barbarossa, as it was called, was the realization of a plan that Hitler envisioned since the early 1920s—the annihilation of the Soviet people and the seizure of Russian territory for the German Reich. For two decades Hitler pressed his sadistic views upon anyone who would listen, and by 1941 he convinced enough people to believe in his rants.

Hitler's propaganda concerning the Slavs of Eastern Europe ensured that this war would be like no other. Unlike the *Wehrmacht's* previous campaigns, success was measured in enemy casualties rather than ground gained; however, despite Nazi Germany's overwhelming achievements during the early phase of hostilities, the Russians refused to concede to the Germans. The *Wehrmacht* had finally met its match on the battlefield, and Hitler had met his match in the ruthless leadership of Joseph Stalin.

The Soviets' stubborn resistance to the overconfident Germans coupled with the hardships created by the intense Russian climate wore at the nerves of the German soldiers and caused them to lose hope for victory. After the major setbacks of 1943, German morale, from soldier to Hitler himself, had evaporated. Victory in the East was no longer feasible for Germany. Less than two years after the German invasion began, the Red Army succeeded in gaining the initiative from their seemingly invincible opponent. The mental defeat of Nazi Germany by 1943 led to the military destruction of the Reich two years later. Hitler's gamble in the East had failed. The Nazis' dream of a Thousand Year Reich ended after just twelve years while the Soviet Union established itself as a legitimate world power.

*For Dominic and Jean who taught me about faith,
Michael who taught me about hope,
Staci who taught me about love,
Zane and Sylvia who taught me about grace,
and God who gave me the ability to understand it all.*

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Preface

From 1936 to 1941 the German *Wehrmacht* blitzed through mainland Europe undefeated in all its military campaigns and occupied most of the continent. These victories, impressive as they were, mattered little to Hitler compared to his next move— invasion of the Soviet Union. Nazi Germany's triumph over Bolshevik Russia was to be Hitler's greatest achievement and the primary objective to his Thousand Year Reich. The fulfillment of this goal defined Hitler's foreign policy from the beginning of his political career, and when he launched Operation Barbarossa on June 22, 1941, there was little reason for anyone to believe his plan would fail; however, four years later on May 10, 1945, the USSR and its allies accepted Germany's unconditional surrender.

Many researchers of the Eastern Front, such as John Erickson, Earl Ziemke, and Alan Clark, have examined in detail the USSR's military defeat of Nazi Germany. The primary focus of this work is the mental aspect of the Nazi-Soviet war as opposed to the physical, that is, the military. The goal of this study is to prove that the Russians psychologically defeated the Germans as early as 1943. Although the Germans did not officially surrender to the Allies until May 1945, most Germans, including Nazis, believed the war with Russia was lost two years prior. After two years of war with the Soviet Union, German civilians no longer trusted Nazi propaganda concerning Slavic inferiority; front soldiers no longer believed in the superiority of the *Wehrmacht* over the Red Army; an increasing number of prominent officers recognized Hitler's failure and sought to remove him from power; and Hitler, the outspoken *Führer* of Germany, isolated himself from public view and awaited the Red storm. My assertion is that the fierce nature of the Russian environment and the brutal manner in which the Russians

fought combined to break the collective German ego that had been built by both German successes and Nazi propaganda. I further conclude that it was the mental aspect of the war that made it the most brutal conflict in world history and led to tens of millions of deaths and the split of the European continent at war's end.

Chapters one and two chronicle how Hitler converted the German masses to his ideology and led them to believe in their superiority over the Slavs of Eastern Europe while chapters three and four illustrate how the German spirit was broken by the brutal nature of warfare with the Russians. The final chapter describes the grim situation for the Germans by 1943 and their loss of hope for victory in the East. I used firsthand accounts along with scholarly works to supplement the information presented in this study. Primary works included those of leading politicians and military figures as well as frontline soldiers.

I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Martin Berger, Dr. Martha Pallante, and Dr. Donna DeBlasio for their time and assistance in this project. I would also like to express a special thanks to John Christy and Gary Reel for instilling a passion for history within me.

1

Development of German Ego

The German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, was one of the grossest military blunders in history and was a chief reason for the fall of Nazi Germany during the Second World War. Veterans and historians alike have questioned why Adolf Hitler took this bold step when Great Britain remained a belligerent against Germany. It is easy to lay blame solely upon Hitler for this critical error, yet the fact remains that millions of Germans, from ordinary citizens to General Staff officers, willingly partook in this action and believed wholeheartedly that the battle would be won; in fact, when news of the invasion spread throughout the globe, most world leaders were in agreement that the Soviet Union would fall in a matter of months. This mindset of German superiority was in stark contrast to how the rest of the world, and indeed its own citizens, perceived Germany at the conclusion of the Great War in 1918. Adolf Hitler's rise to power in 1933 changed this perception. His vision was to transform the German Reich from a beleaguered, defeated nation into a global military and economic power. By 1940 he had done both.

The universally high estimation of German strength during summer 1941 was quite a change from just two decades prior when the victorious Allies forced Germany to submit to humiliating conditions after the Great War. Under the terms of the Versailles Treaty, Germany was not allowed to possess an air force or an armored unit, and could

field only a 100,000-man army; furthermore, the Allies stripped Germany of much of its pre-1914 land, all of its colonies, and worst of all, its national pride.¹ Gerhard L.

Weinberg wrote that the treaty left Germany in a favorable position in Europe after 1918, yet German propaganda led the people to believe that only Germans suffered following the First World War.² Countless movements attempted to wrest power from the vacuum that resulted after the fall of the Kaiser's government. In the mid-1920s the National Socialists gained considerable support and arose as a legitimate contender to seize control of Germany by the end of the decade. The communists, another powerful group, stood in direct conflict with the conservative agenda of the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) and wanted Germany to undergo a proletarian revolution. With careful propaganda and brute force, the National Socialists established themselves as the future saviors of Germany and portrayed the Bolsheviks and Social Democrats, driven by the Jews, as the chief culprits behind the lost world war and a detriment to the German way of life.

In the 1932 presidential election, Paul von Hindenburg, Commander in Chief of the German Army during the First World War, received fifty-three percent of the popular vote to Hitler's thirty-six percent.³ Despite the loss, Hitler's National Socialist German Workers (Nazi) Party won the most seats in the Republic's parliament with 230 (although well short of a majority in the 608-seat legislature).⁴ Because of Hitler's rising popularity and strong allies in the legislative branch of government, and the failure of other leaders

¹ Martin Gilbert, *The First World War: A Complete History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 509.

² Gerhard L. Weinberg, "The Defeat of Germany and the Balance of Power," *Central European History* 2, no. 3 (September 1969): 257, 259.

³ William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*. 1959. Reprint, with a new afterward by the author (New York: Touchstone, 1990), 159.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 166.

to assemble a legislative majority, Hindenburg reluctantly appointed him Chancellor, making Hitler the second most powerful person in the nation. Two events led Hitler to become supreme ruler in Germany: the Reichstag fire on February 27, 1933, set by a Dutch communist named Marinus van der Lubbe; and the death of Hindenburg on August 2, 1934. The Reichstag fire opened the door for the parliament to pass the Enabling Act on March 23, 1933, creating a police state in Germany with Hitler in charge. Karl Bracher stated that Hitler created a totalitarian state “through [an] authoritarian loophole in the Weimar Constitution,” so his seizure of power was accomplished by legal means.⁵ Germany transformed from a parliamentary republic to a dictatorship with this single act. Karl Bracher explained further results of the Enabling Act:

The liquidation of the democratic constitutional state called for the “purge” of the civil service and judiciary, and, together with the smashing of the trade unions and democratic professional organizations (April-May 1933) and the dissolution of all other political parties, resulted in the legal establishment of the one-party state (July 14, 1933).⁶

Hitler now controlled the entire nation.

Before Hitler employed his foreign policy goals, he had to improve the domestic situation. The stock market crash in the United States in 1929 sparked a worldwide depression that hit Germany hard. This aided Hitler’s propaganda against the Western democracies and their dependence upon a capitalist system. Within four years the high unemployment rate that Hitler’s regime inherited virtually disappeared. According to

⁵ Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship: The Origins, Structure, and Effects of National Socialism*, translated by Jean Steinberg and with an introduction by Peter Gay (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970); originally published as *Die deutsche Diktatur: Entstehung, Struktur, Folgen des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Verlag Kiepenheuer, 1969), 210.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 194.

Bracher, this was due to rearmament and universal military service than to a sound economic plan by the *Führer*.⁷ The energetic new leader revived German hopes by backing up his passionate speeches with bold new programs to promote a more healthy, happy, and prosperous Germany. Some examples of his vision included: greatly improved transportation by building the *Autobahns* (motorways); officially breaking Germany's agreement with the Versailles Treaty in 1935 by aggressively building a new, modern military; and promoting healthy living by campaigning against tobacco use and other unhealthy lifestyles.

The 1936 Olympic Games, awarded to Berlin prior to the Nazi takeover, provided Hitler with an opportunity to impress the world with Germany's resurgence. Prior to the Games' commencement, the Propaganda Ministry painstakingly removed all anti-Jewish signs in and around Berlin and urged anti-Semitic periodicals to eliminate, or at least, tone down references to Jews in their writings.⁸ The Reich's image abroad was at stake. Many foreign visitors awed at the German achievements. At the commencement of the ceremonies, the French National Team even offered the Nazi salute to Hitler as they passed him. Despite the impressive showing by Jesse Owens during the 1936 Games, the Germans accrued the most medals with eighty-nine. The United States took second with just fifty-six.⁹ German national pride had returned. By improving Germany's domestic situation and winning the faith of the masses, Hitler could finally concentrate on international issues.

⁷ Ibid., 332.

⁸ Shirer, 232-3.

⁹ International Olympic Committee, "Medal Count for the Berlin Summer Olympic Games," 1936, <http://www.olympic.org/uk/games/past/table_uk.asp?OLGT=1&OLGY=1036> (25 June 2004).

Hitler fulfilled his promises of a unified Reich when he ordered his forces to reoccupy the Rhineland in 1936, and to storm into Austria in 1938 and Czechoslovakia in 1939.¹⁰ Not a single bullet was fired during these “incorporations” by either side; in fact, many greeted the Germans with cheers and bouquets as they drove through the streets.¹¹ Virtually every citizen of the German Reich welcomed this newly earned prestige. Thousands crowded the streets of Vienna in 1938 to show support for the *Wehrmacht* (armored forces) after the bloodless incorporation of Austria (*Anschluss*) into the Reich. In fact, unlike popular belief in the West, *Anschluss* was a celebrated event to the participants. General Heinz Guderian wrote:

I felt that for both countries it was an occasion for rejoicing. It therefore occurred to me that as a sign of our friendly feelings the tanks might well be beflagged and decked with greenery... The flags and decorations on the tanks proved highly successful. The populace saw that we came as friends, and we were everywhere joyfully received... At every halt the tanks were decked with flowers and food was pressed on the soldiers. Their hands were shaken and, they were kissed, and there were tears of joy. No untoward incident marred the occasion that had for so many years been longed for by both sides.¹²

The scene moved even Hitler. Guderian continued:

It was perhaps the only occasion on which I ever saw him deeply moved. While he addressed the enthusiastic crowd below, I was standing next to him on the balcony of Linz town hall and I was able to observe him closely. Tears were running down his cheeks, and this was certainly not play-acting.¹³

Hitler achieved one of his lifelong goals, and his people rejoiced with him.

¹⁰ The Saar had been returned to Germany by a scheduled League of Nations plebiscite in 1934.

¹¹ Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, translated by Constantine Fitzgibbon (New York: Da Capo Press, 1952; reprint, with an introduction by Kenneth Macksey and a foreword by Captain B.H. Liddell Hart, New York: Da Capo Press, 2002), 51, 58.

¹² *Ibid.*, 50-1

¹³ *Ibid.*, 56.

The Army General Staff was against Hitler's plan to occupy Austria at this time. On the night before the *Anschluss*, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, Chief of the High Command of the German Armed Forces (OKW) wrote:

The night that followed was sheer purgatory for me: one telephone call followed another from the Army General Staff and from Brauchitsch; finally at about four o'clock in the morning there was a call from the then chief of the military operations staff, General von Viebahn; all adjured me to persuade the Führer to call the operations off. I had no intention of asking this of the Führer even once; of course I promised them I would try, but I called them back a short time later (having made no attempt to contact him) and told each one that he had rejected their protests.¹⁴

Keitel was already under Hitler's spell; others would later follow. This huge foreign policy success boosted Hitler's popular approval and weakened any opposition from the General Staff. With each subsequent success, Hitler's influence upon military matters increased.

After the *Anschluss*, Hitler's next goal was the occupation of the German-populated Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia. Since the conclusion of the First World War, the Germans complained about the mistreatment of German minorities in the new Czech nation; therefore, Hitler promised to occupy the Sudetenland. Once again Hitler's generals rejected this idea. Colonel General Ludwig Beck, Chief of the German General Staff until August 1938, believed that taking the Sudetenland and risking war with the Western Powers was a prelude to Germany's destruction and tried unsuccessfully to stop Hitler from taking this bold move.¹⁵ His repeated pleas with Field Marshal Walter von Brauchitsch, Commander in Chief of the German Army from 1938-1941, produced no

¹⁴ Wilhelm Keitel, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Keitel* (1961; reprint, edited and with an introduction and epilogue by Walter Görlitz and translated by David Irving, New York: Stein and Day/Publishers, 1966), 58-9.

¹⁵ Robert O'Neill, *The German Army and the Nazi Party, 1933-1939* (New York: James H. Heineman, Inc., 1966), 156.

results, so on August 27, 1938 Beck resigned. To subdue the generals, Hitler met with them on August 15, 1938 and stressed that while Neville Chamberlain and Edouard Daladier, Prime ministers of Great Britain and France respectively, were still in power, there would be no European war as a result.¹⁶ Hitler again succeeded in subverting the military. Operations were to commence that October.

During the first days of October 1938, German forces crossed the Czech border and occupied the Sudetenland in another bloodless encounter. Guderian explained how the Sudeten Germans had to endure years of poverty, unemployment, and persecution at the hands of their Czech rulers.¹⁷ When the Germans entered the Sudetenland, Major General F.W. von Mellenthin explained, “Our soldiers received a touching reception in every village and were greeted with flags and flowers.”¹⁸ Not a single shot was fired by either side. The following spring Germany occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia as a Protectorate. Once again Hitler went against his generals’ wishes, and once again he was proven correct. Now, the generals were virtually powerless to resist his orders. Hitler had unified the Reich, but Great Britain and France felt Germany’s incorporations were acts of aggression. The two Western nations knew Hitler’s next move and vowed to defend Poland from a German invasion. The rest of his conquests would not be so easily achieved.

Unwilling to leave any part of the prewar Reich under foreign rule, Hitler then set his eyes upon Poland. After Poland refused to cede the mostly-German city of Danzig

¹⁶ Ibid., 60.

¹⁷ Guderian, *Leader*, 58.

¹⁸ F.W. von Mellenthin, *Panzer Battles: A Study of the Employment of Armor in the Second World War* (1956; reprint, by arrangement with the University of Oklahoma Press and translated by H. Betzler, New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), xviii.

and other areas predominantly populated by Germans to the Reich, Hitler chose to take it by force; this time, however, Great Britain and France decided to act. On March 31, 1939, Great Britain and France, driven by Germany's aggressiveness during the past year, promised to come to the aid of Poland if Germany invaded. To counter this, Germany signed a Non-Aggression Pact with the Soviet Union on August 23, 1939 to secure its eastern border and avoid a war on two fronts. This came as a shock to the world since one of the basic precepts of Nazi ideology was hatred of the Bolsheviks; however, since the British-Soviet attempts for an alliance failed and war between Germany and the West crept closer, Hitler needed reassurance that the USSR would not join the fight. With utmost secrecy, Germany and the USSR agreed to divide the Polish nation amongst them; in addition, both nations recognized new spheres of influence regarding the Baltic States and Bessarabia.¹⁹ These two nations established new boundaries in Europe. Sensing that the weak-willed British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, would back down from an armed conflict with Germany over a second-rate Slavic nation, once again Hitler ordered his forces to strike, to the dismay of his generals. Hitler wanted the campaign to begin during late summer.

Hitler did not need much help to maintain popular support for his invasion, but he strengthened his case with a careful propaganda move. In August 1939, SS-*Obergruppenführer* (equivalent to Lieutenant General in the U.S. Army) Reinhard Heydrich created a plan that portrayed an attack at the German-Polish border by Polish

¹⁹ Joachim von Ribbontrop and Vyacheslav Molotov, "Documents Relating to the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact and Partition of Poland," September 28, 1939, <<http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/pre-war/390823a.html>> (June 25, 2004).

soldiers. 150 SD²⁰ personnel put on Polish military uniforms and “attacked” a German radio station. The Nazis dressed Jews from concentration camps as *Wehrmacht* soldiers and murdered them to make the incident appear authentic.²¹ The Germans distributed the brutal images throughout the world. German citizens were outraged by the scene and thirsted for vengeance.²² This proved to be the first step of Hitler’s war of annihilation in the East. On August 22, 1939, at a military conference, Hitler exclaimed to his military leaders:

Our enemies are men below average, not men of action, not masters. They are little worms... Now we can strike at the heart of Poland—I have ordered my Death’s Head units [of the SS] with the order to kill without pity or mercy all men, women, and children of Polish race or language.²³

Ten days later, German forces crossed into the Polish frontier. Despite his pact with the USSR, Hitler wanted to continue east and occupy Soviet Russia. On November 23, 1939,

Hitler stated:

I was in doubt for a long time whether or not to start with an attack in the East [i.e., against Russia] and then to switch to the West... Circumstances have compelled us to leave the East for the immediate future... We have a treaty with Russia. However, treaties are observed only while they offer advantages.²⁴

A Soviet-German confrontation was on hold.

²⁰ The SD—*Sicherheitsdienst* (SS Security Service) was the intelligence branch of the SS. The SS—*Schutzstaffel* served as Hitler’s personal guard. The Waffen-SS (Armed SS) served as an elite fighting force rivaling the *Wehrmacht*. For a detailed description of the different SS organizations, see Heinz Höhne’s *Order of the Death’s Head*.

²¹ Heinz Höhne, *The Order of the Death’s Head: The Story of Hitler’s SS*, translated by Richard Barry (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1970); originally published as *Der Orden unter dem Totenkopf* (Hamburg: Verlag der Spiegel, 1966), 260.

²² Nicholas Bethell, *The War Hitler Won: The Fall of Poland, September 1939* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), 2-3.

²³ Alan Clark, *Barbarossa: The Russian-German Conflict, 1941-45* (New York: Morrow, 1965; reprint, with a new introduction by Alan Clark, New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1985), 25.

²⁴ Albert Axell, *Russia’s Heroes: 1941-45*, (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2002), 8.

England and France (with heavy pressure from Great Britain) declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, ending Hitler's hopes for a strictly eastern war. The Second World War had begun. Germany now faced a war on two fronts, which proved to be destructive to the Germans during the First World War. The Germans feared the worst.

Hitler's *Wehrmacht* enjoyed unbelievable success against Poland. At one point, a Polish cavalry brigade attacked German panzers with lances.²⁵ The Germans smashed the brigade. Germany drove right through the Polish defenses and exacted heavy casualties upon their enemy while suffering few casualties themselves. The performance of the panzers²⁶ surprised everyone, including Hitler. Upon witnessing the aftermath of one particular battle, Hitler thought only dive-bombers could cause such destruction; however, Guderian quickly explained that it was the panzers that wreaked such havoc and astonished Hitler.²⁷ The *Wehrmacht's* performance pleased the *Führer*.

In a secret provision of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the Germans planned to attack Poland from the west and the Soviets from the east. Poland would be divided between the allies at the River Bug.²⁸ Much to Hitler's annoyance, the Soviets did not move immediately; however, when the Germans crossed the pre-arranged demarcation line agreed upon secretly by Germany and the USSR, the Red Army hurriedly attacked from the east on September 17.²⁹ With the entrance of the Soviet Union, Poland's already faint hopes of holding out evaporated. It was now only a matter of time before Poland's collapse. On September 24, the German and Soviet armies met, and Poland was no more.

²⁵ Guderian, *Leader*, 72.

²⁶ The term "panzer" encompasses all armored vehicles although it is commonly used to mean tank.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

²⁸ Joachim von Ribbontrop and Vyacheslav Molotov, "Documents Relating to the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact and Partition of Poland," September 28, 1939, <<http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/pre-war/390823a.html>> (June 25, 2004).

²⁹ Guderian, *Leader*, 82.

The German *Wehrmacht* shone during the Polish campaign. Although the new eastern border with the USSR favored the Soviets strategically and the Germans had to surrender some of the land they had taken, Germany resentfully submitted to the previous arrangement.³⁰ Despite the quick victory in the East, there was no time for the German people to rejoice. Concerns in the West took precedence, yet to the Reich's astonishment, no attack had come from her old enemies. Colonel Hans von Luck remembered:

The civilian population, and most of us, thought that with the Polish campaign the war would be over. The French and British had not attacked... [I]t seemed that with the bloodless 'Return home to the Reich' of German-speaking territories, the occupation of the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia, and the 'liberation' of West Prussia and Danzig in a blitzkrieg with few casualties, all the goals that redressed the 'injustice' of the Treaty of Versailles had been achieved.³¹

Great Britain and France rejected Hitler's peace proposals in October, so Hitler prepared for the campaign in the West.³² An end of hostilities looked more and more remote.

By May 1940 Great Britain and France had been at war with Germany for nine months, yet the two Western nations never attacked the Reich. This action, or lack thereof, aided the Germans in strategy and morale. By giving Germany the initiative, Great Britain and France failed to fight the *Wehrmacht* when it was vulnerable and allowed the Germans to dictate how the war would be conducted; furthermore, the Allies' inaction enhanced Hitler's belief that they lacked the desire to fight and boosted the fighting spirit of the *Wehrmacht*. This complacency cost the Allies dearly.

³⁰ Bethell, 342.

³¹ Hans von Luck, *Panzer Commander: The Memoirs of Colonel Hans von Luck* (1989; reprint, by arrangement with Praeger Publishers and with an introduction by Stephen E. Ambrose, New York: Dell Publishing, 1991), 34.

³² Mellenthin, 11.

The Allies decided to fight a defensive battle against their old foe. After their victory in the Great War, Great Britain and France did little to update their tactics for a future conflict on the European mainland. They did increase their tank and air forces considerably; however, French doctrine applied tanks as auxiliaries to infantry and supplements to cavalry.³³ During the French campaign, the Anglo-French forces fielded 4,000 tanks as opposed to the *Wehrmacht's* 2,574, but Anglo-French strategy lagged behind technological advances; as a result, when the German forces attacked through the Ardennes, the *Wehrmacht* succeeded in concentrating 2,300 tanks against only 500 Allied armored units.³⁴ The Allies were totally unprepared for the new war of mobility they were about to face.

Since the West did not attack during the period called the Phony War (September 1939-May 1940), the Germans needed to devise a plan of attack. Critical to any German plan was how to deal with the Maginot Line. This French fortress was the epitome of defensive preparations at the time, and a direct assault by the Germans would have been disastrous. Despite Hitler's obsession with offensive movements, he too adopted the policy of constructing a large defensive system called the West Wall. Both defenses were formidable, but one particular aspect of the German West Wall was its use of buried land mines. German use of these land mines proved effective and caused the French forces to rely on their defensive measures to fight the Germans.³⁵ The intimidation felt by the

³³ Larry H. Addington, *The Blitzkrieg Era and the German General Staff, 1865-1941* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1971), 84.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 101-2.

³⁵ John Mosier, *The Blitzkrieg Myth: How Hitler and the Allies Misread the Strategic Realities of World War II* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 39-40.

French and their reluctance to press into the German Reich allowed Germany to strike first.

The Supreme Command of the Armed Forces (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*—OKW) initially adopted the Schlieffen Plan as the strategy for attacking the West. This entailed three army groups. The northernmost group, Army Group B, consisting of all ten panzer divisions, would drive into Belgium and Holland before heading south into France. This was the primary attacking force. Army Group A would travel through the Ardennes Forest and serve as the supporting unit and establish an infantry line near the Meuse River. The southernmost group, Army Group C, would hold defensive positions opposite the Maginot Line on the German-French border.³⁶ This was the tactic used by the German Army during the First World War, and it developed into a static, trench-style warfare that favored the defender. France expected this and concentrated her defenses accordingly.

Military genius Field Marshal Erich von Manstein devised a second, more risky plan. It called for a diversionary force to mirror the Belgian invasion to pull France's northern defenses into Belgium while Germany's main thrust of armor crossed into France and Belgium through the Ardennes Forest.³⁷ This was totally unexpected since the Ardennes was thought to be inhospitable terrain for tank movement. A drive through the Ardennes would create a concentrated spearhead (*Schwerpunkt*) to surge through the heart of France and branch off behind enemy defenses. This idea was in direct correlation with General Heinz Guderian's three musts to launch a successful armored attack:

³⁶ Addington, 88.

³⁷ Erich von Manstein, *Lost Victories*, edited and translated by Anthony G. Powell with a foreword by Captain B.H. Liddell Hart (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1958); originally published as *Verlorene Siege* (Bonn: Athenäum-Verlag, 1955), 107, 123-4.

1. Suitable terrain
2. Surprise
3. Deployment en masse at a concentrated point (*Schwerpunkt*).³⁸

Many within the General Staff feared this tactic, but Hitler appreciated its originality and enthusiastically adopted it. This became the master plan for the Western Front.

On May 10, 1940 Germany attacked. With a concentrated panzer force, the Germans blitzed through the Ardennes and successfully penetrated French and Belgian defenses. The Allies were completely surprised. Just three days prior to the German attack, General Huntziger, commander of the French 2nd Army, said that the Germans would never attack at Sedan.³⁹ Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's division alone took 97,648 prisoners while only losing 1,600 dead and wounded during the six-week campaign.⁴⁰ Major General F.W. von Mellenthin attributed the success of the French campaign to the Germans' introduction "into warfare the decisive factor of mobility. It achieved mobility by the combination of firepower, concentration, and surprise, together with expert handling of the latest modern arms—Luftwaffe, parachutists, and armor."⁴¹

According to Addington:

The French Army had tremendous firepower, but was a slow and clumsy machine unsuited for a war of rapid movement. Organizational clumsiness was accentuated by the French doctrine, which emphasized systematic, formal methods of attack and defense, and which allowed the local commander little room for initiative.⁴²

German innovation trumped French firepower, and on June 21, 1940 France agreed to an armistice, which ended the land war in the West.

³⁸ Heinz Guderian, *Achtung-Panzer! The Development of Tank Warfare*, translated by Christopher Duffy with an introduction by Paul Harris (Arms and Armour, 1992; reprint, London: Cassell and Co., 2001), 74.

³⁹ John A. Lukacs, *The Last European War: September 1939-December 1941* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1976), 78.

⁴⁰ Luck, 50.

⁴¹ Mellenthin, 30.

⁴² Addington, 85.

The German people exalted their *Führer* for delivering a quick, decisive victory. Thousands of Germans gathered in Berlin to praise Hitler after France, the chief instigator of the Versailles *Diktat*, yielded to German military might. In just two short years, Hitler had corrected the injustices imposed upon the Reich by her victorious enemies of the First World War. These foreign affairs victories coupled with Hitler's overwhelmingly successful domestic policies created an atmosphere conducive to blind obedience and faithful adherence to the beloved *Führer*.

After the surprisingly swift victory against France, Germany became involved in a few important altercations that would have lasting effects upon the European Theater of Operations (ETO). Despite not receiving as much attention as the French or Russian campaigns, German conquests of the Balkans, North Africa, and Northern Europe gave the Nazis a much stronger grip on Europe and served to protect the Reich from her enemies.

One military branch that even Hitler knew to be inferior to his enemies was his navy. During the Norwegian campaign, the German *Kriegsmarine* (navy) suffered heavy losses from the British Royal Navy despite achieving its objectives.⁴³ Hitler never wanted a confrontation with England, so his focus was on building a powerful continental military force. Guderian concluded that German weaknesses in air and sea power showed that Hitler never thought a war in the West would occur.⁴⁴ After the Anglo-French declaration of war, Hitler hoped his *Luftwaffe* (air force) and U-boats could resolve any confrontation with Britain. Hitler believed that the *Luftwaffe* would make up for Germany's naval deficiencies and his U-boats would cripple the British supply routes and

⁴³ Ibid., 100.

⁴⁴ Guderian, *Leader*, 138.

terrify the English into accepting a cease-fire. Neither proved true. Hitler grossly underestimated Britain's resolve and later, American technology and productivity. During the first years of U-boat warfare, Germany enjoyed abundant success. Millions of tons of supplies and thousands of Allied soldiers were lost at sea, yet the British refused to submit. By 1942 Allied advances in SONAR (sound navigation and ranging) and practices of traveling in convoys rendered the German U-boats ineffective. The Atlantic battle belonged to the Allies.

By fall 1940 Germany possessed the most successful military in the world. With lightning speed and masterful strategy, the German war machine conquered the vast majority of continental Europe. Whether by superior air attack with paratroopers in Norway, deadly stealth at sea with U-boats against Great Britain, expert strategy by invading Belgium and France through the Ardennes Forest, or overwhelming power and mobility as demonstrated against Poland and the Balkan nations, the *Wehrmacht* displayed a military machine unrivaled by any other nation in history. The fact that from 1919 to 1935 Germany, as dictated by the Treaty of Versailles, could possess no air force, no tank units, and a field army of no more than 100,000 men made these accomplishments all the more extraordinary.⁴⁵ Mellenthin explained how this was possible when he stated:

During the days of the *Reichswehr* [German military from 1919-1935] of one hundred thousand men, only four thousand officer posts were available in the whole army; the process of selection was strict, for the commander in chief, General von Seeckt, was determined that his officers should be a *corps d'elite*.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Treaty of Versailles, June 28, 1919, <<http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/versa/versa/4.html>> (25 June 2004).

⁴⁶ Mellenthin, *xii*.

Hitler believed his *Wehrmacht* could not be stopped and decided it was time to fulfill his agenda in the East.

On December 18, 1940, Hitler assembled his General Staff and leaders of the Nazi Party to outline his plans for Operation Barbarossa—invasion of the Soviet Union. This conquest would force England to sign an armistice and give the Reich its much-needed *Lebensraum* (living space) in the East. R.H.S. Stolfi noted, “The advantages for Germany would have been so great that Britain’s traditional trump—sea power and naval blockade—would have been rendered obsolete.”⁴⁷ Many in the General Staff did not share Hitler’s enthusiasm, yet only one, *Grossadmiral* Erich Raeder, went on record against his directive.⁴⁸ Despite a high probability of success, most in the General Staff believed this was an unnecessary war. All previous campaigns were justified by either strategic or moral reasons. Still, no one tried to stop this from happening so OKH drew up plans. The invasion was to start in June.

Unlike Great Britain and France, the Soviet Union had no ties to the injustices of the Versailles Treaty. Even the German interventions in the Balkan states could be justified as an act of solidarity with their Italian ally, and the occupations of Denmark and Norway as defensive measures against the British Royal Navy. Indeed Soviet Russia had an agreement with Germany since the both parties signed the 1939 Non-Aggression Pact in Berlin, yet the Germans trusted Hitler and allowed him to lead their nation in a war with their eastern neighbor.

⁴⁷ R.H.S. Stolfi, *Hitler’s Panzers East: World War II Reinterpreted* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 7.

⁴⁸ Center of Military History, *The German Campaign in Russia: Planning and Operations (1940-1942)* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1988), public document 104-21, 3.

The immense size of the Soviet Union required the Germans to attack with three spearheads as opposed to the one spearhead employed during the French campaign. Army Group North, led by Field Marshal Ritter von Leeb, consisted of twenty-nine divisions (three armored and three motorized). Their primary objective was “the destruction of the Soviet forces in the Baltic area and the seizure of Leningrad.”⁴⁹ Army Group Centre, commanded by Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, was the most powerful. It consisted of fifty divisions (including nine armored and six motorized), and its objectives were the destruction of Soviet forces in the areas of Brest-Grodno-Vilno-Smolensk.⁵⁰ Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt led Army Group South in taking the western Ukraine, including its primary city, Kiev. At his disposal were forty-one divisions (five armored and three motorized) and the German Eleventh and Romanian Third Armies. His was the only group to achieve its objective. The Germans held twenty-six divisions in reserve and received help from Finland’s twelve divisions in the north on July 11, 1941.⁵¹

The Red Army’s prior confrontations led the Germans to believe that another *Blitzkrieg* (lightning war) was likely in the East. On November 8, 1917, after weeks of strikes and revolts across the Russian nation, the Bolsheviks seized control of the Winter Palace in the capital of Petrograd (later Leningrad and now St. Petersburg).⁵² The Bolshevik Revolution had begun. Later that month, despite harsh terms set by Germany, the Russians agreed to a cease-fire with the Germans at Brest-Litovsk, which brought an

⁴⁹ John Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad: Stalin’s War with Germany*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 83.

⁵⁰ It was here that Hitler made the notorious decision to send Guderian’s Panzer Group south instead of continuing on toward Moscow. This decision to stop the drive on the Soviet capital drew the ire of Hitler’s generals and many believed it was key to the failure of taking Moscow and thus winning the war in the East.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 83-4.

⁵² Gilbert, 374.

end to the Great War in the East. During the next three months, small states such as Estonia, Latvia, and the Ukraine declared their independence from the Russian Empire. Unwilling to lose these valuable lands, Lenin sent troops into the Ukraine on January 29, 1918 and declared a new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Two weeks later, Lenin organized the Red Army. This action angered the German government, who desired a German-controlled Ukraine; therefore, on February 18, 1918, Germany attacked the Bolsheviks. John Wheeler-Bennett described the situation:

[T]he Russian troops made no resistance whatsoever. They were more demoralized than the Germans had ever expected. The bulk of the troops had already gone home. The remainder, already in a state of disintegration, fled or surrendered wholesale; on one occasion, a lieutenant and six men received the surrender of six hundred Cossacks.⁵³

The war in the East resumed.

After just a few days, Lenin and Leon Trotsky, a former Menshevik Party member and Lenin's future Commissar for Foreign Affairs, knew they were doomed if the war continued. Lenin realized that the Bolsheviks must yield to whatever was asked of them. He told Trotsky, "It's not a question of Dvinsk, but of the revolution. Delay is impossible. We must sign at once. This beast springs quickly."⁵⁴ So on March 3, Russia signed the second Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany. This second treaty carried even stricter terms than the first, but Lenin understood that it was the only option to retaining their new Soviet state. The Bolsheviks:

(gave) up all claims to the Baltic provinces, Poland, White Russia (later known as Byelorussia, now Belarus), Finland, Bessarabia, the Ukraine and the Caucasus. This constituted a third of her pre-war population, a third of her arable land, and nine-tenths of her coalfields.⁵⁵

⁵³ John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *Brest-Litovsk: The Forgotten Peace, March 1918* (1938; reprint, London: Macmillan and Company Limited, 1956), 244.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁵⁵ Gilbert, 401.

Despite the concessions, Lenin directed his propaganda machine toward the lost territories.⁵⁶ The war between Russia and Germany ceased, but the Soviets continued to hope for a worldwide proletarian revolution.

A few years later in 1920, Poland attempted to wrest the Ukraine from the Soviet Union. During the early phase of the campaign, the Russians routed the Poles, but after the Red Army came within reach of the Polish capital of Warsaw, the “Miracle on the Vistula” occurred. The Polish soldiers pushed the Soviets back into their own territory.⁵⁷ Poland succeeded in seizing large areas of the western Ukraine and western Byelorussia from the USSR. This was one of the more dismal performances in the Red Army’s history.

From 1918 to 1921 the USSR went through a turbulent time of civil war that pitted socialist groups and nationalities against each other. Political rivals such as the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and Socialist-Revolutionaries clashed in a battle for ultimate supremacy within the Soviet state while minority groups such as the Georgians, Armenians, Azeris, and Abkhazians also fought one another. Robert Service stated that there was not a merely Russian Civil War, but dozens of civil wars within the former Russian empire.⁵⁸ Millions of people died as a result of these civil wars, and the bitterness between the groups involved remained unchanged for years.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Wheeler-Bennett, *Brest-Litovsk*, 277.

⁵⁷ Bethell, 342-3.

⁵⁸ Robert Service, *A History of Twentieth-Century Russia*, 5th ed., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 113.

⁵⁹ The German attack on the USSR actually helped to end much of the bitterness and unified the Soviet people.

One bright spot for the Red Army occurred during their conflict with the Japanese in 1939. From June to September 1939, the Soviet Union and Japan engaged in violent clashes over disputed territory in Mongolia. Marshal Georgi Zhukov, future Deputy Supreme Commander of the Red Army, led an offensive that demolished the Japanese Kwantung Army at Kholkin Gol. Alvin Coox, an expert in Japanese history, explained that the Japanese suffered almost 20,000 casualties from a force of about 60,000.⁶⁰ Despite the victory, the Red Army had a large number of casualties, which emphasized the Red Army's immaturity regarding modern tactics. The battle received little attention in the West because of Germany's aggressive actions in Europe, but the Soviet victory proved to be instrumental for the Allies during World War II. Japan's experience with the Red Army caused the Japanese High Command to shift their focus toward gaining territories in the South, which led to war with the United States and Great Britain.⁶¹ Japan never attempted to invade the USSR, even when Soviet capitulation seemed imminent during the fall of 1941. Rather than forcing the Soviets to fight a two-front war, which would have proved too much for the Red Army, the Japanese invited another powerful nation into the fray. This decision may have caused the Axis to lose the Second World War.

On November 30, 1939, the Soviet Union, looking to strengthen its position against Germany, attacked Finland. The Soviets sent 700,000 troops into Finland and expected victory within weeks.⁶² The stubborn Finns had other plans. Despite the Soviets' overwhelming superiority in numbers of men and weapons, the Finns' stubborn

⁶⁰ Alvin D. Coox, *Nomonhan: Japan Against Russia, 1939*, vol. 2 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985), 916.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1078.

⁶² Tom Shachtman, *The Phony War: 1939-1940* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1982), 123.

defense kept the Red Army from advancing deep into Finland. One Red Army soldier complained of the troublesome Finnish tactics and how heavily they weighed on Soviet troops. “Our casualties are heavy... more from frostbite than from enemy fire... We can’t even put our noses out of the trenches. Our men have launched several attacks but have always been beaten back.”⁶³ After just one week of fighting, the Finns halted the Russian offensive. The Soviets’ failure to prepare for fighting in deep snow conditions resulted in an embarrassing performance by the Red Army.⁶⁴ In December, the numerically inferior Finns surrounded a large unit of the Russian army. When the Soviets attempted to escape the encirclement, they were annihilated.⁶⁵ The Russo-Finnish War remained a stalemate until February 1, 1940 when the Soviets bombarded the Finns with 300,000 rounds of artillery.⁶⁶ By February 29, the Red Army threatened Viipuri, Finland’s second-largest city. At this time, the Finnish cavalry “would ride out of the west 50,000 strong, and would hold off 750,000 men.”⁶⁷ The Red Army steamroller tactic failed miserably against the inferior forces of the Finns. On March 12, 1940, both sides agreed to a cease-fire. The Russians lost over 200,000 men to just 25,000 Finnish casualties.⁶⁸ The Red Army performed dismally.

The Soviet Union’s internal turmoil also gave hope to the Germans of a victory in the East. During the purges of the 1930s, the Soviet population lived in fear. Joseph Stalin, the Soviet Premier, sent many Russians to the Gulags (Russian labor camps) or to their deaths. No one was safe from Stalin’s suspicious eye. Whether of Russian descent

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Robert W. Thurston and Bernd Bonwetsch, ed., *The People’s War: Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 237-8.

⁶⁵ Shachtman, 125.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 152.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 154.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 155.

or a minority group, such as the Ukrainians or Cossacks, peasant or general in the Red Army, anti-communist or leader within the party, Stalin's henchmen carried out ruthless judgments upon the Soviet citizens. In April 1937, Stalin decided it was time to purge the Red Army. David Glantz described the severity of Stalin's actions:

Of an estimated 75,000 to 80,000 officers in the armed forces, at least 30,000 were imprisoned or executed. They included three out of five marshals; all eleven deputy defense commissars; all commanders of military districts; the commanders and chiefs of staff of both the Navy and the Air Force; 14 of 16 army commanders; 60 of 67 corps commanders; 136 of 199 division commanders; 221 of 397 brigade commanders; and 50 percent of all regimental commanders.⁶⁹

Even Vyacheslav Molotov, the Foreign Minister and second most powerful person in the Soviet Union, feared for his life. Hitler desired to capitalize on the weakened Red Army and the oppressed civilian population. By 1941 the USSR was an isolated nation crippled by fear from within, and her previous military campaigns were anything but glorious. Soviet Russia appeared ripe for invasion.

1941 was the most significant year of the Second World War. The Germans believed they were invincible. Their *Blitzkrieg* in Europe had been a total success. From 1936-1941, the *Wehrmacht* knew nothing but victory. In five short years, the German Reich transformed from an embittered, mistreated nation into a world power and the conqueror of mainland Europe. No other nation in history achieved as much military success in such a short time. The rapidity of their campaigns on the continent attested to the fact that they were the masters of Europe: Austria and Czechoslovakia—immediate, bloodless victories; Poland—27 days; Denmark and Norway—immediate occupation; France—43 days; Yugoslavia—12 days; Greece—18 days; and in North Africa—a swift

⁶⁹ David Glantz and Jonathan House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (Lawrence, KA: University of Kansas Press, 1995), 11.

dominance. Alliances with Italy, Rumania, Bulgaria, Finland, and Japan along with the 1939 Non-Aggression Pact with the Soviet Union protected them in the south and east, and the dejected, demoralized state of Britain and the isolationist posture of the United States provided a high level of security in the west. The sum of these factors inflated the German ego to a level unheard of ten years before. A booming economy created a feeling of security and happiness not known to the Reich since before 1914. The Versailles Treaty, which had disgraced and impoverished Germany, had been avenged and France, its chief instigator, punished. This reinstated a national pride that had been destroyed by the *Diktat* more than twenty years prior.

Finally, a leader who had built this military machine from nothing, backed up his words with action, instilled order and discipline into a chaotic nation, and preached of love and respect for the Fatherland with such conviction that one could easily mistake the Reich for his beloved bride (an image thoroughly encouraged by the *Führer*), won the admiration and devotion of his subjects. Germany reached its zenith in the summer of 1941, but it was short-lived. The dangerous blend of ego, security, pride, admiration, and devotion was a recipe for disaster. Hitler made the Reich a global world power, but he was about to make his greatest mistake—a mistake that would cost him everything.

When the German Army entered the Soviet Union, German confidence was high. Few believed that the recently purged Red Army could slow, let alone stop the *Wehrmacht*. Siegfried Knappe noted:

I did not know a lot about the Soviet Union at the time: I knew it was a backward country, I knew the communist government had persecuted landowners, I knew about the forced collectivization and the mass starvation of large segments of its population, and I knew about the purge of the officer corps in the Soviet Army. I did not think the Red Army could be very effective... I also found the very thought of communism

repulsive and honestly felt that the Russian people would be better off if we removed their communist government... I do not think it even occurred to me or anyone else that we would fail to defeat the Soviet Army. Our confidence was absolute.⁷⁰

Another soldier expressed his disappointment upon hearing that his division was assigned to remain in reserve because “most of us were eager to see action before the inevitable surrender of the Soviet Union.”⁷¹ Despite having little knowledge of this new foe, the Germans believed no army could match their superior tactics; however, it did not take long for the German attitude to shift. After a few weeks of fighting the Russians, many Germans began feeling uneasy about their new situation. Colonel Bernd von Kleist prophetically wrote:

The German Army in fighting Russia is like an elephant attacking a host of ants. The elephant will kill thousands, perhaps even millions, of ants, but in the end their numbers will overcome him, and he will be eaten to the bone.⁷²

The Eastern Front changed the way the Germans viewed war. As a result, the German ego began to fade.

⁷⁰ Siegfried Knappe with Charles T. Brusaw, *Soldat: Reflections of a German Soldier, 1936-1949* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1992), 201-2.

⁷¹ Gottlob Herbert Bidermann, *In Deadly Combat: A German Soldier's Memoir of the Eastern Front*, translated by Derek S. Zumbro (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 15.

⁷² Clark, 55.

2

The Weapon of Indoctrination

Hitler had long prepared Germany for an attack on the Soviet Union. Nazi propaganda thoroughly outlined the depressed and impoverished condition of life for the average Russian under communist rule. This propaganda achieved great success. Omer Bartov stated:

The backward conditions in which the village population lived, made even worse by the effects of the fighting, further encouraged the soldiers to think of the Russians as subhumans, while simultaneously reconfirming the troops' belief in the superiority of their own culture, race, and leadership.¹

Hitler's understanding of propaganda enabled him to captivate the Reich and have free reign of what he desired. This was Hitler's first, and by far, most powerful weapon—the weapon of indoctrination. He used this weapon to perfection. In his study of Nazi propaganda, Ward Rutherford explained:

The propagandist has succeeded just as fully when he has created total enemies for the views he has propounded as when he has created total supporters for them. The enemy often does his work more effectively than his supporters.²

¹ Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis and War in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 157.

² Ward Rutherford, *Hitler's Propaganda Machine* (Greenwich, CT: Bison Books, 1978; reprint, New York: Gallery Books, 1985), 188.

This strengthened Hitler's rhetoric against his communist foes. By examining Hitler's employment of propaganda, it was easy to see how he gained the trust of his people and set the stage for the most brutal conflict in human history.

Propaganda was the power of the Third Reich. National Socialist ideology penetrated every phase of German society. In his book, *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler stressed the importance of propaganda to any regime.³ He prophetically explained how to captivate the masses and make them follow. Even the colors and symbols of the Nazi flag were carefully chosen by him. Hitler knew that to win over a people to his cause, it was the spoken, not written word that would do the job.⁴ He only wrote *Mein Kampf* to have a concrete representation of National Socialist doctrine.⁵ This book became the bible of National Socialism; Hitler and Goebbels were messiah and evangelist respectively.

Hitler treated National Socialism more as a religion than a form of government. One SS member described Nazism as a "new form of religious sect with its own rites and customs."⁶ The rise of National Socialism under Hitler's leadership mirrored that of Jesus' emergence almost 2,000 years ago. As a new messiah, Hitler's first and most important goal was to gain a core of disciples. These had to be devoted entirely to the cause.⁷ Individuals such as Hermann Goering, Rudolf Hess, Dr. Joseph Goebbels, and later Heinrich Himmler and Martin Bormann became Hitler's most trusted colleagues and enjoyed frequent audience with the *Führer*. Hitler often spoke to each of them personally or in small groups, indoctrinating them concerning his plans. The *Führer* gave each of his

³ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, translated by Ralph Manheim (New York: Mariner Books, 1999); originally published as *Mein Kampf* (Landsberg: Verlag Frz. Eher Nachf, G.M.B.H., 1925), 580.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 469.

⁵ *Ibid.*, in preface.

⁶ Höhne, 1.

⁷ Hitler, *Mein*, 581.

followers responsibilities, but they all answered to him. Hitler's word was law. As the war dragged on, many within Hitler's inner circle lost his favor and their responsibilities. For example, Hitler, in his last will and testament, expelled *Reichsmarshal*⁸ Hermann Goering, Commander in Chief of the *Luftwaffe* and Hitler's chosen successor until April 1945, and Heinrich Himmler, *Reichsführer SS* (Leader of the SS), from the Party because of their covert collaborations with the enemy.⁹ Only Bormann and Goebbels remained with the *Führer* to the bitter end. Hitler did not permit lack of National Socialist will.

Throughout his dictatorship, Hitler spent much of his time with his inner circle. These individuals listened to Hitler preach his beliefs on the origins of man; the proper way to run a government; the supremacy of nature's laws; the need for a pure Germanic race; and the supreme enemy of all man—International Jewry and Marxism. Hitler wanted no record kept of these conversations, more accurately, monologues, until July 1941. When circumstances looked favorable that the USSR would collapse under German might, Martin Bormann, head of the Nazi Party and one of Hitler's closest advisers, convinced the *Führer* to keep a record of these conversations for posterity. From 1941 to 1944, Heinrich Heim, a lawyer on Bormann's personal staff, and Dr. Henry Picker, a deputy of Bormann's, transcribed Hitler's *Table Talk* while Bormann edited and approved the documents. These talks often lasted for hours and dragged well into the night. Most topics reappeared many times throughout the war years. Only the inner circle and Hitler's special guests attended the meetings. This form of indoctrination differed from how he captivated the masses.

⁸ This was a title created by Hitler to represent his successor.

⁹ Adolf Hitler, "The Private and Political Testament of Hitler," April 29, 1945, <<http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1945/450429a.html>> (25 June, 2004).

Hitler knew that true power came as a result of controlling the public. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler provided detailed information about how to employ propaganda effectively citing its various functions and purposes in order to achieve maximum results. Some examples included:

- To whom should propaganda be addressed? To the scientifically trained intelligentsia or to the less educated masses? It must be addressed always and exclusively to the masses...
- The function of propaganda does not lie in the scientific training of the individual, but in calling the masses' attention to certain facts, processes, necessities, etc., whose significance is thus for the first time placed within their field of vision...
- All propaganda must be popular and its intellectual level must be adjusted to the most limited intelligence among those it is addressed to...
- The art of propaganda lies in understanding the emotional ideas of the great masses and finding...the way to the heart of the broad masses...
- The function of propaganda is... not to weigh and ponder the rights of different people, but exclusively to emphasize the one right which it has set out to argue for. Its task is not to make an objective study of the truth; its task is to serve our own right, always and unflinchingly...
- ... only after the simplest ideas are repeated a thousand times will the masses finally remember them...¹⁰

Hitler understood the power of words, symbols, and imagery and how an effective propaganda campaign could guide the masses. His mastery of propaganda enabled him to convince an entire nation to willingly follow his commands until Germany's collapse in April 1945. Even by this stage in the war, nine of every ten Germans still loved and venerated the *Führer*.¹¹ Propaganda proved to be a very powerful weapon in Hitler's arsenal.

¹⁰ Hitler, *Mein*, 179, 180, 182, 185.

¹¹ Clark, 449.

From the beginning of his time in power, Hitler set out to organize Germany behind the National Socialist movement. As Z. A. B. Zeman noted:

The Germans were to have no private lives: their work, their holidays, the buildings in their towns, the education of their children, the newspapers they read, the films they saw, the radio programmes they listened to, all carried the Nazi stamp. Newly married couples were presented with free copies of *Mein Kampf*.¹²

Hitler suppressed the rights of the individual and stressed the importance of living as a community. He even planned on changing Berlin's name to *Germania* because "it would give to every member of the German community, however far from the capital he may be, a feeling of unity and closer membership."¹³ As a result of eliminating the importance of individual thought, he could control the minds of the people more effectively.

The power of Hitler's propaganda was not in the words themselves, but in his masterful delivery of those words. A typical Hitler speech, when read, was not impressive, and his writings were often confusing. Hitler's style was what enabled him to captivate, and quite literally, subjugate his audience. When speaking to a large group, Hitler was in a class all his own. One researcher explained the brilliance of Hitler's style:

The opening moves of every speech he made were hesitant... his voice was muted and monotonous. After a few minutes, this apparent unwillingness to communicate gave way to a steadier, louder flow of sentences; the speaker's muscles visibly relaxed, and he was soon to begin using his right arm in gestures that resembled blows aimed at an invisible nail. Then the flow increased into a torrent; the punch-line was delivered in a loud, sometimes hoarse, high-pitched voice; the end was abrupt... The onslaught on the eardrums of the audience was tremendous: it was estimated that the frequency of Hitler's voice in a typical sentence was

¹² Z. A. B. Zeman, *Nazi Propaganda*, 2nd ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 63.

¹³ Adolf Hitler, *Hitler's Table Talk 1941-1944: His Private Conversations* (1953; reprint, edited and translated by Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens with an introduction and a new preface by Hugh Trevor-Roper. New York: Enigma Books, 2000), 523.

228 vibrations per second, whereas 200 vibrations is the usual frequency of a voice raised in anger.¹⁴

Nazi meetings were held late, usually after 8:00 p.m., “when, as Hitler knew, man’s suggestibility was high, and his resistance at its lowest ebb.”¹⁵ This served to be one of Hitler’s most ingenious tactics in reaching the people. By tapping into his listeners’ emotions rather than inspiring their ideological aspirations, Hitler shaped the minds of the audience to believe his rants. His style transformed him from a disgruntled corporal into the *Führer* of Germany. By the mid-1930s, he held the German nation captive. Hitler was Germany.

Hitler’s political passions arose from Germany’s humiliating defeat during the First World War. He felt the war was lost at home as opposed to the battlefields of Europe. Indeed, at the time of Germany’s capitulation, German forces were entrenched in her enemies’ territories.¹⁶ The German homeland never saw the actual battles of the war. According to Hitler, two groups deserved blame for the German loss: Jews and communists. The communist-led revolts in cities such as Berlin and Munich infuriated him; furthermore, he blamed the media, allegedly controlled by the Jews, for publishing articles that demoralized the soldiers and caused the nation to lose hope for victory.¹⁷ To Hitler, communism was an evil, Jewish-created institution that needed to disappear from human thought. He obliterated it at home, yet this was not enough. Europe, he stated, needed to be rid of the Bolsheviks. This became Hitler’s personal and professional goal for the rest of his days.

¹⁴ Zeman, 5.

¹⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹⁶ Gilbert, 503.

¹⁷ Ibid., 497, 481-2.

Hitler specifically stated in *Mein Kampf* that he had no interest in forcing everyone in Germany to become members of the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP). He believed that total membership in the Party should be limited so that the Party's core values would not be diluted.¹⁸ Only those who exemplified stern National Socialist will earned official membership, yet Hitler still needed to win the hearts of the masses. Hitler's tactic for achieving this goal was not dissimilar to how most politicians, past and present, have gained the support of the people: he told them what they wanted to hear. Hitler promised to bring pride back to the Reich, to create good-paying jobs for its citizens, and to create a healthy, happy society. This got the nation's collective attention. When he delivered on these promises, he won the nation's collective heart.

Hitler also employed a few more methods of leading the masses. First, Hitler repeated phrases and statements over and over again until the people just accepted them as true. Hitler noted in *Mein Kampf*, "At first the claims of propaganda were so impudent that people thought it insane; later, it got on people's nerves; and in the end, it was believed."¹⁹ Also, Hitler used inaccurate percentages in his speeches to support his claims with "facts" without ever substantiating these statements with sources. For example, in 1928 Hitler wrote:

With the help of the Bolshevik Revolution, the Russian upper class and also the national intelligentsia were—with inhuman torture and barbarity—murdered and completely eradicated. The victims of this Jewish fight for dominance in Russia totaled twenty-eight to thirty million dead among the Russian people.²⁰

¹⁸ Hitler, *Mein*, 581.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 185.

²⁰ Adolf Hitler, *Hitler's Second Book: The Unpublished Sequel to Mein Kampf*, edited and with a foreword by Gerhard L. Weinberg and translated by Krista Smith (New York: Enigma Books, 2003); originally published as *Hitlers zweites Buch* (Stuttgart: 1961), 232.

Although the exact number was unknown, Gerhard Weinberg cited a cautious estimate of nine million.²¹ Hitler inflated the number to stir feelings against both communists and Jews.

Finally, Hitler provided “proofs” that what he said was evident in German society. Hitler gave an educational lesson to his followers concerning the purity of Aryan blood:

It is remarkable that the half-caste Jew, to the second or third generation, has a tendency to start flirting again with pure Jews. But from the seventh generation onwards, it seems the purity of the Aryan blood is restored. In the long run nature eliminates the noxious elements.²²

The Nazis made statements like these throughout Hitler’s time in power until the public just came to accept them as true, or at least, until the people became completely calloused to their significance. Hitler influenced thousands with his speeches, but the imagery that accompanied these words demonstrated the power of his words.

Adolf Hitler outlined the significance of three different propaganda techniques. The written word, which was the weakest in influence, was necessary because it allowed for philosophies to be passed from generation to generation. Hitler said that writing alone did not produce the desired emotional effect to lead people into a movement.²³ It was too concrete. Since so many people refused to take the time to read heavy material, reliance upon the written word to get a point across to the masses proved ineffective. Speeches, on the other hand, moved people by tapping into their emotions and displaying the passions of the speaker. Speaking to large crowds produced an effect like that of the ocean waves. The speaker initiated the current and the crowd kept it flowing. Still, this form of influence was not the most powerful.

²¹ Ibid., n. 434.

²² Hitler, *Table*, 141.

²³ Hitler, *Mein*, 472.

Hitler needed a symbol to represent National Socialism. Christians had their cross. Jews had their Star of David. These simple designs were concrete representations of their respective faiths. The Nazis, who would be the prominent influence of Europe for the next thousand years, needed their sign. The Nazi flag presented a perfect hypnotic image to catch the people's attention. The red background, chosen specifically to provoke the *Rotfront* (Red Front or communists), represented socialism.²⁴ Because of the communist association with the color red and the rising popularity of the nationalist movement, many German communists were led to Nazi meetings. Hitler noted:

The people came in as our enemies, and when they left, if they were not our supporters, at least they had grown thoughtful, indeed critical... gradually it transpired that after my speech lasting three hours adherents and adversaries fused into a single enthusiastic mass.²⁵

Inside the red background there was a white circle signifying nationalism.²⁶ The nationalist and socialist focus reinforced the Nazi ideal of promoting what was best for the community. Individual rights fell into the shadow of the Reich's demands. This was in sharp contrast to the Weimar Republic's parliamentary-style government modeled after the democracies of the West.

The focal point of the flag became the new symbol of Germany under Hitler's regime—the swastika. The swastika provided the individual aspect of the flag. Hitler adopted this symbol to represent Aryan dominance, and it was to fill each citizen of Germany with a devout pride in his or her Germanic heritage.²⁷ By September 1935, the

²⁴ Zeman, 9.

²⁵ Hitler, *Mein*, 484.

²⁶ Zeman, 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Nazi flag (*Hakenkreuz*, or “hooked cross”) replaced the Weimar flag as the sole emblem of Germany.²⁸ By this time, the Nazi flag dominated every public center in the Reich.

Even Hitler’s mustache played a role in his propaganda; this was his identity. Famous leaders, whether in politics or entertainment, often try to distinguish themselves from others with certain appearances or personality traits. Former president Bill Clinton’s “thumb gesture,” Hermann Goering’s outlandish uniforms, and Malcolm X’s ultra-conservative dress and thick, black-rimmed glasses are all examples of leaders distinguishing themselves from their peers. To this day, the two generations that have been born since Hitler’s death in 1945 identify the small, square mustache with the German dictator. The association between Hitler and the square mustache is so ingrained in modern day thought that the mere sight of somebody adopting this slight physical trait would cause many people to be offended. That was the type of power Hitler wanted imagery to produce.

The most powerful images of the Third Reich were the dazzling displays of human formations during the Nuremberg Rallies from 1933-1938. The human arrangements embodied everything the National Socialists held dear: precise calculations, strict adherence to order, obsession with everything grandiose, and the celebration of German unity, pride, and might. These spectacles amazed the German people as well as foreign visitors. Sir Nevile Henderson, British ambassador to Berlin, stated, “I had spent six years in St. Petersburg before the war in the best days of the Russian ballet, but for grandiose beauty I have never seen anything to compare with it.”²⁹ Large banners, magnificent light shows and fireworks displays, and impassioned speeches accompanied

²⁸ Ibid., 10.

²⁹ Rutherford, 142.

these massive gatherings. One of the most impressive sights at these rallies was the creation of Albert Speer, chief architect of the Reich and later Minister of Armaments. Huge beams of light shined from anti-aircraft searchlights into the air like pillars of light.³⁰ The spectacle was nothing short of awesome.

These gatherings proved to be the most enduring scenes of the Third Reich. This sight spoke more for Hitler's prestige and acceptance than any other did. All other images were creations of Nazi leaders or followers. This image was a demonstration of the people in support of the *Führer*. Witnessing thousands of people arranged in geometric patterns and offering the Nazi salute and shouting, "*Sieg Heil!*" made a lasting impression to any observer. Footage of thousands of Germans offering this gesture to Hitler evoked their undying loyalty to the *Führer* and the frightening level of their indoctrination. On a more personal note, individuals greeted each other with the phrase, "*Heil Hitler!*"³¹ This was also the conclusion in official military directives.

In 1934 the military made its debut as part of the Nuremberg Rally. Each year its role increased as Hitler defied the Versailles Treaty and demonstrated Germany's growing military might. Planes soared overhead and tanks rolled across the landscape while infantrymen fired rifles and artillery rounds at targets. One German soldier described his experience in the formations:

We felt ten feet tall and indestructible! This was pageantry of the highest order, and it inspired enormous national pride in us. It was a jubilant extravaganza with the unmistakable message that Germany was being reborn. I felt extremely proud.³²

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Zeman, 11.

³² Knappe and Brusaw, 97.

Germany began arming itself once again and wanted the world to witness its resurgence. As the 1930s came to a close, Hitler concentrated more and more of his attention toward his ever-growing armed forces.

The German General Staff preferred to distance itself from matters of the state. In doing so, the military isolated itself from every other professional organization within the Reich; therefore, the military's political position weakened.³³ The fact that Hitler reversed the heavy restrictions of the Versailles Treaty and pushed for a world class *Wehrmacht* only strengthened his grip upon the General Staff. In his book, *Achtung-Panzer!*, Guderian, an innovator of armored warfare, wrote:

The Führer is a man of vision. He has recognized the enormous significance for motorized traffic of a programme of road construction which is massive in scale and carried through on constant principles... The initial programme is for 7,000 kilometres of autobahn which will link the main cities of the country."³⁴

Hitler's willingness to increase the mobility of the *Wehrmacht* and allow for a transformation from cavalry tactics to motorization endeared him to the innovative Guderian and many other generals.

The General Staff's isolationist political stance and affection for Hitler's policies combined to weaken its guard and allow Hitler to employ new measures within the *Wehrmacht*. Werner von Blomberg, Minister of War, allowed Hitler to place the swastika upon every *Wehrmacht* uniform in April 1934.³⁵ This was symbolic in unifying the military forces under the Nazi flag. The swastika also adorned military decorations. Once

³³ O'Neill, 11.

³⁴ Guderian, *Achtung*, 208.

³⁵ O'Neill, 37-8.

Hitler unified the *Wehrmacht* in a physical sense by altering uniforms and decorations, he unified the military mentally.

Every military has its oath of allegiance, and these oaths are meant to indoctrinate soldiers into the thinking of those in charge. Adolf Hitler, determined to incorporate himself within the armed forces, changed the German military oath. The oath for all members of the German Army under the Weimar Republic just before the Nazi takeover was:

I swear loyalty to the Constitution and vow that I will protect the German nation and its lawful establishments as a brave soldier at any time, and will be obedient to the President and to my superiors.

Under Nazi Germany, this oath read:

I swear by God this holy oath, that I will render to Adolf Hitler, Leader of the German nation and people, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, unconditional obedience, and I am ready as a brave soldier to risk my life at any time for this oath.³⁶

Service in the *Wehrmacht* reflected loyalty to the *Führer* instead of to the Fatherland. The word “unconditional” in that oath obligated the German troops to obey even illegal and immoral orders from the *Führer*, and it set the stage for unbelievable atrocities during the ensuing war, especially in the East. Most gave him their loyalty. According to Bartov:

[Y]ears of preliminary and army indoctrination distorted the soldiers’ perception of reality. The Wehrmacht’s propaganda relied on a radical demonization of the enemy and on a similarly extreme deification of the *Führer*.³⁷

³⁶ Ibid., 55-6.

³⁷ Bartov, *Army*, 8.

Blomberg even restricted non-Aryan soldiers from becoming officers in the *Wehrmacht* in order to gain favor with the *Führer*.³⁸ Once Hitler gained effective control of the generals, his war plans began.

The new *Wehrmacht* oath was in stark contrast to the oath of the Red Army, which stated:

I, a citizen of the USSR joining the ranks of the Red Army, take the oath and solemnly swear to be an honourable, brave, disciplined, vigilant fighter, strictly guarding military and state secrets... I am always ready on the orders of the Workers-Peasants Government to defend my Motherland—the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.³⁹

Although the German military's oath was effective, it emphasized the importance of Hitler too much. Trust became vital to the oath's observance. As long as the Germans continued to advance, trust was assured; however, as the Germans experienced setbacks, the soldiers' faith in the *Führer* weakened and the oath's sacredness diminished. The Red Army's oath proved to be more effective because its tone was more personal. The soldier fought for the Motherland rather than Stalin. The Motherland could not betray the enlisted man. Also, the emphasis in the German oath was attack; the Soviet emphasis was defense. In regard to warfare, the defender has a mental inclination to fight with more intensity than does the aggressor; thus, the Soviets possessed an early psychological advantage in this respect.

The German Army's blind obedience gave Hitler the power to wage his race war against the Slavic *Untermenschen* (subhumans) and his extermination war against the Jews and communists. An example of Hitler's indoctrination in practice came from an

³⁸ O'Neill, 38.

³⁹ John Erickson and Ljubica Erickson, *The Eastern Front in Photographs* (London: Carlton Books Limited, 2001), 38.

official directive from Field Marshal Walter von Reichenau, Commander of the German Sixth Army during the first weeks of Barbarossa and longtime supporter of Hitler, concerning the conduct of German troops in the Eastern territories:

Army H.Qu., 10 October 1941

[T]he soldier must have full understanding for the necessity of a severe but just revenge on subhuman Jewry... The fear of German counter-measures must be stronger than threats of the wandering Bolshevistic remnants. Regardless of all future political considerations the soldier has to fulfill two tasks:

- 1.) Complete annihilation of the false Bolshevist doctrine of the Soviet State and its armed forces.
- 2.) The pitiless extermination of foreign treachery and cruelty and thus the protection of the lives of military personnel in Russia. This is the only way to fulfill our historic task to liberate the German people once and for all from the Asiatic-Jewish danger.⁴⁰

The new *Wehrmacht* now belonged to Hitler.

The *Wehrmacht* reflected National Socialism's infatuation with order. As a primary means to control, the Nazis stressed order in all parts of society, especially in its national defense units. Hitler stressed this as yet another advance from the chaotic ideology of Bolshevism. Strict order was so impressed upon the mindset of the German soldier that once in captivity, *Wehrmacht* officers and soldiers continued to display their commitment to it.⁴¹ "Even in prison, the Wehrmacht continued to organize itself," wrote one prisoner.⁴² During the Battle of the Bulge in 1944, an American company

⁴⁰ Field Marshal von Reichenau, "A German Field Marshal Instructs the *Wehrmacht* on Its Role in the Soviet Union," October 10, 1941, <<http://www.h-net.org/~german/gtext/nazi/reichenau-english.html>> (25 June, 2004).

⁴¹ This mainly applied to prison camps in the West. Prisoners taken by the Red Army usually found it necessary to abandon their adherence to order and concentrate on survival.

⁴² Guy Sajer, *The Forgotten Soldier* (1971; reprint, by arrangement with HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. and translated by Harper and Row, Publishers, Dulles, VA: Brassey's, Inc., 2000), 457.

commander named John Colby reflected upon an experience with a German unit that surrendered to his platoon:

German sergeants abhorred disorder. This one barked out orders in English and German. He ordered Colby's men to line up on one side of the road, the Germans on the other. He called them all to attention. Then he formally surrendered his company to Colby.⁴³

This action would have been unheard of in any other army during the war, and in no way would such an act have occurred in the East.

On another occasion during the Battle of the Bulge, strict German adherence to order actually proved disadvantageous to the *Wehrmacht*. The Germans succeeded in capturing American military uniforms and posed as entire American units. They drove around changing road signs and caused confusion and fear amongst the Americans' ranks. After the Allies caught on to the scheme, roadblocks were set up to verify the identities of personnel passing through the roadways. Upon interrogation:

[One] German's speech and identification papers were flawless—too flawless it turned out. The authentic Adjutant General's Office Identification Card, carried by all GIs, had printed at the top: "Not a Pass—For Identification Only." With Teutonic exactness, the German forger had corrected the spelling, so that the forged card read "Identification." That missing "n" cost the German officer his life.⁴⁴

Down to the last detail, the German *Wehrmacht* was the most organized military unit in the world. Proper structure ensured success in Hitler's mind and allowed him to establish total control over his Armies. This control proved vital to his desired race war in the East.

⁴³ Stephen Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers: The U. S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany June 7, 1944-May 7, 1945* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 284.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 219.

Since the early days of National Socialism, Hitler and Goebbels portrayed the Slavic races in the East as inferior subhumans that possessed no right to the rich land they inhabited. Gerhard Hirschfeld described one of these images:

An infamous portrait of a Russian soldier, looking like a cross between robot and Neanderthal man, with blood dripping from his bayonet as he went about his business of killing women and children, became a familiar sight.⁴⁵

Except during the brief treaty period between Germany and the USSR from August 23, 1939 to June 22, 1941, Germans heard of the barbarous nature of their eastern neighbors led by Marxist Jewry. The constant theme of Nazi propaganda was that Marxism, an evil creation of the Jews, was the most dangerous obstacle to civilization and needed to be vanquished. For the short duration of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, the Nazis recanted these views—at least publicly.

As war approached, the Propaganda Ministry, led by Dr. Joseph Goebbels, shifted from the domestic to the international scene. Dr. Goebbels' propaganda ministry worked furiously to keep the German population behind the war effort. This was not unusual, as all wartime governments provide material to their populations in order to boost morale and justify their efforts. Goebbels accepted this responsibility with great enthusiasm and executed it with true National Socialist vigor. Goebbels was a master of propaganda. That was why Hitler granted him such power in his Third Reich. Louis Lochner, editor of *The Goebbels Diaries, 1942-3*, stated that a constant theme in Goebbels' work was that "Hitler ran the war while Goebbels ran the country."⁴⁶ Despite being one of the few in the

⁴⁵ David Welch, ed., *Nazi Propaganda: The Power and the Limitations* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1983), 156.

⁴⁶ Joseph Goebbels, *The Goebbels Diaries*, edited, translated and with an introduction by Louis P. Lochner (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1948), 47.

Nazi elite who was educated, he remained a fanatical believer in the *Führer*. In what was to be his last letter, written to his stepson Harold Quandt, Goebbels stated, “may you always be proud of having belonged to a family which, even in misfortune, remained loyal to the very end to the Führer and his pure sacred cause.”⁴⁷ This letter was dated April 28, 1945. Three days later, Goebbels and his wife, Magda, poisoned their six children before committing suicide in the *Führer’s* bunker. Goebbels remained one of Hitler’s most trusted servants to the end. In fact, Goebbels admitted to disobeying the *Führer* one time—when he refused to become Chancellor of the Reich after Hitler’s suicide. He felt adherence to this order would cheapen his life mission and chose to follow his *Führer’s* example.⁴⁸ Goebbels’ devotion remained to the bitter end.

Dr. Goebbels expressed enthusiasm about the continuation of anti-Bolshevik propaganda. After Foreign Ministers Joachim von Ribbentrop and Vyacheslav Molotov signed the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, Hitler forbade the Propaganda Ministry from publishing negative articles about the Soviet Union. This was a complete reversal from all previous Hitler sentiments. In his unpublished work after *Mein Kampf*, Hitler stated:

For Germany, a future alliance with Russia has no sense, neither from the standpoint of sober expediency nor from that of a human connection... [It would prevent] the goal of German foreign policy in the one and only place possible: space in the East.⁴⁹

Most Nazis did not understand how Hitler could enter into a pact with the Soviet Union, yet, on November 23, 1939 at a military conference, the *Führer* explained this new stance

⁴⁷ Joseph Goebbels, *The Goebbels Diaries, Final Entries, 1945*, translated by Richard Barry and edited, introduced and annotated by Hugh Trevor-Roper (New York: Morrow/Avon, 1978); originally published as *Tagebücher 1945: Die Letzen Aufzeichnungen* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe Verlag, 1977), 330.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 332.

⁴⁹ Hitler, *Second*, 152.

when he stated, “We have a treaty with Russia. However, treaties are observed only while they offer advantages.”⁵⁰ Once the Western land campaign ceased, Hitler saw the opportunity to seize his goal.

During the twenty-two months of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, negative German propaganda geared toward the Soviet Union halted. Almost immediately after Hitler’s ascension to power in 1933, Goebbels founded the *Antikomintern* (the Union of German Anti-Communist Societies). The purpose of this organization was, “to combat the Communist International and its allies.”⁵¹ Once the pact between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia became official, a change in public image was necessary, especially during the months prior to the German invasion of the USSR. By December 1939, the name of the organization was changed to “Newspaper against Plutocracy and National Incitement.”⁵² Although the Nazis’ feelings toward the communists never changed, the image presented to both the German citizens and their eastern neighbors had to reflect a peaceful merging of two former enemies. It was a necessary evil that Goebbels endured with clenched teeth.

Just before the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Joseph Goebbels played a unique role in leading German, as well as global thoughts concerning Germany’s intentions toward the Soviet Union. Privately, only a few leading Nazis and generals knew of the upcoming war in the East. Goebbels had to be careful not to reveal Germany’s true intentions. A campaign of misinformation began so as to disguise the

⁵⁰ Axell, 8.

⁵¹ Zeman, 95.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 96.

German concentrations in the East as preparations for an invasion of Great Britain.⁵³ Goebbels played this role to perfection—even to his own detriment. He wrote an article that detailed how German troops were preparing for a mighty invasion of the British Island and “accidentally” had it published in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, a leading Nazi publication. “My article is handed over to the V.B. with due solemnity. Its seizure will follow in the course of the night. For the moment, I shall suffer a severe loss of prestige. But it is worth it.”⁵⁴ His willingness to do this showed just how committed to the cause and to the *Führer* Goebbels was. The Nazi cause was simple: “Bolshevism will be a thing of the past. Thus we shall have fulfilled our one great duty to History.”⁵⁵ A war of both words and arms had begun.

During the early stages of the war when a Nazi triumph seemed imminent, many members within the Propaganda Ministry, such as Hans Fritzsche and Otto Dietrich, made claims that Russia was finished, which irritated Goebbels. This was not to say that Goebbels believed Germany would fail, but rather he felt it was too dangerous to put time limits on a Soviet capitulation and set the expectations so high for the German public that even the smallest failure could have been exploited by Germany’s enemies as a loss.⁵⁶ This showed Goebbels’ genius in propaganda. He knew the war could be lost. He also knew that once a statement was made to the public, it needed to be backed up or else Germany risked losing the propaganda battle. Over-optimistic statements put unneeded pressure on Germany. Goebbels noted that statements like these during the early stages of

⁵³ Joseph Goebbels, *The Goebbels Diaries, 1939-41*, edited and translated by Fred Taylor (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1983), 286.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 406.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 380.

⁵⁶ Ernest Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda 1925-1945* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1965), 247.

the Soviet conflict were the largest propaganda mistakes of the war.⁵⁷ These were mistakes that falsely built the hopes of the German people. After so many statements proved untrue, most Germans lost faith in the Nazi leadership and illegally began listening to foreign broadcasts to hear the “truth.”⁵⁸ The Propaganda Ministry lost the faith of its listeners.

The goal for Germany in the East was *Lebensraum* (living space). Hitler, from the time he became involved in political matters, felt this was Germany’s main foreign policy objective. The Germans needed more space for their people. Eastern Europe provided that much-needed room. With a Darwinian mindset, Hitler felt that if he could take this land from its inhabitants by force, it was his right, or more accurately, his duty to do so. The East was to be the base of the Thousand-Year Reich. Hitler even stated that in the future, because of the rich farmland and beautiful landscapes, people would flock to the new eastern portion of the Reich instead of migrating to America.⁵⁹ For this purpose, the Bolshevist threat had to be eliminated.

Hitler’s plan for prisoners of war in the East differed greatly from prisoners in the West. In contrast to their treatment of the Jewish population, the Germans treated their military prisoners in the West humanely. The East was a different story. According to Omer Bartov, “During the Second World War some 5,700,000 Russian soldiers fell into German hands, of whom about 3,300,000 died in captivity.”⁶⁰ Hitler boasted that since the Soviet Union did not participate in the Geneva Convention, the Convention’s rules for

⁵⁷ Zeman, 160.

⁵⁸ Bramsted, 314-5.

⁵⁹ Hitler, *Table*, 42.

⁶⁰ Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941-45: German Troops and the Barbarisation of War*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 107.

prisoners of war did not apply in the East; therefore, Hitler made the rules of how Russian POWs would be treated.⁶¹ One SS soldier reported that he and some other men volunteered to execute a batch of about 700 Russian prisoners because they received cigarettes and schnapps as a reward for their actions.⁶² This lack of regard for human life was not an isolated incident.

Germans ordered executions just because people were Jewish or communist. From July 7 to December 1, 1941, *SS-Standartenführer* Jäger documented the execution of 137,346 individuals in Lithuania, most of whom were Jews. Of these, 862 were communists. The indifferent nature of the *SS-Einsatzgruppen* (SS-Action Groups) leader showed his level of indoctrination. He noted that on October 10, 1941, his men executed 1,845 Jews (including 712 women and 818 children) as a reprisal for a German police officer shot in the ghetto; furthermore, on October 29, 1941, 9,200 more Jews (including 2,920 women and 4,273 children) were executed by his *Einsatzgruppen* as a “mopping up of superfluous Jews.”⁶³ Also, rules for soldierly conduct were different in the East than they had been during previous operations. For example:

looting of boots in France may have been considered to be “theft”, whereas in Russia it would not be thought of as an offense at all; rape in France would be defined as a “moral offense”, whereas in Russia, if considered at all, it might appear as a racial offense, health hazard or even as “collaboration with partisans”.⁶⁴

Hitler’s war of extermination had begun.

⁶¹ Clark, 206.

⁶² Richard Overy, *Interrogations: The Nazi Elite in Allied Hands, 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 198.

⁶³ *SS-Standartenführer Jäger, Documentation of the Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jewry by the SS Einsatzgruppen-‘Action Groups’ from a Secret Reich Letter,* December 1, 1941, <<http://www.remember.org/docss.html>> (25 June, 2004).

⁶⁴ Bartov, *Eastern*, 27.

Nazi administrators and SS troops were not the only groups to treat civilians in occupied territories poorly; regular Germans in the *Wehrmacht* maltreated civilians as well. Siegfried Knappe, a veteran of the Eastern Front, wrote about a soldier who verbally abused and slapped a Polish civilian. When confronted by Knappe, the soldier explained, “But he is a Jew, Herr Oberleutnant.” Knappe went on to write, “His actions were obviously the result of the incessant anti-Jewish propaganda of the Nazi government. He undoubtedly was doing what he thought was expected of him.”⁶⁵ Also, *Wehrmacht* soldiers had to perform many of the executions of Russians and Jews before the gas chambers became active. One German general noted the criminality of these executions:

This is murder! The German Wehrmacht is waging this war against Bolshevism, not against the united Russian peoples... countless bodies of soldiers lying on the roads, having clearly been killed by a shot in the head at point blank range, without their weapons and with their hands raised, will quickly spread in the enemy’s army.⁶⁶

This not only violated international law, but it also violated one of the “German Soldier’s Ten Commandments” which was printed in every soldier’s paybook: “No enemy who has surrendered will be killed, including partisans and spies. They will be duly punished by courts.”⁶⁷ Once again, Hitler’s word overruled chivalrous warfare and international law.

Not all Russian prisoners of war were executed by the Germans, yet this did not mean that they escaped German barbarism. During the early phase of the war when the Germans overran the Soviets, vast numbers of Red Army troops surrendered. The Reich depended on many of these soldiers to keep the factories producing materials so German

⁶⁵ Knappe and Brusaw, 209.

⁶⁶ Bartov, *Eastern*, 117.

⁶⁷ Lord Russell of Liverpool, *Scourge of the Swastika: A Short History of Nazi War Crimes* (1954; reprint, with a new introduction by Alistair Horne, Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2002), 253.

men could be used by the *Wehrmacht*. During the first days of the war, the number of Red Army troops committing suicide as opposed to being captured dismayed Goebbels. He felt this was no doubt a result of Bolshevik education and committed his Propaganda Ministry to, “deal with that problem by leaflets, since the radio is being jammed.”⁶⁸ Goebbels was not sympathetic. He wanted many of these prisoners to serve as slave labor so German men could be sent to fight, but most Soviet POWs were simply too weak to be effective workers because of the starvation rations they received from the Germans.

Eastern prisoners of war received little food from their captors: six kilograms of bread, 400 grams of meat, 400 grams of fat, and 600 grams of sugar for a twenty-eight day period.⁶⁹ During the Stalingrad disaster, many German troops resorted to eating grass and tree bark to survive; however, Russian POWs within the encirclement had a much more difficult time finding food. Many resorted to cannibalism.⁷⁰ When the Red Army liberated these prisoners after the German surrender, “The survivors were so badly starved that when their rescuers gave them bread and sausage from their rations, most died immediately.”⁷¹ These atrocities were a direct result of the Nazis’ blatant, racial policies.

Nazi and Soviet propaganda went far in determining certain outcomes of the war in the East. Words proved to be just as powerful, if not, more powerful than the physical weapons used during the conflict. Hitler and Goebbels’ words won over a nation and led them on a crusade that proved to be the undoing of Nazi Germany. Aside from the battles, millions were killed or ravaged as a result of ideological differences. Gottlob

⁶⁸ Goebbels, *1939*, 433.

⁶⁹ Russell, 61.

⁷⁰ Antony Beevor, *Stalingrad, The Fateful Siege: 1942-1943* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 315.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 363.

Bidermann explained a common sentiment among German soldiers in the East: “The war in the east had degenerated to the point that we equated surrender to suicide.”⁷² Examples from both Nazi and Soviet rhetoric further displayed how barbaric the German-Soviet war was:

Excerpt from July 19, 1942 article in *Das Reich* entitled “The So-Called Russian Soul” written by Joseph Goebbels:

They [Russians] are stolid and animalistic. They are accustomed to a hard and impoverished existence, and therefore do not hold on to life all that strongly. The average person has less worth than a bicycle. A rapid birthrate quickly replaces any losses. They have a type of primitive toughness that one cannot call bravery. It is entirely different. Bravery is a kind of spiritual courage. The toughness with which the Bolshevists defended their bunkers in Sevastapol was more a bestial drive, and nothing could be more mistaken than to assume that it was the result of Bolshevist views or education... Bolshevism is a master at exploiting the Slavic national soul. Only in Russia was this dreadful experiment possible. It required the primitive and bestial dullness of the peoples forming the Soviet Union, as well as their limited social and economic expectations... The whole country is covered by a spy system that misuses children to spy on their parents... We must destroy this system if we want to live free from danger in the future. This explanation goes far beyond the realm of Philistine discussions of the so-called Russian soul.⁷³

Excerpt from July 24, 1942 article in the *Red Star* entitled “Kill!” written by Ilya Ehrenburg:

We know everything. We remember everything. We have understood: the Germans are not human beings. From now on the word “German” for us is the most horrible curse. From now on the word “German” discharges a rifle. We shall do no talking. We shall not express indignation. We will kill. If you have not killed one German during the day, you have lost a day. If you think that instead of you your neighbor will kill a German, you have failed to understand the menace. If you will not kill a German, a German will kill you. He will take away your people, and will torture them in his accursed Germany. If you cannot kill a German with a bullet, kill him with a bayonet. If there is momentary calm in your sector, if you

⁷² Bidermann, 94.

⁷³ Joseph Goebbels, “The So-Called Russian Soul,” *Das Reich*, July 19, 1942, <<http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/goeb11.htm>> (25 June, 2004).

are awaiting a battle, kill a German before the battle. If you leave a German alive, a German will hang a Russian man and will dishonor a Russian woman. If you have killed one German, kill another—nothing gladdens us more than German corpses. Do not count the days. Do not count the miles. Count one thing: the Germans you have killed. Kill a German!—this is what an old mother begs of you. Kill a German!—this is what a child implores you to do. Kill a German!—this is what your native land cries to you. Do not miss fire. Do not let him by. Kill!⁷⁴

Propaganda made the Nazi-Soviet conflict a war of barbarism. Terms such as “*Untermenschen*” and “Bolshevist Jewry” cheapened people to mere animal-status and made them expendable parts of society. Propaganda made the Eastern Front more than just a war; propaganda made it a war of annihilation.

Another outcome of Nazi propaganda was the devastating effect it had upon the German soldiers after the *Wehrmacht* failed to take Moscow in 1941-2 and Leningrad and Stalingrad in 1942-3. Once emotions were built so high, only total victory could keep their spirits from being destroyed. Upon hearing the news of the Sixth Army’s fall at Stalingrad in February 1943, German radio stations played solemn music for three days and created an atmosphere of desperation.⁷⁵ From front soldier to the *Führer* himself, every German agonized over the loss, and most knew that victory in the East was out of the question.

The Soviets produced the only propaganda that caused Goebbels to be concerned.⁷⁶ He knew the level of control Stalin exerted over his nation and that the Georgian would not be afraid to match the brutal nature of Nazi propaganda. Indeed, Stalin himself exclaimed on November 6, 1941, “If the Germans want a war of

⁷⁴ Ilya Ehrenburg, *The Tempering of Russia*, translated by Alexander Kaun (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1944), 352-3.

⁷⁵ Rutherford, 177.

⁷⁶ Goebbels, *Diaries*, 246.

extermination, they shall have it.”⁷⁷ On the contrary, the western democracies were more moderate and such rhetoric would not be as acceptable to their peoples. Goebbels, as well as Hitler, believed the West was weaker-willed than the Germans and Russians and their peoples could not stomach such harsh measures.⁷⁸ Stalin, on the other hand, obliged Hitler and proved to be an expert propagandist as well. During the war, Stalin outdid Hitler by winning more approval and favor from his people as the war continued; whereas Hitler, with each German tragedy, lost his effectiveness to inspire the citizens of the Reich. Stalin succeeded in mending ties between the Russian Orthodox Church and the atheist, Bolshevik government. Goebbels scoffed in his diary about such hypocrisy, but the scheme worked.⁷⁹ Stalin’s permission to allow churches to conduct worship services within the USSR roused the people behind the dictator and further aided in unifying his people; thus, as the war continued, Goebbels' fears concerning Soviet propaganda proved justified.

The Soviets, like the Germans, were masters of propaganda. One effective method used by the Red Army was its use of loudspeakers. Goebbels noted in his diary that the Soviets sometimes announced when they intended on attacking the Germans by loudspeakers.⁸⁰ This disturbed the Propaganda Minister because the Red Army showed no regard for their own losses as a result of this tactic. Antony Beevor described how the NKVD (Soviet security police) tormented the Germans at Stalingrad:

For hours on end, the loudspeakers blasted out tango music, which was judged to convey a suitable sinister mood, interspersed by messages prepared on gramophone records to remind the beleaguered troops of their

⁷⁷ Joseph Stalin, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union* (1945; reprint, by permission of International Publishers Co., Inc., New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1969), 29.

⁷⁸ Hitler, *Table*, 605.

⁷⁹ Goebbels, *1939*, 439-40.

⁸⁰ Goebbels, *Diaries*, 206.

hopeless situation. At first, these activities had little influence, but later, when German hopes began to fade, the effect became cumulative.⁸¹

Also, the USSR's control of the media allowed them to indoctrinate their people much as the Nazis did in Germany. Goebbels noted:

It's a pity that we can't reach the people of the Soviet Union by radio propaganda. We would have a great chance there. The Kremlin has been clever enough to exclude the Russian people from receiving the great world broadcasts and to limit them to their local stations.⁸²

The Russians used the weapon of indoctrination as well, which further fed the brutality that was the Eastern Front.

Before the ill-fated attempts to take the major Russian industrial and political cities, both propaganda and *Wehrmacht* victories elevated the German ego and allowed them to believe that total victory in the East was possible. At this point, Germany knew only victory. Hitler confidently announced, "When Barbarossa commences, the world will hold its breath and make no comment!"⁸³ Conditions in the West always seemed to favor the *Wehrmacht*. Also, the fighting spirit of the German soldier, along with the *Wehrmacht's* superior technology and innovation seemed to be unrivaled by any other nation; however, these illusions were proven incorrect by the dreadful conditions the Germans had to endure during their four-year battle with the Red Army.

⁸¹ Beevor, 286.

⁸² Goebbels, *Diaries*, 515.

⁸³ Center of Military History, *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision in the East*, Earl Frederick Ziemke and Magna E. Bauer (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985), public document 30-12, 3.

3

Mother Russia

Battle is not just physical but also mental. Once an army loses the will to fight, it is just a matter of time before it crumbles to ruin. For example, despite the United States' far superior technology and organization during the Vietnam War, the North Vietnamese succeeded in demoralizing the fighting troops and civilians back home; thus the U.S. lost the war. The Eastern Front during the Second World War proved no different. At the commencement of hostilities, the German soldiers possessed a fear mixed with excitement at being a part of the greatest crusade the European continent would ever see. The fear the soldiers felt was typical of any soldier before entering a battle; it was not a fear of losing. The Red Army's recent engagement against Finland convinced the Germans that Germany could not lose to the inferior communists. The Germans trained for war, and they were ready to test their training; however, a variety of conditions aided in destroying the morale of the *Wehrmacht* during the war with Soviet Russia.

When the Germans entered the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, there was no reason to believe that the *Wehrmacht* would not achieve total victory. Nazi propaganda preached to the German population for years about their "subhuman" Slavic neighbors and the oppressive regime under which they lived. Germany already annihilated the French and crippled the British; they were world powers. The USSR, on the other hand, was not recognized as a legitimate military threat by any of the major nations of Europe;

moreover, most Germans knew that the Soviet Union's relations with the Western democracies were poor. There were even those who believed, or more accurately hoped, that the West would end hostilities with Germany and join the fight against International Bolshevism. Captain John Cobb, U.S. 82nd Airborne Division, recalled when he was in charge of a German POW camp:

The German who was the ranking officer made a request to see me. I received him, expecting some complaint about living conditions or treatment. Instead, he requested that he be allowed to join us with German volunteers when we began our attack against the Russians. He was incredulous when I informed him that we had no intentions of fighting the Russians.¹

Regardless, Hitler promised victory in the East and the people had faith in his words. Hitler promised social changes within the Reich, and he delivered; he vowed to reverse the humiliation of the Versailles *Diktat*, and he delivered; he prophesied victory in every military campaign thus far, and he delivered. The Germans concluded that Hitler was not just a talker, but also a man who backed up his words with actions and always seemed to be correct. Hitler won the people's trust and loyalty. His words and deeds, combined with expert imagery and propaganda, elevated him to almost godlike status within the Reich, so when he proclaimed that the USSR would be summarily defeated, the people followed unquestioningly to the fight—and ultimately, to their destruction.

It was not long before the Germans realized that this campaign would differ greatly from their engagements in the West. Physical conditions in the East dashed the German soldiers' egos. Bartov cited:

During the war in Russia there was some change in the nature of the offenses. For the first time we hear of cowardice, self-mutilation and numerous charges of neglect of duty while on guard. The nature of this

¹ Ambrose, 456.

bitter war dictated to some extent the type of offenses committed by the troops.²

Besides fighting the Russians, the Germans had to overcome extreme weather patterns and inhospitable terrain while traveling across a nation whose boundaries seemed endless. German soldiers suffered both physically and mentally even before encountering enemy fire.³ Little did they know they would be forced to endure these conditions for the next four years.

Since the failure of Napoleon's armies to conquer the Russians during the early part of the nineteenth century, the Western nations knew the severity of the Russian winter; however, Russia's summer heat never received as much publicity. One soldier described it as a climate of extremes:

[T]he cold was lessening as rapidly as it had increased—which seemed to be the way of the Russian seasons. From implacable winter one was shifted into torrid summer, with no spring in between.”⁴

When the Germans commenced Operation Barbarossa, summer had just begun. With any type of physical activity, heat creates many problems. The heat of the Russian summer provided the Germans with their first taste of Russia's inhospitable weather conditions. Marching in the heat of summer proved unbearable. Fatigue and exhaustion swept through the *Wehrmacht's* ranks before battles even commenced. One *Landser* (infantryman) explained:

The painful feet, the exhausted muscles speak the words of our obligation... Each step is made agonizing by the heat and sweat. A fight

² Bartov, *Eastern*, 29.

³ Sajer, 23-4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

against thirst, a fight against fatigue as well, finding the strength against the sun, weariness, and despair.⁵

Further observations detailed marching under the blazing Russian sun:

I don't know exactly how heavy my pack is, but on top of that there is a thick wool blanket, a munitions case which can make you nuts, and the miserable box with the books in it that I should have sent back... Forty-four kilometers, in the process we were shot at during our midnight rest and therefore we had to go with our equipment at the ready... I was totally drained, exhausted to the last reserves.⁶

Another *Landsers* added:

[One] cannot imagine the strains of this infantry. Marching thirty kilometers a day under a blazing sun, combat pack, hand weapons and munitions cases or a machine gun [weighing 75 pounds] or a mortar, and constant thirst.⁷

This had serious effects upon the infantry. Some sections of the 12th Infantry Division marched 560 miles from June 22 to July 28, 1941. This did not include distances covered during battle.⁸ Since the German uniform was too heavy for the Russian summer, the *Landsers* sweated profusely and needed water. The intense heat, especially in the south, dried many of the lakes and waterways while some of the water sources that remained were poisoned by the Soviets during their retreat.⁹ Water posed a problem for the German Sixth Army during their siege of Stalingrad. General Erhard Rauss explained that during the battles fought between the Don and Volga Rivers, the Germans had virtually no local water supply.¹⁰ Fatigue and poor water supply were not the only problems created by the Russian summer.

⁵ Stephen G. Fritz, *Frontsoldaten: The German Soldier in World War II* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 119.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 119-20.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁸ Bartov, *Eastern*, 21.

⁹ Bidermann, 48.

¹⁰ Peter Tsouras, ed., *Fighting in Hell: The German Ordeal on the Eastern Front* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), 217.

The intense heat and primitive Soviet road system combined to create an unforeseen enemy for the Germans: dust. Unlike the modern roadways common to Germany and Western Europe, the Soviet main roads were merely dirt paths. As the panzers and heavy artillery moved across the Russian landscape, they stirred huge dust clouds that were hazardous both to the soldiers and to the panzers themselves. The saturation of sweat on the uniforms caused dirt to collect. Most went weeks without new or even clean uniforms. Panzer commander Otto Carius described the dust as unbearable and stated, “the fine dust penetrated everything. Our clothes, drenched in sweat, clung to our bodies, and a thick coating of dust covered us from head to toe.”¹¹ Dust also hampered visibility and delayed operations. The Germans made the crucial mistake of not placing dust filters on the panzers. General Erhard Rauss explained:

Many tanks had no dust filters, and on those so equipped the filters soon became thoroughly clogged. Quartz dust was sucked into engines, which became so ground out that many tanks were rendered unserviceable. In other tanks the abrasive action of dust reduced engine efficiency and increased fuel consumption; thus weakened, they entered the autumn muddy season (*Rasputitsa*) which dealt them the death blow.¹²

Despite these trials, summer provided the *Wehrmacht* the best conditions for offensive operations. The autumn months provided the Germans with even more obstacles to their mission.

As fall approached, the *Wehrmacht* anticipated a break from the severe heat encountered during the summer months. What they were not prepared for was the Russian rainy season. The mild climate of spring and autumn granted the Germans a reprieve from extreme temperatures, yet this mild spell produced intense rain. Continual

¹¹ Otto Carius, *Tigers in the Mud: The Combat Career of Panzer Commander Otto Carius* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003), 7.

¹² Tsouras, 216.

rainfall upon the Russian landscape caused the dusty roads to become a morass of mud. Mud hampered the Germans' chief weapon and its most important advantage, the tanks' mobility. The German tanks were often stuck in the mud and lost their ability to move quickly. With this loss of speed, tactical surprise was almost impossible. Thus, Guderian's first principle of armored warfare evaporated. Mud was the worst obstacle to movement that the Germans faced during the war, and it was one of the primary reasons the Germans failed to take Moscow.¹³ One member of the *Gross Deutschland* infantry division said, "Our faltering machines almost drowned in incredible quagmires."¹⁴ During the Germans' first encounter with mud in Russia in October 1941, the Second Panzer Group lost 60 percent of its tanks and Fourth Panzer Group lost fifty tanks without a shot fired. Since Germany produced only eighty-five tanks per month at this time, the army groups received no replacements.¹⁵ Mobility was key during the previous campaigns and Russia was no different, but now that luxury was a thing of the past. Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, Commander of Army Group Centre, complained in his diary that, "The Russians are impeding us far less than the wet and the mud!"¹⁶ The German *Blitzkrieg* ended. German armored units suffered heavily from the mud.

The failure of the Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*—OKH) and the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*—OKW) to prepare their men for Russia's rainy season was one of the most destructive, yet unpublished intelligence failures during the Second World War. There was no excuse for

¹³ CMH 104-21, 81.

¹⁴ Sajer, 286.

¹⁵ Tsouras, 203.

¹⁶ Fedor von Bock, *The War Diary, 1939-45*, translated by David Johnston (New York: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1996); originally published as *Generalfeldmarschall Fedor von Bock: Zwischen Pflicht und Verweigerung, Das Kriegstagebuch* (Munich-Berlin: F.A. Herbig Verlagsbuchhandlung GmbH), 337.

a failure of this magnitude. Before the invasion, the Germans studied their maps and planned their offensives. The problem was that their maps, for the most part, were almost totally incorrect concerning Soviet roads. While on the move, routes and maneuvers had to be adjusted upon realizing that a road on their maps did not even exist.¹⁷ The ones that did exist were just dirt paths. One lieutenant noted, “A well-marked land route shown as an improved, major thoroughfare would actually be a primitive dirt track. It became common practice to use captured Red Army maps whenever possible.”¹⁸ General Guenther Blumentritt, 4th Army’s Chief of Staff in 1941, complained:

The great motor highway leading from the frontier to Moscow was unfinished—the one road a Westerner would call a ‘road.’ We were not prepared for what we found because our maps in no way corresponded to reality. On those maps all supposed main roads were marked in red, and there seemed to be many, but they often proved to be merely sandy tracks. The German intelligence service was fairly accurate about conditions in Russian-occupied Poland, but badly at fault about those beyond the original Russian frontier.¹⁹

The fact that most roads were dirt paths should have warned the officers that offensive operations needed to be concluded, or at least decided, by the end of summer. The June 22 launching of Barbarossa made that extremely difficult, yet the speed of previous campaigns clouded the better judgment of most in charge. Everything had to work perfectly for the Germans to finish off the Russians within so short a time. This proved impossible. Since summer offered the best conditions for a mobile campaign, Hitler needed to launch his invasion during mid to late spring to take full advantage of the season. From the beginning of Hitler’s rule, Russia was the ultimate prize, so an

¹⁷ Guderian, *Leader*, 180.

¹⁸ Bidermann, 118.

¹⁹ B.H. Liddell Hart, *The German Generals Talk* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1948), 179.

intelligence failure of this magnitude was inexcusable; however, the stubbornness of Great Britain moved the impatient *Führer* into the East prematurely.

The panzers were not the only branch of the military to encounter difficulty with mud. Infantry became completely exhausted and offered the Russians easy targets while marching knee-deep in the mud.²⁰ Horses hauling heavy artillery collapsed and died from over-exertion.²¹ This brought the Germans back to the trench-style warfare that was so destructive over twenty years before during the First World War. The defender held the advantage. The Soviets understood this, as General Rauss explained:

During World War II they made it a point not to launch or continue large-scale operations during the muddy season. They went so far as to halt their winter offensive before Moscow on the first warm, sunny day of spring (18 April 1942) despite the fact that their objective—turning the tide against the German invader—was virtually within their grasp.”²²

The Germans, who were accustomed to offensive maneuvers, were unprepared for static warfare. The mud proved costly in terms of lost momentum and equipment. The human toll, relatively speaking, was not as severe. During the coming winter, the Germans would be less fortunate.

Weakened by the summer and autumn advances and undersupplied because of OKW's arrogance, the Germans were totally unprepared for Russia's most notorious ally—"Marshal Winter." Many *Landsers* read about Napoleon's failed drive into the heart of Russia during the previous century, but Hitler was no Napoleon. Surely, they hoped, he would not put Germany's sons into a situation that could lead to disaster like the great Corsican's. They were dead wrong. Hitler believed Germany could defeat the

²⁰ Tsouras, 201.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

²² *Ibid.*, 199.

Soviet Union well before winter set in, so he ordered no winter clothing until it was too late. To make matters worse for Germany, the winter of 1941-2 was the worst on record in 140 years.²³ This, coupled with the failure of the OKW to send adequate winter gear to the front, spelled disaster for the *Wehrmacht*. When General Heinz Guderian sent a request for winter clothing on October 7, 1941, he received a reply from OKW that it would be sent in due time and “not to make further unnecessary requests of this type.”²⁴ Dr. Joseph Goebbels wrote in his diary that Hitler believed the USSR would be vanquished within four months, so there was no rush to send winter aid to the front.²⁵

One soldier noted:

We were painfully aware that our light-clothing issue would not suffice during a Russian winter. In response to the calls on the public for assistance by our all-knowing leaders in brown, sitting far from the fighting in the east, clothing was being collected for the soldiers of the Eastern Front. The warm ski sweaters, fur vests, sport clothing, heavy blankets, wool socks, and mittens thus provided by the winter relief agency [*Winterhilfe*] first reached us in February 1942.²⁶

Winter supplies arrived too late. This miscalculation proved costly to the *Wehrmacht*.

Hitler and the Nazi elite were not the only ones to believe that the war in the East would come to a rapid conclusion; in fact, most *Wehrmacht* officers and foreign experts thought the same. Just before operations commenced, Colonel General Franz Halder, Chief of the German General Staff, believed the Soviet campaign would last from eight to ten weeks.²⁷ After just two weeks of fighting, Halder’s attitude was even more optimistic when he wrote in his diary on July 3, 1941, “It is thus probably no

²³ Clark, 187.

²⁴ Guderian, *Leader*, 234.

²⁵ Goebbels, *1939*, 414.

²⁶ Bidermann, 79.

²⁷ Guderian, *Leader*, 142.

overstatement to say that the Russian campaign has been won in the space of two weeks.”²⁸ Also, General George C. Marshall, American Army Chief of Staff, estimated that the Red Army would last only six weeks, and the British Imperial General Staff gave them an optimistic three months.²⁹ Stalin himself went into shock and excused himself from public view and war planning.³⁰ The early success of the *Wehrmacht* only increased the line of thinking that Soviet Russia would soon be the next victim of Nazi Germany. The German invasion was so successful at the outset that Hitler ordered German industry leaders to begin slowing war production in order to concentrate on domestic production.³¹ By the time OKW realized that the war with Russia would last longer than expected, it was too late. The *Wehrmacht* had to face the harsh Russian winter almost totally unprepared—much like Napoleon’s armies during the previous century.

The havoc that the Russian winter caused the *Wehrmacht’s* fighting ability was unprecedented. Heavy snowfalls during December 1941 once again stalled the panzers because of their narrow tracks. Temperatures well below zero caused rifles to freeze and oil to thicken like tar.³² When the Sixth Panzer Division was within nine miles of Moscow, the temperature dropped to –30 degrees Fahrenheit and helped stall the drive. General Rauss remembered:

Snow dampened and reduced lateral fragmentation of artillery shells, and almost completely smothered mortar fire and hand grenades... mines often failed to detonate when stepped on or even when driven over by tanks.³³

²⁸ Glantz and House, 58.

²⁹ Axell, 12

³⁰ Glantz and House, 62.

³¹ Guderian, *Leader*, 151.

³² Clark, 179.

³³ Tsouras, 178.

Defenders had to create fortifications before winter set in, as the Germans soon discovered. The ground became frozen solid so that soldiers could not dig foxholes or entrenchments. The Germans had to use explosives for this purpose.³⁴ Keeping the armies supplied with food and ammunition was almost impossible. The first winter witnessed only thirty percent of German locomotives reaching the front; furthermore, of the eighteen supply trains required daily to replenish the Second Army and Second Panzer Army, only two made it to the front each day.³⁵ The Germans also had difficulty with their horse-drawn artillery units because the horses could barely stand due to the cold.³⁶ The Russian winter only magnified these shortages.

The intense cold of the Russian winter was something the German soldiers never imagined. The coldest temperature recorded during the entire war occurred on 26 January 1941 when the thermometer plunged to -63 degrees.³⁷ Many *Landsers* watched in horror as an axe could not penetrate frozen horsemeat, and their butter was cut using a saw.³⁸ Many desperate soldiers committed suicide. Others imposed self-inflicted wounds, which was punishable by death. Morale within the *Wehrmacht* reached a new low. OKW's lack of preparation for winter caused its soldiers to regard the cold as their chief adversary as opposed to the Russians. The weather served to weaken the fighting spirit and effectiveness of the *Wehrmacht* and gave the advantage to the Soviets. After being separated from their units, some members of the *Wehrmacht* headed back to Germany

³⁴ Ibid., 180-1.

³⁵ Ibid., 191.

³⁶ Fritz, 110.

³⁷ Tsouras, 172.

³⁸ Clark, 181.

and said the war ended while others tried to hide on German farms.³⁹ Few surrendered to the enemy. Most continued to fight the Russians and the cold. One officer noted:

From one day to the next the situation remained the same: no sleep, no bunker or shelter, no luxury of a simple fire to warm frostbitten limbs. Muscles grew stiff and unresponsive. Feet ached in the freezing temperatures; during the pauses between firefights our arms hung weakly at our sides.⁴⁰

Just six months after Barbarossa began, soldiers like Claus Hansmann stated, “We are all so tired of Russia, tired of the war.”⁴¹ All *Landsers* faced death on a daily basis.

“Unfortunately, there are many men who can no longer summon the energy to withstand the strength of the winter and because of that face a certain death.”⁴² Guy Sajer, an infantryman, noted:

[W]e prepared ourselves for the night so that there was a space between the cases of explosives... Despite the obvious danger of such a resting place, we preferred disintegration in a hot flash to death by freezing... Any desire to piss was announced to all present, so that hands could be held out under the warm urine, which often infected our cracked fingers... Guard duty was the hardest of all. To stand still one seriously risked being frozen alive... We got through the first half hour by beating each other to keep our blood moving. The second half hour was torture. Two men fainted... I burst into loud sobs. I was not the only one to cry, and there were others whose screams and moans were far louder than mine.⁴³

The German soldiers suffered greatly from the Russian winter. As their casualties mounted, the troops began to doubt their chances of victory.

Much as the autumn mud caused technological losses, winter caused human casualties. During the *Wehrmacht's* first winter in the Soviet Union, the Germans lost

³⁹ Tsouras, 193.

⁴⁰ Bidermann, 162.

⁴¹ Fritz, 111.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 112.

⁴³ Sajer, 61, 333-4.

more soldiers to the cold than to the Red Army's bullets.⁴⁴ On November 10, 1941 one German soldier noted, "The cold was, quite simply, a killer; we were all in danger of freezing to death."⁴⁵ General Guderian recorded that "many men died while performing their natural functions as a result of congelation of the anus."⁴⁶ According to German casualty reports from December 1941:

Out of over 100,000 cases of frostbite no fewer than 14,357—over the strength of a division—were classified as 'major' and requiring one or more amputations; there were 62,000 'moderate' (resulting in total incapacity, but without the necessity for amputation), and 36,270 'light' (in which the patient could be fit for action within ten days). Casualties from Russian action averaged at just under 3,000 per day.⁴⁷

Winter was a long, painful experience for the German soldiers. As one soldier described, "Life in Russia for me was a perpetual shivering fit."⁴⁸ The *Wehrmacht's* previous successes led Hitler to believe that the Soviet Union could last only a few weeks against Germany's forces. Thus, when the generals inquired about winter clothing for the troops, the Supreme Command ignored their requests.

The Germans resented how well the Red Army supplied its troops. While many German soldiers wrapped paper around their hands and feet for extra insulation, Soviet troops possessed felt-lined boots, gloves, jackets, and headgear. German soldiers routinely stripped dead or wounded Red Army soldiers of their clothes. One *Landser* noted:

The Russian soldier was issued boots several sizes too large, so as to enable him to wear them stuffed with straw or paper during the brutal winter months. This served as an efficient and a practical protection from

⁴⁴ Tsouras, 181.

⁴⁵ Knappe and Brusaw, 231.

⁴⁶ Clark, 179, 181.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 181-2.

⁴⁸ Sajer, 333.

the debilitating freezing temperatures, which caused so many casualties within our own army.⁴⁹

The culmination of casualties, no winter gear, and weapons failures bruised the German ego, and in December 1941 an event occurred that most world observers would have considered unheard of just a few weeks earlier. After more than two years of fighting and five years of German victories, the German Army issued its first order to retreat. Their aura of invincibility vanished forever.

On December 5, 1941 in three meters of snow, the Soviets launched their counter-offensive, and for the first time during the Second World War, the Germans retreated from an enemy attack. The psychological impact of this was immeasurable. When encountering constant victory, the Germans enjoyed an aura of invincibility. Once that first defeat occurred, the aura disappeared forever and doubt crept into the Germans' minds. The Germans suffered the same fate as the French a century earlier. From June 22 to December 4, 1941, the German mindset transformed from thinking that German occupation of Moscow was imminent to believing that the Soviets, with their millions of men and dreadful seasons, could not be overcome. The *Blitzkrieg* stalled, but the Germans were deep in enemy territory. The occupation of thousands of square miles of Soviet land proved to be another difficult task for the *Wehrmacht*.

From 1917 to 1991, the Soviet Union was the largest nation in land area in the world. Since the collapse of the Soviet government, Russia, the largest of the former Soviet Republics, owns that title. During the Soviet era, the sun never set on the empire. Russia's land area was one of the chief reasons Hitler wanted to invade the USSR. Hitler explained in *Mein Kampf* that the most important way a country became a global power

⁴⁹ Bidermann, 117.

was the occupation of a vast amount of land to sustain its population with food and raw materials.⁵⁰ He envied the United States' and the Soviet Union's sizes and correctly predicted that they would succeed Great Britain and France as the new leading empires.⁵¹ Because of Great Britain's small size, the island nation relied upon her colonies to achieve a powerful status among nations. This required a large navy. Hitler preferred a contiguous Reich to overseas colonization as a means to achieve world prominence, so he employed the idea of gaining *Lebensraum* as Germany's goal.

Hitler chose to expand eastward for a few reasons. First, he wanted the rich farmland of the Ukraine to serve as the food source for his Thousand-Year Reich. Over 700,000 Germans were said to have starved to death from the West's naval blockade of Germany during the First World War.⁵² Occupation of the Ukraine would end Germany's dependence upon foreign food sources. Another advantage of eastern expansion was that Germany could concentrate on building a large land army rather than concern itself with naval warfare. Hitler believed that air superiority replaced naval superiority as the most coveted chess piece in military strategy; therefore, he built a powerful army and air force to achieve his aims.⁵³ Finally, Hitler's hatred of the Slavs, communists, and Jews enticed him to look east in expanding his Reich. This allowed him to kill two birds with one stone, gaining the necessary natural resources to sustain his Reich and removing the "inferior" and manipulative races that he so despised. Hitler stated:

St. Petersburg [Leningrad] must therefore disappear utterly from the earth's surface. Moscow, too. Then the Russians will retire into Siberia... As for the ridiculous hundred million Slavs, we will mould the best of

⁵⁰ Hitler, *Mein*, 136-40.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 644.

⁵² Gilbert, xv.

⁵³ Hitler, *Table*, 551.

them to the shape that suits us, and we will isolate the rest of them in their own pig-styes.⁵⁴

This was easier said than done.

The Soviet Union's land area proved to be a major obstacle for the *Wehrmacht*. After the German-Soviet division of Poland in September 1939, the Germans were considerably closer to the major cities of the USSR, but the *Wehrmacht* still had a great deal of terrain to cover in the process of attacking these cities. When Operation Barbarossa began, Army Group North measured 450 miles from its primary target—Leningrad; Army Group Centre measured 700 miles from Moscow; and Army Group South measured 1,000 miles from Stalingrad. The linear distances alone proved to be a formidable obstacle to the German Army; add to that the spatial distances of occupying the land areas between these cities (which measured hundreds of thousands of square miles), and the *Wehrmacht* had an almost impossible task. Hitler knew this mission required man- and firepower unlike any other invasion in history and prepared accordingly: 3,050,000 men (four million including Germany's allies), 3,350 tanks, 7,184 artillery pieces, 600,000 motor vehicles, 625,000 horses, and 2,770 aircraft.⁵⁵ During the first two years of the war, the frontline was never less than 2,400 miles and reached its zenith in 1942 at 3,060 miles.⁵⁶ He discouraged reminding the public of the vast Russian land area. Goebbels noted, "I am also refraining from publishing big maps of Russia. The huge areas involved may frighten the public. I take a strong line against the imprudent

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 617.

⁵⁵ CMH 30-12, 7.

⁵⁶ Ziemke, *Berlin*, 500.

tendency to set a time-limit on our victory.”⁵⁷ Goebbels was one of the few Nazi leaders to support this cautious approach.

Manpower was not the only concern of the Germans concerning distance. During the *Anschluss* in 1938, a large number of tanks broke down as they drove into Austria.⁵⁸ A repeat of this in the East would prove fatal. The Germans were also concerned about their long, exposed supply routes. Defending these, as the Germans found out, was not easy. The Germans needed more men both to defend and staff their supply routes. During the first few weeks of the war, it seemed as if the Germans would succeed despite these grave issues concerning distance, but it was not long before complications arose and Stalin’s “strategic” defense philosophy took its toll upon the Germans.

Many *Landsers* chronicled the effect that the long marches had on both their physical and mental health. First, there was awe at the sheer magnitude of the steppe. One *Landser* called it a “realm of eternal horizons, where the land is like the sea,” while another stated, “The spaces seemed endless.”⁵⁹ Some expressed excitement at this new adventure. Harry Mielert described, “Finally a land that is wild and bold, a life without beauty, without ideas of spirit... without sensation; a pure, barren, alien land.”⁶⁰ Once the initial awe wore off, the *Landsers* began to feel isolated by the endless terrain. Mielert noted, “The character of this landscape... was the highest stage of loneliness.”⁶¹ Willi Heinrich, another veteran of the front, noted this transformation of thought perfectly in his novel *The Cross of Iron*:

⁵⁷ Goebbels, *1939*, 429.

⁵⁸ Guderian, *Leader*, 53.

⁵⁹ Fritz, 124, 125.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

(A)t first it was all new and exciting for our *Landsers*... the excitement didn't last long. These frightful spaces, monotonous and repetitious; you can't help feeling that one of these days they'll swallow you up.⁶²

As the infantry marched deeper and deeper into Russia, doubts crept into their minds and despair filled their hearts. Siegfried Knappe recalled:

Nothing could have prepared us for the mental depression brought on by this realization of the utter physical vastness of Russia. Tiny little doubts began to creep into our minds. Was it even possible that such vast emptiness could be conquered by foot soldiers?⁶³

Marching continued for hours, which translated into days, which turned to weeks, then turned to months.

Time played a critical role in German plans. Guy Sajer noted that during winter, the sun rose between nine and ten o'clock in the morning and set at about three o'clock in the afternoon.⁶⁴ With so little daylight, *Landsers* often lost sense of time and lived in fear during guard duty or reconnaissance missions, all while anticipating attacks from both the Red Army soldiers and Red Air Force. One infantryman chronicled:

There is nothing more terrifying than moving at night through a piece of wooded or bushy country, in which every shrub might release a sudden flash of white light to dazzle and blind a moment before the intense pain which could mean the end of life.⁶⁵

Guderian noted that the Russians' skills at night fighting provided the Red Army with a great advantage over the *Wehrmacht* that had not been anticipated.⁶⁶ Antony Beevor, author of *Stalingrad*, stressed that during September 1942, while the Germans were pushing toward Stalingrad:

⁶² Ibid., 125.

⁶³ Knappe and Brusaw, 194-5.

⁶⁴ Sajer, 334.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 229.

⁶⁶ Beevor, 26.

The compulsion to shoot at anything that moved at night, often setting off fusillades from equally nervous sentries down a whole sector, contributed to the German expenditure of over 25 million rounds.⁶⁷

The Soviets' night attacks further deteriorated the already poor situation for the Germans in the East. Once again, nature favored the Russians.

Living conditions for the German soldier were horrible. Russia's inhospitable weather brought new problems for the *Landsers* such as lack of sleep, infestation of insects and vermin, and sickness. Each one of these gnawed at the psyche. Within the first month of the invasion, Wilhelm Prüller, a veteran of the Eastern Front wrote:

We spent the night in the open... we made ourselves dugouts and covered them with sailcloth. After midnight it began to rain, and we couldn't stand it much longer in these holes. Wet and shivering with the cold, we wait for morning.⁶⁸

Marshal Vasili Chuikov, commander of the defense of Stalingrad, explained that he emphasized night attacks in order to deprive the Germans of sleep.⁶⁹ This tactic proved effective for the Red Army. The Germans were exhausted mentally and physically from the continued Russian harassment at night.

Extreme filth also reduced the *Landsers* to a more primitive existence. Unlike their Russian opponents, most of the German infantrymen were accustomed to urban, Western society. They were not used to rural settings—at least not rural in terms of the USSR. Much of the peasantry in Soviet Russia lived in rural places untouched by time. In his memoir, *Panzer Commander*, Colonel Hans von Luck described one such encounter with the local population of a small village. A woman came and asked, "Is it war? What's

⁶⁷ Ibid., 150.

⁶⁸ Fritz, 105.

⁶⁹ Beevor, 150.

our little father doing, the tsar?"⁷⁰ After more than twenty years of Soviet rule, members of this village just learned of the Bolshevik Revolution. Germans traveled on paved roads, shopped at stores, and dined at restaurants. Russia's primitive nature took its toll on the German soldiers. One corps commander wrote, "The men have been lying for weeks in the rain and standing in knee-deep mud. It is impossible to change the wet clothing."⁷¹ Sajer also reflected upon the dirty existence: "I would gladly have exchanged ten years of my life for a chance to clean off and fall asleep in a warm bed."⁷² These were the types of details missing from the accounts that the officers wrote concerning the Eastern Front. Life for the enlisted men had few comforts.

With the filthy conditions came sickness and lice infestation. Sajer chronicled a time when he had dysentery and could not stop releasing his bowels while standing in a transport vehicle.⁷³ By no means would the over-crowded truck stop for every man who had to relieve himself. After all, the troops were direly needed at the front. Minor comforts, such as cleanliness, were no longer a consideration. *Landsers* learned to live with lice. Sajer explained that some even organized lice races to pass time.⁷⁴ Many could not stand the constant itching created by the hungry pests. Lice infested most Russian homes, so when German troops were sanitized, it was not long before a new batch of lice feasted on German flesh. "The divisional doctor of the 12 I. D. reported that as the troops could not wash or change their clothes they were infested with lice and suffered from frequent skin infections."⁷⁵ Most preferred to catch lice while in a warm home during the

⁷⁰ Luck, 75.

⁷¹ Bartov, *Eastern*, 23.

⁷² Sajer, 281.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 314.

⁷⁵ Bartov, *Eastern*, 25.

cold nights to sleeping in the outdoors and risk freezing to death. A lieutenant in the 29th Motorized Infantry Division noted, “Top of the list is the fact that every day we become more infested with lice. Lice are like Russians. You kill one, ten new ones appear in its place.”⁷⁶ Despite the filth, the fatigue, and the harsh weather patterns, most Germans chose to live this way instead of facing death; yet death was always right around the corner.

Almost any soldier remembered his first encounter with death during battle. Many veterans described the most delicate details such as facial expressions, the surroundings, and the wounds inflicted upon the fallen. Some suffered from guilt because of the age of the victim, or thoughts of the soldier’s family, or the “it should have been me” syndrome. Unfortunately, as their experiences with death increased, their recollections of, and sympathies toward the deceased decreased. After just four months of fighting, German casualties in the East amounted to 686,000 men.⁷⁷ During the entire Western campaign, the Germans reported only 156,000 casualties.⁷⁸ Death became an expected part of the day. By September 1942, General Walter Model, Commander of the Ninth Army (Army Group Centre), reported that he was losing 2,000 men per day.⁷⁹ For both sides on the Eastern Front, death was an everyday affair.⁸⁰ It was so common that German troops became calloused toward the dead and at times joked about the manners in which some passed. This was acceptable to the front soldiers since all of them felt that sooner or later,

⁷⁶ Beevor, 306.

⁷⁷ CMH 30-12, 45.

⁷⁸ John Barber and Mark Harrison, *The Soviet Home Front 1941-1945: A Social and Economic History of the USSR in World War II* (New York: Longman Inc., 1991), 28.

⁷⁹ CMH 30-12, 407.

⁸⁰ Sajer, 237.

they would join their fallen comrades—certainly a change in attitude from the western campaign.

Germany suffered food shortages throughout the war. Omer Bartov explained that four months into the invasion:

[T]he rations of the 12 I. D. were cut by a third, the main meal of the day consisting of 36 grams of dried vegetables and 60 grams of horse-meat with bones. A German soldier captured by the Russians reported that some men had been tried for eating the oats supplied to the horses.⁸¹

Starvation plagued many German soldiers, especially during the final stages of the Stalingrad disaster. Hitler had not counted on the Red Army's "scorched earth" policy. The actions of the Red Army left the Germans and Soviet civilians with virtually no food to eat. Rations for soldiers were cut... then cut some more... and later, cut yet again. Guy Sajer described how lack of food transformed the German soldiers' minds:

Food was our most difficult problem. For a long time now, we had received no supplies... We became hunters and trappers and nest robbers, and experimented with wild plants whose leaves looked like salad greens. After a long chase, we were sometimes able to catch an abandoned horse... There were also many suicides. I remember two villages stripped of every scrap of food, and more than one massacre. Men were ready to commit murder for a quart of goat's milk, a few potatoes, a pound of millet. Starving wolves on the run don't have time to stop and talk.⁸²

Lack of food reduced the Germans to committing criminal acts just to stay alive. This type of lifestyle continued to display the horrendous nature of warfare on the Eastern Front. Barbarism reached its height during the encirclement at the ill-fated city of Stalingrad.

During the Stalingrad disaster, many Germans began to die for no apparent reason. By the end of December 1942, German doctors discovered that starvation was the

⁸¹ Bartov, *Eastern*, 25.

⁸² Sajer, 376, 385.

reason for these deaths. After completing fifty autopsies, one doctor “found clear signs of death by starvation: atrophy of the heart and liver, a complete absence of fatty tissue, a severe shrinkage of muscle.”⁸³ Thousands of Germans literally starved to death at the front. Despite the fact that soldiers were slowly dying from lack of food, one German doctor observed an officer, “[feeding] his dog with thickly buttered bread when there was not a single gram available to the men in his dressing station.”⁸⁴ *Reichsmarshal Hermann Goering* convinced Hitler that his *Luftwaffe* could supply the surrounded Sixth Army with food and munitions. Field Marshal Friedrich von Paulus, commander of the surrounded German Sixth Army at Stalingrad, informed OKW that his army required 750 tons of supplies per day.⁸⁵ The *Luftwaffe* never came close to meeting this requirement. In *Red Phoenix*, Von Hardesty summarized the situation: “By December 17 the airlift had achieved an average level of 84.4 tons per day; the best day was when 289 tons were moved into the pocket with 154 transports.”⁸⁶ The limited number of supplies was not enough, and the Germans within the *Kessel* (pocket) slowly starved.

The Stalingrad disaster devastated Germany. It was the first time that an entire army of the *Wehrmacht* was totally destroyed by the enemy; however, the experience of the *Wehrmacht* during the previous winter marked a transformation in the mind of the German soldier. Although Stalingrad had not yet occurred, the possibility that some such disaster could now occur entered the Germans’ minds; whereas, just a few months prior to December 1941, the world believed that the *Wehrmacht* would soon crush the Soviet

⁸³ Beevor, 305.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 365.

⁸⁵ Von Hardesty, *Red Phoenix: The Rise of Soviet Air Power, 1941-1945* (Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), 107.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

Union. The winter of 1941-2 proved to be the starting point of a doubt that would linger in the thoughts of the soldiers for the duration of the war; therefore, the first winter was the first true turning point of the war. Stalingrad just made the doubt a reality.

Just as the winter of 1941-2 showed the world that the *Wehrmacht* could be beaten, Stalingrad displayed to the world that Germany was beaten. At no point did the Germans threaten to come near the Russian capital again. Aside from the disastrous Kursk Offensive (Operation Citadel) during the summer of 1943, Germany's engagements in the East became almost entirely defensive. It was no longer a question of if the Germans would lose, but when. In terms of numbers, the Germans lost the entire Sixth Army at Stalingrad—300,000 men strong. Of that number, only 90,000 were left by the time Field Marshal von Paulus surrendered and only 5,000 of those made it back to their fractured homeland after the war.⁸⁷ While watching the thousands of German prisoners at Stalingrad march to their new homes in Soviet prison camps, Red Army Marshal Vasili Chuikov noticed:

All the soldiers and NCOs were on their last legs, their clothes crawling with vermin. Some of them were barefoot, though the temperature had dropped below -30°C. The German officers, however, were a different picture, their pockets bulging with sausages and other food.⁸⁸

The moral loss was even more devastating. Germany never recovered. The *Führer's* orders became more desperate and made less sense after this defeat. His resentment toward the generals made operations even more difficult. Stalingrad became legendary

⁸⁷ Beevor, 408.

⁸⁸ John Erickson, ed., *Main Front: Soviet Leaders Look Back on World War II*, with a foreword by Marshal of the Soviet Union S. Sokolov, Minister of Defense, USSR and a commentary by John Erickson (London: Brassey's Defense Publishers, 1987), 87.

for the Soviets; it was a nightmare for the Germans—a nightmare from which there was no comfort after awakening.

The brutal conditions endured by the *Wehrmacht* on the Eastern Front from June 22, 1941 to February 3, 1943 went far in deciding the war in Europe. The culmination of torrid weather patterns, vast distances, extreme filth, and brutal losses caused even the most indoctrinated soldier to lose faith in victory for the Reich. As demoralizing as life at the front was for the *Landser*, this was only part of the reason for the German defeat. The Germans could have overcome the forces of nature. Ultimate defeat came from another source—the people of the Soviet Union.

4

A New Enemy

The Russian people exemplified a remarkable resolve, driven by deep-seated patriotism that demoralized the Germans. Horrible weather conditions could be overcome. Reckless tactics could be corrected. These only weakened the German military force. It took the action of the Russian people to achieve victory. The Eastern Front of the Second World War was the largest and most intense confrontation in the history of humankind. Of the 1,426 days of hostilities between Nazi Germany and the USSR, only 146 days were “relatively quiet.”¹ Despite facing the largest invading force in human history, the Soviet Armed Forces proved up to the challenge. According to David Glantz:

By June 1941, according to every measurement, the Red Army was the largest and most complex fighting force in the world. Over 5 million men were under arms and more were mobilizing, it had more armies, corps, and divisions than all of its prospective opponents combined, its aircraft, tank, and artillery park was immense, it had the world’s largest mechanized, cavalry, and airborne force, and although underestimated abroad, its mobilization potential was equally impressive. Moreover, ostensibly this entire force was undergoing thorough reform to improve its combat effectiveness.²

Despite the impressive buildup of Soviet forces, Hitler’s army achieved tactical surprise and nearly obliterated the Red Army in the early stages of the war. By the end of 1941,

¹ Erickson, *Main*, 318.

² David M. Glantz, *Stumbling Colossus: The Red Army on the Eve of World War* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 259.

the Red Army lost 4.5 million men, or ninety percent of its prewar strength.³ After the first week of the war, the Red Air Force lost 4,017 aircraft to the Germans' 150.⁴ With the massive numbers and little regard for human life by the leaders of both countries, the Germans and Soviets suffered extremely high casualties. The *Wehrmacht* looked to have the edge early in the campaign, but German troops began to recognize that the Russian soldier would not go down without a fight.

“You win with people.” This famous coaching cliché applied to the Soviet Union’s victory over Nazi Germany during the Second World War. Millions of Soviet citizens volunteered for the war and drove the Germans from their country, but the cost was high. The Soviet Union lost between 27 million and 28 million souls in their struggle with Nazi Germany.⁵ In his study, Albert Axell further explained the price of victory for the USSR:

When victory came...the toll had been high: one life every five seconds of the war, 13 lives every minute, 791 lives every hour, 19,000 daily... There was a realistic maxim about Russian longevity on the Eastern Front. It said that a lieutenant and a platoon leader survived, on average, one attack and a half; a tankman one battle and a half; a pilot one and a half combat missions.⁶

The unbelievable losses that the Soviet Union endured on the Eastern Front displayed the brutality and hatred between the Russians and the Germans as well as Stalin’s incompetence.

³ Ibid., 260.

⁴ Hardesty, 15.

⁵ Barber and Harrison, 40.

⁶ Axell, 245.

Hitler appreciated the ruthless dictatorship of Joseph Stalin. Although Hitler despised the Slavic races of the East and their communist government, Stalin was one of the few world leaders during World War II that Hitler respected. He stated:

Stalin must command our unconditional respect. In his own way he is a hell of a fellow! He knows his models, Genghiz Khan and the others, very well, and the scope of his industrial planning is exceeded only by our own Four Year Plan.⁷

Joseph Stalin certainly lived up to his ruthless reputation. On July 16, 1941 the Germans captured a young Red Army lieutenant named Yakov Djugashvili. The Germans soon discovered the significance of this man's capture; he was Stalin's son. After the battle for Stalingrad ended, the Germans tried to arrange for an exchange—Field Marshal von Paulus for Djugashvili. Stalin, upon hearing this request, coldly remarked, "A marshal would not be exchanged for a lieutenant."⁸ Djugashvili died on April 14, 1943 in Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Hitler admired this type of heartless determination.

Despite his admiration for Stalin, the *Führer* had a mission. The German-Soviet war was to be a turning point in history. It was to be a total war—Germans versus Slavs; National Socialists versus Communists; Hitler versus Stalin. Only one side would remain... the other, crushed. This was exactly what Hitler envisioned. As Goebbels stated in his memoirs, "Bolshevism will be a thing of the past. Thus we shall have fulfilled our one great duty to History."⁹ The war with the Soviet Union was to be a war like no other.

The orders given by Hitler and Stalin proved that this war would change the course of history. Field Marshal Erich von Manstein complained that Hitler's Barbarossa Directive contained no specific operational objectives that were necessary to carry out a

⁷ Hitler, *Table*, 587.

⁸ Erickson and Erickson, 46.

⁹ Goebbels, *1939*, 380.

campaign of this magnitude.¹⁰ Manstein quoted a section of the Directive in his memoir,

Lost Victories:

[D]estruction of the bulk of the Russian Army located in western Russia by bold operations involving deep penetration by armoured spearheads; prevention of the withdrawal of battleworthy elements into the Russian interior.¹¹

This formula contained no specific cities or strategic points to be taken by the *Wehrmacht*. This, coupled with the notorious “Commissar Order”¹² ensured only one thing—death—death to as many Russians as possible. Concerning this order, Field Marshal von Bock noted in his diary on June 4, 1941:

It is so worded that it virtuously gives every soldier the right to shoot at from in front or behind any Russian he takes to be—or claims that he takes to be—a guerrilla. The order rules out any constraint towards punishment of any offenses in this regard, even “if a military crime or offense is involved.”¹³

Although some generals, such as von Bock and Guderian, refused to issue this latter order to their subordinates, others willingly carried out this directive; however, just as this was a new war for Germany, the *Wehrmacht* faced a new enemy—an enemy that ruthlessly matched the brutal orders of the Nazis. Two commands in particular demonstrated Stalin’s willingness to do everything within his power to demand unconditional obedience from the Soviet people. The first, the “Not one step back” order commanded troops to hold their ground no matter how overwhelming the odds were. This order resulted in a calamitous number of Russian casualties. Barber and Harrison outlined the second, Stalin’s Order No 270: “Soviet deserters’ families were liable to arrest; it also

¹⁰ Manstein, 177-8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹² The “Commissar Order” stated that any commissar caught by the Germans was to be “liquidated.”

¹³ Bock, 217.

declared that soldiers falling alive into German captivity had betrayed the motherland, and deprived their families of soldiers' pensions."¹⁴ Thus, Red Army soldiers had two options—fight or die. Just like the *Führer* directives, Stalin's orders guaranteed massive casualties. As a result of these inhumane commands, the Nazi-Soviet war became a war of attrition. This favored the USSR.

In 1925 Hitler stressed the need for a war with Russia in *Mein Kampf*; his attitude was similarly stoic during the Battle of Berlin twenty years later.¹⁵ Germany must destroy the USSR or be destroyed by her. Once Hitler realized that his beloved Germany failed to achieve victory in the East, he ordered all German industry to be demolished; thus he stood true to his convictions of total victory or total defeat. He would have it no other way. The dictators set the stage for the brutality of the war, yet on the Russian side, Stalin's purges created an early disadvantage for the Red Army. This disadvantage was overcome by the iron will of the Soviet people and by their uncompromising tactics.

Red Army innovation suffered greatly under the Stalin regime, yet unlike many of the other European nations, the Soviets learned from American armor tactics. This led the USSR to buy American Christie-suspension tanks, which influenced the design for the legendary T34.¹⁶ The T34 Soviet medium tank was the most celebrated tank of World War II. Guderian called it, "the best tank in any army up to 1943."¹⁷ There were many reasons for this. First, its simple design was conducive to building mass quantities and changes could easily be made without hampering production figures.¹⁸ This was in stark

¹⁴ Barber and Harrison, 28.

¹⁵ Hitler, *Mein*,

¹⁶ Clark, 35.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Luck, 67.

contrast to German techniques. The Germans produced different armored vehicles to fulfill a variety of tasks. As a result, the Germans put out fewer tanks, and modifications to these tanks translated into lost production. As the war continued, spare parts for German tanks were in extremely short supply; therefore, many tanks were abandoned at crucial times when a simple repair job could have made the tank operational. The High Command's failure to recognize the need for spare parts caused irreparable damage to the Germans in the East.¹⁹ In short, the Soviets could easily adapt their tanks to meet the needs of the front; the Germans could not—at least not without major complications.

Another advantage of the Soviet T34 was its design. During autumn and winter 1941, mud and snow immobilized the German tanks. Although autumn proved difficult for Soviet movement as well, the wide-tracked Soviet T34s plowed through the snowdrifts during winter. The following year German crews fitted their tanks with wider tracks to accommodate the situation. To their distress, these wide-tracked tanks could neither fit on German railcars nor German-made bridges. As a result, the attempt to break through the Soviet encirclement of General Paulus' Sixth Army was delayed for twelve hours.²⁰ The shape of the T34 also proved advantageous to the Soviets. During the First World War, tanks were built like naval vessels and were box-shaped vehicles.²¹ The Russian (and also French, American, and some British) armies adopted angular designs that reduced the effectiveness of enemy shells. When the slope of the armor reached at least sixty degrees, enemy rounds were up to two-thirds less effective.²² The Germans did

¹⁹ Center of Military History, *German Tank Maintenance in World War II* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1988), public document 104-7, 4.

²⁰ Tsouras, 179.

²¹ Mosier, 49.

²² *Ibid.*

not adjust their designs until the Panther tank was introduced in 1943; even the early models of the German Tiger tank maintained the box-shaped status quo.²³ The German failure to equip their armored vehicles properly slowed the *Wehrmacht's* offensive capabilities considerably, which caused them to lose momentum.

Soviet tanks also possessed superior armor. General Guderian recalled a specific time before the war that gave him a sense of unease. During the spring of 1941 a Russian commission visited German tank factories and refused to believe that the Panzer IV was their heaviest tank. Guderian and other German officials concluded, "The Russians must already possess better and heavier tanks than we do."²⁴ Guderian's statement proved true during the first week of Barbarossa. The sight of their tank rounds bouncing off Soviet T34s dismayed the Germans. Field Marshal Ewald von Kleist, Commander of the 1st Panzer Army, realized that his tank commanders had to put themselves in dubious positions by engaging the T34's at close range because their "shells bounced off like fireworks."²⁵ Guderian further detailed the difficulty of fighting the T34's when he noted, "The short-barrelled 75 mm. gun of the Panzer IV was only effective if the T34 were attacked from the rear; even then a hit had to be scored on the grating above the engine to knock it out."²⁶ One panzer commander detailed a haunting occasion:

We could not attack them across the open. So I pulled my tanks right back out of sight, made a wide detour, and attacked them from behind. We lined up behind him, and started to shoot. We counted our hits on this tank, but none of them penetrated the armour. Then, I saw the hatch of the tank move. I guessed that they wanted to surrender, so over the radio I told my company to cease-fire. The Russians then opened the hatch completely

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Guderian, *Leader*, 143.

²⁵ Beevor, 66.

²⁶ Guderian, *Leader*, 234-5.

and climbed out. It was depressing to realize how inferior our tank guns were.²⁷

The Germans always seemed to be one step behind their opponents regarding quality tanks. During the early stages of the war, the *Wehrmacht* overcame the problem of tank inferiority with superior armor tactics. As the *Wehrmacht* blitzed through the Russians in the summer and autumn of 1941, another inferiority regarding tanks became chillingly apparent—inferiority in numbers.

Not only did the Russians possess a better quality tank than the Germans, but they also possessed more and produced them at a much faster rate. On June 22, 1941 the Germans attacked the Soviet Union with over 3,000 tanks, but “many of those were the small undergunned Pz Is [Panzer Is], Pz IIs and Pz 38(t)s. Only the 1,404 Panzer IIIs and IVs, in fact, were battle tanks in any real sense of the word.”²⁸ The Soviets were in a similar situation. John Ellis noted, “only 27 per cent [of Soviet tanks] were in any sort of running order... only 1,475 of the available Russian tanks at the front (967 T-34s and 508 KV-Is) could be deemed truly battleworthy.”²⁹ Fortunately for the Red Army, their tank strength exceeded the Germans’ by far. As Guderian noted in *Achtung-Panzer!*, which was published before the war in 1937, Soviet tank strength was at 10,000 machines and 1,200 armored reconnaissance vehicles.³⁰ Guderian explained the difficulty he had in allowing that number to be published since his superiors believed this number was almost impossible. Guderian later explained in his memoir, *Panzer Leader*, that he actually believed Russian tank strength was 17,000 units and he underestimated so as to appease

²⁷ Beevor, 90-1.

²⁸ John Ellis, *Brute Force: Allied Strategy and Tactics in the Second World War* (New York: Viking, 1990), 43.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

³⁰ Guderian, *Achtung*, 153.

the censors. By the time Germany invaded the Soviet Union, the Soviets possessed 12,000 machines at the front and an equal number in the rear.³¹ Germany's situation was further complicated by the fact that as late as the summer of 1942, Germany only produced 500 tanks per month compared to the Russians' 2,200.³² Hitler refused to believe these figures. During the first months of the war, Hitler angrily told Guderian, "If I had known that the figures for Russian tank strength which you gave in your book were in fact true ones, I would not—I believe—ever have started this war."³³ Evidently, Hitler saturated his written and spoken material so much with false propaganda that he failed to believe accurate statistics given by his officers.

The simple advantages of tank armor and design could easily have been null and void had Hitler possessed better intelligence of his enemy (although he very well might have discarded this intelligence as he had with Guderian's assessment of Russian tank strength). These simple, yet valuable advantages of the T34 devastated the Germans' morale. *Landsers* were filled with fear at the mere sight of them. It was not until the introduction of the German Tiger tank, with its 88-millimeter turret-gun, in 1943 that the Germans had an answer to the T34; but by that time it was too late. The Soviet T34 proved superior in every way to the German tanks during the early part of the war. The nation that prided itself on its armored warfare learned a hard lesson and quickly realized that the advantage of mobility favored the Russians.

In 1935, Hitler began the rearmament of Germany. The amount of material produced by the Germans from 1935 to the beginning of the war in 1939 was remarkable.

³¹ Ellis, 42.

³² Beevor, 223.

³³ Guderian, *Leader*, 190.

During this short period, Hitler transformed the weak *Reichswehr* into a world-class *Wehrmacht*. Germany's lack of a powerful, modern military was no more, but once the war began, a new problem arose for the Reich: keeping up with the Allies.

With the realization that the war in the East would not end soon and the United States' entrance in the war during December 1941, war production became a critical component for Germany. Production was not a problem during the Western campaigns because of their short duration. The longest of the *Blitzkrieg* campaigns (France) lasted just six weeks. Now the Germans had to fight a long war with no end in sight. Hitler did not plan on this. As a result, the Reich now faced the bulk of the world's industry. By 1943 the Soviet Union annually produced 48,000 heavy artillery pieces and 24,000 tanks to the Germans' 27,000 and 17,000 respectively.³⁴ In addition to this, Germany had to compete with Great Britain's 36,720 tanks produced from 1941-43 and the United States' 88,410 tanks. The U.S. also contributed over four million armored, combat, and supply vehicles, almost 100,000 fighter planes, and over 90,000 bombers to the war in Europe. From 1939 to 1945 the Allies produced a surplus of 156,000 tanks, 644,000 artillery pieces, 2,457,000 trucks and lorries, and 400,428 aircraft over the Germans.³⁵ Bartov concluded, "The Third Reich was capable of winning a European Blitzkrieg; it could not win a total world war."³⁶ Ultimately, the Lend-Lease Act of 1941 helped the Soviets defeat Germany.

The Soviet Union alone out produced the German Reich; Lend-Lease made the gap even larger. During the first bleak months of the war when German victory was

³⁴ Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), 182.

³⁵ Ellis, 348.

³⁶ Bartov, *Army*, 16, 14.

within sight, the United States sent the Russians 128,038 tons of supplies, and after intense negotiations during summer 1941, the U.S. and Britain agreed to increase this amount to 1.5 millions tons of materials. This translated into 400 planes, 500 tanks, 152 antiaircraft guns, 5,000 jeeps, and 2,000 tons of aluminum per month for the nine months following September; however, during the first three months of the protocol, only about 55 percent of the promised aircraft (including only five of 300 bombers), four of fifty antiaircraft, and one-third of the promised tanks arrived in Russian ports.³⁷ This did not impress the Russians. It was not until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 that the United States stepped up its efforts and sent mass supplies to the Russians.

The Soviets succeeded in driving the Germans away from Moscow without the help of the United States. Secretary of State Sumner Welles cheapened the heroic deeds of the Red Army when he said, "it should never be forgotten that the arms and airplanes he [Stalin] received from the then limited resources of the United States helped greatly to make possible the victory at Moscow." Official U.S. historians, however, viewed it differently: "The impact of U.S. aid to the Soviet Union was as yet insignificant and played no role in the repulse of the German attack before Moscow."³⁸ The icy, wartime relationship between the USA and USSR already showed signs of Cold War politics.

The relationship between the West and the USSR was a marriage of convenience. Both sides wanted Nazi Germany defeated, yet neither side could trust the other. Stalin complained that many of the American tanks were of low quality and wanted more

³⁷ Leon Martel, *Lend-Lease, Loans, and the Coming of the Cold War: A Study of the Implementation of Foreign Policy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979), 30, 38.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

advanced aircraft, as opposed to the P-40s and Hurricanes they received.³⁹ With regard to tanks, Stalin's statements were justified—the T34s proved to be more effective against German tanks than anything the Allies provided for the Russians. Many Soviet tank crews complained about the thin armor of the American tanks and instead wanted to be in their own T34s; Allied aircraft, on the other hand, boosted the morale of Soviet pilots.⁴⁰ Although the Anglo-Americans kept the best quality aircraft for themselves, the fighters they sent to the USSR were of much higher quality than the Soviet I-15s or I-16s.⁴¹ American jeeps also proved very popular among both Soviets and Germans. Upon capturing a cache of new American jeeps just delivered to the Soviets, officers of the 16th Panzer Division commented that the American vehicles were superior to their own.⁴² American industry greatly aided the war effort in the East after 1941.

After the U.S. became a full participant in the war in December 1941, supplies streamed to the Soviets. From October 1941 to June 1942, the Soviets received 1.4 million tons of food and war materials.⁴³ The next phase increased the tonnage of supplies to over seven million from July 1, 1942 to June 30, 1943. With each year this amount increased.⁴⁴ The Soviet leadership allowed the USSR to achieve an abundance of war materials over their adversaries, yet it was Soviet citizens that made this abundance in material produce results.

It was not long before the Germans realized that this new enemy would not crumble as easily as those from their previous campaigns. Red Army tactics proved

³⁹ Axell, 53.

⁴⁰ Beevor, 124.

⁴¹ Hardesty, 17, 141.

⁴² Beevor, 110.

⁴³ Martel, 39.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 40, 46.

vastly different from those of the Western armies. One of the most disturbing tactics used by the Soviets was the *Taran*, or ramming technique. Axell cited an official Soviet Combat Directive that stated, “If machine-guns jam in the air, if cartridges are spent prematurely, if the enemy is out to destroy an important state object, go and destroy the enemy by ramming.”⁴⁵ To carry out such an order required devotion never seen by the Germans during their Western campaigns and brought with it a new terror. Hardesty explained the tactic this way:

Little chivalry animated the behavior of the Soviet pilots in ramming, at first glance inexplicable to most Westerners, there was a profound patriotism, the willingness to risk one’s life for the “Motherland.” Emblazoned on many Soviet planes was the motto *za Rodinu*—“For the Motherland.” The *taran* represented a higher calling for VVS [*Voyenno-vozdushnyye sily*—Soviet Air Force] pilots, a way of making a meaningful sacrifice for the nation.⁴⁶

As the *Luftwaffe* quickly massacred the Red Air Force during the opening days of battle, Soviet pilots with few or no aerial combat skills chose to ram enemy aircraft rather than fly away or land their planes when resistance proved futile. The idea of such an act terrified *Luftwaffe* pilots much as the Japanese *Kamikaze* planes terrified American naval personnel in the Pacific Theater of Operations (PTO).

The Red Air Force considered ramming an official tactic, yet most who engaged in this unorthodox method of fighting did so of their own accord. The first case of ramming during the Second World War occurred within the first hour of hostilities. When Lieutenant I. I. Ivanov’s I-16 fighter plane ran out of ammunition, he rammed a German bomber.⁴⁷ (German bombers were the ideal targets of ram attacks.) He posthumously

⁴⁵ Axell, 122

⁴⁶ Hardesty, 30.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

received the Gold Star, Hero of the Soviet Union award. There were more than 200 cases of Soviets ramming *Luftwaffe* planes during the war.⁴⁸ Red Air Force pilots who executed this tactic displayed a deep patriotism that placed the needs of the Motherland above all else, including their own lives. This desperate maneuver haunted the Germans until the tide of the air war turned in favor of the Russians in 1943. Despite the relatively small number of reported cases of ramming during the entire war by Red Air Force pilots, it unnerved *Luftwaffe* pilots. No doubt each time a German pilot took flight, the horrifying thought of this barbaric tactic surely entered his mind. Aside from ramming, Soviet Air Defense Forces (PVO), particularly around Moscow, proved formidable. From November to December 1941, the Sixth Fighter Air Corps destroyed 250 *Luftwaffe* planes.⁴⁹ The Soviets' large number of anti-aircraft weapons and fighter planes kept the invaders from the capital.

The Soviet scorched earth policy was another brutal tactic that was subtler, yet far more deadly than ramming. Understanding Germany's lack of supplies and food, Stalin ordered the Red Army to destroy or remove anything useful to the *Wehrmacht*. The Red Army's decision to destroy the Zaporozhe Dam in August 1941 demonstrated the weight of this order. The dam was considered one of the engineering masterpieces of Socialist ingenuity.⁵⁰ Ilya Ehrenburg explained, "Stores of provisions and arms, fields, villages, are aflame. The Germans are moving through scorched earth."⁵¹ The Soviets also destroyed or packed up entire manufacturing facilities and transported them to the rear areas away from the onslaught and out of range of the *Luftwaffe* bombers. The Soviets destroyed "six

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 28, 27.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁵⁰ Clark, 316.

⁵¹ Ehrenburg, 6.

million houses, leaving twenty-five million homeless, slaughtering or carrying off seven million horses, seventeen million head of cattle, [and] twenty million pigs.”⁵² The scorched earth policy made life miserable for both the Germans and remaining Soviet civilians.

As the Germans pushed deeper into Russian territory, their supply lines became more critical to their survival. Problems with transportation as a result of weather, distance, and partisans reduced the effectiveness of the Germans’ ability to transport needed materials to the front. Had the Russians retreated and allowed the Germans to capture materials and industry intact, German dependence upon the supply lines would have been greatly reduced and offensive potential strengthened. General Erhard Rauss explained this peculiar defense of the Red Army and its effects:

Even if time was of the essence, the Russians succeeded in carrying off large numbers of cattle, as well as a substantial amount of equipment and supplies... In retreating they did not hesitate to burn to the ground the cities and towns of their own native land, if it seemed that any advantage was to be gained [by the Germans]. Thus, in the retreat of 1941, they almost completely destroyed the cities of Vitebsk, Smolensk, and many others, leaving nothing of value to fall into the hands of the Germans and delaying their advance. All that remained for the Germans were ashes and ruins.⁵³

This willingness to destroy their own lands rather than allow the Germans any type of advantage by surrendering them proved baffling to the soldiers of the Third Reich. The Germans began to realize how brutal the eastern campaign was. One question that perplexed the Germans was how the Russians kept supplying their troops after such

⁵² Alexander Werth, *Russia at War: 1941-1945* (E.P. Dutton, 1964; reprint, New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, Inc., 1984), 216.

⁵³ Tsouras, 104.

destruction of their manufacturing facilities. It was not long before they learned the answer to this question.

One of the greatest achievements during the entire Second World War was the Soviets' successful transfer of industry to the East. According to Alexander Werth:

[B]etween July and November 1941 no fewer than 1,523 industrial enterprises, including 1,360 large war plants had been moved to the east... The 'evacuation cargoes' amounted to a total of one and a half million railway wagon-loads.⁵⁴

Confused as to how the Soviets kept producing new weapons after deep penetrations by the *Wehrmacht*, Colonel Hans von Luck found the answer in interviews with Russian prisoners of war. One prisoner said, "in a lightning action, Stalin had evacuated the industrial concerns around Moscow and those further south on the Volga to the east as far as the Urals."⁵⁵ On August 7, 1941, the Zaporozhie steel mills at Dniepropetrovsk began packing their supplies to be relocated. Within two days, the first trains began leaving, and by Christmas Eve these plants were in production again.⁵⁶ This transfer was essential to Soviet war capability and proved to be one of the few true successes of Stalin's defensive actions.

The Red Army employed other tactics that proved unusual to the Germans and frustrated the *Wehrmacht's* attempts to achieve victory in the East. The steamroller tactic was one of the oldest traditions of the Russian armies. Since Russia always maintained a numerical superiority over its opponents, high casualty rates were not a serious concern for the Tsars and Russian military leaders. Despite its proletarian rhetoric, Stalin's regime proved no different in this respect. As the German spearheads drove into the USSR, wave

⁵⁴ Werth, 216.

⁵⁵ Luck, 76.

⁵⁶ Werth, 214-5.

after wave of Red Army troops met them at the front. Also, the Soviets used this method during their offensives with large-scale infantry assaults; however, advances in technology during the twentieth century rendered this tactic hopeless in terms of winning a war. Although not tactically effective, the steamroller achieved success in terms of depressing the Germans. Upon witnessing thousands of Russians being mowed down and thousands more willing to repeat the process over and over again, many Germans gave up hope of overcoming the endless supply of Russian personnel. The continual “Uraah!” screamed by the Russians as they attacked German fortifications echoed in the Germans’ ears and haunted their thoughts. How could a responsible officer order such an attack knowing that the outcome would be utter disaster? Even more disconcerting to the Germans were not the orders, but the willingness of the troops to obey. Militarily the steamroller tactic was a failure, but the method did achieve results in morale.

The partisan movement proved to be another extremely effective tactic of the Soviets. On July 3, 1941 Stalin addressed the Soviet people (for the first time since the invasion began) and gave detailed instructions for partisan units to wreak havoc behind enemy lines:

There must be diversionist groups for fighting enemy units, for spreading the partisan war everywhere, for blowing up and destroying roads and bridges and telephone and telegraph wires; for setting fires to forests, enemy stores and road convoys. In the occupied areas intolerable conditions must be created for the enemy and his accomplices, who must be persecuted and destroyed at every step.⁵⁷

Partisans attacked supply lines; they attacked the civil administration in the rear areas; they attacked the frontline troops from behind. Not only did Germans have to fear life at

⁵⁷ Joseph Stalin, “Stalin, Soviet Premier, Broadcast to the People of the Soviet Union,” July 3, 1941, <<http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1941/410703a.html>> (25 June 2004).

the front, but they had to fear life in the rear as well. This led to extreme orders by some *Wehrmacht* officers. One such order stated: "Prisoners behind the front-line... Shoot as a general principle! Every soldier shoots any Russian who is found behind the front-line and has not been taken prisoner in battle."⁵⁸ There was no safe place in Russia. The partisan movement was in large part the fault of the Germans themselves. The brutal manner in which the Nazis treated civilians in the rear areas caused many Russians to become partisans and make life for the Germans a living hell. Leonid Grenkevich stated:

The Nazi command attempted to eliminate the growing Soviet Partisan Movement by these and other harsh retaliatory measures against the indigenous population. However, in the long run, the results were clearly negative and the harshness self-defeating. The endangered population instead fled to join the partisans.⁵⁹

By treating the civilian population humanely during the eastern campaign, the Germans could have avoided many problems. Better treatment of the civilian population went against the entire reason for Hitler's invasion in the first place; therefore, this was not a route the *Führer* was willing to take. The *Wehrmacht* would have to find a way to win this war despite the problems in the rear.

Fake surrenders by the Russians also caught the *Wehrmacht* by surprise. Red Army troops often acted as if they were surrendering to the enemy, and once the Germans let their guard down, the Russians would commence shooting.⁶⁰ A variant of this tactic was when Russian soldiers pretended to be dead and allowed the *Landsers* to march by them. It was not long before German infantrymen realized fire was not only coming from the front, but from the rear as well. The Red Army soldiers arose and took aim at the

⁵⁸ Bartov, *Eastern*, 110.

⁵⁹ Leonid D. Grenkevich, *The Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941-1944: A Critical Historiographical Analysis*, edited and with a foreword by David M. Glantz (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1999), 117.

⁶⁰ Tsouras, 21-2.

German troops. Both of these tactics proved suicidal, yet many Russians, owing to their devout love of their homeland, willingly sacrificed themselves to purge Mother Russia of the fascist invaders. The Germans, used to the relatively chivalrous nature of fighting in the West, quickly realized that this enemy would not lie down. This war would require much blood to achieve victory.

The Soviet Union's best resource was its people. Field Marshal Ewald von Kleist remarked:

The men were first-rate fighters from the start, and we owed our success simply to superior training. They became first-rate soldiers with experience. They fought most toughly, had amazing endurance, and could carry on without most of the things other armies regarded as necessities. The Staff were quick to learn from their early defeats, and soon became highly efficient.⁶¹

At the time of the invasion, the Soviet population more than doubled Germany's.⁶² Both sides knew that the Soviets had the edge as far as manpower was concerned. Stalin banked on this. Alan Clark noted:

Before the purge the Red Army had been a vigorous and perceptive body, abundantly equipped and alert for new ideas. Now innovation slowed down to walking pace; technique disappeared, the 'Mass Army' reclaimed its position as the proletarian ideal—but the trained reflexes which can quicken a mass and make it formidable had been eliminated. Its training and indoctrination were primarily offensive.⁶³

Stalin saw no need to improve defensive tactics. His thought was that space and numbers alone would deter any nation from invading the USSR. Stalin gravely underestimated both Hitler's will and the *Wehrmacht's* mobility. Because of Stalin's inadequate planning, the Eastern Front became a bloodbath of epic proportions.

⁶¹ Hart, 220.

⁶² CMH 30-12, 15.

⁶³ Clark, 34.

As the *Wehrmacht* drove through the Red Army, the Germans felt uneasy because no matter how many Russians they killed, more kept arriving at the front. Deputy Commander in Chief of the Red Army Georgi Zhukov detailed the heroic efforts of Muscovites as the Germans pressed forward:

During October and November the working people of Moscow provided five divisions of volunteers to the front. Their total contribution from the start of the war had been seventeen divisions. In addition to these divisions of the people's militia, Muscovites formed and armed hundreds of fighting teams and tank-destroyer detachments... An additional 100,000 workers underwent military training in their spare time and then joined military units.⁶⁴

On November 10, 1941, as German troops dreamed of warm nights in the homes of Moscow, Ilya Ehrenburg wrote, "Moscow is right under their noses. But how terribly far Moscow is!"⁶⁵ Observing the reckless abandon that the Red Army employed continually raised the question of how much longer the Russians could fight. Entire battalions were thrown in front of the German onslaught only to be massacred. In many cases, these battalions were untrained. Between 3 and 5 September 1941, the Red Army sent replacements to the front just after they received their weapons and uniforms.⁶⁶ Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, Commander in Chief of Army Group Centre, wrote in his diary, "In some cases the Russians have thrown scarcely-trained industrial workers from Moscow into the fight," which led him to believe that, "we would surely meet the Russian strength and that a decision against what was probably his last forces."⁶⁷ Nothing could have been further from the truth.

⁶⁴ Georgi K. Zhukov, *Marshal Zhukov's Greatest Battles*, edited and with an introduction and explanatory comments by Harrison E. Salisbury and translated by Theodore Shabad (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 59.

⁶⁵ Ehrenburg, 84.

⁶⁶ Thurston and Bonwetsch, 240.

⁶⁷ Bock, 266, 272.

In July 1941, as the Germans threatened the first of the major cities of the Soviet Empire, Stalin ordered Kiev held at all costs. Marshal Semën Budenny, commander of the entire southwestern front, placed over 750,000 soldiers in the region to defend. By September 18, the Red Army in Kiev exhausted all their ammunition and was encircled by the Germans. After five days, the Soviets finally surrendered. The Germans captured over 600,000 troops.⁶⁸ By the end of September, Soviet losses were staggering: 2.5 million men, 22,000 guns, 18,000 tanks, and 14,000 aircraft.⁶⁹ It looked as if victory was imminent, but to the horror of the Germans, the Russians just kept coming.

The Soviet Union possessed a large cross-section of nationalities, age groups, and education levels. Within each of these groups, fierce devotion to the Russian Motherland abounded. One challenge for the *Wehrmacht* was to tap into the patriotism of the minorities and persuade them that the German Army was an army of liberation from communist yoke.⁷⁰ In some cases this worked. Up to one million Russians volunteered to help the *Wehrmacht* during the war, although many of these were minority groups or people taken from Finland, Romania, Poland, or the Baltic states from 1939-40.⁷¹ German atrocities toward civilians persuaded most Russians that life under Stalin's regime, as burdensome as that was, was preferable to life under the swastika.⁷² The failure of the Germans to keep the sympathies of the Russian minorities in their favor proved to be a devastating mistake. Hitler's desire for *Lebensraum* and the annihilation of the Slavs gave Stalin a powerful propaganda device that he exploited fully.

⁶⁸ Erickson, *Stalingrad*, 210.

⁶⁹ Clark, 142-3, 145.

⁷⁰ Beevor, 185.

⁷¹ Thurston and Bonwetsch, 235.

⁷² *Ibid.*

One of the most effective moves made by Joseph Stalin during the war was to appeal to the Russian sense of patriotism. On July 3, 1941 Stalin dubbed their situation “The Great Patriotic War.” Thus, he tapped into the Russian sense of devotion and reminded his people how Russia pushed Napoleon’s armies away in 1812 (The Patriotic War). The speech created a sense of urgency within the Soviet people for two reasons: First, this was the first time Stalin addressed the nation after hostilities began (almost two weeks); second, was the manner which Stalin opened his speech: “Comrades! Citizens! Brothers and Sisters! Men of our army and navy! I am addressing you, my friends!”⁷³ Werth explained that the informal tone of Stalin’s announcement to the Soviet people was unheard of prior to this.⁷⁴ Ilya Ehrenburg, a journalist for the *Red Star* noted, “Stalin’s speech moved us all. It was profoundly human. Each citizen felt that Stalin was addressing him personally, from the very first phrase.”⁷⁵ One German officer explained it this way: “It was not Nazi versus Communist. We Germans were the attackers destroying the Russian homeland; they were the defenders of ‘Mother Russia.’”⁷⁶ Stalin also informed the Soviet people of Hitler’s ideas for Jews and Slavs and of the appropriation of land for Germans in the East. His speech, combined with the terrible atrocities committed by the Nazi administrators and the *Wehrmacht* in the occupied zones, convinced millions of citizens to unite behind the Stalin’s repressive regime.

The Russians’ patriotism was unprecedented. From commissar to officer to foot soldier, countless acts of devotion to the Motherland occurred in the East. The Germans

⁷³ Joseph Stalin, “Stalin, Soviet Premier, Broadcast to the People of the Soviet Union,” July 3, 1941, <<http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1941/410703a.html>> (25 June 2004).

⁷⁴ Werth, 132.

⁷⁵ Ehrenburg, 4.

⁷⁶ Luck, 69.

received their first taste of Russian patriotism in July 1941 during the fighting at Brest-Litovsk. The Germans were surprised by the way that Soviets chose to die rather than surrender. They often found messages inscribed on the walls of the Brest fortress by Russian soldiers. One such note read:

We are three men from Moscow—Ivanov, Stepanchikov, and Shuntiaev. We are defending this church, and we have sworn not to surrender. July 1941... I am alone now. Stepanchikov and Shuntiaev have been killed. The Germans are inside the church. I have one hand-grenade left. They shall not get me alive.⁷⁷

A message from an anonymous soldier read, “I am dying but not giving up! Farewell, Motherland! 20 July 1941.”⁷⁸ Another remarkable example happened during spring 1942. Ten months after the Germans captured the fortress of Brest-Litovsk, defensive fire continued to come from one particular tunnel. When the Germans finally captured the Russian soldier, his feet were bleeding, swollen, and frostbitten. His clothes were in shreds, and he could not even stand. He died before medical help arrived. When the fortress was retaken in 1944, the Soviets celebrated the “last defender” of the Brest fortress.⁷⁹ His relentless defense of the fortress, despite its futility, provided another example of the Russian will to defend the Motherland. Acts like these horrified the Germans and caused them to view their Russian adversaries with a mixture of fear and respect.

Soviet soldiers often demonstrated a responsibility to die for Mother Russia. The suicidal bravery of the Russians attested to their feeling of deep obligation to defend

⁷⁷ Thurston and Bonwetsch, 238-9.

⁷⁸ Erickson and Erickson, 33.

⁷⁹ Axell, 40-2.

Russia from the fascists rather than belief in the proletarian ideals of communism.

Ehrenburg noted examples in his diary on July 19, 1941:

There was a brewery in Vitebsk. For twenty-four hours they filled bottles with inflammatory liquid. Volunteers crept up to the tanks. Nineteen tanks were destroyed. The Germans entered an empty, dead city. They did not enter at once; they were afraid, and waited two days. And for two days seven volunteers awaited them near the bridge. A detachment of the militia hid in the woods, east of Vitebsk. They kept in touch with the seven men to the last minute. The seven reported from time to time: "We are waiting." When the German tanks and artillery rolled on the bridge, an explosion was heard. Everything was hurtled into the air. The seven heroes perished.⁸⁰

These men were not Red Army soldiers, but regular citizens. Russian patriotism seemed much more fanatic to the Germans than that of the Western soldiers. The Germans noticed a stark contrast between the Russian and French soldiers they fought during their respective campaigns. Alan Clark explained:

Then [in France] a people sacrificed their country and institutions for their own personal safety. The pleasures of wine, adultery, and civilised conversation could, it seemed, be preserved simply by refusing to fight... But the Russians of 1941 knew these things only dimly... now in the German invader they had a focus for all their misery and resentment.⁸¹

Alexander Werth described how civilians did their part by working many hours under extreme conditions.

At the height of the Siberian winter, some people had to walk to work—sometimes three, four, six miles; and then work for twelve hours or more, and then walk back again, day after day, month after month.⁸²

These civilians received no glory or praise other than the fact of knowing they did their part for the front. The Russian sacrificed himself, not for the Bolshevik

⁸⁰ Ehrenburg, 6-7.

⁸¹ Clark, 161-2.

⁸² Werth, 218-9.

government or some other institution, but for Mother Russia. Self-sacrifice was common. In one case:

[A] platoon fought until only four were left alive and their ammunition ran out. A wounded man was sent back with the message: "Begin shelling our position. In front of us is a large group of fascists. Farewell comrades, we did not retreat."⁸³

Another amazing act of self-sacrifice occurred in November 1941 when a wounded Jewish man crawled up to a German tank with some hand grenades and blew it and himself up.⁸⁴ The selfless acts committed by Soviets differed greatly from what the Germans experienced during their western conflicts.

Hitler's brutal orders for the East resulted in the unification of the Soviet people to fight against the Germans. Within an hour of Foreign Minister Molotov's speech about the German invasion, an eighty-one-year-old Cossack set off to join the Red Army to fight the Fascist aggression.⁸⁵ One case that showed the endurance of the Russians occurred when a tank was disabled and its crew presumed dead.

No supplies reached us without first receiving, during their voyage, well-placed salvos of artillery. We would change the times of delivery, but this served to no purpose. Often our positions themselves were heavily pounded. In the depth of night patrols came through the forest to throw hand-grenades perfectly directed through our gun-slits. We asked ourselves how the devil this was possible. The mystery was only cleared up by chance... One day an army cook was in search of some equipment... [and he] saw two squatting skeletons... Can anyone imagine the guts of those two men, one of whom, a captain, had lost an eye... although they were wounded, [they sent] information to their troops by means of their wireless set.⁸⁶

⁸³ Beevor, 217.

⁸⁴ Ehrenburg, 85.

⁸⁵ Beevor, 10.

⁸⁶ Clark, 84.

Even commissars, communists put in charge of observing the actions of Red Army officers, displayed their devotion to Mother Russia. In September 1941, thirteen Russians shot German tank commanders at point blank range from a trench. Once the Germans realized from where the fire originated, their tanks unleashed their rounds on the Russians' position, killing them all. Rather than give up, these soldiers chose to sacrifice themselves in exchange for just three dead Germans. Twelve of the individuals were officers and the last was a commissar with his rifle "cocked and aimed."⁸⁷ Across the political, economic, and racial spectrum, the Soviet people were united against the German invaders.

Women displayed their patriotic duty for Mother Russia. Around 500,000 women fought the Germans during World War II in every branch of the military.⁸⁸ According to one German, "They were political fanatics, filled with hate for every opponent, cruel, and incorruptible. The women were enthusiastic Communists—and dangerous."⁸⁹ Red Army Colonel Aleksandr Utvenko recalled one particular incident after all food and ammunition was exhausted. When a Red Army soldier began walking toward the German lines to surrender, "Galya, a woman interpreter on our staff, shouted: 'Look at him! The snake is going to surrender!'", and she shot him with her pistol."⁹⁰ Women served in the Red Army unlike any other army during the war. According to one historian, Soviet women constituted 41 % of doctors, 100 % of nurses, and 30.5 % of the Moscow Air Defense (PVO), and fought in every other aspect of military service including service as pilots, tank crew, snipers, and infantry; furthermore, eighty-six women earned the Gold

⁸⁷ Tsouras, 32.

⁸⁸ Thurston and Bonwetsch, 212.

⁸⁹ Tsouras, 33.

⁹⁰ Beevor, 91.

Star, Hero of the Soviet Union award (equivalent to the Congressional Medal of Honor in the United States).⁹¹ Soviet women proved to be a mighty adversary to the German invaders.

The branch of service that Soviet women earned the most notoriety was in the Red Air Force. Nadezhda Popova, a veteran of the Red Air Force, complained, “At first no one in the armed services wanted to give women the freedom to die,” however, it was not long before the Kremlin granted this freedom.⁹² During the war, Soviet women accounted for over 24,000 sorties.⁹³ Most of these were in the PO-2, a wooden training plane with an open cockpit. This led to some unpleasant flights during the winter months when some women had to pry their bombs from the ice-covered wings with their bare hands.⁹⁴ Soviet women displayed their loyalty to Russia as members of the Red Air Force and earned the respect of their fascist enemy.

With the fierce patriotism of both Germans and Soviets, the War in the East was bound to be a war of brutality. Both sides believed in the justification of their causes—the Germans believed they were ridding Europe of the Bolshevist threat and protecting their homeland from a future Russian attack, and the Russians believed they were defending their homeland from the fascist invaders. For four years, neither side relented. Notorious orders such as Hitler’s “Commissar Order” and Stalin’s “Not one step back” policy only made the fighting more intense. Under such determined leadership, soldiers on both sides not only had to fear the enemy, but they also had to fear their own comrades. Thousands on both sides were executed by their own officers for acts of cowardice. Many chose not

⁹¹ Hardesty, 193.

⁹² Axell, 59.

⁹³ Hardesty, 193.

⁹⁴ Axell, 61-2.

to surrender because their own country's propaganda preached of a worse fate than death at the hands of the enemy. As a result of this mixture of patriotism, hate, and fear, the battle became personal for many in the East. It was a battle of attrition.

The iron will of the Soviet people ultimately spelled doom for the German *Wehrmacht*, yet the cost of this victory proved high. By 1943 the Germans had enough of the Russians and wanted the war to end while it was still far from the Reich's borders.⁹⁵ Unfortunately for the Germans, this did not occur. The *Wehrmacht's* amazing tendency to regroup and Hitler's insistence upon total victory allowed for more bloodshed in the East. The war continued for two more years, but the *Wehrmacht's* offensive capabilities were broken by the Soviets. Ilya Ehrenburg recorded this in his journal on July 28, 1942, just as the Stalingrad onslaught began:

August will be a grave month for all the Allies. We need only to remind them that one cannot win everything without losing something. In weighing and calculating everything, the English and the Americans must not overlook one quantity that may be difficult to define, but that is quite important for the outcome of the war—the Russian heart.⁹⁶

Six months later, at the conclusion of the Stalingrad assault, that quality displayed itself when the Red Army routed the German Sixth Army. The tide of the war shifted in favor of the Russians. The Soviet people proved to be too much for the *Wehrmacht* to overcome.

⁹⁵ Martin Kitchen, *Nazi Germany at War* (New York: Longman Publishing, 1995), 74.

⁹⁶ Ehrenburg, 356.

5

Realization of Defeat

From June 1941 to February 1943, the German military waged a tenacious war against the Soviet Union only to be stopped dead in its tracks. Hitler's indoctrination of Germany's masses allowed him free reign to continue the war until the *Wehrmacht* quit producing victories. Despite being pushed back a few times prior to Stalingrad, Germany never lost the initiative and took the fight to the Russians. After Stalingrad, the Germans' desire to continue evaporated. The hardships caused by the Russian climate and Soviet people culminated in the loss of the German Sixth Army in the southwestern part of the USSR. While the Germans advanced into Russia, they could endure the harsh realities of the war in the East; however, a loss of this magnitude proved to be too much for the German people to overcome. The fierce nature of the Eastern Front drained the morale of the German people and destroyed the myth that Hitler was Germany's savior. Now the roles had reversed and for the next two years, the Soviets dictated the course of the war.

By February 3, 1943 the Germans were mentally broken by the fierce nature of fighting with the USSR. On that date, the entire Sixth Army surrendered following Field Marshal Friedrich von Paulus' example from two days prior. The Germans lost over 300,000 soldiers and twenty-four generals during the six-month siege.¹ This was too

¹ Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East* (Washington, D. C.: Dorset Press, 1968), 79.

much for the *Wehrmacht* to overcome. Even more devastating was the loss of German morale. For the first time in three and a half years of war, the Germans lost an entire army in battle. Hitler's propaganda machine dropped the baton and allowed the Soviets to capture the initiative. The German troops trusted Hitler, and he let them down. Joachim Wieder, a survivor of Stalingrad, reflected upon the announcement in late November that they (Sixth Army) had been surrounded by the Russians:

I can still remember the exact wording. It started: "Sixth Army has been surrounded. This is not your fault. As always, you have fought bravely and tenaciously up to the moment the enemy had you by the neck..." Finally, mention was made of the relief operation to which Hitler had personally committed himself. Psychologically clever and calculating, the appeal ended with the encouraging words promising consolation and salvation: "Hold on! The Führer will get you out!"²

Two months later, while listening to *Reichsmarshall* Hermann Goering's address on the radio concerning the ten-year anniversary of the Third Reich and the heroism of the members of Sixth Army, Wieder recalled:

The glances, gestures and words all around unmistakably showed the rage that was growing in people's souls. Whoever might still have trusted in the promise of help from outside now had to recognise with growing horror that at home, where relatives still hoped for a reunion, the warriors of Stalingrad had been finally written off. We all felt that we had heard our funeral oration before its time... I felt instinctively that a crime was being dressed up with heroics and glossed over with national honor. Had any people, betrayed in their trust and loyalty, ever before had to suffer the discrepancy between bombastic mouthings and horrifying reality as terrible as we were suffering it now? In those days I had the burning wish that some day many survivors of the battle would reach home in order to give witness to the whole truth about Stalingrad and to oppose any uncalled-for soldierly or national legend-mongering.³

²Joachim Wieder and Heinrich Graf von Einsiedel, *Stalingrad: Memories and Reassessments*, translated by Helmut Bogler (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1995); originally published as *Stalingrad und die Verantwortung des Soldaten* (Munich: F A Herbig Verlagsbuchhandlung GmbH, 1993), 46.

³ *Ibid.*, 108-9.

Members of the Sixth Army saw right through the propaganda ranted by Hitler's second in command, but unfortunately for them, it was too late.

Just as the stall of the *Blitzkrieg* during the winter of 1941 showed the world that the Germans were not invincible, the loss at Stalingrad showed the world, and more importantly, the Germans themselves, that Germany was in fact beaten. Scores of victories and decades of Nazi propaganda built the Germans' egos so high that the fall caused from defeat was devastating. It was a blow from which the Germans never recovered. The loss of morale echoed throughout the Reich. From civilian to officer, the German people got from the loss at Stalingrad their first taste of how serious the situation in the East was. Hitler and his chief military officers already knew the gravity of the Eastern Front, yet until the Sixth Army surrendered, they remained hopeful that the *Wehrmacht* could produce a miracle in southwest Russia. Von Paulus' surrender dashed this hope.

In a move that was more propaganda than strategy, Adolf Hitler sent his Sixth Army toward the Caucasus to capture the city that bore Joseph Stalin's name. The symbolism of such a conquest proved too tempting for Hitler to resist. Hitler himself refrained from having his name ascribed to German cities during his rule for that very reason.⁴ His gamble failed. The man who lived and breathed propaganda during his entire political life gave Stalin, his archenemy, a propaganda treasure chest. The Russians exploited this fully. The impact of this tragedy was felt immediately and lasted for the remainder of the war. Martin Kitchen explained:

The German defeat at Stalingrad also resulted in a mounting criticism of Hitler. The invincible Führer had promised that Stalingrad would be captured and that the German army would never retreat from the Volga.

⁴ Hitler, *Table*, 556-7.

His words were now shown to be a hollow boast. Many soldiers were convinced that Hitler was directly responsible for the catastrophe and were sharply critical of his stubborn refusal to allow any withdrawals on the eastern front.⁵

Hitler himself sank into a deep depression. He isolated himself from his inner circle during meals, he became easily enraged at the slightest incident, and most telling, he virtually disappeared from the public's eyes and ears.⁶ From this point on Joseph Goebbels was the mouthpiece for the *Führer*.

Von Paulus' surrender enraged Hitler. On January 31, 1943 Hitler promoted von Paulus from Colonel General to Field Marshal. This was not a reward for his honorable service but an invitation to commit suicide. Upon hearing the news of the promotion, Paulus stated, "I have no intention of shooting myself for this Bohemian corporal."⁷ Until that day, no German field marshal ever surrendered to an enemy.⁸ This promotion assured Hitler that von Paulus and the Sixth Army would continue to resist the Red Army until the last bullet. Von Paulus and the rest of his men would then use the last bullets for themselves. Von Paulus proved Hitler's assumption wrong. The day after his promotion, the new field marshal emerged from his headquarters with his Soviet captors. Hitler's dismay with this action showed in his conversations with Colonel General Kurt Zeitzler, Chief of the General Staff, and with Colonel General Alfred Jodl, Chief of Staff of OKW, at the *Wolfsschanze* on February 3:

THE FÜHRER: Because otherwise, you gather yourselves together, build an all-round defense, and shoot yourself with the last cartridge. If you imagine that a woman, after being insulted a few times, has so much pride that she goes out, locks herself in, and shoots herself dead immediately—

⁵ Kitchen, 75.

⁶ Hugh Trevor-Roper, preface to *Hitler's Table Talk, 1941-1944: His Private Conversations*, by Adolf Hitler (New York: Enigma Books, 2000), xviii.

⁷ Beevor, 381.

⁸ Ziemke, *Berlin*, 79.

then I have no respect for a soldier who (shrinks back from it and prefers) going into captivity. There I can only say: (I can understand in a case) like General Giraud, where we come in, he gets out of the car, and is immediately captured. But [—]

ZEITZLER: I can't understand it either. I still think that (it may not) be true—that he may be seriously wounded.

THE FÜHRER: No, it is true... A person who doesn't have courage at such a moment to take the step that everyone has to take once, won't have the strength to resist. He'll develop a martyr complex. (With us) the intellect is cultivated too much and strength of character not enough...

ZEITZLER: There's no excuse. Then he has to shoot himself before, if the nerves threaten to fail.

THE FÜHRER: If the nerves fail, there is nothing (left but to say:) I couldn't take it any longer—and shoot oneself...

THE FÜHRER: I want to tell you something: I don't understand a man like (Paulus), who doesn't prefer death. The heroism of so many tens of thousands of men, officers and generals is wiped out (by a man like that,) who, when the moment comes, doesn't possess the character to do what a weak woman has done.

JODL: But I'm still not quite sure if that's right [—]

(THE FÜHRER:) ... The man and the woman were together there. Later the man died of his illness. Then I received a letter from that woman; she begged me to care for the children. ... Then she shot herself. The woman did that; she found the strength—and soldiers don't find the strength! You'll see; It won't take eight days before Seydlitz and Schmidt and also Paulus speak on the radio.

JODL: I'm firmly convinced of that.

THE FÜHRER: They're now taken into the Lubyanka, and there rats will eat them. How can somebody be (so cowardly)? I don't understand it.

JODL: I still have doubts.

THE FÜHRER: I don't, unfortunately.⁹

⁹ Helmut Heiber and David M Glantz, ed., *Hitler and His Generals: Military Conferences 1942-1945, The First Complete Stenographic Record of the Military Situation Conferences, from Stalingrad to Berlin*, translated by Roland Winter, Krista Smith, and Mary Beth Friedrich and with an introduction by Gerhard L. Weinberg (New York: Enigma Books, 2003); originally published as *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen: Die*

The *Führer* was frustrated. This frustration turned to despair, which turned to anger; anger toward the generals for their lack of will; anger toward the *Wehrmacht* for its failure to crush the Bolshevik hordes; and anger toward the German civilians for not doing enough for the front. Paulus' failure to comply with Hitler's indirect order gave the *Führer* another reason to distrust his generals. Because of this, Hitler stated, "During this war no one else will become a field marshal. That will all be done after the end of the war. One should not count ones chickens before they hatch."¹⁰ Once again the generals failed to display the National Socialist will to act; the rift between Hitler and his officers greatly increased. Further distrust came later that year when Marshal Badoglio led a *coup* against Mussolini in Italy.¹¹ Hitler feared the same fate would befall him. His instincts served him well.

Immediately following the disaster at Stalingrad, a group of officers, disillusioned by the *Führer's* apparent flaws as Supreme Commander, decided it was time to act. These officers understood the gravity of the situation and came to the conclusion that Hitler must die. Amongst the conspirators were: General Friedrich Olbricht, General Hans Oster, General Erwin Lahousen, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, Major-General Henning von Tresckow, and Major Fabian von Schlabrendorff. In his book, *20 July*, Constantine FitzGibbon detailed the failed attempt on the *Führer's* life.¹² This is a short paraphrase of FitzGibbon's findings: These men (and many others) devised a plan to assassinate Hitler

Protokollfragmente seiner militärischen Konferenzen 1942-1945 (Munich: Institut für Zeitgeschichte, 1962), 59, 60, 66.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹¹ Shirer, 998.

¹² Constantine FitzGibbon, *20 July*, Berkeley Medallion Edition (New York: Berkeley Publishing Corporation, 1968), 56-62.

when he visited Army Group Centre in March 1943. On March 13, as the *Führer* left the Army Group for Rastenburg, Tresckow asked Colonel Brandt, one of Hitler's staff officers, if he could take a case of brandy back to the headquarters for his friend, General Helmuth Stieff. The brandy was actually a bomb with a thirty-minute timer, so as to detonate midflight; however, the bomb failed to explode. After hearing the news that the *Führer's* plane safely landed at Rastenburg, Schlabrendorff hurriedly flew back to East Prussia to intercept the package. Once in his possession, he secretly examined the bomb and could not figure out why it had failed to detonate. The incident passed without notice.¹³ The *Führer* remained alive and in control of the Reich, but the failure at Stalingrad caused the seeds of dissension to grow.

Stalingrad proved to be an epic moment in the Second World War. After the tragedy, Hitler sunk into a deep depression and rarely addressed the public.¹⁴ The chasm between his generals and him widened to a point that neither party had an ounce of faith or trust in the other. Even Waffen-SS generals began to seek removal of the *Führer* from power.¹⁵ Heinz Höhne noted:

Even the strictest ideological vigilance, however, could not prevent the Germans from being confronted with the realities of the situation. Two sobering years of bloody war in Russia provided cruel proof of the falsity of the tale about "sub-humans."¹⁶

The soldiers themselves noticed that their actions became increasingly more defensive and the front slowly crept toward the Reich's border. German civilians began to grumble

¹³ John Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics 1918-1945*, Compass Books Edition (New York: The Viking Press, Inc., 1967), 562-4.

¹⁴ Marlis G. Steinert, *Hitler's War and the Germans: Public Mood and Attitude During the Second World War* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1977), 187.

¹⁵ Höhne, 510.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 503.

about the war and Hitler's leadership. Unlike the Germans, the Soviets beamed with confidence. One Red Army soldier noted, "After Stalingrad, not a single soldier had a single doubt about the outcome of the war."¹⁷ The Red Army generals also grew in confidence. They learned from the Germans' previous offensives during the past year and a half and adopted new tactics. The Russians, battered but not beaten, began using their infantry units more effectively instead of just relying on the old "steamroller" tactic.¹⁸ For almost two full years, the Germans pounded the Russians, yet the Bear would not die—now it was the Russians' turn to hit back.

Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin ruled their respective countries with absolute power, and both dictators involved themselves extensively in strategic decisions regarding the war; however, Stalin's willingness to allow his generals more freedom in military matters proved to be a key component to the Soviet victory. At the beginning of the war, Stalin handcuffed his generals. Despite knowledge of the Germans' buildup of military forces on the Soviet border and rumors of a German attack, he forbid Red Army troops to fire upon the *Wehrmacht* because Stalin believed Hitler was only trying to force more concessions from the USSR.¹⁹ Thousands of confused Red Army soldiers simply surrendered, and General Dmitri G. Pavlov, Commander of the Western Front, was executed because he followed these orders.²⁰ Because of his refusal to allow Marshal Timoshenko to pull back and escape a German encirclement, Stalin was directly responsible for the 665,000 troops taken prisoner by the German Army Group South at

¹⁷ Beevor, 404.

¹⁸ Glantz and House, 176.

¹⁹ Beevor, 4.

²⁰ Glantz and House, 52-3.

Kiev in September 1941.²¹ Finally, when the Germans arrived at the outskirts of Leningrad and Moscow in autumn 1941, Stalin gave his generals more freedom to plan. As a result, the Germans never entered Moscow nor Leningrad and the Soviets gave the *Wehrmacht* its first taste of defeat on December 5, 1941. Stalin still meddled in military affairs, but his respect for his generals grew, and by 1943, they set the strategies for ensuing offensives. As David Glantz put it:

Perhaps the principal cause of the reversal in the East was the revolution in Soviet command, staff, and operational and tactical techniques. By mid-1943, Stalin had come to trust his commanders and staff officers as professional leaders, and they had justified this trust by learning the painful lessons of mechanized warfare.²²

Marshal Vasili Chuikov, Commander of the Soviet 62nd Army at Stalingrad, reflected upon some new tactics used by the Red Army on the road to Berlin:

[O]ur troops successfully used new forms of doing battle, such as reconnaissance developing into attack, “special echelons” and “artillery raids” instead of long artillery preparation... they had a stunning effect on the enemy, being a complete surprise to him.²³

Stalin’s growing appreciation of his generals was in stark contrast to his counterpart in Germany, whose constant intervention in military affairs destroyed the General Staff’s trust and confidence in Hitler.

While Stalin’s generals enjoyed more and more control in military affairs as the war progressed, Hitler restricted his commanders with each successive German defeat. Goebbels noted in his diary on March 2, 1943 that, “our problem today is not the people

²¹ Erickson, *Stalingrad*, 208-10.

²² Glantz and House, 176.

²³ Vasili I. Chuikov, *The Battle for Stalingrad* (1963; reprint, with an introduction by Hanson W. Baldwin and translated by Harold Silver, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1964), 342.

but the [military] leadership.”²⁴ During the disastrous winter of 1941, the commanders of Army Groups Centre and South, Field Marshals Fedor von Bock and Gerd von Rundstedt respectively, were relieved of command along with the Commander in Chief of the German Armed Forces, Field Marshal Walter von Brauchitsch, and General Heinz Guderian, commander of the Sixth Panzer Army (Army Group Centre). Hitler assumed the title of Commander in Chief thereafter.²⁵ In September 1942, Hitler created the Defense Order, which took away “the independence of subordinate leaders in choosing the means to accomplish their assigned missions.”²⁶ This led to the dismissals of Field Marshal Wilhelm List, Commander of Army Group A (which Hitler again appointed himself to succeed a dismissed officer) and Colonel General Franz Halder, Chief of the General Staff (OKH). In an unprecedented admission, Hitler himself took full responsibility for the Stalingrad defeat so no major dismissals occurred.²⁷ This was precisely the time that some of the German officers made plans to assassinate Hitler. Thus, after the July 20, 1944 attempt on Hitler’s life, another round of dismissals occurred, most notably, General Guderian replacing Kurt Zeitzler as Chief of the General Staff (further effects of the July 20 plot will be discussed later).

In an intriguing reversal of personalities, the order-crazy Hitler caused great confusion with his dismissals during hostilities while the purge-happy Stalin kept a consistent team of military leaders throughout the war (some primary members of this team included: Marshals Georgi Zhukov, Alexander Vasilevsky, Vasili Chuikov, Kliment Voroshilov, Semën Timoshenko, Colonel General Ivan Konev, and Lieutenant General

²⁴ Goebbels, *Diaries*, 310.

²⁵ CMH 30-12, 83.

²⁶ Glantz and House, 153.

²⁷ Manstein, 365.

Konstantin Rokossovsky). Thus, although Stalin's purges during the 1930s devastated the Red Army and hampered operations during the early phases of the war, the new continuity of leadership allowed the Red Army to overcome early defeats and gain the initiative by 1943. Hitler's actions, on the other hand, increased dissension within the *Wehrmacht* and caused his officers to lose faith in the war effort.

Hitler and his officials knew the war was lost; still their propaganda became more urgent, violent, and desperate. Twelve days after the Sixth Army's surrender at Stalingrad, on February 15, 1943, Dr. Goebbels delivered his most famous speech to a carefully selected audience of Nazi enthusiasts at the Berlin *Sportpalast*. Entitled "Nation, Rise up, and Let the Storm Break Loose," this speech became better known as the "Total War Speech." Dr. Goebbels used the Stalingrad disaster to demonstrate how fearsome the Eastern Front was for German soldiers and that the lost battle was proof of the Soviet preparations to take over all of Europe, and ultimately, the world.²⁸ Goebbels urged every German citizen, male or female, young or old, rich or poor, to do their part for the front. "Total war is the demand of the hour."²⁹ It was up to the Reich and its allies to bring victory over the Bolshevik threat.

Violent themes were abundant in this and other speeches. The Nazis prepared the German people to conquer or be conquered. Goebbels stated in this speech that, "A merciless war is raging in the East. The Fuhrer was right when he said that in the end there will not be winners and losers, but the living and the dead."³⁰ If the German people could not stop the communist onslaught, they were not worthy of existing as a nation.

²⁸ Joseph Goebbels, "Nation, Rise Up, and Let the Storm Break Loose," February 18, 1943, <<http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/goeb36.htm>> (25 June 2004).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Heinrich Himmler, *Reichsführer SS*, was more direct to a group of SS group leaders at Posen (Poland) on October 4, 1943.

What happens to the Russians is a matter of utter indifference to me... Whether the other races live in comfort or perish of hunger interests me only in so far as we need them as slaves for our culture; apart from that it does not interest me. Whether or not 10,000 Russian women collapse from exhaustion while digging a tank ditch interests me only in so far as the tank ditch is completed for Germany... We had the moral right, we had the duty to our people, to destroy this people which wanted to destroy us.³¹

Though Reich propaganda possessed violent themes prior to the defeat at Stalingrad, it shifted from a tone of certain victory by a superior German race to desperate defense from an inferior, yet powerful foe. In a meeting with the heads of his Propaganda Ministry, Goebbels announced:

I myself want to see disappear from my mind and from the mind of the Ministry the idea that we cannot lose the war. Of course we can lose the war. The war can be lost by people who will not exert themselves; it will be won by those who try hardest.³²

The Nazi elite was at a point of crisis, and they knew it would take everything at their disposal to reverse the situation in the USSR.

The Nazis, desperate to retain their power at all costs, put everything on the line—including Germany itself. Goebbels' call for total war was a desperate maneuver to make every citizen, whether soldier or civilian, either a contributor to the German victory or a cause for the Reich's defeat. That way the Nazis could take credit for mobilizing the home front in the event of a miracle reversal of fortune or apply blame to the Reich's people for not possessing the National Socialist will to see the task through to the end. All forms of entertainment were cancelled; all restaurants were forced to conserve

³¹ Heinrich Himmler, "Himmler's Speech at Posen," October 4, 1943, <<http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/timeline/Poznan.htm>> (25 June 2004).

³² Zeman, 165.

portions; all luxury stores and salons were closed. “After the war we will happily go by the rule ‘Live and let live.’ But during a war, the slogan must be ‘Fight and let fight!’”³³ Goebbels concluded his famous speech with ten questions addressed to the crowd. Each question was meant to confirm the people’s support for the *Führer* and their willingness to do their parts for the war effort. He stressed the cross-section of individuals present at the *Sportpalast*—wounded veterans from the East, Party members, officers, factory workers, intellectuals, etc.—and designated these people as the voices of the entire German Reich. After the “representatives” resoundingly affirmed all ten questions, Goebbels concluded his speech. It was not long before Germany found out whether or not the *Wehrmacht* had the ability to gain the initiative once again. Goebbels appealed to the people’s defensive instincts, but the response was not what the Nazis hoped.

During the crisis at Stalingrad, the German population became disgruntled by the Nazi leadership. Many refused to believe the lies that Goebbels continued to preach.

Martin Kitchen explained:

Official propaganda could no longer be believed and thus the people relied increasingly on letters from the front, on reports from soldiers on leave, on rumours and on enemy broadcasts. Their credulity was further strained when they came into direct contact with Soviet prisoners and forced labourers whom they often found pleasant, intelligent, diligent and bearing no resemblance to the ‘subhumans’ of Nazi ideology.³⁴

During the first few weeks after the collapse of the Sixth Army, the SD (intelligence service) believed that the morale of the German people remained high, but this was not the case. Marlis Steinert wrote: “There were no signs of the ‘moral impetus’ which propaganda had sought to arouse; the sacrifice of Stalingrad had not fired the ‘heroic will

³³ Joseph Goebbels, “Nation, Rise Up, and Let the Storm Break Loose,” February 18, 1943, <<http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/goeb36.htm>> (25 June 2004).

³⁴ Kitchen, 50.

to victory' among Germans."³⁵ The chief reason for this was the Nazis' failure to convince the middle class that total mobilization of all Germans would occur. Kitchen explained, "it was clear that moves intended to bring about a concentration of economic power would benefit the few at the expense of the many."³⁶ Nazi propaganda began losing its grip upon the German minds, and the people became increasingly critical of the regime.

By 1943 the German population believed the war in the East was lost. Nazi propaganda deliberately misled the people and as a result, lost German trust.³⁷ German civilians began to take aim at the *Führer*. Comments arose that Hitler had promised too much when he stated that the Germans would never be thrown out of Stalingrad and his "greatness and infallibility suffered severely in the eyes of many Germans."³⁸ Many Nazi Party members even stopped wearing their badges and greeting people with the common, "Heil Hitler!"³⁹ After years of indoctrination, the German population finally began to wake up to the lies preached by Nazi leaders. On May 26, 1943 Melitta Wiedemann, the lead writer for the anti-Comintern journal *Die Aktion*, wrote a letter to Heinrich Himmler condemning the misleading *Untermensch* propaganda of the Third Reich:

The theory that the Eastern peoples and, above all, the Russians are sub-humans has been disproved in practice. They fight well. They sacrifice everything for their country. Their weapons are at least as good as ours... if we wish to have millions of men labouring for the Reich in the East and vast armies of Eastern forces at the front, it is absolutely essential that this sub-human theory disappear from our propaganda.⁴⁰

³⁵ Steinert, 198.

³⁶ Kitchen, 53.

³⁷ Ian Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth: Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 189.

³⁸ Steinert, 191, 195.

³⁹ Kitchen, 53.

⁴⁰ Höhne, 506-7.

Unfortunately, it was too late. As Ian Kershaw stated, “Psychologically as well as militarily, Stalingrad was a turning-point in the war.”⁴¹ The bitter fighting in the East destroyed the confident German mindset.

Soviet propaganda gained strength while Nazi propaganda weakened by 1943. Hitler isolated himself and had Goebbels read his speeches to the German people.⁴² Also, many churches began to criticize the Nazis for their treatment toward the Jews, citing that the Anglo-American bombing raids of German cities served as retribution for German atrocities.⁴³ As Hitler’s reputation began to erode, Stalin’s improved greatly. Reviled by his people during the 1930s and early 1940s, Stalin expertly won the favor of the Russian population as the war raged. His most endearing move came when he officially renewed ties with the Russian Orthodox Church. John Barber and Mark Harrison emphasized the importance of this move:

Stalin’s reception of its head, Metropolitan Sergei, in the Kremlin in September 1943 and his approval of the revival of the Synod marked official recognition of the Church’s importance as a symbol of continuity with Russian tradition, and of its substantial contribution to mobilising patriotic support for the war effort.⁴⁴

After this reception, the Soviet citizens placed more faith in their nation’s leadership.

Further unity occurred from Stalin’s dissolution of the Comintern (Communist International) and his reception of a pan-Slav congress in Moscow in May 1943.

Goebbels expressed his concern over this latter occurrence in his diary:

[T]he purpose of [the congress] was to win the Slavic peoples of the Balkans over to the Bolshevik cause. I won’t permit the propaganda

⁴¹ Kershaw, 192.

⁴² Steinert, 187.

⁴³ Kitchen, 235.

⁴⁴ Barber and Harrison, 70.

slogans of the Moscow Congress to be quoted; the less attention paid to them, the better it is for our cause.⁴⁵

By dissolving the Comintern, Stalin allayed some of the misgivings of his Western Allies.⁴⁶ This demonstrated (at least, outwardly) that the Allies posed a united front against Nazi Germany and relations between the East and West were cordial. The Soviets also employed captured German generals to urge the *Wehrmacht* to give up the fight—the most notorious of these being Field Marshal Friedrich von Paulus. Goebbels wrote with some concern about this on September 22, 1943:

[An] Association of German Officers has published an appeal against the Fuehrer containing much propaganda criticizing our politics and conduct of the war... it will not fail to have its effect upon public opinion. The real point to the appeal is to be found in the demand for a direct peace which these officers claim they want to prepare for the German people.⁴⁷

Hitler increasingly lost prestige within the Reich and induced the resentment of his Axis allies.

Any hope that a German victory in the East was within the capabilities of the *Wehrmacht* ended during July 1943 with the failed offensive at Kursk, codenamed Operation Citadel. Hitler debated the idea of launching the offensive during the spring, but after an impressive victory at Kharkov by Manstein's army group, Hitler decided to take the risk. He knew it was a huge gamble that could prove disastrous, but consistent with his character throughout his entire career, Hitler chose offense rather than defense. Once again there was conflict within the leadership concerning the need to attack. By this stage in the war, it was no longer Hitler versus the generals, but Hitler versus the generals and the generals versus each other. Zeitzler, Keitel, and Field Marshal Guenther von

⁴⁵ Goebbels, *Diaries*, 426.

⁴⁶ Werth, 671.

⁴⁷ Goebbels, *Diaries*, 526.

Kluge, Commander in Chief of Army Group Centre after von Bock's dismissal, supported the operation.⁴⁸ Field Marshal Erich von Manstein said it was too late.⁴⁹ He believed if the operation began sooner, its chances of success would have been much greater; Albert Speer, Minister of Armaments, Colonel General Heinz Guderian (whom Hitler reinstated to active service as Inspector General of Armored Troops) and Field Marshal Walther Model, Commander of Army Group Ukraine-North, flatly rejected it.⁵⁰ The generals' disagreements with each other enhanced Hitler's belief that his self-appointment as Supreme Commander in December 1941 was justified. After tossing the idea around, Hitler decided to launch Citadel in early July. This went against even Hitler's better judgment, but he felt that this operation would once and for all decide the eastern campaign. Besides, Hitler was desperate for a huge victory after Stalingrad. Hitler's desperation showed in his conversation with Guderian.

GUDERIAN: How many people do you think even know where Kursk is? It's a matter of profound indifference to the world whether we hold Kursk or not. I repeat my question: Why do we want to attack in the East at all this year?

HITLER: You're quite right. Whenever I think of this attack my stomach turns over.⁵¹

Even Hitler's faith in victory was all but gone.

One of the main reasons Hitler chose to enact Operation Citadel was that he, along with Zeitzler, believed that the new German Tiger tanks would give the advantage in terms of armor superiority to the *Wehrmacht*. Indeed, most Germans who observed the Tiger expressed comfort in its superiority over the Soviet tanks regarding firepower and

⁴⁸ Guderian, *Leader*, 306-7.

⁴⁹ Manstein, 447.

⁵⁰ Ziemke, *Berlin*, 129.

⁵¹ Guderian, *Leader*, 309.

maneuverability. Will Fey, a panzer commander of the elite Waffen-SS, wrote, “We were proud of this Panzer... For us, from the first day on, it was more than just a weapon.”⁵²

Tank commander Otto Carius, a veteran of the Volkhov Front (Leningrad region) stated:

[I]ts robustness could fill us with enthusiasm. It really drove just like a car. With two fingers, we could literally shift 700 horsepower, steer 60 tons, drive 45 kilometers an hour on roads, and trek 20 kilometers an hour cross-country... We were completely satisfied with our “Tigers” and our infantry no less so.⁵³

One infantryman concurred: “The presence of the Tigers reassured everyone. They were like steel fortresses, and no Russian tank could equal them.”⁵⁴ Unfortunately, Hitler made a fatal error concerning his new prize weapon. Carius wrote that the Tigers were not supposed to enter battle until July 22, 1943; however, in his haste to gain victory in the north while losing Stalingrad in the south, Hitler employed a few Tigers in the Leningrad region.⁵⁵ Carius explained that the Tiger contained a demolition charge so if it had to be abandoned, the tank crew could destroy the tank before it fell into enemy hands.⁵⁶

On one occasion, the Soviets captured one of these sixty-ton machines virtually undamaged. Red Army Marshal Kirill Meretskov explained:

I ordered the trophy to be taken to our test range where specialists studied its armour and ascertained its most vulnerable spots. Our factories designed and manufactured very powerful shells and self-propelled gun mounts with a 152-mm gun. And when the Germans launched massive tank attacks on the Kursk Salient in the summer of 1943 we were not caught unawares. By capturing the Tiger the tank-busters of the Volkhov Front helped frustrate the Nazi command’s Operation Citadel.⁵⁷

⁵² Will Fey, *Armor Battles of the Waffen-SS: 1943-45*, translated by Henri Henschler (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003); originally published as *PANZERKAMPF* (Osnabrück: Munin Verlag, 1990), 2.

⁵³ Carius, 21, 119.

⁵⁴ Sajer, 340.

⁵⁵ Carius, 27.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵⁷ Erickson, *Main*, 103.

For the Germans, this was a terrible mistake, and it went far in foiling the Germans last great offensive in the East.

Operation Citadel was a total failure. From the beginning the Germans were at a disadvantage. The Red Army's intelligence allowed them to take proper defensive measures against the Germans. The Soviets concentrated a much larger amount of heavy and medium artillery than the Germans, and although tank strength was relatively equal, quality certainly favored the Russians.⁵⁸ The Russians enjoyed a 2.5:1 ratio of superiority in men and guns.⁵⁹ Fresh off the difficult loss at Stalingrad, the Germans could ill-afford another botched offensive. Also, the terrain around Kursk had a slight incline that favored the defender.⁶⁰ The successful German offensives earlier in the war depended on surprise to overcome numerically superior troops and tanks. Now surprise was lost. Not only did the Soviets know the Germans planned to attack at Kursk, they knew precisely when the Germans were to commence the operation. Nikita Khrushchev, a commissar and future Soviet premier, stated, "The fascists are attacking between 3 and 5 July. This isn't a guess, but a fact. We know it."⁶¹ For the first time, the Red Army was ready for a major German offensive. The result was that the virtually unknown Russian town of Kursk became the sight of the largest tank battle in history. The Germans amassed 3,155 tanks to the USSR's 3,275.⁶² After just a few weeks, Hitler called off the attack because of the Western Allies' landing at Sicily and imminent threat of their invasion of the European mainland.⁶³ What was to be a demonstration of the *Wehrmacht's* ability to overcome the

⁵⁸ Glantz and House, 165.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Robin Cross, *The Battle of Kursk: Operation Citadel 1943* (Michael O Mara Books, 1993; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 151.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁶² Glantz and House, 165.

⁶³ Ziemke, *Berlin*, 139-141

worst disaster in German military history became a worldwide admission that the German war machine was broken beyond repair. On the eve of the German attack, Hitler sent a message to his soldiers:

Soldiers of the Reich! This day you are to take part in an offensive of such importance that the whole future of the war may depend on its outcome. More than anything else, your victory will show the whole world that resistance to the power of the German Army is hopeless.⁶⁴

After Citadel's failure, the message was loud and clear—the war in the East had been decided. The *Wehrmacht* lost 70,000 men, 2,952 tanks, 195 assault guns, 844 field guns, 1,392 planes, and 5,000 lorries at Kursk.⁶⁵ Although casualties for both sides were calamitous, the Red Army possessed a greater ability to overcome such losses. Major General F.W. von Mellenthin provided a grim analogy that summed up the German situation in the East: “We were now in the position of a man who has seized a wolf by the ears and dare not let him go.”⁶⁶ Unfortunately for the Germans, there was little they could do to hold back this wolf.

As the war continued and Germany's situation worsened, Hitler's decisions became increasingly irrational and ruthless. One of these decisions proved that Hitler knew all was lost—the intensification of mass execution of the European Jews. Hitler allowed thousands of trains to transport Jews to the death camps instead of freeing these trains for moving direly needed supplies to the soldiers at the front.⁶⁷ Since Hitler could not rid the world of Bolshevik Jewry, at least he could exterminate the Jews that remained in German hands; thus Hitler insisted upon his orders to fight to the last man

⁶⁴ Clark, 329.

⁶⁵ John Erickson, *The Road to Berlin: Stalin's War with Germany*, vol. 2 (Great Britain: Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd, 1983; reprint, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 112.

⁶⁶ Mellenthin, 277.

⁶⁷ Russell, 171.

and the last bullet to hold back the encroaching Red Army. Time was now against Hitler. The elimination of all European Jews and communists, which was the mission of Hitler and the entire National Socialist movement, would not occur, so Hitler had the choice of saving the Reich at his expense or continuing the fight until the bitter end and allowing the entire Reich to be destroyed while taking as many Jews and communists with him. In typical Hitler fashion, he chose the latter. Hitler served National Socialism more than Germany.

Though demoralized, battle-weary, and in many cases, wounded, the German soldiers continued to fight. By 1943 members of the *Wehrmacht*, for the most part, knew the war in the East was lost. At worst, they hoped it would end with the Germans entrenched in enemy lands like at the conclusion of the First World War. This did not happen. Hitler refused to bring the war to a close because that would mean the end of the Third Reich. The only group that could possibly bring an end to the war without also bringing the destruction of Germany was the General Staff. Many, such as Jodl and Keitel, feared and respected the *Führer* while others such as Guderian hid behind the argument that an assassination attempt of Hitler was morally wrong and went against both soldierly ethics and godly values.⁶⁸ This completely skewed the fact that millions of Germans would have to die before Hitler would capitulate. Guderian's elitist attitude trumped his reason. As a result, ordinary Germans bore the brunt of the burden.

Not all officers believed the same as Guderian or Jodl. On July 20, 1944 another attempt on Hitler's life occurred (the seeds of which were planted just after the first failed attempt in 1943). At a military conference in Rastenburg, Colonel Count Claus von

⁶⁸ Guderian, *Leader*, 348.

Stauffenberg set a bomb under the table at which Hitler sat and left the room. Although this time the bomb detonated, the conspirators failed to kill the *Führer*.⁶⁹ Some of the plotters from the first assassination attempt in March, such as Tresckow, Olbricht, and Oster, took part; however, with the Red Army pushing the *Wehrmacht* west and the Anglo-American landing in France on June 6, 1944, the impact of this attempt was much larger. Field Marshals von Kluge, Rommel, and the retired Beck all played some role in the attempted *Putsch* while Guderian, despite not taking part, had prior knowledge of the plot and failed to disclose this information.⁷⁰ (Had Hitler known of Guderian's insight, the Colonel General would most likely have shared the fates of the conspirators, but he did not and Guderian was promoted to Chief of the General Staff the following day.) The number of officer casualties from suicides, executions, and dismissals was unprecedented. The *Wehrmacht* lost its two top commanders in the West (Rommel and von Kluge), Chief of OKH (Zeitzler), Chief of the General Staff of the Reserve Army (Stauffenberg), Chief of the *Abwehr* (intelligence service of the OKW) and his assistant (Canaris and Oster), Chief of Staff of the Home Army (Olbricht), Chief of Staff of Army Group Centre (Tresckow), and Commander in Chief of the Reserve Army (General Fritz Fromm), amongst many others.⁷¹

The repercussions of the attempted *Putsch* affected the Reich for the remainder of the war. Hitler's distrust of the generals turned to bitter hatred. The *Führer's* military decisions became more and more irrational and the slightest difference of opinion from

⁶⁹ For a detailed account of the events on July 20, 1944, see Constantine FitzGibbon's *20 July*.

⁷⁰ FitzGibbon, 245.

⁷¹ Arrests and executions from the failed assassination attempt numbered in the thousands and included friends, family, and mere acquaintances. In some cases, distant relatives, many of whom never even met those involved, were taken into custody. This new reign of terror no doubt resembled what the Red Army officers experienced during the Soviet purges of the 1930s.

one of his generals caused him to explode into a rage. Guderian recalled a time he repeatedly asked Hitler to allow an experienced general to lead an attack against the Russians instead of Himmler:

And so it went on for two hours. His fists raised, his cheeks flushed with rage, his whole body trembling, the man stood there in front of me, beside himself with fury and having lost all self-control... He was almost screaming, his eyes seemed about to pop out of his head and the veins stood out on his temples... Suddenly Hitler stopped short in front of Himmler and said: "Well, Himmler, General Wenck will arrive at your headquarters tonight and will take charge of the attack... The General Staff has won a battle this day." And as he said this he smiled his most charming smile.⁷²

Despite his "victory," Guderian's persistence annoyed his superiors and led to his dismissal a few months later.

The troops at the front also suffered from the consequences of the failed attempt on Hitler's life. After all, it was they who had to enforce the irrational orders of the *Führer*; furthermore, the idea that some of their superiors saw the need to eliminate Hitler at this stage of the war haunted them. Not only were the Germans fighting the Russians and Anglo-Americans, but they were also fighting amongst themselves. It is no wonder that 1944 became known as the year of Stalin's "ten great victories." They were as follows:

- 1 the relief of Leningrad (January)
- 2 the encirclement of German troops in the south-west Ukraine and entry into Romania (February-March)
- 3 the destruction of German forces in the Crimea (May)
- 4 the defeat of Finnish forces and re-establishment of the 1940 frontier (June)
- 5 the liberation of Belorussia, including the destruction of twenty-five German divisions (June)
- 6 the entry of Soviet forces into Poland against fierce resistance (July)
- 7 the occupation of Romania and Bulgaria (August)
- 8 the liberation of Latvia and Estonia (September)

⁷² Guderian, *Leader*, 415.

- 9 the liberation of Belgrade (October)
- 10 the expulsion of German troops from northern Finland and Norway (October)⁷³

The end of Nazi Germany came just a few months later.

With the High Command reshuffled (again) and the *Wehrmacht* depleted, the Germans realized that the end was near. The effects of the Nazis' total war had taken their toll. The *Wehrmacht*, once the epitome of organization and might, bore no resemblance to its former self. Despite all of Hitler's rants about the importance of order, he succeeded in reshuffling the General Staff many times during the war. For example, Hitler had five Army Chiefs: Brauchitsch (the last military Supreme Commander 1938-1941); Halder (1939-1942); Zeitzler (1942-44); Guderian (1944-5); and General Hans Krebs (1945). His lust for power and status as "the greatest general of all time" clouded his better judgment; Stalin, on the other hand, learned from his mistakes and allowed his subordinates to have more say in the strategic aspects of the war.⁷⁴ Hitler's constant dismissals created confusion within the *Wehrmacht* and made it impossible to lead the Germans to victory.

It is also noteworthy to mention a few military leaders whom Hitler refused to dismiss. The most significant of these included Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel (OKW Chief) and his Chief of Staff, Colonel General Alfred Jodl along with *Reichsmarschall* Hermann Goering. From 1938 to 1945 Keitel and Jodl held their respective positions within the Supreme Command despite the many administrative mistakes during the course of the war (like OKW's failure to supply German troops with proper winter gear). Hitler did not replace them because of their obedience to him. Keitel later became the

⁷³ Barber and Harrison, 37.

⁷⁴ Ziemke, *Berlin*, 502.

German representative to sign the unconditional surrender with the Allies. Allied prosecutors tried and convicted both men. They were hanged by their captors on October 16, 1946 at Nuremberg.

Goering, Hitler's chosen successor, remained Commander in Chief of the *Luftwaffe* despite the many times his air force failed to live up to his boasts. Amongst the *Luftwaffe's* failures were its inability to defeat the British Royal Air Force in 1940, thus creating a stalemate in the West, and its botched attempts to supply the German Sixth Army trapped at Stalingrad. By 1943 German cities were virtually unprotected from Anglo-American saturation bombing offensives, while the Red Air Force (VVS) recovered from almost complete annihilation during the opening stages of the war to achieve air superiority over the *Luftwaffe*. In the months between the two major German disasters of 1943, Stalingrad (February) and Kursk (July), the *Luftwaffe* and Red Air Force engaged in an intense fight over the Kuban River resulting in "one of the most dramatic air battles of World War II."⁷⁵ The Red Air Force destroyed 3,700 *Luftwaffe* aircraft in this two-month battle and permanently gained air superiority over the Germans.⁷⁶ Heinz Guderian reflected upon the collective dissatisfaction with Goering's leadership by August 1944:

In Jodl's and my presence [Hitler] addressed [Goering] in very blunt terms: "Goering! The *Luftwaffe's* doing nothing. It is no longer worthy to be an independent Service. And that's your fault. You're lazy..." As a result of this conversation I urged Hitler to act according to what he now realised and to appoint some competent air force general to succeed the *Reichsmarshal*. I told him that we dare not risk losing the whole war on account of the incompetence of one man like Goering... I failed to make any impression. Until the very end Goering retained his offices.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Hardesty, 121.

⁷⁶ Erickson, *Main*, 326.

⁷⁷ Guderian, *Leader*, 445.

Although the *Luftwaffe*'s shortcomings demonstrated Goering's incompetence as commander of the air force, Hitler remained loyal to his longtime friend and fellow National Socialist.

As the Soviets entered the Reich's borders from the East and the Anglo-Americans entered from the West, Hitler ordered the final deathblow to Germany. All German businesses, industries, utility companies, etc. were to be destroyed before they fell into enemy hands. Unlike Stalin's scorched earth defense during the opening stages of the war, this was not intended to hurt the Allies' offensive capabilities as much as it was to destroy Germany's capabilities to operate as an independent nation at the conclusion of the war. Hitler told Speer:

If the war is lost, the nation will also perish. This fate is inevitable. There is no necessity to take into consideration the basis which the people will need to continue a most primitive existence. On the contrary, it will be better to destroy these things ourselves because this nation will have proved to be the weaker one and the future will belong solely to the stronger eastern nation [Russia]. Besides, those who will remain after the battle are only the inferior ones, for the good ones have been killed.⁷⁸

Thus, Hitler's *Untermensch* theory included Germans as well as Slavs. Although to a large extent the retreating *Wehrmacht* and its enemies destroyed German industry, Hitler's trusted architect and Minister of Armaments, Albert Speer, saved some of Germany's industry by countermanding this order.⁷⁹ Despite Speer's efforts, Hitler's insistence upon continuing the war to the very end set the stage for the Reich to be crushed to a level that would not be fully overcome until 1990 when East and West Germany finally reunited into one nation.

⁷⁸ Shirer, 1104.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1104-5.

The Germans' dream of being world conquerors ended in 1943. The glorious *Blitzkrieg* campaigns of 1936 to 1941 were a distant memory. No longer did the Germans enjoy the rapid victories with few casualties as they had in the West. Instead, more and more letters of heroism arrived at the homes of dead soldiers' families while news of *Wehrmacht* retreats (mainly from foreign broadcasts) fueled rumors of inevitable German defeat. Although the failed assassination attempt of Hitler in 1944 garnered a great deal of sympathy for the *Führer* and utter contempt for the General Staff, Hitler and Goebbels lost their abilities to deceive the masses.⁸⁰ The horrific nature of the Eastern Front convinced the German people that the war was lost and exposed Hitler's *Untermensch* lie.

During the first two years of Barbarossa, the *Wehrmacht* held the strategic initiative in the East, but by mid-1943 the Red Army switched to offensive operations and never relinquished control back to the Germans. German civilians and soldiers alike were demoralized by the war with the USSR and desired nothing more than an end to the hostilities while the front was still outside the Reich's borders. Also, numerous officers sought to depose the *Führer* while the Nazi elite preached of the coming "Bolshevist hordes." Each group handled the reality differently, yet all knew what the outcome would be. Two years of desperate attempts to overcome both Russia and her people proved impossible. The Germans hammered at the Soviets with everything they had, and the mighty Red Army refused to concede. As early as December 22, 1941 Ilya Ehrenburg wrote in the *Red Star*: "Germans still send their tanks against us. But they are no longer the same Germans. Water eats away a stone. Our resistance has eaten away

⁸⁰ Steinert, 265.

the German spirit.”⁸¹ In this case, Soviet propaganda proved to be true. The USSR broke Hitler’s spell over the German people. Unfortunately for the Germans, the war lasted two more grueling years and millions of people perished while the Reich was conquered and divided by the Allies. The nation that occupied almost the entire European continent was utterly destroyed by her enemies. It took just two years of war with the Soviet Union for Hitler and his people to realize that the Thousand-Year Reich would never be. Hitler’s gross underestimation of the USSR’s military capabilities along with his failure to prepare the *Wehrmacht* for the intense Russian climate cost Germany her world-power status, and it cost the Nazis their existence.

⁸¹ Ehrenburg, 99.

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