

# War in a Twilight World

Partisan and Anti-Partisan Warfare  
in Eastern Europe, 1939–45



Edited by  
**Ben Shepherd and Juliette Pattinson**



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*Also by Ben Shepherd*

WAR IN THE WILD EAST: The German Army and Soviet Partisans

*Also by Juliette Pattinson*

BEHIND ENEMY LINES: Gender, Passing and the Special Operations  
Executive in the Second World War

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## Partisan and Anti-Partisan Warfare in Eastern Europe, 1939–45

Edited by

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# Contents

<i>List of Maps, Table and Figure</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	viii
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	ix
<i>Glossary</i>	xii
 Introduction: Illuminating a Twilight World <i>Ben Shepherd and Juliette Pattinson</i>	 1
<b>Part I The Soviet Union</b>	<b>25</b>
Foreword <i>Evan Mawdsley</i>	27
1 Partisans, Civilians and the Soviet State: An Overview <i>Kenneth Slepyan</i>	35
2 'One senses danger from all sides, especially from fanatical civilians': The 121st Infantry Division and Partisan War, June 1941–April 1942 <i>Jeff Rutherford</i>	58
3 The Relationship between Soviet Partisans and the Civilian Population in Belorussia under German Occupation, 1941–4 <i>Alexander Brakel</i>	80
4 The German Gendarmerie and Partisans in Belorussia, 1941–4 <i>Erich Haberer</i>	102
Select Bibliography	126
<b>Part II Poland</b>	<b>129</b>
Foreword <i>Paul Latawski</i>	131
5 The <i>Armia Krajowa</i> and Polish Partisan Warfare, 1939–43 <i>Paul Latawski</i>	137

6	'A Game of Cat-and-Mouse': The Gestapo Spy Network in Tomaschow Mazowiecki, Poland 1939–45 <i>Claire M. Hubbard-Hall</i>	156
	Select Bibliography	178
	<b>Part III Yugoslavia</b>	<b>179</b>
	Foreword <i>Klaus Schmider</i>	181
7	Bloodier than Boehme: The 342nd Infantry Division in Serbia, 1941 <i>Ben Shepherd</i>	189
8	Integrated Warfare? The Germans and the Ustaša Massacres: Syrmia 1942 <i>Alexander Korb</i>	210
9	Propaganda and the Partisan War in Ljubljana 1943–45 <i>Gregor Joseph Kranjc</i>	233
	Select Bibliography	257
	<i>Index</i>	258

# List of Maps, Table and Figure

## Maps

- 4.1 Areas of civil government in Nazi-occupied Belorussia (Generalkommissariat Weissruthenien), 1941–4. 105  
*Source:* (1940) Map of the Belorussian SSR, 1st edition, printed by the Cartographic Factory GUGK (Minsk: SNK SSR). The map is in the private possession of the author.
- 4.2 Gebietskommissariat Baranovichi in the Generalkommissariat Weissruthenien, 1941–4. 106  
*Source:* (1940) Map of the Belorussian SSR, 1st edition, printed by the Cartographic Factory GUGK (Minsk: SNK SSR). The map is in the private possession of the author.
- 6.1 Poland, 1941. 161  
*Source:* author's own map.
- 8.1 Sarmia, 1942. 214  
*Source:* Tobias Stiefel. Produced by illustrator especially for this volume.

## Table

- 6.1 Categories of Gestapo Informer used by specific German police outposts in Poland 1939–45 162

## Figure

- 6.1 Photograph of Gestapo Informer Tadeusz Miller (b. 7.12.1912) who worked under the alias 'Roman Sculz' in the Tomaschow area. 167  
*Source:* This photograph was attached to his Gestapo informer personnel file. Reproduced with NARA permission.



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# Glossary

*Armia Krajowa (AK)*: The Polish Home Army; an underground movement with close links to the Polish government-in-exile. Founded in 1940 to fight both German and Soviet occupiers. Formally called ZWZ.

*Armia Ludowa (AL)*: The People's Army; conspiratorial military organisation of the Communist Polish Workers' Party, formed early 1944.

*Auskunftsperson (A-Person)*: 'Information person'; category of Gestapo informer in Poland.

*Central Staff of the Partisan Movement*: Agency established in May 1942 to supervise Soviet partisan operations, led by First Secretary of the Communist Party of Belorussia Pantaleimon Ponomarenko. Disbanded January 1944.

*Četnici*: Heterogeneous Serb nationalist resistance movement under Draža Mihailović. Cooperated with the Axis powers, and fought the fascist Ustaša and the partisans.

*Delegatura*: 'Government Delegacy'; body that ran the administrative structures of the Polish underground state, organised along the lines of shadow ministries.

*Domobran*: Official Croatian State Army involved in anti-partisan operations. It committed war crimes and experienced tense relations with the Ustaša.

*Domobranci (Slovensko domobranstvo)*: 'Homeguard'; refers collectively to all the German-sponsored anti-partisan military forces.

*Gauleiter*: Party leader of a regional branch of the NSDAP.

*Gebietskommissar*: Head of regional civil administration.

*Gebietskommissariat*: Regional civil administrative area.

*Geheime Staatspolizei (Gestapo)*: Nazi State Secret police.

*Gendarmerie*: Local police.

*Gendarmerie-Gebietsführer (GGf)*: Regional Gendarmerie Commander.

*Generalkommissariat Weisruthenian (GKW)*: Area of Belorussia under German civil administrative rule.

*Ghetto*: Special area in a village or town used to concentrate the Jewish population.

*Hague Convention*: Convention signed on the Second Peace Conference at The Hague in 1907; among the first formal statements of the laws of war and war crimes.

*Independent State of Croatia (ISC)*: German satellite in Yugoslavia, 1941–5, governed by the fascist Ustaša and its chief Ante Pavelić.

*Jagdzug* (pl. *Jagdzüge*): Mounted German Gendarmerie squadron involved in anti-partisan operations in the Soviet Union.

*Kierownictwo Dywersji (KEDYW)*: ‘Diversionary Command’; formed in Poland in 1942 with responsibility for all sabotage, special and ‘combat diversionary’ operations, consisted of trained specialists.

*Kierownictwo Walki Konspiracyjnej (KWK)*: ‘Directorate of Underground Struggle’; Polish body that provided direction for all aspects of resistance, both civil and military, determining policy and directing operations.

*Kriminalpolizei (Kripo)*: German criminal police.

*Landbewirtschaftsgesellschaft Ostland (LO)*: ‘Ostland Agricultural Corporation’.

*Lauerstellung*: Gendarmerie ambush operations.

*Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del (NKVD)*: ‘The People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs’.

*NKO Order 189*: 5 September 1942, called on Soviet partisans to intensify their military operations and to actively recruit all elements of the population to participate in the national resistance.

*Oberkommando des Heeres (OKH)*: German Army High Command.

*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW)*: German Armed Forces High Command.

*Operationszone Adriatisches Küstenland (OZAK)*: ‘Operation Zone Adriatic Littoral’; German occupied district, September 1943–May 1945, which encompassed north-eastern coastline of the Adriatic Sea and its hinterland.

*Ordnungspolizei (Orpo)*: Uniformed German police.

*Osvobodilna Fronta (OF)*: 'Liberation Front'; Communist-led Slovene coalition that led armed resistance against Axis occupiers.

*Pokrajinska uprava (PU)*: 'Provincial Administration'; name of the Slovene administration that assisted the German occupiers in managing the Province of Ljubljana.

*Polityczny Komitet Porozumiewawczy (PKP)*: 'Consultative Political Committee'; a body of the Polish underground that included representation of the main political parties.

*Polska Organizacja Wojskowa (POW)*: 'Polish Military Organisation'; a secret military organisation, formed in 1914 under Józef Piłsudski, to conduct espionage and diversionary activity against the partitioning powers and to provide military cadre for a future Polish army.

*Polska Partia Robotnicza (PPR)*: *Polish Workers Party*.

*Postenführer*: Commander of a district Gendarmerie post.

*Rada Jedności Narodowej (RJN)*: 'Council of National Unity'; body that replaced PKP, formed in 1939, existed for two months until replaced by ZWZ.

*Raion (pl. raioni)*: Term denoting district of Soviet Union.

*Referat Nachrichtendienst*: Gestapo counter-intelligence department.

*Schuma-Post*: Rural auxiliary police station.

*Schutzmann (Schuma)*: Indigenous auxiliary policeman in the service of the German police.

*Schutzmannschaft (pl. Schutzmannschaften)*: Indigenous auxiliary police formation.

*Schutzstaffel (SS)*: 'Protective Squadron'; Nazi paramilitary force, established 1925 and then greatly expanded. Served as police and military forces in the occupied territories as well as being principal agency in charge of extermination policy.

*Sicherheitsdienst (SD)*: *Nazi Secret Service*.

*Sicherheitspolizei (Sipo)*: *Nazi Security police*.

*Slovensko domobranstvo*: 'Slovene Homeguard'; anti-partisan military force that collaborated with the German occupiers in the Province of Ljubljana; name of the force's official bilingual German/Slovene publication.

*Staatsgut*: estate (LO-administrated former Soviet state farm).

*Stronnictwo Narodowe (SN)*: 'The National Alliance'; a Polish partisan group.

*Studium Polski Podziemnej (SSP)*: The Polish Underground Movement 1939–1945 Study Trust.

*Stützpunkt*: Rural auxiliary police stronghold.

*Švabobranci*: ‘Defenders of Germans’; a derogatory play on the word ‘domobranci’ used in OF propaganda.

*Służba Zwycięstwu Polski (SZP)*: ‘Service for Poland’s Victory’; earliest Polish resistance.

*Trybuna Wolności*: Publication distributed by the Polish Workers Party.

*Ustaša*: ‘Insurgent’; name of the Fascist movement led by Ante Pavelić which governed Independent State of Croatia from April 1941.

*Vertrauensleute (V-Leute)*: Gestapo confidential agents.

*Vertrauensmann (V-Mann)*: elite Gestapo spy.

*Volksdeutsche*: ethnic German.

*Vsenarodnaia voina*: ‘All-People’s War’; defined insurgency as a mass movement involving all elements of the population; Russian term used in propaganda and policy, implemented officially under NKO Order 189.

*Walka*: ‘The Struggle’; publication distributed by the Polish partisan group, the National Alliance.

*Wehrmacht*: Official name of the German Armed Forces between 1935 and 1945; sometimes used inaccurately to denote the German Army specifically (the correct term for which is *Heer*). See also *Oberkommando des Heeres* and *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*.

*Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Südost*: Wehrmacht Command South-East (Balkans).

*Werks/Wahrman (W-Person)*: ‘Works’/‘truth person’, category of Gestapo informer.

*Zütrager/Züverlassigermann (Z-Person)*: ‘Informer’/‘reliable person’, category of Gestapo informer.

*Związek Odwetu (ZO)*: ‘Union for Retaliation’; Polish organisation charged with sabotage and diversionary activity between 1940 and 1942; replaced by KEDYW.

*Związek Walki Zbrojnej (ZWZ)*: ‘The Union for Armed Struggle’; Polish group which replaced the SZP and changed its name to *Armia Krajowa* in 1942. The ZWZ became the national resistance organisation in Poland 1939–42.



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# Introduction: Illuminating a Twilight World

*Ben Shepherd and Juliette Pattinson*

## The setting

Eastern Europe suffered under Nazi rule much more than the rest of the occupied continent during World War II. Like western and southern Europe, its peoples found themselves subjected to harsh, punitive and sometimes ferociously savage measures inflicted in response to popular resistance. And like western and southern Europe, its foodstuffs, labour and economic resources were exploited increasingly ruthlessly as the war dragged on. However, it differed in its experience of occupation because it was populated by peoples who in Nazi thinking were racially inferior, even subhuman. This alone went a long way towards legitimising the singularly brutal, exploitative treatment to which Nazi policy subjected eastern Europe. It also often exacerbated that treatment to a horrific degree.<sup>1</sup>

Given this backdrop, it would be astonishing had a vast, diverse and active body of resistance to Nazi rule in eastern Europe *not* emerged. Resistance across German-occupied Europe assumed various forms; the historian Henri Michel identified no fewer than ten: passive resistance; go-slow by workers; strikes; secret tracts and newspapers; escape lines for Allied airmen; information-gathering; sabotage; assassination; maquis and guerrilla warfare; and particularly towards the war's end, the emergence, successful or otherwise, of full-scale liberation movements.<sup>2</sup> At national level, resistance sometimes took the form of alliances between hitherto antagonistic groupings with different long-term objectives, some sponsored by the western Allies, some by the Soviet Union. These alliances were often fractious at best, and indeed could collapse into bloody conflict, but the fact that they emerged at all, together with the scale of resistance overall, testifies to the abhorrence with which so many among

the occupied peoples of Europe regarded Nazi rule, and the courage and tenacity with which they were prepared to resist it.<sup>3</sup>

But how prevalent each of these varieties of resistance was, and how effective resistance to Nazi rule was overall, depended upon a range of conditions specific to different occupied regions and countries. In many parts of eastern Europe, it was not just the extraordinary harshness of Nazi rule which guaranteed that resistance would emerge; the fact that many eastern European countries retained age-old traditions of resistance to foreign invaders also helped lay the groundwork.

Moreover, such was the topography of vast swathes of eastern Europe – extensive, often underdeveloped rural areas encompassing thick forests, copious swamps or extensive mountain ranges – that resistance there assumed the specific character of *guerrilla* warfare far more than it did in flatter, more urbanised western Europe. Such terrain, and the remoteness and impenetrability it offered, was a boon to the emergence of armed, mobile irregular units, operating usually across country to sabotage the occupier's communication and supply lines, terrorise its troops with hit-and-run strikes, and generally disrupt its efforts to administer and exploit the occupied territory.

The potential of such methods had been noted by military thinkers over the years. T. E. Lawrence, for instance, regarded guerrilla warfare as an 'exact science', facilitated by such factors as an unassailable geographical base, an opposing conventional army of limited strength forced to control a wide area, and a population sympathetic to the guerrillas' cause. Here Lawrence recognised guerrilla warfare's political dimension – the need to cultivate active, widespread popular support, and with it an essential source of supply, shelter and manpower. Guerrillas, Lawrence maintained, also needed speed, endurance and technical equipment.<sup>4</sup> Mindful of the Arab irregulars he led during World War I, Lawrence wrote that guerrillas should be 'an influence, an idea, a thing intangible, invulnerable, without front or back, drifting about like a gas'.<sup>5</sup> They should focus on destroying not their conventional opponent per se – something its forces' superior size, equipment and weaponry prohibited – but its supplies and communications.

In the Balkans and Russia particularly, guerrilla warfare tactics had been the favoured method of irregular fighters for centuries past. The most effective anti-German guerrillas operating in eastern Europe during World War II were something more specific: partisans. While guerrillas seek simply to overthrow the established order, partisans see themselves as an adjunct to regular forces seeking to re-establish independent government. Eastern European partisans of World War II thus

echoed the thinking of Clausewitz, who, observing the role guerrillas had played in driving the French out of Spain and Prussia during the Napoleonic Wars, had maintained that guerrillas were most effective when helping facilitate campaigning by regular forces.<sup>6</sup> The regular forces in question during World War II were those of the western Allies, the Soviet Union and, albeit less extensively, the various governments-in-exile of the occupied European countries.

The partisans' military effectiveness varied; however, so did their treatment of the population. It must be remembered, of course, that the partisan movements of German-occupied eastern Europe were seeking, ultimately, to liberate their countries from what was, overall, an astonishingly brutal foreign tyranny. But in the eyes of the occupied population, the partisans' practical impact upon everyday life was more directly important than the partisans' long-term aims. That impact was determined partly by the very nature of the problematic relationship between partisans, population and occupiers. This was a population, caught as it was between partisan groups and Axis occupation forces, whose behaviour was shaped not so much by loyalty, nationalism and political conviction, as by pragmatic day-to-day calculation as to with which side its best chance of survival lay. When it came to procuring supplies from the population, moreover, partisans, especially Soviet ones, were not always famous for their restraint. Thus, though the picture varied across eastern Europe, partisans could employ coercion just as readily as cultivation in their dealings with the population.

The need to combat guerrillas, partisans and insurgents generally has given rise to models of *counter-insurgency warfare*.<sup>7</sup> Such models advocate in the first instance the deployment of well-equipped, mobile forces in sufficient numbers to destroy or expel large bodies of insurgents. This is followed by the establishment and development of permanent, cooperative contact with the population, to secure its support for the occupying regime and thus complement the military effort to stifle the irregular enemy's attempts at resurgence. Engaging the population effectively requires awareness of its economic needs and social and cultural sensibilities, and occupation policies which meet them.<sup>8</sup> Counter-insurgency warfare, then, like insurgency, is not just a military undertaking, but a political one also. Thus wrote General Gallieni, who commanded French counter-insurgency forces in North Africa during the early twentieth century: '[i]t is by combined use of politics and force that pacification of a country and its future organisation will be achieved. *Political action is by far the most important*. It derives its greater power from the organisation of the country and its inhabitants'.<sup>9</sup>

But not only did German anti-partisan warfare in eastern Europe fall far short of such models, to a great extent, its essential character rejected such models in the first place. This should not be surprising; the Germans' approach was, after all, permeated by excessively harsh military thinking and ideological racism, and prosecuted in the cause of what was, overall, a ruthless and rapacious occupation. While many field commanders did display some acumen that eventually led them to appreciate the benefits of saner, more constructive conduct,<sup>10</sup> much of the German anti-partisan effort across eastern Europe was characterised by exceptional, often immensely counter-productive, brutality.

The chapters in this volume are, for the most part, based on papers presented by both established and emerging scholars at the international conference 'Partisan and Anti-Partisan Warfare in German-Occupied Europe 1939–1945', held at Glasgow Caledonian University in June 2007 in association with the University of Strathclyde and the German Historical Institute, London. They constitute a series of case studies of the behaviour of partisan and anti-partisan forces, and of the populations caught between them, at the levels of sub-national regions, localities and units.<sup>11</sup>

The book breaks new ground in three ways. Firstly, by concentrating on eastern Europe, it pays attention to that theatre in which the factors that shaped partisan and anti-partisan warfare had particularly devastating effects.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, by bringing together chapters on partisan warfare *and* on the occupiers' response to it, it offers a picture of the lower levels of the eastern European partisan war which is more wide-ranging and two-sided than is presently offered by any other single work. Thirdly, while not a national-level comparison as such, the book's use of case studies invites readers to recognise regional specificity and draw comparisons and contrasts. Moreover, the case studies' low-level focus illuminates the particularly diverse influences that shaped the conduct of those millions of actors – partisans, occupiers and civilians – who constituted the mass of humanity engaged in the partisan war on the ground.

All the case studies are drawn from the three eastern European countries in which popular resistance to German occupation was most prominent and sustained: the Soviet Union, Poland and Yugoslavia. Each of the three national sections is headed by a contextualising foreword by a leading specialist.

In breaking such new ground, the book seeks among other things to undermine some of the myths that have surrounded the subject over the past 65 years. Much of the earlier historiography generated by

Anglophone historians concerned itself with the crucial but necessarily somewhat narrow question of how far partisan movements contributed to eventual Allied victory.<sup>13</sup> Many studies since the 1980s have moved the focus onto the occupied countries themselves, upon the ways in which populations responded to occupation, and the social, cultural, economic, political and psychological factors which motivated the various degrees of resistance, accommodation or collaboration that they displayed. Yet much of the recent historiography which seeks to apply these questions to eastern Europe has continued to emerge not from Anglophone countries, but from the countries which were themselves occupied.

As such, the historiography has frequently been affected by the fierce emotion and the social, cultural and political controversies which debates on partisan warfare often still generate within these countries.<sup>14</sup> Particularly relevant for this volume is the fact that, though a more justifiably critical view of the effectiveness and conduct of communist partisan movements did emerge after the fall of the Eastern Bloc, it has not always been a sufficiently objective view. In the former Soviet Union, for instance, historians within many of the recently formed republics have sometimes excessively downplayed the efforts of the Soviet partisans in order to serve new nationalist agendas. The need for a differentiated, nuanced investigation of the conduct of partisans, their effectiveness, and their treatment of the populations caught between them and the Axis occupier, is clear.

The debate over German anti-partisan warfare has been equally controversial, particularly over the Wehrmacht's role within it. A post-war historiography depicting a 'clean' Wehrmacht unsullied by involvement in Nazi crimes was by the 1990s giving way to a fiercely critical view which saw anti-partisan warfare as one of numerous ways in which the Wehrmacht had sold its soul to the Third Reich, implicated itself in its crimes and indoctrinated its troops wholesale to perpetrate them.<sup>15</sup> Currently a more balanced picture is emerging. Rightly, most of the works which contribute to it do not seek to deny the grim overall picture which is now established. They do seek, however, not only to quantify the extent of Wehrmacht involvement in such criminality, but also to explain the reasons for the different degrees of ruthlessness and restraint that Wehrmacht units displayed.<sup>16</sup> This book contributes to this more differentiated investigation of Wehrmacht anti-partisan warfare across eastern Europe.

It also investigates hitherto under-explored aspects of the yet more sinister role of the SS and Police. It was these institutions which played

the leading role in implementing the Nazi regime's genocidal policies, and whose units and personnel have thus been the primary focus of studies into perpetrators of the Holocaust (*Täterforschung*).<sup>17</sup> Essential as this focus remains, recent studies have engaged with the more general workings of how the SS and Police enforced Nazi policy across occupied Europe, and the wider institutional frameworks within which they operated.<sup>18</sup> Such studies have deepened understanding of the wider context of the dark, damning picture which *Täterforschung* studies have unearthed. They also help lay the groundwork for lower-level case studies of how the SS and Police operated within different local and regional contexts.<sup>19</sup>

The rest of this introduction outlines six main, interlinking factors which together shape the conduct of partisan and anti-partisan warfare on the ground, and which the chapters, albeit to different degrees, collectively investigate. The first is the occupier's overall strategy, and the military, economic, ideological and political factors which go towards shaping both the strategy itself and the conduct of anti-partisan warfare. The second factor, the relationship between the occupied rear and the front line, relates closely to the first, given that the wider progress of the war is a crucial determinant of the strategy of occupation. The occupier's strategy in turn impacts upon the third factor for consideration: the forces that contribute to the development and establishment of resistance. These include not just the occupier's strategy, but also the nature and extent of outside help; the state of a resistance movement's leadership, organisation and supply; and the physical environment in which resistance develops.

The fourth and fifth factors, concession and coercion, reflect one another and relate to the most fundamentally important battle of all: attaining the effective cooperation of the civilian population caught in the middle of the fighting. Each side may employ any combination of concession and coercion in order to try to achieve this. Which combination a particular insurgent or counter-insurgency unit employs may depend not just upon higher-level orders, and the strategy of occupation or resistance which those orders seek to promote, but also upon the particular situation in which it finds itself and the particular attitudes of its commander. But whichever combination a unit employs, the effectiveness of that combination will be crucial to that unit's success. It plays a pivotal role with respect to the final, perhaps most complex factor whose importance within partisan and anti-partisan warfare is investigated in this book: the causes, nature and effects of the dynamics between occupier, partisans and population.

In outlining these issues, the introduction places partisan and anti-partisan warfare in eastern Europe during World War II within a wider historical framework of irregular warfare. This is not an attempt to 'normalise' the context of eastern Europe during World War II; the overall scale of the German occupation's brutality and rapacity is too great for that. It demonstrates, however, that the mechanisms of partisan and anti-partisan warfare in this context, if not the form and scale that they took, display important similarities with other irregular conflicts throughout history. Among other things, this demonstrates the topic's relevance to greater understanding of numerous present-day conflicts.

### **Strategy of occupation, and relations between front and rear**

Military, economic, political and ideological factors have each shaped occupation policy in varying ways throughout modern times. The imperial powers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example, implemented a range of economic, political and ideological programmes across the spectrum of their African and Asian colonies, while at the same time employing the 'right' combination of economic, political and military measures both to secure sufficient popular cooperation and to suppress any resistance to their rule.<sup>20</sup> It was not, however, just the restiveness or otherwise of the indigenous population which helped determine how far an occupying power relied upon cultivation and how far coercion. Ideological factors could play a role also. European colonial armies, for instance, could use racist justifications, often increasingly founded on social Darwinist theory, to legitimise the use of the whip hand for brutish, 'inferior' peoples who allegedly only understood the language of force. To be sure, there were major differences between the motives and forms of European colonial regimes in Africa and Asia and those of Nazi occupation policy in Europe – just as there was also considerable diversity in motives and form both among and within those colonial regimes themselves.<sup>21</sup> But it is clear that, whether in terms of economic exploitation, ideological justification or ruthless suppression, there was significant common ground between the conduct of Nazi occupation and the conduct of at least some colonial regimes.

Well before the military and economic pressures of wartime radically intensified the Third Reich's economic exploitation of occupied Europe, economic, ideological and security-related considerations were already lending German occupation policy in eastern Europe a remarkably harsh



aspect. Some of these considerations had their genesis in Germany's long-standing relationship with eastern peoples. That relationship, long characterised on the German side by feelings of deep mistrust and cultural superiority, was debilitated further by the cataclysm of World War I, by the extensive contact with 'backward' eastern peoples which German soldiers and administrators underwent during its course, and by the rise in the East of the spectre of Bolshevism from 1917 onward.<sup>22</sup> But the harshness which the Germans displayed towards the East during these years was still relatively measured and differentiated compared with what came later; it was National Socialist occupation policy and National Socialist ideology which exploited the legacy of those years, and exacerbated German conduct in eastern Europe during World War II well beyond the level of harshness it had attained during World War I. Thus, not only did Nazi occupation policy earmark the peoples of Poland and the Soviet Union for pitiless economic exploitation from the start; the ethnic makeup of those peoples meant they could expect singularly severe, indeed ferocious, treatment on racial and ideological grounds also. As far as the general population was concerned, Nazi ideology transferred the principles of social Darwinism to a European setting, maintaining that terror was the surest means of keeping 'backward' eastern peoples in line. Meanwhile leadership groups within society, whether aristocrats, clerics and army officers in Poland, communist functionaries in the Soviet Union, or the intelligentsia in both, were singled out, as ideological enemies and potential nuclei of future resistance, for liquidation. Ideologically-fuelled ruthlessness gained further impetus in Poland's case because the Nazis had incorporated much of that country into the Reich itself and subsequently uprooted Poles mercilessly to make way for ethnic German settlers in the cause of 'Germanisation'. Finally, ever greater numbers of Jews in both countries, depicted in twisted Nazi propaganda not only as racially inferior but also as a security threat, fell victim to a campaign of persecution and killing which eventually mushroomed into the opening stages of the 'Final Solution'.

Less obdurate treatment was envisioned, initially, for Yugoslavia. Certainly, many Austrian-born Nazis, Hitler among them, regarded the Serbs with great contempt.<sup>23</sup> This was also to a considerable extent a legacy of World War I, founded as it partly was on hatred which had been engendered by such things as Serbia's role in the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the losses Habsburg troops had suffered against Serbian irregulars and, most humiliatingly, against Serbia's armies in the field.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless Yugoslavia's southern Slav population was deemed less backward than the eastern Slavs of Poland and

the Soviet Union. The Germans' less ideologically founded regard for Yugoslavia was reflected among other things in the fact that it had been purely strategic reasons, rather than ideological or economic ones, which had prompted them to conquer it in 1941. But a communist-inspired national uprising that year led to a drastic intensifying of murderous German 'security' measures against Jews, Communists and indeed the general population in much of that country also.

As the war dragged on, the occupation's mounting economic rapacity engendered a vicious cycle of further resistance, further German brutality in response, and the erosion of order and stability across occupied Europe. Here, the issue of how occupation strategy shaped the partisan war connects with the second issue: that of how the nature and course of the partisan war was affected by the relationship between the occupied rear and the front line. Indeed, in eastern Europe during World War II, most directly in the Soviet Union, keeping occupied territory pacified was crucial to supplying not just the German front line, but also the German domestic population.

The importance of keeping occupied territory pacified so as to maximise its economic benefit to the war effort has been a salient feature of larger wars of the past two centuries. During World War I, for instance, the Allied powers in possession of African colonies exploited their economic resources ruthlessly, while seeking at the same time to keep a coercive lid on the indigenous unrest which often erupted in response.<sup>25</sup> As this example suggests, the pressures placed upon occupied civilians to provide food and other economic resources for a major war effort, and thus be denied the benefits themselves, can alienate them so extensively as to hamstring any conciliatory occupation policy. In German-occupied Europe during World War II, the alienating effect was especially profound. It manifested itself most starkly, from 1943 onward, in mushrooming partisan numbers caused by an influx of men and women desperate to escape the ever more predatory German labour draft. Indeed, in parts of eastern Europe, anti-partisan operations were often used to support the draft, sweeping up the able-bodied populations of 'bandit-friendly territory' and, sometimes, eliminating the non-able-bodied as well as plundering such territories' resources more generally.<sup>26</sup>

As the war progressed, it became increasingly clear to many within the Germans senior command levels, particularly those of the Wehrmacht, that defeating partisans was only achievable through more effective cultivating of the population on whose support partisans relied. Yet the population's mounting abhorrence of the spiralling economic

deprivations of German occupation policy rendered this politically insightful approach infinitely harder to realise. Such a relatively 'enlightened' approach was also constrained by the destructive contradictions of an anti-partisan policy which, though increasingly recognising the need for more restraint, was still characterised by extreme severity and brutality. This in turn reflected the ongoing tendency of many in the German occupation administration, civilian or military, to view eastern European populations with tunnel-visioned racial contempt.

More constructive initiatives were debilitated further by the massively destabilising effect of the outrages which some of Germany's allies were perpetrating. This is exemplified by the barbarity unleashed by the fascist Ustaša regime of Croatia against that country's Jewish, Serbian and Sinti and Roma populations, a topic on which Alexander Korb's chapter focuses. The terror the Ustaša inflicted during 1941 and 1942 damaged order and stability in occupied Yugoslavia and fuelled extensive partisan support.

Such then was the brutal, rapacious, contradictory backdrop of occupation policy, shaped among other things by the relationship between rear and front, against which the eastern European partisan war was played out.

The next issue relates directly to the partisans themselves.

## **Development and establishment of resistance**

A major contributor to the growth of resistance, one which this introduction has already considered, is the behaviour of the occupiers themselves. The role of short-sighted, ill-thought-out occupation policy in fuelling insurgency was made painfully clear during the early 2000s in the case of Iraq. Of German occupation policy in eastern Europe during World War II and its effect in fuelling partisan support, this introduction has said much already.

A further boost to many insurgent movements, the ultimately successful ones at least, comes from outside. A prominent post-1945 example is the massive support China provided to communist forces during the Vietnam War.<sup>27</sup> The main outside sponsors of resistance in the very different context of eastern Europe during World War II were the Soviet Union, Britain and the US, though the significance of each sponsor's contribution varied across occupied countries.<sup>28</sup> The Soviet Union was swifter to support partisan movements on its own soil than were the western Allies to support partisan movements elsewhere in occupied Europe. This was partly because, by 1942, the Soviet High Command

saw partisan warfare as an important complement to its conventional war effort. In Yugoslavia's case, the country's geographical distance from the Soviet Union and the Red Army meant that it fell to the western Allies to sponsor emergent partisan groups there. Finally, the Polish Home Army, to ultimately tragic effect, was denied effective help from either side. Essentially, the Soviets failed to help it largely because they feared it would form a nucleus of future resistance to post-war Soviet rule; the western Allies failed partly because of practical obstacles to supplying deep into eastern European airspace, and partly because of the need to avoid antagonising the Soviets.

With resistance established, a further factor crucial to its ongoing development was the state of its leadership, organisation and supply. This was not just determined by how much outside help it received; effective organisation and leadership, and relations with the communities of the regions in which partisans operated, were also crucial. Partisan groups certainly needed to live off the population to some extent. But in doing so, they needed to be mindful of the danger of losing the population's support. The necessity of not alienating the population was stressed by Mao Tse-Tung.<sup>29</sup> Soviet partisans in particular, as this chapter has already pointed out and as the chapters by Kenneth Slepyan, Alexander Brakel and Erich Haberer further illustrate, were often far from restrained in this regard.

A final factor which determined the growth of a partisan movement was topographical. It is no accident that some of the most drawn-out insurgencies of recent years, such as in Chechnya and Afghanistan, have taken place amid the kind of rugged terrain which is a boon to irregular fighters and a bane to occupying troops. In the Soviet Union during World War II, the flatness of much of the land was compensated for by the vastness of the area in which partisans operated, and the preponderance of swamp and forest within it. In Yugoslavia, the extremely mountainous terrain of Bosnia, Herzegovina and Montenegro made them particularly ideal partisan strongholds. Similar conditions applied, albeit less starkly, to Polish partisans operating in the Carpathian Mountains in the south of their country. Of course, the harshness of conditions in such regions meant that partisan groups also had to be particularly hardy to survive; as the French counter-insurgency theorist David Galula pointed out, harsh climate often benefits counter-insurgents, due to their superior logistical and operational facilities, more than it benefits insurgents.<sup>30</sup> That said, the hardiness of partisans in Yugoslavia, southern Poland and elsewhere during World War II meant they were able, more often than not, to overcome this challenge.<sup>31</sup>

## Concession, coercion and relations with the population

The motivation, workings and effectiveness of the strategy of co-option and concessions, which any sensible observer would recognise as vital to success in both insurgency and counter-insurgency warfare, is the fourth issue to be addressed. Its flipside is coercion, something in which German security forces were particularly well-schooled. Both issues are best addressed together, in relation firstly to the German side, then to the partisan. As already pointed out, both in turn relate closely to the final, perhaps most complex issue which the case studies in this volume address: the causes, nature and effects of the dynamics between occupier, partisans and population.

Counter-insurgency theorists and practitioners have since the nineteenth century increasingly recognised that military force is only one element of the resources that need marshalling for the effective combating of insurgents.<sup>32</sup> The others are an appealing and effective political structure, a competent administrative bureaucracy and a sufficiently extensive, competent and loyal police presence.<sup>33</sup> Resource constraints, and the need to employ personnel sufficiently receptive to native concerns and problems, usually compel an occupying power to rely upon the native population itself for much of the provision of these elements. This was certainly the case across much of colonial Africa, even though the native personnel who volunteered for such tasks often did so less out of loyalty to their colonial masters than out of pressing pragmatism, self-interest or other motives.<sup>34</sup> To an extent, their increasing brutality and rapacity notwithstanding, the Germans managed to elicit similar forms of cooperation in occupied western Europe. There can be no better recent examples than US efforts to establish and maintain viable, independent national governments in Iraq and Afghanistan, vastly different though the context is.

Essential to underpinning all these elements, finally, is an effective hearts and minds campaign. Two vital elements of such a campaign are measured treatment of the populations of those areas affected by insurgency, and enticements to desert directed towards insurgents themselves. Numerous British and French counter-insurgency experts, observing at first hand the wars of colonial retreat in Malaya, Algeria and elsewhere during the 1950s, were among those practitioners and theorists who since the nineteenth century have grown increasingly mindful of the wisdom of such methods.<sup>35</sup> By the early 2000s, prominent US and US-employed military experts also, such as US General David Petraeus and the Australian David Kilcullen, were adopting and developing these ideas further.<sup>36</sup>

The importance of securing hearts and minds was no less relevant to the Germans in eastern Europe during World War II. Very often, however, their ideological blinkers prevented them from recognising this. Far from co-opting existing political structures in Poland and the Soviet Union, they systematically destroyed those structures as surely as they sought to destroy Poland and the Soviet Union as national entities. Resource and manpower constraints, however, left them no choice but to co-opt natives for tasks of everyday administration and policing. Fears for the safety of oneself and one's family in the event of non-compliance, offers of better rations and other inducements in the face of severe wartime shortages and the opportunities for corruption which such employment afforded all ensured that plenty of individuals were prepared to stomach such work. But the destructive contradictions of German occupation policy rendered their task increasingly impossible. In Poland, for example, Nazi attempts to relocate enormous numbers of Poles to make way for ethnic German settlers unleashed social, economic and administrative chaos. Instances such as this hamstrung the ability of the machinery of occupation to deliver the kind of tolerable existence for the indigenous population which might yet have limited its support for the partisans.

Elsewhere in eastern Europe, German approaches to native government and administration were sometimes more pragmatic, Nazi ideology's disdain for Slavic races in general notwithstanding. Yugoslavia is a case in point; though dismembered as a nation upon its defeat, its constituent peoples attained various degrees of autonomy in the settlement that followed. The main reason for this was that the Germans recognised that their own resources could not possibly stretch to imposing the degree of control they exercised in Poland upon the rest of the territory they now occupied. Thus Croatia, for instance, attained full independence following the German invasion, and its Ustaša-led government became a willing, albeit rarely helpful, German ally. Serbia, meanwhile, was run by a puppet government whose main priority was to try and secure a bearable existence for its citizens under wartime occupation. Yet neither arrangement was a lasting recipe for the sort of effective governance and administration that would have been genuinely conducive to peace and stability within occupied territory. Among other things, all the former territories of Yugoslavia eventually were groaning under mounting Axis demand for economic resources and labour. The Slovenes, at the northern edge of the former Yugoslavia, had also to endure mass relocation to make way for the arrival of ethnic German settlers. And the blood-soaked fanaticism and

often-breathtaking ineptitude of the Ustaša regime was itself a further source of the chaos and misery guaranteed to translate into mounting partisan support.

Yet more sensible heads did seek to sanitise the conduct of German occupation, even if they were usually motivated by hard-headed pragmatism rather than morality. Calls for more conciliatory measures, offering the occupied peoples of eastern and western Europe a genuine stake in a German-dominated future, and enticing them to common cause in the 'anti-Bolshevik crusade' in the East, came from the Wehrmacht, German civilian administrators and indeed a few in the SS and Police. Such measures were not pursued consistently or determinedly enough to soften the brutal, exploitative edifice of Nazi occupation policy significantly. Yet the fact that they were attempted highlights the importance of looking beyond a picture of monolithic ruthlessness, to examine the motives for and effects of varying approaches to occupation generally and anti-partisan warfare particularly. In this volume, the chapter by Jeff Rutherford on north-west Russia investigates a prosecution of anti-partisan warfare that displayed a significant degree of restraint, and was the more effective for it. Gregor Kranjc's chapter on Slovenia, meanwhile, illuminates among other things the motivation and workings of an extensive, albeit only partially effective, Axis hearts and minds campaign there.

Intimidation and exemplary punishments, measures which the German military traditionally favoured over co-option and concession, are likewise a perennial feature of counter-insurgency warfare. After all, a population whose loyalties are torn between insurgents and occupiers is likelier to plump for the latter if threatened with sanctions for *not* doing so, as well as enticed with rewards *for* doing so. Hostage-taking and reprisals in response to guerrilla-style action have thus been a commonplace aspect of counter-insurgency campaigns ever since the systematic destruction of Spanish villages by French armies during the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>37</sup> In recent decades, the stipulations of international law and the power of the media to expose the conduct of wars have combined to infuse the issue of coercion in counter-insurgency warfare with mounting controversy, and heap justifiable opprobrium upon the sometimes-appalling excesses it unleashes. That *some* degree of coercion is required for effective counter-insurgency warfare, albeit necessarily within recognised legal and moral frameworks, is nevertheless indisputable.

Yet the Germans' harsh ideological and military proclivities during World War II ensured that the coercion, or rather the brutality, which they exercised very often went beyond objective military necessity,

international legality *or* moral justification. Behind that brutality lay a combination of ideological and 'practical' military considerations.

Conventional armies have traditionally abhorred irregular warfare and the 'underhand', 'unconventional' methods it employs, and have responded with considerable, often excessive, ruthlessness accordingly – most often against the civilian populations caught in the middle. International law's most significant response during the decades leading up to World War II were the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907. These sought to codify and restrain both the conduct of irregular warfare and the measures to which an occupying power should be entitled in order to combat it.<sup>38</sup> Yet the odium with which conventional armies regarded irregular warfare remained. Nowhere was it stronger, for a host of historical reasons stretching back into the nineteenth century, than within the German military.<sup>39</sup>

Conventional armies have also frequently failed to afford the combating of irregular warfare the attention and resources it warrants.<sup>40</sup> A relatively recent example was the US military's decision, following the Vietnam War, to develop its capabilities in anticipation of a conventional war against the Warsaw Pact in Europe, rather than in the direction of unconventional forms of warfare such as counter-insurgency – a decision it came to rue following a sequence of difficult, sometimes disastrous, conflicts during the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>41</sup>

For the Germans in eastern Europe during World War II, the two stances – extreme aversion to irregular warfare and a simultaneous reluctance to commit powerful forces against it – reinforced one another. An anti-partisan campaign founded on terrorising both partisans and population did not just chime with the German military's traditional thinking; it was also seen as a way of compensating for the inadequate manpower which the German High Command was prepared to devote to that campaign.<sup>42</sup> The extreme harshness of the Germans' convictions was again reinforced by ideology, for the racial contempt they felt towards Slavs and Jews in eastern Europe made it easier still for them to justify a terroristic policy to themselves. Ben Shepherd's chapter on the Wehrmacht in Serbia in 1941 exemplifies the dreadful effects when brutal, ideologically-fuelled security directives from above were implemented by commanders on the ground whose own military and ideological ruthlessness was even harsher than that conveyed in the orders issued to them.

Sometimes, particularly in the occupied Soviet Union, brutality took the form of indiscriminate mass shootings and extensive destruction of villages, outrages committed wholesale against purportedly 'bandit-friendly'



areas. Such measures were not only immoral but, in alienating the population and destabilising order in the occupied rear, often counter-productive also. As David Galula wrote, '[c]an the counterinsurgent use terrorism too? It would be self-defeating since terrorism is a source of disorder, which is precisely what the counterinsurgent aims to stop'.<sup>43</sup> The potential for a harsh military mind-set to spill over into savage conduct by the troops has been clear in other counter-insurgency campaigns. The My Lai massacre in Vietnam in 1968 is arguably the most infamous post-1945 example of what can happen if a military institution, while not necessarily exhorting its troops to such actions, allows the kind of mentality to develop which might lead to them.<sup>44</sup> At other times, the Germans' brutal methods were more focused, though no less vicious, victimising as they did Jews, Communists and other 'ideological enemies' of the Reich. Such measures were sometimes driven partly by calculation: targeting such groups, it was hoped, would subdue the population through the display of the German capacity for terror, while at the same time not alienating the population too far.<sup>45</sup> More fundamentally, however, they were driven by a desire to use 'security needs' as cover for policies of racial and ideological extermination.

Not all these measures were counter-productive all the time – though of those that were not, a very great many remained morally reprehensible nevertheless. A stark example is the Wehrmacht policy in Serbia in 1941, when it pursued a reprisal policy of shooting a 100 Jews or Communists for every German soldier killed by partisans. This was a policy designed to impress the Serbs with the Germans' propensity for brutal retaliation, but because it was not being visited upon the Serb population in general, it succeeded in cowing that population, for a time at least, rather than provoking it into fiercer resistance. Effective though such butchery was, however, it would be a delusional counter-insurgency specialist indeed who would seek to defend it morally. Yet the fact that coercive German measures did sometimes work, exemplified here by Claire Hubbard-Hall's chapter on the activities of the infamous Gestapo in Poland, indicates that it was not always just hateful ideology or narrow, blinkered military thinking that drove them. Cold, ruthless but nevertheless effective calculation drove them as well.

The relatively more conciliatory examples of German conduct which this volume presents, meanwhile, show that partisans themselves could ill-afford to assume that German inhumanity and misrule automatically guaranteed that the population would willingly cooperate with them instead. Mao held that insurgents needed to impress the population with their own capacity for orderly behaviour, and offer an appealing

wider programme of measures. Considering the ravages of occupation that were blighting the population, one might imagine that the partisans would have found this task easy. Yet how far they succeeded varied across occupied eastern Europe, and depended upon numerous factors.

Such was the very nature, as already pointed out, of relations between partisans and population that willing cooperation was far from guaranteed. This, after all, was a population which needed to make day-to-day calculations as to which side to support actively, or at least accommodate, in order to best ensure its own survival. In this situation, coercion could further motivate the population to cooperate with the partisans, just as surely as it could motivate it to cooperate with the occupiers. The restraint, or otherwise, with which partisans treated the population of a particular area, could also be determined by whether or not the partisans hailed from that area themselves. A baser reason for harsh partisan treatment of the population, meanwhile, was the lack of discipline within partisan units – something which, in turn, could be determined by how well they were led.

The effects of all these factors are best illustrated in this volume by Slepian's chapter, and by Brakel's and Haberer's complementary case studies of the same area within the border regions of the Soviet Union. It was Soviet partisans, driven among other things by Stalin's ruthless exhortations, who were most strongly disposed towards coercion. And it was because of this, as well as difficulties in maintaining firm control from the centre and ensuring supply across such a wide area, that Soviet partisans were often highly prone to thuggish, piratical and sometimes murderous behaviour in their dealings with the population.<sup>46</sup> This, alongside the even more indiscriminate severity which the Germans themselves so often employed in anti-partisan warfare, meant that the population was trapped between rival terrors competing for its cooperation by whatever means. But such was the ruthlessness of many partisans, not to mention that of Stalin and the Soviet authorities themselves, that they were unmoved by the population's plight.

In Poland, large-scale actions by mobile, forest-dwelling partisans against German personnel and supply did increase as the war went on. Yet in contrast with Soviet partisans, the Polish Home Army, by far the largest body of partisans operating on Polish soil, adopted a 'secret army' model of resistance in much of its activities for the majority of the war. This approach, which many western European resistance movements adopted, favoured actions less likely to provoke ferocious German retaliation. This was partly because the Home Army feared that such a response would seriously disrupt its less spectacular but nonetheless

vital sabotage and intelligence-gathering activities. Yet it was also because, unlike the Soviet partisans, it feared bringing the occupiers' wrath down on the population's heads.<sup>47</sup> Its greater concern for the population was born partly of the fact that, unlike the Communist-controlled Soviet partisans, it stood for a constitutionalist form of government and was largely devoid of extremely ruthless elements. Moreover, the fact that occupied Poland was much smaller than the occupied Soviet Union made it more likely that partisan groups there would be operating among populations with whom they felt at least some local or regional affinity. The detailed military thinking behind the development of the Home Army's strategy has yet to receive the level of attention from historians which it warrants, but it is an important aspect of the Polish underground's campaign. Paul Latawski's chapter fills this lacuna by focusing upon higher command rather than the regional or local levels which are the concern of other chapters in this collection.

Yugoslav partisans, though Communist, also contrasted with their Soviet counterparts in important ways. Though they too could exercise ruthless coercion in their dealings with the population, their concentration in particular locations such as Bosnia and Herzegovina greatly reduced many of the problems of control and discipline which often characterised the much more disparate Soviet partisan groups. The regions they controlled were seen by their leadership not just as military bases but as mini-states also, to the viability of which the population's cooperation was essential. The centrality of control and supply which this system achieved, together with growing practical support from the western Allies as the war progressed, enabled the Yugoslav partisans not only to operate in the style of guerrillas, but also to build up a conventional fighting capability considerably superior to that of their Soviet and Polish counterparts, one which eventually enabled them to play a more significant role in their country's eventual liberation.

None of this meant, however, that cooperative relations between partisans and population were a given in Yugoslavia. Indeed, the reality could not have been more different. Quite apart from anything else, the Communist Yugoslav partisans were only one of a range of ethno-political groupings, the Serb nationalist Četniks and the Croatian fascist Ustaša being other examples, whose mutual, often murderous, antagonisms lent the conflict in Yugoslavia the character not just of an insurgency, but of a civil war as well – albeit one which emerged out of the conditions of the German occupation. In this situation, the dangers to civilians not just from their occupiers, but also from their own countrymen, were evident.

## Conclusion

The chapters in this volume explore the influences that shaped the conduct of partisan and anti-partisan warfare on the ground in German-occupied eastern Europe, through six interrelated issues: strategy of occupation, relations between front and rear, the factors that fuelled the emergence and establishment of partisan movements, the driving forces behind policies of cooperation and co-option on the one hand and behind policies of coercion and terror on the other and, finally, the factors that shaped relations between partisans, occupiers and population on the ground. The chapters break new ground in significant ways: they illuminate hitherto under-explored aspects of partisan and anti-partisan warfare in eastern Europe, and often go against commonly-held perceptions of both occupiers and partisans. They do not detract from the overall picture – the key elements of which are reiterated in this conclusion – and nor are they likely to be accepted by readers unquestioningly. Yet they do contribute, in important ways, to the complex and still highly controversial debate with which readers of this book will be seeking to engage.

The varied picture of German anti-partisan warfare at this level certainly does not detract from the horrific overall picture. All leading Reich agencies, the Wehrmacht included, were culpable in the economic rapacity, brutal repression and indeed outright genocide which the German occupation unleashed upon peoples across eastern Europe. Anti-partisan warfare was linked with these outrages; indeed, to a significant extent, it was used to further them. Nevertheless, so complex was the interplay between the forces that drove anti-partisan warfare, and so varied the contexts in which they made themselves felt, that the behaviour of German forces on the ground could assume manifold forms. The gamut of behaviours on display here was extensive. At one end of the spectrum, some German units made effective attempts to engage with the population. Some of these attempts, however, were less successful because they undermined pro-German elements within the population. At other times, German units could use concession and coercion selectively, or employ calculated utilitarian terror, or, at the far end of the spectrum, commit appalling acts of carnage. In contrast to this, they were often rendered impotent in the face of the sometimes even more appalling carnage committed by some of their own Axis proxies.<sup>48</sup>

Just as the varied picture of the German side which this collection presents does not detract from the damning picture of German conduct overall, nor does the varied picture on the partisan side detract from the

fact that, however partisan groups on the ground may have behaved, a principal goal of partisan movements across eastern Europe was to expel an appalling foreign tyranny from their countries' soil. This was a foreign tyranny, moreover, which had been imposed in an aggressive war which neither those countries nor their partisan movements had sought. Yet here similarly, the complexity of the interplay between the forces that shaped partisan warfare, and the varied contexts in which their effects were felt, produced a range of behaviours. It was not just the fact that different partisan movements favoured different strategies and tactics, and different degrees of coercion or cooperation with the population – though the difference between the Polish Home Army and its Soviet counterpart does provide a clear contrast on that score.<sup>49</sup> Within a movement as vast as that of the Soviet partisans, the varied states of organisation, leadership and relations with the population could produce a plethora of behaviours ranging from extreme ruthlessness to relative restraint.<sup>50</sup>

The time factor is also crucial. General strategies, effects of occupation, levels of organisation and leadership within the partisan movements and levels of coercion and concession all varied over time in accordance with the changing course of a war which turned increasingly against Germany. The time factor was most important in shaping the stance of that third, crucial group within the triangular relationship of partisan and anti-partisan warfare – not the Germans or the partisans, but the population caught in the middle whose cooperation was essential to either side's success. Foreign-imposed tyranny and partisan movements intent on helping to expel it were a reality. But the population on the ground based its calculations on how to behave not upon this reality, but upon its view of which side it should cooperate with in order to best ensure its day-to-day survival. Yet as the German occupation grew ever more obdurate and exploitative, partisan movements better-resourced and more effective, and ultimate Allied victory ever more likely, a shift in the population's calculations took place which increasingly favoured the partisans. This is a process reflected in several chapters in this book.<sup>51</sup>

This book makes no claims to be the final word on the matter. Such was the complexity of the forces at work, and the multiplicity of the regional- and local-level contexts in which their effects were played out, that the need for further in-depth study of partisan and anti-partisan warfare in German-occupied eastern Europe is clear. Yet the book does shed new, significant light upon many aspects of that warfare as it took place on the ground and advances a framework for a

better understanding of them. Furthering the study of partisan and anti-partisan warfare remains a particularly important undertaking when applied to an area of Europe in which the effects of such warfare, and of the German occupation as a whole, were especially devastating, and in which their legacy continues to resonate with particular insistence.

## Notes

1. For a comprehensive overview of German-occupied Europe and accompanying bibliography, see M. Mazower (2008) *Hitler's Empire* (London: Allen Lane).
2. H. Michel (1961) *Les Mouvements Clandestins en Europe* (Vendôme: Presses universitaires de France), pp. 11–16.
3. S. Hawes and R. White (1976) *Resistance in Europe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), pp. 7–23.
4. A. Ibrahim (2004), 'Conceptualisation of Guerrilla Warfare', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 15, 112–24. See also J. Barr (2007) *Setting the Desert on Fire* (London: Bloomsbury).
5. Ibrahim, 'Conceptualisation', 115–16.
6. Ibid., 113.
7. 'Insurgency' and 'counter-insurgency' are used in this introductory chapter as catch-all terms for all forms of irregular and anti-irregular warfare, be they concerning guerrillas, partisans or other types of irregular combatants.
8. For an introduction to post-1945 counter-insurgency theory literature, see B. Heuser (2007) 'The Cultural Revolution in Counter-Insurgency', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 30, 153–71.
9. J. Ellis (1995) *From the Barrel of a Gun* (London: Greenhill), p. 148. Emphasis in original.
10. See for example H. Meier-Welcker (1982) *Aufzeichnungen eines Generalstabsoffiziers 1939–1942* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Rombach); R. Gehlen (1997), *Der Dienst. Erinnerungen 1942–1971* (Mainz: Hase & Koehler).
11. Strategic- and national-level papers from the conference feature as articles in B. Shepherd and J. Pattinson (eds) (2008) 'Partisan and Anti-Partisan Warfare in German-Occupied Europe 1939–1945', special volume of *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 31, 5.
12. For an excellent comparative overview of Western Europe, see B. Moore (ed.) (2000) *Resistance in Western Europe* (Oxford: Berg).
13. See especially M. R. D. Foot (1976) *Resistance* (London: Eyre Methuen); D. Stafford (1983) *Britain and the European Resistance 1940–1945* (London: Macmillan).
14. For relevant historiography concerning occupation and partisan warfare within the individual countries, see relevant individual chapters in this volume.
15. For an introduction to the debate up to the late 1980s, see T. Schulte (1989) *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia* (Oxford: Berg), pp. 1–27. For a historiographical overview up to the late 1990s, see R.-D. Müller and G.-R. Ueberschär (eds) (1997) *Hitler's War in the East 1941–1945* (Oxford: Berg).

16. Overview works of the past decade include R.-D. Müller and H.-E. Volkmann (eds) (1999) *Die Wehrmacht* (Hamburg: Oldenbourg); H. Heer and K. Naumann, (eds) (2000) *War of Extermination* (New York: Berghahn); C. Hartmann, J. Hürter and U. Jureit (eds) (2005) *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht* (Munich: C. H. Beck).
17. For a recent overview, see J. Matthäus (2006) 'Historiography and the Perpetrators of the Holocaust', in D. Stone (ed) *The Historiography of the Holocaust* (London: Palgrave Macmillan). Arguably the best example of such a study remains C. Browning (1992) *Ordinary Men* (New York: Harper Collins).
18. See, for instance, E. Westermann (2005) *Hitler's Police Battalions* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas); P. Blood (2006), *Hitler's Bandit Hunters* (Washington DC: Potomac).
19. See chapters by Haberer and Hubbard-Hall, this volume.
20. Overview works include B. Vandervort (1998) *Wars of Imperial Conquest in Africa 1830–1914* (London: University College London Press); D. Killingray and D. E. Omissi (eds) (1999) *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers, c.1700–1964* (Manchester: Manchester University Press); I. F. W. Beckett (2001) *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies* (London: Routledge); K. Hack and T. Rettig (eds) (2006) *Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia* (New York: Routledge). More recent national-level studies include A. J. Birtle (1998) *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1876–1941* (Washington: Centre of Military History, 1998); T. R. Moorman (1998) *The Army in India and the Development of Frontier Warfare, 1849–1947*.
21. On, for instance, Joseph Chamberlain's attempt to include Britain's tropical colonies in a protectionist economic system of 'imperial preference', see M. Havinden and D. Meredith (1995) *Colonialism and Development: Britain and Its Tropical Colonies 1850–1960* (London: Routledge). For further reading on differences between colonial regimes, see for instance S. E. Stockwell (2007) *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell); F. Cooper (2005) *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press).
22. Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, Ch. 1; V. Liulevicius (2000) *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); G. P. Groß (ed.) (2006) *Die Vergessene Front: Der Osten 1914/15. Ereignis, Wirkung, Symbol* (Paderborn: Schöningh).
23. Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, p. 198.
24. See chapter by Shepherd, this volume.
25. H. Strachan (ed.) (2000) *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), ch. 7.
26. C. Gerlach (1999) *Kalkulierte Morde* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition), pp. 975–1036.
27. Q. Zhai (2000) *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press).
28. E. Mawdsley (2008) 'Anti-German Insurgency and Allied Grand Strategy', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, 695–719.
29. Ibrahim, 'Conceptualisation', 118.

30. D. Galula (2006) *Counterinsurgency Warfare* (Westport, CT: Praeger), pp. 36–7.
31. Foot, *Resistance*, pp. 12–13.
32. Heuser, 'Cultural Revolution'. For pre-World War II examples of 'political' approaches to counter-insurgency warfare, see Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies*, pp. 37–47.
33. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, pp. 26–33.
34. For recent treatment, see for instance T. H. Parsons (2004) 'African Participation in the British Empire', in P. D. Morgan and S. Hawkins (eds) *Black Experience and the Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 257–85.
35. R. Thompson (1967) *Defeating Communist Insurgency* (London: Chatto & Windus); J. Nagl (2002) *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); F. Guelton (2002) 'The French Army "Centre for Training and Preparation in Counter-Guerrilla Warfare" (CIPCG) at Arzew', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 25, 35–53.
36. D. Kilcullen (2005) 'Countering Global Insurgency', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, 597–617; D. Petraeus (2006) 'Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldiering in Iraq', available at [http://www.army.mil/professional\\_writing/volumes/volume4/april\\_2006/4\\_06\\_2.html](http://www.army.mil/professional_writing/volumes/volume4/april_2006/4_06_2.html), accessed 30 June 2010.
37. G. H. Lovett (1965) *Napoleon and the Birth of Modern Spain* (New York: New York University Press), p. 693. See also Beckett, *Small Wars*, pp. 27–30; C. J. Esdaile (2004) *Fighting Napoleon* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).
38. See J. Horne and A. Kramer (2001) *German Atrocities 1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press), pp. 444–5.
39. Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*.
40. F. Kitson (1971) *Low Intensity Operations* (London: Faber & Faber), p. 199.
41. R. M. Cassidy (2006) *Counterinsurgency and the Global War on Terror* (Westport, CT: Praeger); R. Lock-Pullan (2006) *US Intervention and Army Innovation from Vietnam to Iraq* (New York: Routledge).
42. B. Shepherd (2004) *War in the Wild East* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), pp. 41–57; K.-J. Arnold (2005), *Die Wehrmacht und die Besatzungspolitik in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot), pp. 443–4.
43. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, pp. 71–5.
44. D. L. Anderson (ed) (1998) *Facing My Lai* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas); J. S. Olson and R. Roberts (1998) *My Lai* (NY: St Martin's Press).
45. J. Friedrich (1993) *Das Gesetz des Krieges* (Munich: Piper), pp. 743–828.
46. See chapter by Brakel, this volume.
47. Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, p. 473.
48. See the chapters by Haberer, Kranjc, Rutherford, Hubbard-Hall, Korb and Shepherd, this volume.
49. See chapter by Latawski, this volume.
50. See chapters by Slepian and Brakel, this volume.
51. See chapters by Slepian, Brakel and Kranjc, this volume.



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# **Part I**

## **The Soviet Union**

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# Foreword

*Evan Mawdsley*

The occupation of the western territories of the USSR was unlike that of any other part of Europe. First of all, the scale was larger. At the start of 1943, Axis forces occupied some 850,000 square miles of territory which had been part of the USSR on 22 June 1941; this territory held some 65–70 million inhabitants. To put this in perspective, the area of metropolitan France was only 215,000 square miles, and the population there was 42 million. Secondly and paradoxically, however, the situation was unusual because nearly three-quarters of the Soviet population and a much larger share of the territory was *not* under German control, and a conventional Soviet war effort by the Red Army interacted with that of insurgents. (The only wartime parallel was with China, but there the capital and main industrial regions were in the hands of the occupiers, and the Chinese Nationalist government could do little to support insurgents.) A third difference was the role of ideology. Racist ideas about Slavs and Jews, fear of the Communists as long-time foes of National Socialism and ideological plans for economic exploitation (the acquisition of *Lebensraum* or 'Living Space') put German occupation policy in a different dimension. Ideology also gave the Stalinist state a perception of the resistance that was unlike that of the governments-in-exile in the west; this is discussed below. The final difference from occupation elsewhere was the diversity of the occupied area. The USSR had been a multi-national state, and some parts of the territory had been under Moscow control much longer than others; the time span ranged from over 20 years (for the ethnic Russian areas, and eastern Belorussia and eastern Ukraine) to two years or less (for western Belorussia and western Ukraine, and the Baltic region).

The Germans made their largest territorial gains in a fairly short period between the time of the 'Barbarossa' invasion of 22 June 1941 and late

September of that year. By that time, they had encircled Leningrad, overrun nearly all Ukraine and come within 150 miles of Moscow. They would take more territory on the approaches to Moscow after September 1941, but they lost it again when the Red Army counter-attacked in December 1941 and January 1942. In contrast to other parts of Europe, it was possible for some Soviet citizens to escape eastward, out of the way of the German onslaught, at least after the first weeks following the Germans' surprise attack; on the other hand, a large number of former Soviet soldiers found themselves trapped behind German lines after the defeats of the summer and autumn of 1941.

By February 1942, the front line in northern and central European Russia had stabilised, and it would not significantly change until the summer and autumn of 1943. In the southern part of the European USSR, however, the front was more dynamic in 1942. Hitler mounted his 'second offensive' towards Stalingrad and the Caucasus in May. From June until November 1942 the Axis-occupied area in the southeastern European USSR significantly increased. With the Battle of Stalingrad (November 1942 to February 1943), the Red Army regained the initiative. The Germans lost first their summer and autumn gains in the southeast, after that some territory west of Moscow and then most of Ukraine. The final expulsion of the occupiers came in mid-1944, when the Red Army cleared the approaches to Leningrad, liberated Belorussia and recaptured the Baltic states.

German occupation lasted longest in the western part of the USSR, notably in Belorussia and Ukraine; case studies of the former region are provided in the chapters by Brakel and Haberer.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, although the Baltic territories of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania remained in German hands until the late summer of 1944, the resistance movement there was never as strong as elsewhere. This was partly because the Germans treated the local population somewhat better, at least the non-Slav and non-Jewish part of it. It was also partly because most of the local people had little identification with the USSR, their territories having been annexed by that foreign state in 1939–40.

Hitler was ideologically opposed to creating any high or medium-level indigenous political authority to replace Soviet rule. He would not accept successor governments made up either of sympathetic members of the Russian majority, or even of representatives of the non-Russian minorities. The situation was in contrast to some other parts of Europe in World War II: in much of the former territory of Yugoslavia, where the Croats were given a free hand, and in France, Denmark or Norway, where some power was left to sympathetic right-wing collaborator

politicians of the local nationality. The closest parallel to the USSR would be Poland. One reason for this harsh treatment was that Hitler conceived of the Russian struggle as a unique 'war of annihilation', but in addition it was fundamentally impossible to satisfy *both* Russian anti-Communists *and* the self-appointed leaders of the various non-Russian nationalities. The former group, while anti-Stalinist, wanted to restore Russian control over the peripheral territories while the latter wanted to bring about or restore national independence.

The authorities in Berlin hoped that military victory over the Red Army would be won quickly. Nevertheless, they expected that the task of keeping down the occupied USSR with its legacy of 'Jewish-Bolshevik' dictatorship would be a most challenging one. The various Wehrmacht 'illegal orders' allowing summary execution of captured political officers and the use of mass collective reprisals were conceived partly with the problem of potential Communist resistance in mind. This policy continued into 1942. After the failure of the Blitzkrieg some leaders of the occupying forces, especially in the *Ostheer* (the German Army in Russia), saw that the policy of crude repression was counter-productive, but by the autumn of 1941 any hope of winning over the population at a political level had been lost.

The organisation of the German occupation was based on the concept of the extinction of Soviet/Russian statehood. The Germans began their invasion with harsh anti-partisan measures directed especially at resistance they expected from Communists and Jews, and this was one of the functions of the infamous *Einsatzgruppen* (SS security task forces), four of which were murderously deployed on Soviet territory in 1941. The original plan was that the occupied territories of the former USSR were to be divided into four *Reichskommissariats* under German civilian administration. In the end, only two *Reichskommissariats* were set up. *Reichskommissariat Ukraine* (with headquarters at Rovno – now Rivne) took in most of Ukraine and southern Belorussia. *Reichskommissariat Ostland* (with headquarters at Riga) took in the Baltic states and northern Belorussia. Incomplete German military success meant that planned *Reichskommissariats* for central Russia and for the Caucasus were never created. Various branches of the SS and Police played a part in the security of these particular territories. One such branch, the German Gendarmerie, is the focus of Erich Haberer's chapter in this volume.<sup>2</sup> The German task was an impossible one, but it was also true that the occupation was confused and dysfunctional, just as much of the NSDAP state was dysfunctional. Warring bureaucracies could not work together and extremists were given their head by Hitler.<sup>3</sup>

The *Ostheer* was in charge of the immediate area on and just behind the front line, imposing the initial occupation and enforcing it. The activity of one German division – the 121st Infantry – is discussed in the chapter by Jeff Rutherford.<sup>4</sup> The administration of each of the rear areas of the individual field armies (the Second Army, Fourth Army and so on) was organised here, as elsewhere in Europe, into *Korücks*, an abbreviation of *Kommando des rückwärtigen Gebietes* (rear area command). A small number of special-purpose security divisions (*Sicherungs-Divisionen*) were deployed, as well as some troops from among Axis allies and some forces raised from the local population. Although the partisans caused considerable alarm among the occupation forces, they did not require a significant diversion of strength from the front line of the *Ostheer*.

The Germans would allow no 'Russian' political administration, but there was a considerable effort to recruit the local inhabitants at the grass-roots to aid the Axis cause. Millions of people were conscripted as forced labourers. The Germans were also able to secure the services of a very large number of Soviet citizens in their armed forces, as German Army auxiliaries (the *Hilfswillige* – *Hiwi*), but also even as military units, some directly involved in counter-insurgency duties. This recruitment to serve the Reich in fields, mines, factories and even in military uniform was most successful among the non-Russian nationalities. There were several distinct reasons for this, including the fact that most of the German-occupied territory was inhabited by minorities.<sup>5</sup> In European terms this contribution was large, partly due to the huge pool of potential personnel.

Just as the occupation policy in the USSR was different from elsewhere, so was the opposition to it.<sup>6</sup> The term 'resistance' (*soprotivlenie*) is almost never used in the context of occupied Soviet Russia. The anti-German underground was known as the *partizanskoe dvizhenie* (partisan movement), after the peasant guerrillas who had fought Napoleon in 1812, and after unconventional fighters against the Whites and the Intervention during the Civil War of 1917–22.

Elsewhere in Europe the resistance appeared after the disintegration of conventional state authority, and in states where the pre-war government had been weak or liberal. In contrast, Stalinist Russia in the 1930s had been a totalitarian dictatorship which had set up an elaborate system for mobilisation and control of the population using the Communist Party, propaganda and the vast secret police network of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD). Despite catastrophic military defeats, the Soviet regime was intact and the initiative

for the partisan movement would come from above rather than below. The development of an independent resistance movement 'from below' was certainly unwelcome in the Kremlin. (There was also a fundamental parallel with Lenin's pre-revolutionary view that the insurgency against the Tsarist government should be organised from above by the 'vanguard' Bolshevik party rather than from below by a 'spontaneous' workers' movement.)

The nature of this state-sponsored partisan movement changed over time. Initially, it was seen by Moscow as a (short-term) movement of Communist party members and one under the close control of the Communist Party, the Soviet state and specifically, the NKVD. Moscow ordered local party organisations to create urban and rural underground cells 'from the best people' in town and country, using the urban party organisation as the base. Only in 1942 was much wider participation from below welcome, and the partisan movement was then described as an all-people's (*vsenarodnoe*) movement; this process is thoroughly explored in Kenneth Slepyan's chapter, and in his monograph *Stalin's Guerrillas*.<sup>7</sup> At its peak in the summer of 1943, the partisan movement claimed some 200,000 fighters.

Despite the highly centralised nature of the Stalinist state, there was much disagreement over how the 'partisan movement' should be organised. It was only in May 1942, 11 months after the start of the German occupation that a Central Staff of the Partisan Movement (*TsShPD*) was created in Moscow, attached to the Supreme Headquarters of the Red Army (the *Stavka VGK*), and under the former Belorussian party leader P. K. Ponomarenko. There were six subordinate headquarters – Ukrainian, Briansk, Western, Kalinin, Leningrad, and Karelo-Finnish 'Staffs of the Partisan Movement'. The delay had been caused both by the wartime uncertainties and priorities, but also by infighting between the party (at different levels), the Army and the NKVD. Communist rhetoric changed over time: it initially called for a national uprising, but eventually settled for aiding the Red Army.

Other 'unofficial' insurgent movements did exist on occupied Soviet territory. There was no ethnic-Russian alternative to the Communist partisan movement. This was in contrast to splits in the anti-German underground in some other parts of Europe, where there were rival Communist and non-Communist resistance movements, for example, in France, Poland or Yugoslavia. However, some of the non-Russian minorities created – or continued – their own insurgent movements which were both anti-German and anti-Soviet (effectively anti-Russian), and aimed for what would later be called 'national liberation'. The most



significant of these was the UPA, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, formed in 1943 but based on a pre-war Polish-based Ukrainian nationalist organisation. Other 'forest' movements would appear in the Baltic and former Polish borderlands when the Red Army returned in 1944.

Unlike resistance movements elsewhere in Europe, the Soviet partisan movement received virtually no supplies or cadres from the 'Western' organisations like the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) or the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS). On the other hand, partisans on the ground depended heavily on the 'external' influence of the Soviet 'mainland' for guidance and for supply. That said, it should be borne in mind that the Red Army's effective support was limited in the early stages of the war by the early defeat and retreat, and throughout the war by the short range of supply aircraft and radio transmitters. It made a great difference that after December 1941 Soviet defeat was no longer inevitable and, after Stalingrad and the beginning of 1943, that continued German occupation was unlikely and that the return of Soviet power was very probable.

In the final – liberation – phase of the war during 1943–4 the partisans played an important part as auxiliaries to the Red Army in gaining intelligence about the Germans and attacking their supply lines. They had become stronger as supplies from the 'mainland' improved, as Soviet victory seemed inevitable and as the German occupiers became weaker. The classic episodes were the 'rail wars' where, in coordinated surges of activity, the partisans cut the railway supply lines of the German armies. As in the rest of Europe, however, the partisans were incapable of effecting liberation on their own, even against a greatly weakened German Army.

In 1944 the partisan movement was wound down. Partisan fighters were scooped up in large numbers as replacements for the advancing Red Army at a time when that force was beginning to suffer shortages of personnel. In the political sphere the partisans played an important part in pushing through the re-establishment of the Communist Party dictatorship in peripheral regions and in suppressing the anti-Soviet insurgents.

## Notes

1. On the complexities of resistance and national identity in the borderlands see also A. Weiner (2000) *Making Sense of War. The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
2. See also P. Blood (2006) *Hitler's Bandit Hunters*, foreword by Richard Holmes (Washington: Potomac Books).

3. On this see J. Steinberg (1995) 'The Third Reich Reflected: German Civil Administration in the Occupied Soviet Union, 1941–4', *English Historical Review*, 110, 620–51.
4. See also O. Bartov (1985) *The Eastern Front, 1941–45: German Troops and the Barbarization of Warfare* (New York: St. Martin's); G. Megargee (2006) *War of Annihilation: Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front, 1941* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield); B. Shepherd (2004) *War in the Wild East* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).
5. This would not explain the relative success of German recruitment of minorities from the eastern and unoccupied part of the USSR – the Volga Tatars and some inhabitants of the Caucasus and Central Asia. These recruits mostly came via POW camps rather than territorial occupation; here German preferences were important, as well as the ambivalent loyalty of many captured Red Army soldiers from non-Russian areas.
6. The classic work on the movement is J. Armstrong (ed.) (1964) *Soviet Partisans in World War II* (Madison: University of Wisconsin) which has to some extent been replaced by L. Grenkewich and D. Glantz (1999) *The Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941–1944. A Critical Historiographical Analysis* (London: Frank Cass). There are excellent local studies, notably A. Hill (2005) *The War behind the Eastern Front* (London: Frank Cass).
7. K. Slepyan (2006) *Stalin's Guerrillas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas).

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# 1

## Partisans, Civilians and the Soviet State: An Overview

*Kenneth Slepyan*

Civilians are an inseparable part of guerrilla wars, no less so than in the struggle between the Soviet partisans and the German-led occupation forces during World War II. The ultimate success of the Soviet partisan movement depended on civilians, who provided material aid, manpower, intelligence and other support. However, civilians could also supply the occupiers with the same goods and services. How to treat occupied civilians was a central problem facing both the Soviet leadership in Moscow and the partisans in the forests. Complicating the issue of civilian-partisan relations were the population's often ambivalent – and sometimes outright hostile – views of the Soviet regime. The government's innate distrust of its own citizens, especially when they were no longer under its overt control, and the partisans' own fears of spies and collaborators, made establishing close and friendly relations between partisans and civilians all the more difficult.

Officials and partisans alike struggled over two key questions: first, was the partisans' mission to focus solely on direct military objectives against the enemy, which could lead to civilian losses, or should the partisans also protect citizens and their property, even if this protection interfered with their military operations? Second, should civilians be enlisted into the broader guerrilla struggle as part of a national uprising, or should civilian participation be discouraged to avoid risky contact with potential enemy collaborators?

Although government policies eventually evolved into a generally consistent programme by 1943, state efforts to define civilian-partisan relations were initially marked by confusion. In formulating its policies, the regime employed state media to establish the parameters of sanctioned behaviours, and government agencies to provide specific orders and instructions. State media presented three messages to the partisans: first,

from the beginning of the war, the partisans were depicted as leading a national uprising, an 'all-people's war' (*vsenarodnaia voina*); second, they were to attack the enemy relentlessly, no matter the cost to themselves or to the local populace; and third, they were to protect Soviet civilians and their property. The last of these was emphasised only after the Soviet Union gained the strategic advantage in 1943 and had begun the permanent liberation of occupied territory.

The initial orders from government agencies, however, contradicted the inclusive call for 'all-people's war', envisioning a limited insurgency largely autonomous from the surrounding population. Partisans were to ignore the consequences of their actions on local civilians – their aim was to inflict maximum damage to the occupiers. In September 1942, the government changed its official course and embraced 'all-people's war' as its new policy. While the prior focus on military action remained, partisans were now supposed to seek active civilian support to increase the military and political effectiveness, broaden the regime's support base, and demonstrate the legitimacy of the Soviet state.<sup>1</sup> But in reality, even with this official change, Moscow still showed little concern for overall civilian welfare and security. Finally, in 1943, after the strategic situation had turned in the Soviets' favour, policymakers stressed the need for partisans to protect citizens' lives and property, even as their military operations intensified. Taken as a whole, state policy, whether emanating from the media or institutions, actually legitimated a range of actions, any one of which partisans could cite to justify their decisions.

Although the partisans were subject to Moscow's instructions, they did not always obey them, nor did the regime have the means to ensure their obedience. The partisans had their own immediate interests and concerns, shaped by local conditions, by their own sense of what their mission should be, and by their evolving social composition which drew increasingly from nearby civilians. The combination of official ambiguity and partisan autonomy meant that policy towards civilians was decided as much by the partisans on the ground as it was by officials in the Kremlin.

Both Soviet and Western historians have generally argued that the partisans followed a coherent set of policies drafted by the centre. From the beginning of the war Soviet propagandists and historians portrayed the partisans both as fearless resisters fighting the German occupation and as protectors of civilians, defending lives, property and the Soviet way of life. Thus, historian A. S. Zalesskii, author of one of the most important works in the field, emphasised the role partisans played in

linking the Communist Party with the people, and the ways in which partisans and civilians helped one another: partisans supplied protection, while civilians provided crucial material support.<sup>2</sup> The collapse of the Soviet Union, although allowing for free discussion, nevertheless seems to have had little effect on this view, with the exception that the glorification of the Communist Party has been excised. For example, according to one typical text, the Russian people looked to the partisans as their 'defenders and saviours', and 'in fact, the partisans and population became a single national (*narodnyi*) army',<sup>3</sup> statements which would fit comfortably in any Soviet-era work.

Before the opening of the Soviet archives in the early 1990s, Western historians relied on captured German records, Soviet memoirs and secondary sources. Influenced by the Cold War and by ongoing counter-insurgency campaigns against Communist and Communist-inspired foes, these scholars contended that the partisans were the agents of a repressive, totalitarian regime, who gained civilian support only because German policies were even more brutal and inhumane than those of the Soviet government.<sup>4</sup> One analyst argued that the partisans, far from trying to prevent attacks on civilians, in fact welcomed them, stating, the guerrillas 'were not fighting to preserve, but to destroy the old society, and, in its place, help create a new one'.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the partisans were the 'long arm of the Soviet state', imposing its policies, and ensuring its political presence even in the occupied territories.<sup>6</sup> Paradoxically, then, Soviet and Western historians agreed fundamentally that the partisans unquestioningly fulfilled Moscow's orders, even if they differed over the intent and nature of those policies.

The opening of the Soviet-era archives has enabled historians, including the contributors to this volume, to re-evaluate the relationship between the Soviet partisans and civilians. This chapter relies extensively on archival sources, particularly the records of the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement, as well as interviews of partisans and partisan veterans conducted by the Commission on the History of the Great Patriotic War. Documents such as unit reports, diaries, official memoranda, briefings and conference transcripts illuminate both the formulation of policy and the ways in which partisans implemented – or did not implement – these instructions. While these materials have their own inherent biases, especially in their tendency towards self-promotion by individuals, units and agencies, these newly available sources have facilitated historians' efforts to uncover the dynamics of the guerrilla struggle and its effects on civilians at the micro- and regional levels.<sup>7</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of Soviet partisan policy towards civilians in the occupied territories, and the ways in which the partisans themselves both responded to these instructions and determined their own stances. A discussion of such a complex topic at this level can only point to general patterns. Other chapters in this volume will fill in the details, and readers are invited to see how far these case studies conform or conflict with the interpretation set forth here.

It is also important to recognise that the categories of 'state officials', 'partisans' and 'civilians' in reality were not as discrete as they might seem in this discussion. Partisans were often government officials (such as district party secretaries), and many others were civilians before joining the insurgency, while many soldiers, cut off from their units or having escaped from prisoner of war camps, had tried to settle with local civilians before going to the forests. It is therefore important to keep in mind the fluidity of these terms, especially in an extremely dangerous and tumultuous time.

## **Soviet wartime media and partisan–civilian relations**

The Soviet government used both direct and indirect methods in its attempts to control the partisans. State media, including newspapers and leaflets distributed behind enemy lines and radio broadcasts to the occupied territories, were an important form of indirect control, establishing the parameters of acceptable partisan actions.<sup>8</sup> However, the media promoted multiple discourses which sometimes produced ambiguous and confusing messages. The first concept presented in the initial weeks of the war portrayed the partisans as fighting an 'all-people's war' as part of a national 'great patriotic war'. Newspaper accounts stressed that the partisan ranks were filled with ordinary people, albeit led by Communists and Soviet activists. Thus, according to a mid-July 1941 *Pravda* article, the partisans formed a 'mighty people's movement', and 'the fascists will soon be convinced – if they are not already convinced – that the partisan movement is an all-people's movement'.<sup>9</sup>

A sub-discourse related to 'all-people's war' was the media's call to avenge unprovoked atrocities against Soviet civilians, in which villages were destroyed and their inhabitants deported to Germany or killed.<sup>10</sup> As news spread of these crimes, the public's desire for revenge became deep and primal, a visceral emotion felt powerfully and profoundly, both nationally and personally. Articles in central newspapers and films such as *She Defends the Motherland* (1943) depicted the desire for revenge

as the primary reason why people became partisans.<sup>11</sup> As a typical article noted, personal and national interests became one:

Yes, every worker, collective farmer, teacher, attacking the lair of the enemy in the dead of the fall night, has his own score to settle with the Germans. They seek revenge upon the fascist scoundrels for the burning down of homes, for the murder of mothers and wives. They seek revenge for their motherland, for the plunder of cities and villages, for the bitter tears of mothers, for the trampling of the fields. The combat detachment is bonded with the blood of Soviet people going to the forest to seek revenge on the enemy. And this detachment will not lay down its arms until that time when the last fascist soldier is swept from the Soviet land.<sup>12</sup>

The sub-discourse of revenge had political significance far beyond any military benefit that might also have been achieved: it enabled the regime to tap into the powerful popular urge to strike back at perpetrators, using the partisans to forge a bond between citizens and the government.

The second discourse, emphasising military action, was established by Stalin himself in his address to the nation on 3 July 1941. Stalin defined the partisan movement solely in terms of destroying the enemy, calling on the partisans to 'foment guerrilla warfare everywhere, to blow up bridges and roads, damage telephone and telegraph wires, set fire to forests, stores, transports'.<sup>13</sup>

Following Stalin's lead, newspaper reports focused on the success of partisan military operations. Partisans who risked and sacrificed the lives of their loved ones were especially celebrated. In one typical story, the four children of a legendary Belorussian partisan commander were taken hostage by the Germans, who promised that their lives would be spared if the commander turned himself in. After much anguish, the commander sacrificed his children, who were then tortured and shot, because, as he reportedly said, 'hundreds of lives were charged to me, and I cannot abandon them to torment. No, not me, not you, nor our children can live in the same land with the Germans'.<sup>14</sup> Such stories glorified the partisans' dedication to the Soviet cause, demonstrated the necessity of civilian suffering and further stoked the fires of revenge.

The third discourse was the partisans as the people's defenders. Partisans were commended for protecting civilians from, as reported in the media, unprovoked German attacks, citing in particular the establishment of civilian camps within partisan-controlled areas, enabling



peaceful citizens to live 'a Soviet life' with hospitals, telephones, workshops, collective farms and of course Party organisations.<sup>15</sup> Although this discourse first emerged in spring 1942, it became much more prominent in 1943 as Soviet forces went on the strategic offensive. A lead article in *Pravda* in March 1943 stated that as the Germans concentrated near population points, 'the sacred responsibility of the partisan is to frustrate the plans of the enemy, not to give him the chance to carry out black deeds'.<sup>16</sup> And in his annual May Day address in 1943 Stalin ordered the partisans to save 'Soviet citizens from being driven into German slavery' and to avenge 'the blood and tears of our wives and children, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters'.<sup>17</sup>

These public depictions suggest that the regime was concerned about the fate of the occupied population, especially during and after 1943. Yet stories celebrating the partisans' willingness to sacrifice even their most loved and defenceless kin also indicated that the insurgents had to be ruthless and to ignore civilian suffering if they were to fulfil their duty to the national cause. Consequently, the message communicated by the state media remained ambiguous. Government policy did little to add clarity.

## **Soviet policy and partisan-civilian relations**

While state media provided general guidelines, government organs exercised more direct control. As with the media, the responsible officials and agencies pursued multiple and evolving policies, which were loosely consistent with the discourses disseminated by the media. Each also had its own implications for the partisan-civilian relationship, inadvertently enabling partisans to follow those policies that best suited their particular circumstances.

Although facilitating an insurgency, Soviet leaders wanted desperately to avoid what John Erickson has termed 'the organised dissidence' inherent in guerrilla warfare, which was so prevalent during the Civil War when partisans frequently disobeyed orders from superiors.<sup>18</sup> Distrusting its own population and lacking institutional control to ensure the partisans' reliability, the leadership recruited partisans from among Party members, dedicated Soviet activists and state security personnel.<sup>19</sup> In keeping the partisans limited to proven regime loyalists, officials attempted to fight an all-people's war without the people, a far cry from the populist rhetoric then being proclaimed in the newspapers.

An example of how far policy diverged from public discourse was the partisans' implementation of the 'scorched earth' programme. On

29 June 1941 the Central Committee instructed Soviet cadres, including partisans, to destroy crops, livestock, machinery, communication lines, public buildings and even private houses and barns that might be useful to the occupiers.<sup>20</sup> A subsequent order issued in mid-November at the height of the German offensive against Moscow was even harsher, calling on partisans to destroy all structures within 40 to 60 kilometres behind the frontline.<sup>21</sup> Partisan operations fulfilling this directive hardly endeared the 'people's avengers' to the peasants, since often it was the latter's property that was destroyed.<sup>22</sup> Peasants occasionally resisted these actions, as occurred in one village in the Krasnodar region when partisans attempted to destroy the only mill, but were thwarted by the local inhabitants.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, one of the most famous heroes of the partisan war, Zoia Kosmodem'ianskaia, an 18-year-old Komsomol volunteer, was tortured and executed by the Germans after peasants handed her over, incensed by her efforts to burn down a barn.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, from the leadership's perspective, the scorched earth policy was effective: in 1942–3, partisans destroyed 10 per cent of all grain and 20 per cent of all meat produced in the occupied territories at a time when production had fallen from the already low levels of the 1930s, further dashing German expectations that the occupied East could become the Reich's breadbasket.<sup>25</sup> This policy, however, undermined Soviet claims that the partisans were fighting an 'all-people's war' to protect the occupied citizenry.

In autumn 1942, a second policy more closely aligned to the populist rhetoric of 'all-people's war' emerged, championed primarily by Belorussian Communist Party head Panteleimon Ponomarenko. As early as the summer of 1941, Ponomarenko contended that the partisan movement should actively promote peasant participation.<sup>26</sup> His appointment as chief of staff of the newly formed Central Staff of the Partisan Movement at the end of May 1942 indicated that Stalin had come to endorse his views, but it was not until early September that he convinced Stalin to issue a new order, People's Commissariat of Defence (NKO) Order 189, 'On the Tasks of the Partisan Movement'. It called on the partisans to conduct an 'all-people's war' 'so that the partisan struggle embraces the broadest masses of the Soviet people on the occupied territory'. The partisans' mission was now as much political as it was military: to demonstrate the legitimacy of the Soviet regime by creating a massive and vibrant armed resistance. To facilitate their new mission, they were now to include in the movement 'all honourable male and female citizens, desiring to be liberated from the German yoke'.<sup>27</sup> As Stalin himself told a group of partisan commanders attending a Kremlin reception just before the order was issued, 'You must have stronger ties

with the people. This guarantees your success'.<sup>28</sup> Thus propaganda and policy were to converge, and out of it a new approach to partisan-civilian relations emerged.

In fact, the insurgency's base was already expanding. The first partisans, the proven regime loyalists, suffered heavily in the first year of the war, but beginning in spring 1942, their remnants were joined by significant numbers of Red Army soldiers, left stranded behind enemy lines. At the same time, ordinary citizens encouraged by the successful Soviet counter-offensive before Moscow, outraged by increasingly rapacious and brutal German occupation policies, and motivated by local, ethnic or Soviet patriotism also began to enter the ranks in substantial numbers, a trend that accelerated greatly in 1943–4. In June 1942, the Central Staff recorded almost 70,000 partisans, but six months later it had registered over 102,000 partisans, increasing to at least 181,000 by January 1944 (not including those whose areas had already been liberated).<sup>29</sup> This growth occurred overwhelmingly within the pre-1939 borders; in the territories annexed in 1939–40, the partisans remained insignificant because of the Soviet regime's unpopularity and the strength of nationalist movements, especially in Western Ukraine.<sup>30</sup>

This demographic transformation had important implications for the partisans' relationship with civilians. The partisans of 1941, though often operating in their home districts, at times could be quite single-minded pursuing their state-sanctioned missions, indifferent to local concerns. The special teams sent by the state security services were probably the most dangerous of all, from the civilians' standpoint, as they generally had no connections with the locality, and benefited from the popular outrage caused by enemy atrocities against civilians. Generally speaking, the civilian partisans who joined in 1942 and after were more sympathetic to local inhabitants' fears about security as they were more likely to have left loved ones behind in their towns and villages, a sentiment manifested by their high desertion rates when they were ordered to leave their home districts.<sup>31</sup> Not surprisingly, local partisans tended to prioritise the defence of their villages, and occasionally negotiated informal truces with nearby German garrisons to safeguard their families' homes. These behaviours could be dangerous as Soviet authorities viewed them as inherently anti-Soviet.<sup>32</sup> The centre responded by threatening to destroy offending units and by introducing 'foreign' detachments with no ties to the area, to attack the enemy, thus provoking reprisals against neighbouring civilians. This in turn would lead to the survivors joining the partisans and seeking revenge against the occupiers, continuing the cycle of violence.<sup>33</sup>

NKO Order 189 tied the movement's official objectives to the well-being and support of the occupied population. As the Soviets went on the strategic offensive following the victory at Stalingrad, the government further expanded the partisans' mission to actively defend civilians and their property. As the Red Army advanced, German labour draft and food procurement efforts intensified, in part to deny the Soviets desperately needed human and material resources.<sup>34</sup> Peasant hardship, already extreme, worsened significantly. By 1943, peasants in Smolensk province were reduced to eating grass and roots to survive and units in eastern Belorussia were forced to move west because there were no more provisions to be had. Starvation also became a serious concern in the Leningrad region, especially near the front lines and near German collection centres.<sup>35</sup> As early as mid-August 1942, Ponomarenko had tried but failed to get Stalin to rescind the scorched earth policy on the grounds that it hurt both peasants and partisans.<sup>36</sup> After Stalingrad, however, it became increasingly evident that Soviet forces would need provisions and manpower as the occupied territories were liberated. Thus, the Central Staff in mid-summer 1943 ordered that every effort be made to protect civilians, and their harvest and livestock. The occupiers were to be denied access to grain, and German procurements were to be interrupted by guarding the fields or by destroying German supply convoys. In areas where they were not yet firmly established, partisans were ordered to help with the harvest, take what they needed and distribute the rest to the peasants before the Germans arrived.<sup>37</sup> These instructions were echoed by at least one regional party organisation.<sup>38</sup> In the media, as we have seen, a new emphasis was placed on the partisans' protecting human and material resources. But lest peasants think these actions were precursors to abolishing collective farms after the war, as was rumoured, radio broadcasts to the occupied territories in 1943 assured them that the collective farms would be re-established upon liberation.<sup>39</sup>

The new focus on protecting human and material assets, however, did not mean abandoning military objectives. The government and state media continued to emphasise military priorities. Indeed, 1943–4 saw massive, centrally-planned sabotage operations involving tens of thousands of partisans operating independently and coordinating with the Red Army. Nor was this policy shift based on a new-found humanitarianism; rather, it emanated from a utilitarian need to secure human and material assets. Yet as the movement developed and as the strategic situation changed, the leadership, encouraged by a few key advocates like Ponomarenko, increasingly took civilian concerns and safety into

account. Thus the government ultimately stressed both the pursuit of military goals and the protection of civilians. These dual objectives sometimes conflicted with each other, but, as we shall see below, this ambiguity also gave enterprising partisans license to follow their own interests so long as they fitted within the broad official rubric.

## Revenge and trust behind enemy lines

Changing our perspective from that of Moscow to that of the partisans', the implications of these ambiguities become clearer, especially in light of the partisans' autonomy from the government. Despite the establishment of the Central Staff in May 1942 and the attachment of political commissars and state security personnel to most units, the partisans still retained some *de facto* independence from Moscow. Not only were partisans expected to use their own initiative in planning and implementing their operations, but ambiguous and contradictory orders and overlapping jurisdictions and inter-agency conflicts within the state administration enabled them to manipulate their governmental overseers so that they could pursue their own interests.<sup>40</sup>

What those interests were was not always clear. Paralleling the disputes in Moscow over partisan–civilian relations, partisans behind the lines struggled with each other – and often with their own consciences – over what their primary mission was. Unlike high-level officials, the partisans faced daily the realities of war and its effects on civilians, who were often friends and relatives. As we shall see, partisans had to decide if they were warriors seeking to destroy the enemy or protectors of the people prioritising saving lives and property over military objectives. How they dealt with this dilemma had immediate life-or-death consequences for nearby civilians.

An important factor was how closely the partisans identified their cause with civilian interests. As noted earlier state media emphasised that the partisans embodied the popular will, a claim that became increasingly credible as more ordinary civilians joined their ranks. Moreover, after having witnessed and experienced the horrors of Axis occupation, the partisans identified quite powerfully with their role as the 'people's avengers' and as the saviours, not only of Soviet citizens, but of all humanity. Partisan commander Aleksei Fedorov stressed this point in his memoirs, stating '(t)he partisan, it goes without saying, went into battle not to enrich or feed or clothe himself. He was a warrior in the people's cause, a people's avenger'.<sup>41</sup> Revenge and patriotism were often intertwined, as one partisan expressed in a letter home that he wanted

to perform 'his holy duty as a Soviet citizen' to kill Germans.<sup>42</sup> One partisan wrote to his sister, that he went to the forest 'to beat the hated enemy at every step for all of humanity', while another letter-writer declared 'this war decides the life not only of Soviet power, but even the life of all of humanity on the globe'.<sup>43</sup>

German racial persecution of the 'sub-human' Soviet population (especially, but not limited to, Jews), fuelled these sentiments. Faye Schulman, a Jewish partisan whose family was murdered by the Germans early in the war, wrote in her memoir, 'I resolved to volunteer for active combat operations, to fight for my people – for Jewish dignity and honour – and for an end to the Nazi killing machine'.<sup>44</sup> Other Soviet nationalities had similar feelings. For example, the Belorussian partisans of the 'Flame' Partisan Detachment read graphic stories of German atrocities against Belorussian women and children in their unit-produced journal in late 1943, and as 'the best sons of the Belorussian people' saw it as their duty to avenge these deaths.<sup>45</sup>

As the 'people's avengers', the partisans saw themselves as the judge, jury and executioner of popular justice. Moreover, they commonly referred to their bonds with the local populace and were proud to report to officials that civilians would call them 'ours' (*nashi, svoi*), indicating their inclusion in the local community.<sup>46</sup>

Yet as powerful as the ties between partisans and civilians were, forged by their common desire for vengeance, three factors, continuing from the 1941–2 period, undermined this relationship: the lack of mutual trust between the two groups; the partisans' dependence on civilians, willingly or not, to provide supplies; and the partisans' willingness to disregard civilian losses to achieve their objectives.

In 1941, partisans found little support from the surrounding Soviet population, not only in the newly annexed regions but even within the pre-1939 borders. Many Soviet citizens early on viewed the Germans favourably as a civilised people who would treat them fairly. Others, remembering the horrors of collectivisation, hoped that the Germans would abolish the collective farms, while in the newly annexed regions, the experience of mass deportations at Soviet hands was still a raw and open wound. Most occupied Soviet peasants generally took a wait-and-see approach to their new masters, an attitude common throughout occupied Europe.<sup>47</sup>

For their part, partisans tended to see civilians, even fellow villagers, as potential spies and informers. This mentality was partly a result of pre-war anxieties over spies, intensified by the purges of the 1930s – during which conspiracies had been understood to be an inevitable part of normal

political life. But the partisans' mentality was also a result of the very real fear that civilians, whether from conviction or coercion, would betray them to the enemy.<sup>48</sup> Many units initially separated themselves from the nearby population, leaving a local official to observe, '[the partisans] all knew each other ... [they are] all Communists, workers and are united. If they accepted a large number of new people, then spies will penetrate the unit'.<sup>49</sup> Rumours circulated that the Germans employed Jews, Tatars and other minorities, and women (the latter usually alleged to be infected with syphilis), to infiltrate and destroy units from within.<sup>50</sup>

These fears and suspicions often led the partisans to seek out and annihilate suspected collaborators, including village elders, police, and other local administrators. Sometimes even peasants merely working in their fields were killed for 'collaborating' with the enemy.<sup>51</sup> In other cases, whole families were targeted. Thus, one commissar reported that his unit, operating in the Briansk forest, killed not only policemen, 'but also their relatives up to the third generation, and even children'.<sup>52</sup> But as brutal and alienating as these killings were, they still were much more selective than the Germans' indiscriminate reprisals.

As the insurgency grew more powerful, civilian worries paradoxically increased. Partisans pressured civilians to commit to the Soviets and essentially 'criminalised' the wait-and-see posture adopted by so many, despite the obvious risks this entailed.<sup>53</sup> One organiser told a village that it must form a self-defence group, otherwise it would be designated 'counter-revolutionary'. 'If we do not atone for our guilt', she told the assembled villagers, 'then we will swim in our own blood'.<sup>54</sup> For her and other partisans, the national emergency required that local civilians declare openly their allegiance to the Soviet Union, even if it exposed them to German retribution. Indeed, some partisans, like officials in Moscow, believed that political advantage could be gained from these reprisals, and attacked German troops solely to provoke a brutal response from the occupiers against innocent civilians.<sup>55</sup> One partisan, well aware of the propaganda value of German atrocities, asked Moscow to send a film crew to the occupied territories to record 'the staggering picture: fire-ravaged remains, shootings, cremated corpses'.<sup>56</sup> An underground Communist official in Smolensk Province told Soviet interviewers how these atrocities were a political boon to the regime:

[N]ow ... when the fascists reveal themselves and what they represent to the peasants ... when the peasants now have before them the ways of the Bolsheviks or the ways of the fascists, Stalin and Hitler, they say 'No, Stalin is right'. With whom could [the peasants]

compare Stalin and the Bolsheviks? With no-one, because they did not know anyone else ... Thus the peasants can, even if primitively, unmask the face of the fascists and immediately turn from them, and go over reliably and firmly to the side of Soviet power.<sup>57</sup>

Civilians were caught between the occupiers on the one hand, and the partisans on the other, both of whom demanded unswerving loyalty to their respective causes. As one village elder despaired in 1943:

We live between the hammer and the anvil. Today we are forced to obey the partisans or they will kill us, tomorrow we will be killed by the Germans for obeying them. The nights belong to the partisans, but during the days we are in no-man's land. Oh, I know the partisans can protect us now, but for how long?<sup>58</sup>

Many partisans were painfully aware of the peasants' precarious situation. One recalled, 'We were armed, and could defend ourselves. But what could [the villagers] do? For giving a loaf of bread to a partisan they were shot. I might stay the night and go away, but if someone informed on them that I had spent the night in that hut, they would all be shot'.<sup>59</sup> These concerns were not exaggerated: during the four years of guerrilla warfare, Belorussia alone lost approximately a quarter of its population.<sup>60</sup>

In the western borderlands, where the partisans did not become a real presence until 1943, these issues were further complicated by the emergence of Ukrainian and Polish nationalist groups, and furthermore, the ethnic strife between Ukrainians and Poles, which resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and widespread ethnic cleansings. Although the partisans fought Germans, Poles and Ukrainians opposing Soviet rule, their primary aim was to persuade nationalist groups to attack the Germans, and to sway the local populace from the nationalists' cause. These efforts had only limited success. As the war progressed, however, the partisans began to make inroads with civilians, increasing the public's perception that the Soviets were going to win the war.<sup>61</sup>

## The politics of procurements and manpower

The most sensitive and critical issue on a day-to-day basis was partisan procurements and recruitment. Ponomarenko insisted that the partisans rely on the surrounding population to supply them with their everyday needs. While this policy was unavoidable, given the impossibility



of establishing reliable supply chains across the battle lines to feed tens of thousands of armed men and women, it placed an extraordinary burden on an already impoverished population.<sup>62</sup> After 25 years of war, revolution, civil war, famine, collectivisation, more famine and more war, most people had little left to give. Civilians, caught between the rapacious demands of the Germans and the partisans, faced starvation. And yet while, as we have seen, partisans were often more sensitive to civilian needs than state authorities were, at times the immediate demands of supplying provisions and manpower meant that the partisans placed much greater pressure on civilians. Meanwhile, state officials, worried about the political ramifications of these actions, tried to restrain the partisans.

The extent to which peasants gave up food and belongings voluntarily varied from place to place. They gave more willingly to units they regarded as 'ours', either because these partisans were from the area or had managed to establish personal ties with the villagers, but were much more reluctant to supply 'foreigners', that is to units deployed from other districts and regions.<sup>63</sup>

The nature of partisan requisitioning, both in general and in the context of past Soviet policies, further exacerbated relations with civilians. Throughout history, irregular fighters have walked a fine (and often blurred) line between being popular heroes and outlaws. Though peasants may have envied the freedom and wild lives of the fictionalised and mythologised bandits and irregulars portrayed in popular memory, real-life partisans threatened their survival, especially in the harsh conditions of war. During World War II peasants across Europe often viewed requisitions by resistance fighters as banditry as much as legitimate provisioning for a just cause.<sup>64</sup> Soviet peasants were no different. Thus, the inhabitants of one Belorussian district, according to Soviet observers, regarded the partisans of a nearby brigade as bandits, and not the defenders of the populace they were supposed to be.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, one Soviet partisan veteran referred to his unit's procurement operations as 'organised looting'.<sup>66</sup> Some units, to avoid the taint of banditry, sent political officers to negotiate with villagers, and sometimes even handed out receipts for what they took, hoping to lend credibility to their claims that they were the legal representatives of Soviet power.<sup>67</sup>

Nevertheless, their actions contributed to the belief of many observers, including party officials and army officers, that the partisans were bandits and thugs.<sup>68</sup> Behind even the most peaceful negotiations was the ever-present threat that the partisans might simply take what they wanted and kill anyone who stood in their way. In the most extreme

cases, village elders who refused to aid the partisans were executed for collaboration with the enemy.<sup>69</sup> And certainly many partisans, and sometimes whole units, simply robbed and plundered solely for their personal gain, while others committed even more brutal crimes, including rape and murder.<sup>70</sup> To hide their criminal behaviour, partisans sometimes claimed that they were in fact procuring goods for their units and were punishing collaborators, as did one partisan who clothed his mistress by plundering goods from a peasant family and shooting the father, who, he alleged, was an 'alien element' hostile to Soviet power.<sup>71</sup> In another typical example, a report from Ukraine's Sumy region in 1943 complained that partisans, led by a party member, pillaged a loyal village and even took goods belonging to the wives of the underground Communists and Red Army soldiers.<sup>72</sup>

Even when conducted 'legitimately', partisan requisitions invariably collided with peasant memories of the recent past. The overt or implied use of force to obtain provisions in the name of the Soviet state reminded both peasants and partisans of the forced procurements of the Civil War and of collectivisation in the 1930s, revealing an underlying fissure still dividing officialdom and its perceived agents from the rural population. As these operations were often led by commissars who were former local party officials, and who in the pre-war period had been responsible for overseeing grain procurements, requisitions must have reinforced the idea among some that the partisans were also an occupying power. However necessary they were for the partisans' survival, requisitions threatened to undermine their popular support, and by extension, popular support for the Soviet regime.

Government officials, particularly Ponomarenko, were aware of the political danger posed by excessive procurements.<sup>73</sup> In February 1943, Ponomarenko criticised partisans in the Smolensk region who had taken so many goods from civilians that the latter were completely destitute:

Worsening [relations] between the partisans and the population can occur during the incorrect carrying out of procurements. It is the task of political officers, first of all, to see to it that the population is not offended. The population sees the partisans as its defenders, its own sons and brothers, and is prepared itself to join the detachments. The most serious crime of all, then, is to allow a dysfunctional relationship with the population to develop.<sup>74</sup>

While Ponomarenko's concerns were justified, the increasing material needs of the ever-growing movement, coupled with his demand that the

partisans supply themselves at the expense of local civilians, made such behaviours inevitable. Moreover, the power of commanders who wanted to stop partisan plundering was often limited. Although some commanders managed to control their troops, others feared that imposing discipline could put their own authority, and even their own lives, at risk. Thus, when partisan commander Shitov was criticised by a fellow commander for failing to control his drunken, marauding fighters, Shitov allegedly replied, 'What do you want, that our partisans kill us in our first battle?'<sup>75</sup>

These issues revealed the very real tensions embedded in the state-partisan-civilian triangle. The partisans needed to be supplied, but this could only be done by taking goods from the already suffering locals. The additional burden threatened to undermine support for both the partisans and the regime, yet the state's inability (and disinclination) to supply the partisans meant that such friction was unavoidable. The unspoken legacy of pre-war Soviet rural policy could only have furthered this alienation. In effect, local poverty, partisan logistical requirements, and history combined to create an extraordinarily difficult political situation. Yet in the end, the even harsher German occupation policies, the personal ties forged between partisans and civilians, and patriotism (be it regional, national, ethnic, or Soviet) combined in varying degrees to sway most civilians to support the Soviets, even if only tacitly.

Another potential sore point between partisans and civilians was the question of recruitment. Initially, many partisan units, either out of necessity or acting in the belief that, as the legal representatives of Soviet power, they had the right and the obligation to conscript recruits, drafted civilians into their ranks. These drafts occurred most frequently in 1942 and early 1943, as by mid-1943 so many civilians were seeking to join the partisans that commanders often turned away unarmed would-be volunteers. In some instances, however, partisans staged mobilisations, forced 'drafts', and even false arrests, in order to provide cover for volunteers and their families, afraid of German retributions.<sup>76</sup> Not surprisingly, actual conscription was decidedly unpopular with civilians; units that relied on conscription often suffered from poor morale, and in some cases partisans shot civilians who refused to join them.<sup>77</sup>

Ponomarenko's policies on conscription reflected his populist belief that ordinary citizens wanted to volunteer and fight the enemy. Although current research does not indicate that he ever issued a general order forbidding conscription, instructions to individual commanders and internal correspondence with Stalin and other Soviet officials throughout the war reveal that he felt strongly that the movement should be

composed of volunteers. In some cases he categorically forbade units to conscript civilians, and at least in one instance he ordered a commander back to Soviet territory, in part because the latter ignored this instruction.<sup>78</sup> In the case of recruitment, then, official Soviet policy could be more 'civilian-friendly' than the actions of partisans who were more concerned with their own immediate survival.

## Military versus political priorities

Perhaps the most important element shaping partisan–civilian relations was how the partisans viewed their mission. Like the leadership, partisans debated whether they should emphasise military objectives or the protection of Soviet citizens as their fundamental task, either of which could be justified by citing media portrayals and official orders. Unlike distant officials in Moscow, however, the partisans faced the immediate consequences of their decisions.

For those partisans who prioritised military operations, protecting civilians was a tactical and psychological distraction. Not only were unarmed civilians extra mouths to feed, but they reduced the partisans' mobility, so essential for the success of offensive missions and for unit survival when the Germans conducted anti-partisan operations.<sup>79</sup> These realities severely constrained the ability of even the most well-meaning partisans to protect civilians. Thus, partisan commander S. A. Kovpak told the survivors of the Galician Jewish ghetto of Skalat that due to military necessity, his unit, about to embark on a raid to the Carpathian Mountains, could only take along those fit enough to endure the rigours of a long march.<sup>80</sup> Partisan commander M. I. Duka declared in an interview with officials after his area's liberation:

To take a district – this is a big deal, but to tie oneself to the population as it happened in the southern districts of Orel Province – that is incorrect. If [a district] is already taken, then you have to hold it, you have to try to keep it. A pure partisan war and its tactics must not tie [the partisans'] fate to the population.<sup>81</sup>

When a fellow commander chastised Duka that his operations had led to the deaths of 26 civilians, Duka responded matter-of-factly that the Germans would always retaliate against civilians whenever the partisans acted.<sup>82</sup>

In some areas, such as the forests of Belorussia, and central and north-western Russia, extensive 'partisan regions' were formed, often

encompassing thousands of square miles, providing partisans with more or less permanent bases. These zones also attracted large numbers of civilians seeking protection from the Germans. The regions were, however, highly vulnerable to blockades and attacks, which created severe food and material shortages. Some commanders contended that the added strain of protecting civilians during blockades and assaults undermined partisan morale and reduced their combat effectiveness.<sup>83</sup> According to these partisans, objective circumstances required them to ignore possible German reprisals and to accept heavy civilian losses as an unfortunate but unavoidable by-product of the guerrilla war.

Other partisans, following sentiments expressed in NKO Order 189, saw their war as part of a larger political struggle in which the protection of human lives could override military considerations. Achieving this goal sometimes meant departing from the tactics outlined by Duka. When the 5th Leningrad Partisan Brigade came under heavy pressure from a German force in the fall of 1943, the brigade's commanders defended the local inhabitants rather than abandon them to their fates as standard guerrilla operations suggested. One officer characterised this decision as 'a question of principle: what impression would this make on the population. Therefore, [we] decided to fight and to fight in such a manner as to transform every village into a fortress of the partisan struggle and leave only when it was impossible to stay any longer'.<sup>84</sup> Of course, as the partisans often lacked heavy weapons, their actual ability to defend civilians against even modest direct assaults was quite limited. Ultimately, in case of enemy attack, the civilians' best defence was to hide in the forest and hope that they would not be caught in the crossfire or exposed to enemy retribution. Nevertheless, by making this stand, these partisans hoped to demonstrate their willingness to defend civilians, and thus gain the popular support so necessary to the wider struggle behind enemy lines.

Some partisans went even further, asserting that the foremost task of the 'people's avengers' was to save lives, regardless of the consequences. One commissar responded to those who protested that, as one partisan said, 'we're here to fight the Huns, and not to nurse children' by retorting 'only bastards can talk like that. I am ashamed of you! I see you do not understand the duties of partisans. To protect people who are being persecuted by the fascists is our most important task. To save lives is to fight the enemy'.<sup>85</sup> For some this meant avoiding combat whenever possible. Hence, the commander of a Jewish partisan detachment, Tuvia Bielski prioritised the saving of Jewish lives rather than engaging in combat for its own sake. Although he occasionally sanctioned vengeance missions, he told his people, 'Don't rush to fight and die. So few of

us are left, we have to save lives. To save a Jew is more important than to kill Germans'.<sup>86</sup> To protect his unit from officials' accusations that it was too passive, Bielski used Soviet political language to frame his actions. He was so convincing that the commander of partisan forces in the Baranovichy region called the apolitical (and former Polish citizen) Bielski 'a good Bolshevik'.<sup>87</sup>

Bielski's example points to both the challenge and the solution faced by the partisans in dealing with Moscow, particularly those who emphasised the saving of lives. In following whatever course of action they chose, partisans could deflect charges of passivity – and, by implication, of being 'anti-Soviet' – by employing language legitimated by official orders and state media calling on partisans to protect civilians. In this manner, partisans could exploit the ambiguities inherent in this guerrilla war to pursue their own interests.

## Conclusion

While government agencies initially stressed military priorities at the expense of civilian well-being, state media validated both the sacrificing of civilian lives in the pursuit of military objectives and the need to protect these same lives. Media proclamations that this 'all-people's war' required close ties with the population conflicted with initial official instructions – and often the partisans' own inclinations – that the insurgency remain as autonomous from civilians as possible, a policy reversed only in September 1942. Thus, state authorities unintentionally presented partisans with a range of possible actions, any of which could be justified by referring to official pronouncements.

The partisans' concerns were remarkably similar to those of officials and state media. This confluence of state and partisan responses reflects, in part, the importance of the Soviet state in shaping partisan views. But the partisans' own experiences behind enemy lines were perhaps even more important to their understanding of what their main task in the war was. That both the regime and the partisans defined the insurgents as 'the people's avengers' reflected the genuine convergence of official and popular desire to eradicate the enemy, and thus a powerful indication of national unity. Indeed, one of the factors that made World War II such a defining event in the Soviet Union was this uncommonly close alignment of official and popular sentiments.<sup>88</sup>

The national emergency and the demands of military and political necessity often compelled officials and partisans to treat occupied civilians not as vulnerable fellow citizens, but as assets to be won or

lost, and if necessary, to be exploited and sacrificed in order to win the war. Indeed, the underlying premise of Soviet policy rested on a 'rational' cost-benefit analysis: whichever policy secured the greatest political and military benefit to win the war was the best, regardless of the cost to civilians. Thus, the regime appears to have continued its pre-war practice of viewing its population in purely utilitarian terms. While some partisans defined their struggle in these terms and shared these beliefs, others used the state's own propaganda celebrating Soviet humanitarianism to emphasise protecting civilians. Social, familial, ethical, and regional considerations could also lead partisans to try to reduce civilian losses through physical protection or even by minimising offensive combat. In so doing they had to camouflage their intentions to throw off the suspicions of state officials who were always alert to partisan passivity. Herein lies the difficulty in characterising the movement's relationship to civilians in any one particular way. Perhaps the one sure observation that can be made is that local conditions and partisan attitudes were often as decisive as state policy in determining partisan-civilian relations in a given district.

In the end, the partisans were neither uniformly the popular heroes of Soviet and post-Soviet history, nor were they the mindless enforcers of the totalitarian state. Even top policymakers and propagandists struggled to define the partisans' proper relationship with civilians. It is essential, therefore, in examining this or any other insurgency, that we understand the political, social, cultural and local factors that motivated the individuals and groups who comprised these movements, as well as the broader ideologies and objectives in whose name they were ostensibly fighting.

## Notes

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## 2

# ‘One senses danger from all sides, especially from fanatical civilians’: The 121st Infantry Division and Partisan War, June 1941–April 1942

*Jeff Rutherford*

On the second day of Operation Barbarossa, Lieutenant E. of the 121st Infantry Division raged against apparent irregular forces who ‘seemingly shot out of every house’ in the Lithuanian village of Vilkoviszki. Members of his 405th Infantry Regiment responded in the heavy-handed manner called for by Nazi doctrine: ‘As every house which the devious guerrillas shot from was set on fire, nearly the entire town was burning by evening’.<sup>1</sup> In many ways, this diary passage encapsulates what has become the dominant image of the Wehrmacht in the recent historiography: a brutal force, employing the utmost in violence to sweep away all real and imagined resistance.<sup>2</sup> And though elements of this image certainly ring true, closer analysis also reveals a wider range of attitudes and behaviours that fail to correspond to this picture of a marauding Wehrmacht. The following examination of the 121st Infantry Division during the period from the beginning of the invasion of the Soviet Union to the end of the ‘Winter Crisis’ in April 1942 highlights the various ways in which the division both at the institutional and individual levels dealt with the partisan threat during the first stage of the Soviet–German War.

Such a dual approach is important, for the army as an institution approached these matters in a manner different from that of individual soldiers. The division carried with it the army’s doctrine concerning irregular warfare, one that had been developing for some 70 years when Germany invaded the Soviet Union. At the individual level, one third of the men of the 121st Infantry Division had been civilians only eight months before the invasion in June 1941; not yet fully integrated into the Wehrmacht’s culture, they were likely to view the thorny issue of relations with civilians, both armed and unarmed, in a different light.<sup>3</sup>

This approach requires the use of two types of source material. Wehrmacht records, primarily from the divisional level, form the foundation of the study. Such material provides a comprehensive account of both the unit's actions and its institutional mindset during the war. As several historians have noted, however, these records contain gaps, especially concerning actions that fall outside traditional military engagements. Both Wolfram Wette and Hannes Heer have argued that German units purposely omitted such information from their files to ensure that the Wehrmacht's reputation remained unsullied.<sup>4</sup> One way of uncovering this 'missing history' is to use source material generated by the soldiers themselves, such as letters and diaries. As various published collections of letters clearly illustrate, many men had no qualms about sharing stories of atrocities and war crimes with their loved ones back home.<sup>5</sup> Whilst letters provide one means of penetrating the fog of war, they were subjected to censorship: both external (the state) and internal (either the individual's conscience or the sheer inability or disinclination to convey often disturbing thoughts and experiences to family and friends).<sup>6</sup> Diaries offer a more personal view of war as they convey a soldier's immediate reaction to combat and occupation. The problem with such personal sources, of course, is how representative they are of the attitudes and beliefs within the ranks.<sup>7</sup> A judicious use of such individual voices alongside official Wehrmacht documents, however, allows historians to provide a more comprehensive account of the German Army's campaign in the Soviet Union.

The 121st Infantry Division has left a relatively wide assortment of sources for historians to investigate. In addition to the nearly complete war diaries for the Ia (operations), Ic (intelligence) and Ib (quartermaster) sections of the division during the first ten months of the campaign, various sub-unit war diaries as well as several diaries and memoirs penned by the rank-and-file exist. An examination of such source material leads to two important conclusions. First, whilst the division utilised coercion in its attempts to quash the partisan movement, force never constituted its sole approach to the problem of insurgency; the 121st Infantry Division also made conciliatory gestures towards the civilian population in hopes of ending its support for the partisans. Second, the individuals who fought within the ranks of the 121st Infantry Division had diverse reactions to the partisan threat and the civilian population from which it emanated: acts of kindness and pity were mixed with violence and ideologically inspired hate during the first ten months of war. By examining the actions of the 121st Infantry Divisions within the context of the Reich's Eastern Army (*Ostheer*), some conclusions regarding the representativeness of its behaviour can be made. In fact,

in comparison to other divisions and units which have been the subject of scholarly case studies, the 121st Infantry Division acted in a very restrained manner, from the very beginning of the invasion up to the conclusion of the Winter Crisis.

### **From *Franc-Tireurs* to Soviet partisans: The evolution of German anti-partisan doctrine**

During World War II, the German Army's policies towards partisans were conditioned by a mixing of the army's traditional views of irregular warfare with Nazi ideological precepts.<sup>8</sup> Anti-guerrilla doctrine began to evolve within the Prusso-German Army following the defeat of the regular French Army at Sedan and the appearance of *franc-tireur* units throughout the country during the 1870–1 Franco-Prussian War.<sup>9</sup> Helmuth von Moltke, Chief of the Prussian General Staff, stated that 'experience has established that the most effective way of dealing with this situation [guerrilla activity] is to destroy the premises concerned – or, where the participation has been general, the entire village'.<sup>10</sup> Moltke also ordered the taking of hostages as a deterrent to sabotage activities.<sup>11</sup> The use of collective measures – the punishment of a community or hostages when the actual perpetrators could not be identified – became the basis of German anti-partisan policy in 1870 and remained so until 1945.<sup>12</sup>

As Isabel Hull has so brilliantly detailed, the policies enacted on the spur of the moment during the Franco-Prussian War were both institutionalised into the Army's official doctrine and kept alive through 'memory and myths' in the officer corps and the enlisted ranks.<sup>13</sup> Hull also points out that those practices enshrined in Army policy actually contradicted existing international law. To German military thinkers, this was a non-issue. The majority of the military leadership believed that 'the exceptionality of war rais[ed] it above law', and due to this, military professionals should be allowed to wage war to a victorious conclusion, no matter the cost, without outside interference.<sup>14</sup>

The continued development of anti-insurgent doctrine and the powerful '*franc-tireur* myth' generated by the 1870 war led the Imperial Army to commit widespread atrocities in Belgium and northern France in 1914.<sup>15</sup> John Horne and Alan Kramer have painstakingly recreated this myth as it spread throughout the ranks of the *Kaiserheer* during its advance in the summer and fall of 1914. This led to widespread atrocities against Belgian civilians in retaliation for perceived *franc-tireur* attacks. Horne and Kramer detail several important components of this myth: the invisibility of the guerrilla; a belief that the French

and Belgian governments were planning collective resistance against the German Army, therefore making each and every civilian a possible enemy; the participation of women and children in resistance activities, inverting conventional gender and age roles and adding yet another layer of treachery to the experience; and the guerrillas' frequent recourse to mutilating captured and dead German soldiers.<sup>16</sup> The invading troops absorbed these views and, when faced with tense or inexplicable situations, fell back on this belief system, lashing out at the civilian population. Unlike the Franco-Prussian War, however, collective measures became the order of the day during the opening months of the war in the west, despite the fact that there appears to have been no *franc-tireur* activity during this period.<sup>17</sup>

The matrix that Horne and Kramer developed to explain the Imperial Army's view of irregular warfare can be profitably used in examining the Wehrmacht's attitude towards Soviet partisans. The primary difference between the Imperial Army and the Wehrmacht's anti-guerrilla doctrines is that the latter was infused by a National Socialist ideology that viewed partisan warfare in the Soviet Union as an insidious expression of Judeo-Bolshevik resistance. This injected a new dose of venom into the army's already brutal doctrine and was intended to ensure that partisan activity in the Soviet Union would be met with ruthless reprisals.

The ideological framework of Operation Barbarossa was constructed around the 'Criminal Orders'.<sup>18</sup> The 'Guidelines for the Behaviour of the Troops in Russia' as well as the SS-Army *Einsatzgruppen* agreement served as the most important decrees in the context of partisan warfare. The latter order established a division of labour between the army and the SS in securing the occupied territories.<sup>19</sup> Whilst the Wehrmacht focused on the Red Army, SD and other SS formations would combat any resistance movements in the rear. In effect, the German Army willingly ensnared itself in the Nazi machinery of annihilation and extermination by working with the SS to systematically suppress partisan movements and other forms of perceived resistance. The former order stated that 'Bolshevism is the mortal enemy of the national-socialist German *Volk*', and it called for 'ruthless and energetic measures against Bolshevik zealots, guerrillas, saboteurs, and Jews and the complete elimination of all active or passive resistance'.<sup>20</sup>

The beliefs manifested in the 'Guidelines for the Behaviour of the Troops in Russia' filtered down the army's hierarchy in the form of army, corps and divisional orders. The corps headquarters instructed its subordinate units to expect attacks in the rear areas led by 'the communist section of the population'.<sup>21</sup> The 121st Infantry Division

amplified this order to its troops, explaining that since partisans were forbidden by international law, they were to be 'eliminated in the field or in flight'; this included 'civilians or uniformed groups'.<sup>22</sup> In sum, these orders identified a wide range of possible resisters outside the ranks of the regular Red Army who needed to be eradicated as quickly as possible. As the 121st Infantry Division went to war in June 1941, it carried with it a brutal irregular warfare doctrine resulting from the Nazi radicalisation of the army's already ruthless anti-insurgency policies. This potent mix created the preconditions for the Wehrmacht's savage treatment of any and all resistance, real or imagined.

### **The 121st Infantry Division and the invasion of the Soviet Union**

Already on the first day of war, reports of irregular warfare trickled into divisional headquarters. The 121st Infantry Division's Reconnaissance Section reported that Red Army men were quickly changing into civilian clothes. Whilst this may have indicated nothing more than an attempt to escape from the war, these German soldiers interpreted it as a devious attempt to continue the fight as partisans.<sup>23</sup> As previous historians have pointed out, the Germans conflated both bypassed and deserting Red Army troops into a burgeoning partisan threat and this led advancing German troops to frequently resort to violence in ambiguous situations.<sup>24</sup> One NCO in the 121st Infantry Division related the following incident:

A few metres from my severely wounded comrade, several Russians are lying in shallow ditches alongside the road. Their faces are turned to the ground. Are they dead? No blood anywhere. No traces of battle. Are the Soviet soldiers playing dead? I kick one of the Soviet soldiers in the side with my boot. He doesn't move. I see, however, how his eyes blink. Aha, so this is the situation, I thought. I shouted out to my comrades 'Be careful' and then we cleared up the situation.<sup>25</sup>

Other soldiers, however, had different, more humane views of such occurrences. Another NCO believed that Red Army men feared immediate execution following their surrender and therefore hoped to escape by lying motionless.<sup>26</sup> To this soldier, the line between acceptable resistance and the dishonourable behaviour of irregular fighting did not correspond to the Manichean vision of good and evil propagated by the German leadership.

During the first three months of war, division files recorded two separate incidents that illustrated the 121st Infantry Division's response to partisan activity. On 24 June, as the division marched through the Lithuanian village of Kazlai, several random shots were fired at the troops. The divisional commander ordered the collection of all male inhabitants and had them put under armed guard. The action stopped here; the division did not shoot any civilians in retaliation nor burn the village down.<sup>27</sup> A similar incident occurred nearly two months later on 18 August, as soldiers of the division's 408th Infantry Regiment rested in a rural Russian community. During this break in the advance, a fire allegedly started by partisans resulted in one German casualty. Retribution, however, was limited to the temporary arrest of the male population, as decreed by the regiment's commander.<sup>28</sup> No mention of executions is found in the division's files for either case. Whilst it is possible that such actions were deliberately omitted from its records, during its later occupation of Pavlovsk, the 121st Infantry Division did record other instances in which it carried out collective measures and executions; it seems that during the opening months of the invasion when victory was ostensibly assured, the division made no attempts to conceal its actions.<sup>29</sup> This leads one to conclude that despite being subjected to what it viewed as devious methods of fighting outside the parameters of civilised war, as well as to Wehrmacht directives that called for harsh retaliatory measures, the division did not automatically respond with calculated violence. Restraint characterised its actions in Lithuania and Russia proper during this initial period of war.

During the first two and a half months of war, the 121st Infantry Division had only limited experiences with partisan warfare. Whilst the division reported numerous examples of suspicious activity during the first three days of the invasion, it seems extremely likely that the fire identified by the Germans as coming from irregulars was actually due to scattered Red Army men and NKVD border guards. This lack of partisan activity was due to two important factors. First, the speed of the advance only exacerbated the Soviets' lack of preparations for partisan warfare; Moscow simply had no time to create an effective structure for irregular warfare. Second, the division's drive through Lithuania is important in this context; native Lithuanians frequently saw the Wehrmacht as a liberating force, and when they took up arms, they directed their anger towards those they believed collaborated with Soviet power.<sup>30</sup> The combination of these two issues ensured that the division faced little irregular opposition during its war of movement in the summer of 1941. Despite this lack of enemy activity, XXVIII Corps



demanded that the division remain alert to the partisan threat.<sup>31</sup> It also warned the divisional commands that leaflets calling on the civilian population to support the partisans had been found in the rear areas and then reiterated the Army's preferred solution to guerrilla activity: 'The brutal and devious fighting methods of the partisans are to be met with ruthless action. All cases of sabotage, such as cutting through cables, are to be punished sharply'.<sup>32</sup>

The division then passed on this information to its troops. It stated that 'the fight against Bolshevik agitators, guerrillas, saboteurs, and partisans demands ruthless and energetic measures' and suggested that collective measures were the best means of discouraging such resistance. Such responses included compulsory labour service for the male population, the confiscation of cattle and vehicles, restrictions on civilian movement, the closing of stores, and the taking of hostages. Whilst asserting that only officers could determine if a suspect was guilty of guerrilla activity, the order defined for all ranks who indeed was a partisan: 'all armed civilians, who commit enemy actions or are suspected of allowing it, fall under the term partisan'. The men were then warned to deal with civilians and suspected partisans in a measured manner: 'all uncontrollable, individual actions ... are to be stopped'.<sup>33</sup>

These two orders, issued in a period of relative quiet, highlight several important themes. First, the German Army was convinced that Soviet civilians were going to rise en masse and resist the German invaders. This was due both to the army's already discussed belief in the inevitability of people's wars, and to the constant bombardment of National Socialist propaganda that painted the population of the Soviet Union as a seething mass of Slavic *Untermenschen* led by fanatical Judeo-Bolsheviks. Second, the army was not only prepared but also quite willing to use violent measures to ensure security. Third, the maintenance of hierarchical authority within the army remained a high priority; discipline needed to be enforced. The tension between these two issues – the necessity of crushing a civilian-generated resistance whilst at the same time maintaining the vaunted discipline of the Prusso-German Army – proved to be an extremely difficult balancing act for the Wehrmacht to master.<sup>34</sup>

### **'The attitude of civilians is extremely hostile': The Leningrad region**

The dire warnings issued by both corps and divisional command seemed prescient as the 121st Infantry Division continued its approach

towards Leningrad in September 1941. As the *Blitzkrieg* sputtered to a crawl, the division was forced to hammer its way forward against stiffening Soviet opposition, both professional and irregular. During early September, the Intelligence Section stated that 'partisan activities reached their high-water mark'.<sup>35</sup> This was reflected by the execution of 17 suspected partisans within a ten-day period during the first half of the month.<sup>36</sup> Soldiers within the division's ranks detected a heightened animosity among the inhabitants of this area: the commander of 408th Infantry Regiment believed that 'the attitude of civilians is extremely hostile. One notices the influence of propaganda that had been more intensive in Petersburg and its surroundings than in the countryside'.<sup>37</sup> Another German wrote that 'one sensed dangers from all sides, especially from fanatical civilians'.<sup>38</sup> This soldier was one of the division's more thoughtful men and his writings illustrate the increasingly tense and confusing situation in which German soldiers found themselves. In one instance, he made repeated calls for the inhabitants to come out of a hidden shelter he had discovered in the forest. When a peasant finally emerged with raised hands and explained he was hiding his family from the fighting, the German allowed him to return to the shelter instead of treating him as a partisan. This expression of humanity, however, quickly faded when he was confronted by an actual guerrilla: 'a patrol captured a partisan. He was wearing civilian clothes and had a belt of ammunition around his body and carried a rifle in his hand. As we confronted him, he looked at us with the face of a criminal and sub-human'.<sup>39</sup> Even for this particular soldier, who had earlier in the campaign debated the ethics of the invasion with a close friend and whose writings indicate he was not a Nazi true-believer, racist ideology clearly influenced his view of the partisan war in the Soviet Union.

This increasing suspicion of civilians found expression in a series of orders designed to stop simultaneously the movement of Russian civilians between the front lines and partisan activity. Prisoner interrogations revealed that the Red Army utilised civilians to collect information on the German order of battle. Thus began a concerted effort to seal the pocket around Leningrad, an effort that led to a merging of anti-partisan measures with larger strategic goals, namely the implementation of *Hungerpolitik* (starvation policy).<sup>40</sup> Whilst the Third Reich launched Operation Barbarossa in an attempt both to solve the strategic deadlock facing it in Europe and to destroy the mortal ideological enemy of the National Socialist state, the invasion also served an extremely important economic purpose. German economic experts considered the vast resources of the Soviet Union – both in terms of raw materials and

foodstuffs – as vital to Germany's continued war effort. The necessity of securing prodigious amounts of food for both the invading Wehrmacht and the German homefront led German pre-war planners to conclude that upwards of 30 million Soviets were superfluous and would, in all likelihood, starve. These deaths would be concentrated in central and northern Russia as these areas failed to produce enough food to feed their inhabitants. The two largest targets for starvation were therefore Moscow and Leningrad.<sup>41</sup>

Following Hitler's decision to encircle and starve Leningrad into submission, units in Army Group North adjusted their policies towards civilians attempting to escape the city and, in effect, became complicit in this policy of mass starvation. The corps headquarters instructed its subordinate formations to halt all civilian movement through the lines 'even through the use of weapons'.<sup>42</sup> The Germans wanted to keep as many 'useless eaters' as possible within the confines of the city to weaken its defensive capabilities. Two weeks later, corps command shifted its emphasis: now, the refugees – which, as the Germans themselves recognised, were overwhelmingly women and children – were described as carrying arms, and 'this type of disgraceful guerrilla behaviour' needed to be eliminated 'with the sharpest means'.<sup>43</sup> During the next few days, the 121st Infantry Division issued orders building upon those already promulgated. Arguing that 'large waves of Russian civilians' who had passed through the German lines during the past few days were 'undesirable ... on espionage and economic grounds', the division commander then demanded that 'all traffic of civilians through the front line is to be stopped by the use of brute force'.<sup>44</sup> The repeated issuing of these orders indicates, however, that the troops ignored the earlier orders; apparently, their consciences carried more weight than official directives when faced with desperate women and children. The commander of the neighbouring 58th Infantry Division claimed that his men were more worried about shooting 'women, children and defenceless old men' than they were with their own strained military situation and this attitude seems applicable to the 121st Infantry Division as well.<sup>45</sup>

### **The radicalisation of the 121st Infantry Division's anti-partisan policies**

The division's advance stopped following the seizure of Pavlovsk on 18 September.<sup>46</sup> Once established in the town, the unit implemented several coercive measures to secure its position. In response to a number

of severed communication cables as well as random sniper shots within the town, the division ordered the registration of all males aged 14–70.<sup>47</sup> After consultation between division and corps command as well as II SS Brigade (a police unit utilised specifically for anti-partisan and ‘cleansing’ operations), it was decided to send those men not native to the community to labour and prison camps.<sup>48</sup> This accounting for Pavlovsk’s population also meant that any civilian who surfaced after the initial registration was deemed a ‘partisan who would be treated accordingly’ – in other words, shot.<sup>49</sup>

II SS Brigade was not the only police unit that the 121st Infantry Division dealt with during the occupation of the town. Pavlovsk Palace housed the command staff of both the division and an SD formation operating in northwest Russia, and this physical proximity, as well as their shared ideological beliefs, led to a close relationship between the two institutions.<sup>50</sup> The SD unit informed Berlin ‘that discussions of locally important questions regularly took place in the headquarters of *Einsatzgruppe* A with the town commandants and other participating Wehrmacht authorities’ (for example in Pavlovsk); this obviously referred to the 121st Infantry Division.<sup>51</sup> During the first few weeks of German occupation in Pavlovsk, the division worked hand-in-hand with SD units in attempts to throttle the nascent partisan movement. On 24 September, police units executed nine Russians, six of whom were caught with explosives after curfew.<sup>52</sup> In early October, the 121st Infantry Division arrested three civilians found in possession of a radio transmitter as well as two women described as ‘agents’. The three civilians were handed over to the Secret Field Police attached to Eighteenth Army; there is no mention of the fate of the two women. In all probability, they were executed.<sup>53</sup> Executions reached a highpoint on 5 and 6 October when 15 civilians were shot by members of the division. Five suspected partisans were killed on 5 October; the remaining ten were shot the following day during the implementation of the division’s first collective measure in retaliation for the cutting of several German communications cables.<sup>54</sup> Following this execution, SD headquarters in Pavlovsk issued an announcement to the population publicising the action and warning that in the future, such acts of sabotage would be punished by the shooting of 20 civilians.<sup>55</sup> Several factors caused the division to act in an increasingly violent manner in the late fall of 1941. The proximity to Leningrad, widely regarded as the birthplace of the Bolshevik revolution, and to institutions such as the SD – *die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges* (soldiers of the ideological war), in the words of Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm – and II SS Brigade both

carried significant ideological weight.<sup>56</sup> The Wehrmacht's anti-partisan policy as a whole underwent a general radicalisation, symbolised by the 16 September 1941 decree issued by Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, Chief of the *Oberkommando des Wehrmacht*. Claiming that German counter-measures for the insurgency had 'proven insufficient', Keitel demanded 50–100 communists killed in 'atonement' for the death of every German soldier at the hands of partisans.<sup>57</sup> The interaction of these circumstances led the division, which had acted in a relatively humane manner during the opening months of Operation Barbarossa, to begin to fight a war more in line with the expectations of the Reich's political and military leadership, without, however, crossing the line into indiscriminate violence.

By late October, the division had become much more vigilant in patrolling the no-man's land between its lines and those of the Soviets: this increase in activity was explicitly framed in terms of the partisan threat. Even now, however, the men of the 121st Infantry Division did not automatically resort to violence. In one incident, ten civilians who were trying to cross German lines and escape encircled Leningrad were forced to turn back towards the city; no fatalities were recorded.<sup>58</sup> Another patrol discovered 18 civilians and 14 Red Army men who had been living between the lines. After 'firm questioning' that determined 'they were all partisans living in an empty bunker' – even though the group included ten women and four children – the division delivered those considered the most dangerous to the SD whilst the remainder were sent to the labour camp outside the city.<sup>59</sup>

These actions highlight the division's increasing involvement in anti-partisan activities, as well as the severity with which they treated civilians on these occasions. Yet harsh though this conduct certainly was, the division acted in a more restrained manner than it might have in its dealing with individuals it labelled as partisans. Wehrmacht doctrine not only legitimised but actively called for the execution of all of these individuals; the men of the 121st Infantry Division, however, did not pull the trigger. This restraint needs to be kept firmly in perspective, for it is highly likely that the overwhelming majority of these 42 civilians and Red Army men perished – being sent to the SD, back into Leningrad or to a labour camp in late 1941 were all probable death sentences. It is nevertheless significant that the division's anti-partisan policies did not immediately lead to large-scale shootings carried out directly by its own troops, rather, the division worked with other organisations, such as the SD or the Secret Field Police, who carried out the bulk of the anti-insurgency actions. The pre-war agreement concerning the

*Einsatzgruppen* between the SS and army created a situation in which army units, such as the 121st Infantry Division, were able to pass on the actual executions to other formations. This of course does not absolve the division of responsibility for the deaths of these civilians; the 121st Infantry Division was clearly complicit in what is likely to have been their grim fate. Nevertheless, the division's approach to partisan warfare had not yet deteriorated into capricious violence to the extent displayed by numerous other army divisions.<sup>60</sup>

After the month of October 1941, partisan activity in Pavlovsk dropped off considerably during the remainder of the occupation, with the division characterising such activity as 'minimal'.<sup>61</sup> The insurgents in the town and surrounding area shifted from targeting the Wehrmacht to collaborators among the civilian population, inducing it into an 'unproductive apathy and passivity'.<sup>62</sup> Such a change in partisan tactics leads to two conclusions. First, the division had effectively neutralised the guerrilla threat to its own activities. Nowhere in the division's files is there even a hint of concern about partisan actions after the first month of occupation. Here, the coercion that typified the army's institutional response to irregular warfare was successful. This effectiveness was due in part to the measured response of the 121st Infantry Division. Instead of dispensing indiscriminate violence against random civilians, the division parcelled out arrests and shootings only in specific cases. Though the men themselves at times took measures into their own hands, there is nothing to indicate that as a unit, the division's use of force ever degenerated into ideologically driven, arbitrary violence.

Second, the German attempt to conciliate the civilian population had begun to show promise, and the partisans had responded with terror directed against collaborators.<sup>63</sup> The Wehrmacht possessed two advantages over the partisan forces in its dealings with the native population. First, since the partisans fought to reinstate Bolshevik control, many civilians viewed the Germans as the far better choice, as the following examples indicate. One of the first positive moves taken by the Germans in winning over the civilian population concerned the re-naming of the city. Delegates from the city approached the Germans and requested that the city's Communist name – Slutsk – be returned to its Tsarist name – Pavlovsk.<sup>64</sup> Both division and corps command approved this request and the division commander instructed the name change to be part of a celebration during an upcoming Church holiday which proved to be a 'psychological success of great value'. The church was 'overflowing with people' and a German officer sent to observe was 'thanked' by numerous people for allowing the service to occur. Civilians displayed real gratitude

towards the ‘true Christian Adolf Hitler’ for ‘free[ing] the city from Satan and his helpers’.<sup>65</sup> Tangible assistance included paying civilians for information<sup>66</sup> and, more importantly, providing citizens with food. Whilst both sides regularly plundered civilians for supplies, only the Germans were able to provide foodstuffs to the area’s inhabitants in exchange for information.<sup>67</sup> Paradoxically, whilst the delivery of foodstuffs to the local population was seen as an effective way of limiting partisan activity, it also pointed to the primary cause of popular resistance in Pavlovsk and its environs: the scarcity of food for the civilian population.

### **‘Another Family to the Partisans’: Soldiers, civilians and the competition for food**

The Wehrmacht’s policy of procuring as much as possible from the surrounding countryside during the advance – living off the land – led to particularly acute problems in Army Group North’s area of operations. Leningrad and its environs could not feed themselves during peacetime and were reliant on the importation of grain from Ukraine and Siberia.<sup>68</sup> The addition of Army Group North’s soldiers and the dislocation caused by the fighting ensured that the food situation was even more strained during the war. This situation continually worsened during the summer and fall of 1941, evolving into outright starvation during the winter of 1941–2. For German formations, serious problems arose a mere month into the campaign. On 26 July, the Corps headquarters declared that the supply situation was at ‘breaking point’, and called on its subordinate troops to ‘exhaust all means’ to alleviate the situation.<sup>69</sup> Whilst the division’s files do not indicate that the 121st Infantry Division had reached such a precarious state, it is clear that the troops supplemented their rations to a considerable extent with vegetables, chickens, pigs and cattle taken from the civilian population.<sup>70</sup> Following the division’s order to its men to feed themselves and the horses every second day, another soldier wrote of ‘mounted troops swarm[ing] like the Huns to the right and left of the route of advance, searching for hay, pigs, calves [and] chickens in villages kilometres away. There is, however, little there and when we are gone, there is nothing left’.<sup>71</sup> The results of this rapacious policy were well understood by the more thoughtful soldier. One NCO described the process by which the Army’s gathering of food radicalised the population:

Though the field kitchens come on most evenings, the soldier must supply himself during the course of the day. He had no choice but

to plunder the gardens ... The poor population then had more items which were absolutely necessary for their livelihood taken by the baggage units. Behind us came other organisations who took up this cause and this did not contribute to any increase in trust in the German leadership.<sup>72</sup>

This same soldier, after seeing a Russian peasant distraught over the slaughter of his last cow merely to satisfy the desire of a passing German soldier for liver, wrote that such actions added 'another family to the partisans'.<sup>73</sup>

The issue of food also played an important role in triggering the partisan movement in Pavlovsk. Upon entering the city, the Germans confiscated all food stocks in markets and warehouses as well as in private possession.<sup>74</sup> This immediately led to famine-like conditions within the city: some 6000 of the town's 15,000 inhabitants starved to death during the war.<sup>75</sup> Whilst individuals of the 121st Infantry Division and other lower-level German formations provided sustenance for starving women and children in their midst, the very fact that this was necessary is evidence of the desperation felt by Soviet civilians inhabiting the cities within the siege line.<sup>76</sup> Faced with either a slow, painful death by starvation or at least a chance of survival by joining the partisan movement, some civilians inevitably chose the latter.

Whilst the higher political and military leadership of the Third Reich viewed the partisan movement in ideologically-laden terms, the division's soldiers had a different understanding of the causes of the resistance. The growing resistance to German rule due to the policy of living off the land has already been mentioned. One NCO, whilst describing the resistance movement as 'treacherous or even underhanded', excused the population as Stalin had called for such a struggle and it was 'led by the Politruks, the political combatants' placing Soviet citizens in a 'cauldron which we can't understand'.<sup>77</sup> Here, the totalitarian Stalinist state was seen as the villain behind the partisan movement. Another man had a more straightforward explanation for guerrilla activity: simple patriotism. After a partisan was executed for setting a house on fire in Pavlovsk, the German described the incident and the subsequent punishment:

he believed he was serving his country by making life difficult for us ... for the security of the troops, the struggle against the partisans allowed no mercy. Through appropriate measures against these people, it needed to be made clear that partisans were not soldiers and



were to be treated in principle as guerrillas. So it happened in this case.<sup>78</sup>

It seems from such instances during the first year of war that troops of the 121st Infantry Division did not view the partisan movement in strictly ideological terms. More rational causes, such as the Germans' forced requisitioning; a helpless population stuck between the German hammer and the Stalinist anvil; and basic patriotism were seen as the primary motivations for the resistance. In all of these cases, members of the division understood why civilians took up arms against the Wehrmacht and even, in some cases, sympathised with the insurgents.

### **The 121st Infantry Division in the context of the *Vernichtungskrieg***

This is not to say that the 121st Infantry Division treated suspected and real partisans with niceties; on the contrary, from late September 1941 on, the division generally treated them according to army doctrine: it executed alleged partisans on a more regular basis and carried out collective measures against Pavlovsk's population. Up to this point, however, the division displayed a noteworthy restraint in dealing with partisans, as a comparison with other German divisions illustrates. The 253rd Infantry Division, a front-line combat unit which fought under Army Group Centre, began carrying out collective measures as early as 7 July 1941, and, according to the historian Christoph Rass, such occurrences were 'everyday events' during Operation Barbarossa.<sup>79</sup> The 126th Infantry Division, operating in the same general area as the 121st Infantry Division, executed individual civilians from the very beginning of the campaign and carried out larger collective measures beginning in mid-July 1941 that became part of the division's everyday activities by late autumn.<sup>80</sup> The contrast between these actions and the much milder reactions of the 121st Infantry Division to partisan activity in the summer and early autumn of 1941 is striking.

Even after the general radicalisation of Wehrmacht policy as a whole in mid-September 1941, the 121st Infantry Division's behaviour still compared favourably to other divisions. The 253rd Infantry Division reported in December 1941 that it had shot 230 partisans, making 'nearly daily reports' from September onwards, concerning the executions of alleged partisans.<sup>81</sup> Truman Anderson has examined the experiences of the 62nd Infantry Division which had been withdrawn from the front for refitting in October 1941 and was then utilised to help

quieten the partisan threat in the rear.<sup>82</sup> Whilst the division initially favoured a somewhat more restrained approach towards civilians, growing partisan activity radicalised its behaviour. Its first collective measure consisted of the burning of one village and the execution of ten random villagers; a few weeks later, the division destroyed another village in a reprisal action but this time murdered some 200–300 civilians.<sup>83</sup>

Divisions whose primary mission was to secure the rear areas of the German front had far more blood on their hands than the combat units, especially during the latter third of 1941. The 221st Security Division, for example, killed 1746 alleged partisans whilst suffering a mere 18 dead during operations from mid-September through November 1941.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps the most infamous of all Wehrmacht divisions was the 707th Infantry Division which operated in the rear-area in Belarus. This division quickly linked Jews with partisans and it waged a campaign of unparalleled brutality in its attempt to simultaneously end the partisan and Jewish ‘threat’; by the end of December 1941, the unit reported that it had executed some 19,000 civilians, of whom a majority were Jewish.<sup>85</sup>

When placed in this context, the measured response of the 121st Infantry Division stands out. Whilst the carrying out of collective measures became a regular occurrence for numerous German divisions, they remained the exception for the 121st Infantry Division. Why did it behave differently from these other divisions? First, under-equipped rear area divisions frequently found themselves isolated in a sea of potentially hostile civilians and they resorted to terror in an attempt to cow the population into submission.<sup>86</sup> In contrast, the 121st Infantry Division was superior in terms of manpower (both quantitatively and qualitatively) and equipment to such formations and, as part of a large invading force operating on a narrow front, it never felt threatened by partisan activity. Focused as it was on defeating the Red Army in combat, the division was less likely to feel the need to resort to arbitrary violence to complete its mission.

The differences between the 121st Infantry Division and other German combat formations are more difficult to explain. Part of it undoubtedly has to do with the theatre of operations. The 253rd Infantry Division operated in Army Group Centre and this section of the front witnessed the largest partisan movement during 1941, whilst the area that the 121st Infantry Division operated in was relatively partisan-free.<sup>87</sup> Another possible explanation centres on the attitudes of a division’s officers. Whilst ideology certainly acted as a motivating factor in the behaviour of both the 707th Infantry Division and the 221st Security Division, it seems

that the officers of the 121st Infantry Division, from the commander down to junior officers, approached the war in a much more professional and measured manner.<sup>88</sup> Anti-Semitism and other such inflammatory sentiments are strikingly absent from the overwhelming majority of divisional documents and the unit as a whole seemed far more focused on maintaining a quiescent rear area than in engaging in violent and arbitrary sweeps against a 'racial' enemy.

The example of the 121st Infantry Division demonstrates that not every division in the *Ostheer* automatically resorted to the violent measures that both Army doctrine and the National Socialist political leadership demanded. Whilst coercive policies were certainly instituted by the division, they were complemented by conciliatory actions from the very first days of the invasion. The division certainly participated in the machinery of extermination utilised by the Third Reich in the East, but its own contribution was generally limited to cooperation with the SS. At the lowest levels, an examination of the division's ranks highlights the various experiences and behaviours that accompanied the three million German soldiers who invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. Whilst some men fought Hitler's war against Jews, Bolsheviks and 'racially inferior' Slavs, others maintained a much more humane outlook towards Soviet civilians. The wide range of attitudes and actions displayed at both the institutional and individual levels of the 121st Infantry Division provide a cautionary note to those who speak of one homogenous, habitually violent and criminal Wehrmacht.

## Notes

1. Tagebuchartige Aufzeichnungen des Lt. E.-Btl. Adjutant, 23.6.41, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BA-MA), RH37/3905. Federal German laws prohibit naming individuals who are either still living, have died within the past 30 years as well as in cases in which no concrete evidence exists regarding their life or death status if they had been born during the preceding 110 years.
2. The most prominent example of this view is Hamburg Institut für Sozialforschung (1996) *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941–1944 Ausstellungskatalog* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition). This position is powerfully summarised in H. Heer (2000) 'The Logic of the War of Extermination: The Wehrmacht and the Anti-Partisan War,' in H. Heer and K. Naumann (eds) *War of Extermination* (New York: Berghahn Books), pp. 92–126. Elements of this approach are also found in the works of Omer Bartov; see O. Bartov (1992) *Hitler's Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
3. On the numbers of men without prior combat experience, see Stellv. Generalkommando X (Wehrkreiskommando X) Abt. Ib mob Nr. 4150/40g 16.10.40 Betr.: Aufstellung der 121. Inf.-Division, BA-MA RH26-121/2.

4. W. Wette (2006) *The Wehrmacht* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), pp. 119–20, 122, 200; H. Heer (2004) *Vom Verschwinden der Täter* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag), pp. 67–104.
5. O. Buchbender and R. Sterz (eds) (1982) *Das andere Gesicht des Krieges: Deutsche Feldpostbriefe 1939–1945* (Munich: Beck); W. Manoschek (ed.) (1995) *Es gibt nur eines für das Judentum: "Vernichtung". Das Judenbild in deutschen Soldatenbriefen 1939–1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition).
6. K. Lätzel (1997) 'Vom Kriegserlebnis zur Kriegserfahrung. Theoretische und methodische Überlegungen zur erfahrungsgeschichtlichen Untersuchung von Feldpostbriefen', *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen* 56, 1–30.
7. K. Lätzel (2005) 'Feldpostbriefe: Überlegungen zur Aussagekraft einer Quelle' in C. Hartmann, J. Hürter and U. Jureit (eds) *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht* (Munich: C. H. Beck), pp. 171–82.
8. For a concise overview of this issue, see B. Shepherd (2004) *War in the Wild East* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), pp. 34–57.
9. J. Horne and A. Kramer (2001) *German Atrocities 1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press), pp. 140–53.
10. Quoted in M. Howard (1991) *The Franco-Prussian War* (New York: Collier Books), p. 378.
11. I. Hull (2005) *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), pp. 118–30.
12. Examples of German collective measures are found in G. Wawro (2003) *The Franco-Prussian War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 238, 264–5, 279.
13. Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, p. 119.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
15. Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, p. 94.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 96–111.
17. Horne and Kramer identify some 130 incidents of ten or more civilians being killed for alleged partisan attacks; see *ibid.*, pp. 435–9.
18. For an overview of these orders, see C. Gerlach (1999) *Kalkulierte Morde* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition), pp. 81–94. All four orders are reproduced in G. Ueberschär and W. Wette (eds) (1991) *Unternehmen Barbarossa* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch), pp. 248–59.
19. The order is reproduced in Ueberschär and Wette, *Unternehmen Barbarossa*, pp. 249–50.
20. Richtlinien für das Verhalten der Truppe in Rußland, BA-MA RH26-126/25.
21. General Kommando II AK, Anlage 3 zu 0100/41g.Kdos., 28.5.41, BA-MA RH26-121/6.
22. 121 ID Ia, Besondere Anordnungen zum Div.-Befehl für den Angriff, 20.6.41, BA-MA RH26-121/6.
23. Kriegstagebuch (hereafter KTB), 22.6.41, BA-MA RH26-121/8.
24. Shepherd, *Wild East*, p. 62; G. Megargee (2006) *War of Annihilation: Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front, 1941* (New York: Rowan & Littlefield), p. 59.
25. W. van Heesch (1962) *Meine 13. Infanterie-Geschütz-Kompanie Grenadier-Regiment 408* (no place of publication), p. 66.
26. 'Der Todesmarsch nach Leningrad', BA-MA Msg 2/2580, p. 36.
27. KTB, 24.6.41, BA-MA RH26-121/8. The Hague Rules of Land Warfare of 1907 gave irregular units legal protection only if they functioned, for all

- intents and purposes, as regular military formations. See L. Friedman (ed.) (1972) *The Law of War: A Documentary History* (New York: Random House), I, pp. 308–23.
28. Ic Meldung, 17.8.41, BA-MA RH26-121/56.
  29. These events are discussed later in the chapter.
  30. Perhaps the best published source on Army Group North's advance through the Baltic states is the war diary of its commander-in-chief, Field Marshal Ritter von Leeb; see W. von Lieb and G. Meyer (ed.) (1976) *Tagebuchaufzeichnungen und Lagebeurteilungen aus zwei Weltkriegen* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt), pp. 276–300. Ernst Klink's discussion of Army Group North's movements remains the most authoritative examination in the secondary literature; see E. Klink (1996) 'Der Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion bis zur Jahreswende 1941/42', in H. Boog et al., *Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion* (Frankfurt: Fischer), pp. 541–736, here pp. 550–7. On the generally welcoming attitude of the Baltic population, see K. Arnold (2005) *Die Wehrmacht und die Besatzungspolitik in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot), pp. 149–50. On Lithuania in particular, see V. Bartusevicius, J. Tauber and W. Wette (2003) *Holocaust in Litauen* (Cologne: Bohlau).
  31. During the last six months of 1941, the 121st Infantry Division was subordinated to three different corps and two different armies. Such movement by subordinate units was quite common within the Wehrmacht as it continually redefined its operational and tactical plans. For more on this topic, see J. Hürter (2001) 'Die Wehrmacht vor Leningrad: Krieg und Besatzungspolitik der 18. Armee im Herbst und Winter 1941/42', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 49, 377–440.
  32. Generalkommando XXVIII AK Abt. Ia, 6.8.1941, Korpsbefehl Nr.3, BA-MA RH26-121/11. The last two sentences of the order were underlined in the division's files.
  33. 121 ID Ic, 6.8.41, BA-MA RH26-121/11.
  34. For a perceptive analysis of this problem, see Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, pp. 62–73.
  35. 'Chronik der 2.Kompanie Nachrichten-Abteilung 121', BA-MA RH44/381.
  36. Ic Meldung, 5.9.41; 11.9.41; 14.9.41, BA-MA RH26-121/56.
  37. 'Mein Regiment', 30.8.41, BA-MA RH37/3096.
  38. 'Der Todesmarsch nach Leningrad', p. 177.
  39. Ibid., pp. 161, 177.
  40. See Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, pp. 46–59 and A. J. Kay (2006) *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder. Political and Economic Planning for German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1940–1941* (New York: Berghahn Books). Dissenting voices include Hürter, 'Die Wehrmacht vor Leningrad'.
  41. Allgemeine wirtschaftspolitische Richtlinien für die Wirtschaftsorganisation Ost, Gruppe Landwirtschaft, 23.5.1941, in Ueberschär and Wette, *Unternehmen Barbarossa*, pp. 323–5.
  42. Generalkommando XXVIII AK, Abt. Ia/Ic 11.9.41, BA-MA RH26-121/12.
  43. XXVIII AK, Tätigkeitsbericht Teil III, 17.-19.9.41, BA-MA RH24-28/109.
  44. 121 ID Ia. Div. Befehl für die Einnahme von Ssluzk am 18.9.1941–19.9.1941, BA-MA RH26-121/12; 121 ID Ia. Div. Befehl für den Übergang zur Verteidigung 19.9.1941, BA-MA RH26-121/12.
  45. 24.10.41, KTB HGr. Nord, in Ueberschär and Wette, *Unternehmen Barbarossa*, pp. 281–2. See also Hürter, 'Die Wehrmacht vor Leningrad',

- p. 401; J. Ganzenmüller (2005) *Das belagerte Leningrad 1941–1944* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh), p. 70.
46. XXVIII AK KTB, 18.9.41, BA-MA RH24-28/20a.
47. Ibid., 24.9.41.
48. Ibid.
49. XXVIII AK KTB, 21.9.41, BA-MA RH24-28/20a; Divisions-Befehl 24.9.1941 – Behandlung von Zivilpersonen, BA-MA RH26-121/12.
50. Heesch, *Meine 13. Infanterie-Geschütz-Kompanie*, p. 98.
51. Ereignismeldung Nr. 150, 2.1.42, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA), College Park, Maryland, T-175, Roll 234.
52. Sicherheitspolizei und SD Sonderkommando 1B an XXVIII AK, 24.9.41, BA-MA RH24-28/100.
53. Ic Meldung, 2.10.41, BA-MA RH26-121/57.
54. Ic Meldung 7.10.41, BA-MA RH26-121/57; Tätigkeitsbericht Teil III, 6-8.10.41, BA-MA RH24-28/109. According to the Corps Intelligence Section, a further ten civilians were shot on 9 October 1941 for the same incident. A record of this execution is not mentioned in the 121st Infantry Division's records and it is impossible to determine who carried out the shooting. This incident is also mentioned in Chrezvychainaia Gosudarcvennaia Komissiia po Ustanobleniiu i Rassledobaniiu Zlodeianii Nemetsko-Fashistskikh Zakhvatchikov i ikh Soiuznikov, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), Washington, DC, RG 22-002M, Reel 18, Pavlovsk, 3.
55. Ereignismeldung Nr. 116, 17.10.41, NARA, T-175, Roll 234.
56. H. Krausnick and H. Wilhelm (1981) *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges. Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1938–1942* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt).
57. The decree is reproduced in Ueberschär and Wette (eds), *Unternehmen Barbarossa*, pp. 305–6. For brief discussions of this order, see T. Richter (1999) 'Die Wehrmacht und der Partisanenkrieg in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion', in R.-D. Müller and H.-E. Volkmann (eds) *Die Wehrmacht* (Munich: Oldenbourg), pp. 843–4.
58. KTB, 31.10.41, BA-MA RH26-121/16.
59. XXVIII AK, Tätigkeitsbericht Teil III, 21.-22.10.41, BA-MA RH24-28/109.
60. See below, this chapter.
61. 121 ID Ic, 16.2.42, BA-MA RH26-121/18.
62. Wi.Kdo. Krasnogwardeisk, Gru.Fü., Monatsbericht März 1942, BA-MA RW31/948.
63. The actions of the 121st Infantry Division in this respect reflected a larger phenomenon within the German Army. As belief in a quick victory faded during the course of 1941–2, certain segments of the Army began favouring a more conciliatory approach to the civilian population, in hopes of winning its support for the German war effort. See T. Mulligan (1988) *The Politics of Illusion and Empire: German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1942–1943* (New York: Praeger); M. Oldenburg (2004) *Ideologie und militärisches Kalkül. Die Besatzungspolitik der Wehrmacht in der Sowjetunion 1942* (Cologne: Böhlau); Shepherd, *Wild East*, pp. 132–65.
64. XXVIII AK, Tätigkeitsbericht Teil III, 13.10.41, BA-MA RH24-28/109. The fact that the Germans were informed that the new town name was in honour of a female Jewish Communist no doubt made this decision easier.

65. Ortskommandatur, Pavlosvk (Slutzk), 14.10.41 to 121 ID, BA-MA RH26-121/70.
66. 5.9.41, KTB, 121 ID Ib, BA-MA RH26-121/65.
67. 121 ID Ic, Feindlagen-Bericht Nr. 1, 16.2.42, BA-MA RH26-121/18.
68. G. Hass (2002) 'Deutsche Besatzungspolitik im Leningrader Gebiet 1941–1944', in B. Quinkert (ed.) *'Wir sind die Herren dieses Landes'. Ursachen, Verlauf und Folgen des deutschen Überfalls auf die Sowjetunion* (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag), pp. 66–7; A. Hill (2005) *The War behind the Eastern Front* (London: Routledge), p. 26.
69. Generalkommando II. Armeekorps, Abt. Qu., Besondere Anordnungen für die Versorgung des II A.K. Nr. 30, 26.7.41, BA-MA RH24-2/462.
70. KTB I Ib, Divisionsintendant 121 Inf. Division 10.3.1942, Tätigkeitsbericht für die Zeit vom 20.6.41 bis 20.9.41, BA-MA RH26-121/65; Tagebuchartige Aufzeichnungen des Lt. E., Btl. Adj., 13.7.41, BA-MA RH37/3095.
71. Tagebuchartige Aufzeichnungen des Lt. E., Btl. Adj., 20.7.41, BA-MA RH37/3095.
72. 'Der Todesmarsch nach Leningrad', p. 112.
73. Ibid., p. 117.
74. Chrezvychainaia Gosudarcvennaia Komissiia, USHMM, RG 22-002M Reel 18, Pavlovsk, p. 1.
75. Ibid., p. 6.
76. Ereignismeldung Nr. 190, 8.4.42, NARA T-175, Roll 234. For more on troops providing assistance to the population of this area, see Jeffrey Rutherford's Ph.D. thesis (2007) *Soldiers into Nazis? The German Infantry's War in Northwest Russia, 1941–1944* (Austin: University of Texas), pp. 215–18.
77. 'Der Todesmarsch nach Leningrad', p. 112.
78. Heesch, *Meine 13. Infanterie-Geschütz-Kompanie*, p. 99.
79. C. Rass (2003) 'Menschenmaterial'. *Deutsche Soldaten an der Ostfront. Innenansichten einer Infanteriedivision 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh), p. 340.
80. 126 ID Ic, 2.7.41, BA-MA RH26-126/116; AR 126 Tagesmeldung, 22.7.41, BA-MA RH26-126/9. For a further discussion of the 126th Infantry Division's approach to partisan warfare, see Rutherford, *Soldiers into Nazis?*, pp. 131–4, 148–52.
81. Rass, 'Menschenmaterial', p. 339.
82. T. Anderson (1999) 'Incident at Baranvka: German Reprisals and the Soviet Partisan Movement in Ukraine, October–December 1941', *Journal of Modern History*, 71, 585–623.
83. Ibid., 608, 611–12.
84. Shepherd, *Wild East*, p. 85.
85. Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, p. 619.
86. Shepherd notes that the 221st Security Division was responsible for 35,000 square kilometres by the end of July 1941; *Wild East*, p. 51.
87. On the weakness of the Soviet partisan movement in the Leningrad region in 1941, see Hill, *War*, pp. 76–9.
88. *Generalleutnant* Otto Lancelle commanded the division from the beginning of the invasion until his death in action on 10 July 1941; he was replaced by *General d. Artillerie* Martin Wandel, who led the unit until December 1942. On the former, see BA-MA Msg-109/10849; on the latter, see BA-MA

Msg-109/10854. These sources provide brief biographical sketches of senior German officers. The author is planning an investigation of the divisional officers' backgrounds through an examination of their personnel files and *Nachlässe* (unpublished manuscripts and papers) held in the Military Archive in Freiburg. It will model itself on Johannes Hürter's ground-breaking analysis of the senior commanders of the *Ostheer*; see J. Hürter (2006) *Hitlers Heerführer* (Paderborn: Oldenbourg).



# 3

## The Relationship between Soviet Partisans and the Civilian Population in Belorussia under German Occupation, 1941–4

*Alexander Brakel*

The Soviet partisan movement was easily the largest resistance movement in World War II, with possibly half a million active participants.<sup>1</sup> Yet it remained a marginal phenomenon compared to the 70 million people living in German-occupied parts of the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, shortly after the war, Soviet officials began speaking of the partisan war as a nationwide mass movement (*vsenarodnoe partizanskoe dvizhenie*). For example, the Deputy Chief of the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement, Lavrentii Tsanova, used this term as the title of his book on the Soviet underground movement, which was the first overall account on this topic published in the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> This remained the official interpretation, used in Soviet historiography, of historians such as Pantaleimon Ponomarenko or the collective of historians that issued the largest account on the partisan movement in Belorussia.<sup>4</sup> To bring the above figures in line with this interpretation, Soviet propaganda claimed that the partisan movement and the local population had possessed an inseparable unity: it was widely accepted in Soviet historiography that partisans had acted in support of the civilian population and vice versa.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, German sources, such as the reports from the occupied eastern territories (*Meldungen aus den besetzten Ostgebieten*) present a completely different picture, accusing partisans of terrorising the local inhabitants.<sup>6</sup> Although this might easily be viewed as an example of Nazi ideology demonising its opponents, this image is partly supported by the large quantity of partisan files deposited in post-Soviet archives, which were opened following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. We can therefore now draw a much more precise picture of the partisan movement and its relationship with civilians.

Unfortunately the stereotype of the partisan war as a nation-wide mass movement remained widely unchallenged in post-Soviet historiography.<sup>7</sup>

This especially holds true for present-day Belarus, where the Soviet victory in the so-called Great Patriotic War is part of the state's *raison d'être*. The dictatorial regime of current president Alexander Lukashenko emphasises the partisans' alleged heroic deeds as part of the greater narrative, according to which the Belorussians played the most decisive part in defending the world against the 'brown plague'.<sup>8</sup> There are only rare exceptions to this rule, such as the short study by the Belarussian journalist Viktar Khursik, which describes how a partisan detachment burned down a village near Minsk and killed most of its inhabitants.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, in German historiography the partisans were described mainly on the basis of the contents of Wehrmacht documents. During earlier post-war decades, most historians adopted the former German Army's perspective that the partisans had been irregular forces whose treatment had not been subject to the Hague Convention. According to that view, the mere existence of partisans was illegal. Therefore, their harsh treatment was justified, as were retaliatory measures against civilians who supported them.<sup>10</sup>

Over the last 20 years this picture changed considerably. Historians showed not only that the Germans conducted anti-partisan warfare very brutally, but also that they often used it to camouflage their policies of annihilation – particularly against Jews and Sinti and Roma – and economic exploitation.<sup>11</sup> However accurate this approach was, it still relied exclusively on German sources and therefore failed to analyse the partisan side. Moreover, after the end of the Cold War, Western historians accessed formerly closed documents and concentrated on the conflict between Germans and partisans. Yet they paid little attention to the partisans' relationship with the civilian population.<sup>12</sup> Polish historians have addressed this omission.<sup>13</sup> But while Soviet and post-Soviet historians mainly portrayed the partisans in a positive light, their Polish colleagues did quite the opposite.

Russian historian Aleksandr Gogun recently published the most comprehensive account on the Soviet partisan movement. He examines the partisan movement in Ukraine and sheds light on nearly all its aspects, including its relationship with the indigenous population. However deserving his book is, some of Gogun's assessments seem to be influenced by a strong anti-Soviet and anti-communist attitude. It will therefore be interesting to see whether future research backs his findings that the partisans behaved in an almost exclusively hostile way towards civilians.<sup>14</sup> In 2004 the Polish-German historian Bogdan Musiał published a comprehensive edition of partisan sources that shed light on various aspects of the Soviet underground movement, including

its attitude towards inhabitants of villages. The cited documents draw a rather different picture from the one in classical Soviet accounts: instead of protecting civilians, the partisans were well-known for robbery, assault and rape.<sup>15</sup> But again it remained unclear how widespread these phenomena were. Were they rare exceptions or did they occur regularly?

This chapter examines relations between partisans and civilians more thoroughly in order to address these omissions. It will focus on the Belorussian region of Baranovichi,<sup>16</sup> a region situated in the western part of present-day Belarus, which until 1939 belonged to Poland.<sup>17</sup> Following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Soviet forces conquered it in September 1939. During the German occupation of 1941 to 1944, Baranovichi became a stronghold of both the Soviet partisan movement and the armed Polish underground, *Armia Krajowa* (Home Army, AK). Thus, in addition to Soviet and German sources, Polish documents are available and have been used in preparing this chapter. A case study on this region is, therefore, advantageous in terms of the rich existing sources. As case studies from other regions of western Belorussia have not yet been undertaken, it is difficult to know whether the findings from Baranovichi region are representative for western Belorussia in general. However, works like Gogun's provide interesting parallels. Yet the situation in Baranovichi probably differed significantly from the situation for the partisans in the eastern parts of occupied Belorussia, where they were able to establish so-called partisan republics – large territories exclusively controlled by the underground movement and very seldom attacked by German troops. Thus, the partisans here were able to create more or less bearable conditions for the local inhabitants and protect them against German terror. As we will see, the situation in the Baranovichi region was quite different. Thus, the situation in Baranovichi was more or less typical for the most western parts of the country where 'partisan republics' were rare.

The main reason why the partisan movement was able to develop in Baranovichi was geography. The dense and largely inaccessible woodland, Nalibotskaia Pushcha, as well as the swamps, offered sanctuary to resistance fighters in the north of the Baranovichi region. On the other hand, the region was of high strategic importance: the main railway line, which ran west to east from Warsaw to Moscow and brought troops, ammunition and food to the German Army Group Centre, crossed Baranovichi in the form of the north-south line leading from Vilnius to Ukraine.<sup>18</sup> As the sabotage of German communication lines was one of the partisans' most important tasks,<sup>19</sup> they were very active in this region.

The documents produced by the partisans themselves constitute a rich base of evidence with which to examine relations between them and civilians. The documents include orders and reports from the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement, from its plenipotentiary for the Baranovichi region as well as from different partisan commanders. They provide accounts of the state of the underground movement, and orders for improving shortcomings. Nevertheless, these documents need to be approached very cautiously; they exaggerate both the partisans' military achievements and the German casualties they inflicted, and downplay the partisans' failings. This was all in order to please their bosses, who were usually far from the scene. But these files can conversely be deemed very reliable when they do honestly acknowledge negative aspects of partisan activity. Similarly, positive appraisals of partisan activity provided by the Germans or the Polish underground, neither of whom would have had a vested interest in giving unjustifiable credit to a mutual enemy, can be considered more reliable than positive self-appraisals by the partisans. In any case, this chapter reduces the danger of one-sidedness by comparing accounts from all three groups of sources.

All the partisan documents used for this article are stored in the National Archive of the Republic of Belarus in Minsk. German documents are also located there, as well as in several other Belarussian archives and several branches of the German Federal Archive (*Bundesarchiv*). The German documents include reports from different German occupation institutions such as the Army, the SS and, primarily, the civilian administration and the police. But while these documents provide a good insight into the military effects of the partisan movement and the impact it had upon the German occupation regime, they are written from an external perspective: the Germans were able to judge the partisans' strength and the effectiveness of their actions by the damage they were inflicting, but they knew little about the partisans' internal situation. This was also the case with relations between partisans and civilians; civilians complained about the partisans, but this might easily be regarded as an attempt to avoid being suspected by the occupiers of helping the underground movement.

The Polish sources, mainly derived from the *Archiwum Akt Nowych* in Warsaw, are status reports by the local representatives of the *Armia Krajowa* for the territorial headquarters of the Polish resistance. They describe the situation in the occupied territories, paying great attention to the 'Red partisans'. As their enemy, the *Armia Krajowa* was likely to draw a negative picture of them. Yet in doing so, these sources too help provide a more balanced picture overall.

The chapter begins with a short overview of the emergence and development of the partisan movement, analyses how it helped certain groups of civilians by giving them shelter within its ranks, and examines how it dealt with the rest of the population. It will be shown that it was partisans' procurement of food which placed the heaviest burden upon relations between both groups. The partisans did not restrict their food procurement merely to their own needs, but usually took as much as they could get irrespective of the population's requirements. Thus, the violence practised by the partisans was not restricted to purely military goals such as ensuring their own survival. The final section examines how the Soviet leadership used the partisan movement as a means of achieving ideological as well as military aims. It will be shown that for the majority of civilians, the partisan movement in the Baranovichi region was a burden rather than a relief.

### **The fledgling stage of the partisan movement**

The partisan movement originated with small, unconnected groups of former Red Army soldiers who found themselves trapped behind the German front. As rumours circulated of the German treatment of Soviet prisoners of war, thousands of them formed small groups and hid in the forests to avoid capture.<sup>20</sup> Soon, Jews from the ghettos sought shelter in the woods from German terror and annihilation, and either joined these groups or formed their own.<sup>21</sup> Yet over a year after the German attack on the Soviet Union, total numbers of partisans in the Baranovichi region amounted to a mere few hundred men concentrated in small units with often no more than ten members.<sup>22</sup> These groups, who were rarely linked with one another and were constantly lacking weapons and ammunition, were far too small to pose a real threat to the occupiers. Some occasionally laid ambush to small German patrols but the majority seem to have concentrated on survival, engaging in armed raids against state farms. However, even this was enough to shatter the Germans' belief that the region was safe and secure.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, it would not be long before levels of partisan disruption increased considerably.

Beginning in autumn 1942, the Soviet government in Moscow endeavoured to organise all partisan groups into a centralised and highly effective paramilitary movement. Members of the NKVD were sent into German-occupied territory to secure the Kremlin's grip on the local partisan movements. They transformed the small and militarily inadequate groups into hierarchically organised detachments and brigades. At the

head of each stood a commander in charge of military aspects, and a commissar responsible for ideological control of the troops. This was because, in Stalin's understanding, the partisan movement should operate as his extended arm both in military and political terms.<sup>24</sup>

These organisational efforts took time to implement, but although the secret service officers only partly succeeded in establishing order and discipline, military efficiency did increase. But partisans were still a very small minority; the vast proportion of civilian inhabitants did not join their ranks. Only when the Germans intensified their forced labour policy and deported large numbers of young Belorussians to Germany in late 1942 did the partisan movement in Belorussia gain momentum. Thousands of civilians joined the partisans in order to avoid being deported.<sup>25</sup>

### **Partisan support of civilians**

This demonstrates the most important function of the Soviet underground for the civilian inhabitants in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union: partisans provided refugees with shelter from German terror and annihilation. However, neither the local partisan leaders nor the Soviet rulers in Moscow regarded this as their main purpose. In their view, partisans were to constitute a significant military factor, not a humanitarian one. Partisan detachments were therefore ordered to accept only those refugees who were able to fight. Often women, children and old men were sent away. Due to the lack of weapons even healthy young men were sometimes expelled from partisan groups.<sup>26</sup> This was especially true for Jewish refugees: anti-Semitism was widespread among the local population of western Belorussia and the partisan movement was no different.<sup>27</sup> Although Stalin and the Soviet leadership clearly knew that the German occupiers were targeting the entire Jewish population, they did nothing to prevent it. Sometimes, Jews were not simply rejected, but actually killed by the partisans.<sup>28</sup> For example, Hersh Smolar, who had escaped from the Minsk ghetto and joined the partisans in Stolbtsy, once found the corpses of several Jewish women floating in the River Neman. His fellow partisans, who had suspected them of being Nazi spies, had murdered them.<sup>29</sup> A Jewish woman from Mir remembers that having escaped from the ghetto, she and her brother did everything to avoid contact with the partisans, because they had heard numerous rumours of their anti-Semitic behaviour. Her concerns were justifiable; one partisan they later met did indeed try to kill them.<sup>30</sup>

Yet many partisan detachments were closely linked with ghettos and helped Jews to flee. Lejzer Tsaretskii, a 61-year-old Jew from the small town of Stolbtsy, fled from the ghetto and joined a partisan detachment. Its commander received him cordially and even sent some of his men to the ghetto to help more Jews to escape their planned annihilation.<sup>31</sup> In autumn 1942 the 'Zhukov' brigade attacked the police station at Novyi Sverzhen and freed some 500 Jews, 200 of whom joined their ranks.<sup>32</sup> Eventually in 1943 partisan officials ordered the admission of all Jewish refugees.<sup>33</sup> In the region of Baranovichi alone, several hundred Jews survived the war in the ranks of the partisans. This made the partisan movement the Jewish population's largest rescuer.<sup>34</sup>

Non-Jewish refugees were treated similarly, even if they did not have to endure anti-Semitic attitudes. Most were only accepted if they were of military value to the partisans.<sup>35</sup> For example, M. Szczypak, who fled to the woods from Liakhovich, was rejected by a partisan unit near Slonim because of the lack of weapons.<sup>36</sup> As late as May 1944, the commander of the detachment 'Voronov' accepted only armed individuals to his unit.<sup>37</sup>

These orders were changed in spring 1944 when partisans in the Baranovich region were instructed to accept everyone seeking shelter. The reason for this shift was the need to make it impossible for the German occupiers to recruit workers and especially collaborationist fighters.<sup>38</sup> But for many civilians, especially for Jews, the partisans provided the only possible way to survive the war.<sup>39</sup> In this aspect, Baranovich seems not to have differed significantly from other regions.<sup>40</sup>

Partisan memoirs and Soviet historians both claim that partisans protected civilians against German terror.<sup>41</sup> This is, however, only partly true. In the eastern parts of the occupied territories partisans sometimes managed to erect so-called partisan republics, large areas governed exclusively by the underground movement.<sup>42</sup> But in western Belorussia, such zones were very rare, and partisan actions often provoked German reprisals which partisans were unable to prevent. For example, one peasant complained that partisans had stolen his bread and cattle. The Germans arrived the next day, noticed the missing goods and punished him severely for having helped the partisans. The peasant concluded that without that sort of partisan, he would live a much safer life.<sup>43</sup> Partisans robbed the manor of Olbryna so often that the occupiers suspected its administrator of cooperation with their enemies and shot him on the spot.<sup>44</sup> Thus, local people fell victim both to partisans and to German anti-partisan reprisals.

The attitude of the Communist movement was clear throughout World War II and on all fronts; it was wrong to fear reprisals and active resistance was the way forward whatever the cost. It seems likely that partisans even wished to provoke German terror against civilians in order to exacerbate the latter's hatred of the occupiers and make them join the partisans.<sup>45</sup> However, there is no clear evidence of this in the documents. On the other hand, civilians undoubtedly suffered from German reprisals due to partisan operations.<sup>46</sup> This badly affected the partisans' image among the civilian population.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, nothing had a worse impact on relations between civilians and partisans than the procurement policy of the Soviet underground.<sup>48</sup>

### **Partisans' procurement policy**

Partisans relied heavily on the local population. They needed weapons, ammunition and especially food and often the only source was local villages.<sup>49</sup> In the beginning, when partisan groups were small, providing them with food was relatively straightforward. And even the Germans acknowledged that, at this stage, most villagers were giving to the partisans voluntarily.<sup>50</sup> And even if they did not, the amount of food the partisans needed was still tolerable for the affected peasants. At the end of May 1942, for instance, a group of underground fighters stole one cow and one sheep in the village of Bachni.<sup>51</sup> The following night another group took five horses and a few groceries.<sup>52</sup> But as the underground movement expanded, due to German reprisals, procurement and, probably most importantly, the Germans' forced labour policy, supplying itself with food became increasingly difficult. Procurement operations became regular events and from August 1942 they became almost daily phenomena. Although the Germans tried very hard to protect the villages and state farms in order to secure their own food supply, their forces were much too weak to cope with this challenge.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, as the partisan groups increased in size, so too did their looting. In late July 1942 a detachment of some 50 men took away all the peasants' carriages and eight tons of grain at a village near Turets; on 15 August about 30 partisans forced the inhabitants of the village of Kolki to hand over 20 horses with carriages; and on 3 September 1000 kilograms of rye and 500 kilograms of wheat were stolen from the mill near Obryna.<sup>54</sup> On top of the effects of German procurement policy, peasants were often left without any food at all.<sup>55</sup>

Food procurement was of crucial importance for one other reason too. In order to obtain food, partisans had to enter the villages. Thus,



procurement operations brought them into close contact with civilians.<sup>56</sup> Very often procurement was accompanied by robbery and brutal violence against villagers.<sup>57</sup> Apart from their desperate need for food, many partisans forced peasants to give them everything they wanted. Alcohol was, unsurprisingly, in particularly high demand, but they also stole goods of no use to them, including lingerie.<sup>58</sup> When peasants refused to surrender their belongings, they were threatened, beaten up or even shot. Rape was especially widespread.<sup>59</sup> Drunken partisans were particularly dangerous for the peasants and violence regularly became an end in itself.<sup>60</sup>

One Polish girl remembered how the partisans targeted her village nearly every night. One day they demanded vodka, and when her uncle told them that they did not have any, he was shot in the head. The offender commented that there was no sense in a human being without vodka. At another estate a partisan tried to rape a maidservant. When the farmer's son dared to help her, a bystanding partisan killed him.<sup>61</sup>

The chief of staff of the detachment 'Suvorov' organised collective drinking bouts with his fellow commanders. Completely drunk, one of them tried to rape two female partisans. A sober partisan had to use physical violence to prevent this.<sup>62</sup> The search for alcohol turned some procurement operations into veritable 'vodka expeditions': partisans of the 'Stalin' brigade used most of the groceries obtained from the peasants in one village to exchange them for vodka in the next. According to a commander, one of these villages had turned into a bazaar with the peasants voluntarily offering vodka to the partisans in exchange for food. He noted that he could give several hundred examples of partisans beating, hanging or shooting peasants for only half a litre of alcohol.<sup>63</sup>

## **Soviet efforts to discipline the partisan movement**

When the Communist Party strengthened its efforts to control the underground movement in autumn 1942, it was horrified to learn that such actions had attained a massive scale.<sup>64</sup> A report sent to the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement in June 1943 described the situation with the partisan brigade 'Frunze' that operated in the Baranovichy region:

The brigade consisted of 650 armed fighters [...], most of them former soldiers of the Red Army. The leaders of the brigade did not order them to fight, did not train them and did not try to close links with other brigades and detachments. There was no discipline at all. Drinking, marauding and illegal executions were widespread. The population called the 'Frunze' brigade looters and bandits.<sup>65</sup>

The situation in other brigades was similar, even though 'Frunze' may well have been the most extreme. Already the chronic lack of ammunition constrained the partisans' ability to fight the Germans. Instead, most of them were idle and roaming the forests. This, of course, impacted negatively upon their discipline and further encouraged their (mis)use of alcohol.<sup>66</sup> In August 1943 a special correspondent of the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement drew a disastrous picture of the situation in Baranovichy region:

Peasants ceased seeing any difference between bandits and proper partisans. Bandits mingle with the partisans, thus plundering the local population. Many partisan detachments take part in this. Gambling, drunkenness, robbery, lack of discipline, disobedience of orders can be encountered within all detachments. This brings discredit on the partisan movement. [...] Food and clothing can only be obtained with great difficulty and by use of weapons.<sup>67</sup>

Party plenipotentiaries tried vigorously to stop such behaviour. They imposed a ban and prosecuted those who violated it.<sup>68</sup> Some especially brutal partisans were even sentenced to death.<sup>69</sup> However, the permanent lack of qualified fighters made it difficult to execute them. Condemned men were usually reprimanded and given the chance to atone.<sup>70</sup> Very telling is the case of one company commander who was three times sentenced to death for looting, rape and other forms of violence against the civilian population. On each occasion, he pledged to change his behaviour and was granted amnesty. However, when he failed for the fourth time, he was eventually shot.<sup>71</sup>

It remains unclear whether the compromised nature of the fight against indiscipline was the main reason why the partisan leadership did not succeed quickly in their endeavours to stamp out such phenomena. The complaints did not cease. Nevertheless, by 1944 it seems that the situation had slightly improved. While it is not possible to quantify this precisely, the number of complaints certainly declined. Violence against civilians nevertheless remained an issue until the end of the German occupation.<sup>72</sup>

Probably more important was military necessity. While partisan leaders could counter brutal behaviour, they could not go without food. And as supply from the Soviet hinterland fell far short,<sup>73</sup> almost everything had to be requisitioned from the peasants. In some respects, the communist leaders made matters worse. In order to obtain their supplies from the peasants, they were ready to use even more brutal methods.

For example, the chief of the Central Partisan staff, Pantaleimon Ponomarenko ordered his men to threaten peasants with the death penalty so as to make them hand over their weapons and ammunition. If they refused, he commanded, the village mayor should be hanged.<sup>74</sup>

On the other hand, many partisans were fully aware of the importance of being on good terms with the villagers. They therefore tried to organise procurement in a manner that made it bearable. Procurement, they were advised, should follow a strict order and must not lead partisans to plunder or treat peasants brutally. Partisan detachments were to procure in particular villages to avoid some villages being targeted more often than others. Commanders told their subordinates to take the locals' material situation into account. They were not to rid them of their means of subsistence.<sup>75</sup> In many cases, this was untenable. Even partisans gave accounts of whole villages left without any food reserves. It might be the case that the partisans used their procurement raids as a means of class-struggle as well and tried to ruin so-called kulaks and bourgeois exploiters. First and foremost, however, the conduct of the raids was determined by the specific conditions of partisan warfare: while the occupiers could be sure to return to the same villages as often as they wanted, partisans could never be sure of having the same opportunity. At any time, the Germans could block roads or occupy villages, preventing partisans from procuring food.

The prevailing lack of ammunition further restricted partisan opportunities. In February 1944 the members of the 'Zhukov' brigade, based in the region of Mir and Stolbtsy, each had only 15–20 cartridges left, far too few to risk an encounter with the Germans. But without a struggle they were only able to procure their food from five villages, all of which had been thoroughly plundered already.<sup>76</sup> In the southern areas of Baranovichi the situation was equally bad.<sup>77</sup> And the partisans were well aware that the situation could become even worse: during the large-scale anti-partisan operation 'Hermann' which took place in the northern parts of the Baranovichi region in July and August 1943 and forced the partisans to leave their usual territory of operation and seek shelter in the dense woods and swamps of the Pushcha Nalibotska, the partisans were so desperate that they had to resort to eating berries, horses and even dogs.<sup>78</sup> Thus, stockpiling large amounts of food was often essential, even though it meant an additional burden for the local inhabitants.<sup>79</sup>

In essence, then, Communist partisan leaders could combat lack of discipline and senseless violence on the part of their units, but food procurement was inevitable for military and economic reasons. And the only way to get food was to take it from peasants. A detachment

commander refused to participate in a procurement operation, asserting: 'I won't rob peasants'. He was reproached and excluded from the Communist Party.<sup>80</sup> Given these circumstances, demands to leave peasants enough food for their own requirements were pure lip service.

This raises another question: given the overall necessity of the partisans' procurement, did they restrict their own nutrition to the absolutely necessary, or did they consider the local inhabitants' needs at all? In several orders the partisan officials told their subordinates to restrict their procurement to strict norms.<sup>81</sup> The official reports of partisan detachments, written after the war, draw an inconsistent picture: members of the 'Zhukov' brigade had an average norm of 800 grams of bread and 200 to 250 grams of meat per day.<sup>82</sup> Assuming that some kind of vegetable was added to this portion, this equals some 3000 kilocalories. One would not call this starvation rations, but taking into account the physically exhausting life of a partisan, it was no luxury. It was approximately the same as what the local policemen got and about 1000 kilocalories less than what the German soldiers would have had.<sup>83</sup> The 'Frunze' brigade had about the same.<sup>84</sup> Other units state that under favourable conditions they had more than enough to eat. The commander of the 'First of May' brigade even claimed that his men could always have eaten without restrictions. In fact, the large amount of meat they ate had a negative impact on their health.<sup>85</sup> Similar accounts exist from other units.<sup>86</sup> This leads to the conclusion that the determining consideration for partisan nutrition was how much partisans could obtain from their operational area, rather than the well-being of the population within it. Similar behaviour is reported from other regions of Belorussia and Ukraine.<sup>87</sup> However, much more research is needed to draw a more precise picture of the overall situation.

## **The ideological duty of the partisan movement**

Partisan violence was not restricted to procurement. It was also a means of imposing ideological discipline on the local inhabitants of Belorussia. According to Soviet doctrine, the entire Belorussian territory belonged to the Soviet Union.<sup>88</sup> Every single person living there was subject to Soviet orders. All men could be drafted into the Red Army or its partisan representative on occupied soil. And many were indeed drafted. For example, 16 per cent of members of the Stalin Brigade were drafted from the local population.<sup>89</sup> Young men were chosen and ordered to join the nearest partisan unit immediately. Those who did not agree were executed.<sup>90</sup>

Even worse was the treatment of locals whom partisans suspected of collaborating with the Germans. Partisans not only shot suspects, but often their families as well and burnt down their houses. Members of auxiliary police forces were especially targeted.<sup>91</sup> In July 1942 a strong partisan unit with about 300 men attacked the police base at Soltanovshchisna and captured two local policemen. The two were killed, mutilated with bayonets and hanged on a mast with a sign on their neck threatening anyone collaborating with the Germans with the same fate.<sup>92</sup>

Frequently, partisans terrorised other personnel of the occupation system such as mayors and even teachers. Sometimes they gave them the chance to quit their job, sometimes they only ordered them to give up certain aspects of their work, and sometimes they simply killed them without warning.<sup>93</sup> Members and sympathisers of the Polish underground, the *Armia Krajowa* were another group of victims. The AK had been founded in 1940 as a reaction to the German and Soviet occupation of Poland. After the German attack on the Soviet Union the Polish Government-in-Exile resumed diplomatic relations with Moscow. Thus, in the first period of the war, the two resistance movements supported each other against the Germans, or at least avoided significant conflict. However, the leaders of both movements were under no illusions about the extent of their ideological antagonism. The Soviet partisans tried to re-establish Soviet power in the German occupied territories and thus also incorporate the eastern parts of pre-war Poland into the Soviet Union. The Home Army, on the contrary, dreamt of resurrecting the Polish state within its pre-September 1939 borders. For this purpose they tried to cooperate with the Soviet partisans and hoped for a general uprising against the occupier.<sup>94</sup>

After the German defeats at Stalingrad and Kursk, when it became clear that Soviet victory was only a matter of time, Soviet partisan officials lost interest in further cooperation and stopped negotiations. They now regarded their main duty as the cleansing of the occupied territories of 'hostile elements'. With the Red Army dealing effectively with the Germans, the main opponent was now the Polish underground; in November 1943 Chernyshev ordered the disarming of the Polish units.<sup>95</sup>

This was the beginning of guerrilla warfare between two underground movements. Neither side restricted their violence to their enemy's armed forces, directing it also against their families and relatives. Anyone who gave food or shelter, voluntarily or not, to the Polish partisans risked mass reprisals against their village. This might take the form of verbal

threats, physical beatings or death by shooting. Occasionally, the partisans burned down barns and crofts, depriving families of their livelihood. Within the Baranovichi region, more than 500 alleged followers of the *Armia Krajowa* lost their lives.<sup>96</sup> An additional 4000 were registered in membership lists. When the Red Army reoccupied the territory in summer 1944, partisan leaders handed these lists over to the NKVD, which dealt with the registered persons in its own special way.<sup>97</sup>

## Conclusion

The partisan movement in the Baranovichi region saved the lives of thousands of people fleeing German atrocities and persecution. At the outset, Red Army soldiers, prisoners of war, forced labourers and Jews received shelter at partisan camps in the woods. Not everyone was accepted, however.

For the rest of the region's population, the partisan movement was of little help. It is certainly true that the partisans' main objective was not to support the population, but to help win the war, but the fact is that this does not fit with their self-image as 'people's avengers'. The local inhabitants had to share their meagre food reserves, even if they were already starving. Until the very end of the German occupation, peasants lived in fear of partisans, who could burn their houses, brutalise them or even kill them and rape their wives and daughters. Partisans also drafted the peasants at gunpoint. Finally, partisans provoked German counter-attacks and reprisals, from which the civilian population suffered most. Of course, partisans were not responsible for German brutality. As has been pointed out, the Germans sometimes used anti-partisan warfare, particularly during the first few months of the war in the Soviet Union, as simply a cover for policies of annihilation directed towards Jews and other racial groups. And after this phase of racial extermination, the Germans continued to conduct anti-partisan reprisals and operations which resulted in huge numbers of deaths among the civilian population more generally. Clearly it was the Germans, not the partisans, who must bear responsibility for this. But it should nevertheless be noted, in the case of these later measures, that they were usually carried out only after partisan activity had actually taken place.<sup>98</sup>

Moreover, the partisans' greatest advantage became the civilians' greatest disadvantage. As partisans wore no uniforms, the Germans could not tell them apart from other civilians. This resulted in the killing of innocent people. Of course, another reason was the contempt many German soldiers and SS men felt towards the Slavic inhabitants

of Belorussia. Nazi racist theory resulted in a much higher scale of brutality than for example in France.<sup>99</sup> According to this theory, Slavs were barbaric sub-humans prone to react only to the harshest measures. Therefore, German officials regarded mass-scale reprisals and executions as the only adequate answer to any resistance.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, the will to secure the conquered territory remained the main driver of brutal anti-partisan operations.<sup>101</sup>

Neither Germans nor partisans cared much for the innocent victims they created. The price civilians paid for the underground movement was extraordinarily high.<sup>102</sup> By contrast, the main reason why Jewish family camps offered their inhabitants a considerably greater chance of survival was that, by choosing not to fight the Germans, they did not provoke anti-partisan operations. Moreover, this spared the lives not only of camp inhabitants, but of villagers also.<sup>103</sup> Although the brutal German regime made armed resistance appear a sensible reaction, the vast majority of the civilian population would have been better off if it had not taken place. Of course, the best situation of all for the population would have been if the Germans had never invaded the Soviet Union in the first place, but that was something the partisans could not have changed.

The fact that the great majority of the population would have been better off without partisan activity holds especially true given the partisans' insignificant military effect: their main aim was to sabotage German lines of communication. In the Baranovichi region they achieved very little in this regard. Although in 1943 the Germans were forced to put some railway sidetracks out of service, the vital main lines remained in working order until the end of the occupation.<sup>104</sup> Besides, the Germans managed to repair most of the damage quickly. Only in summer 1944 did partisans manage to blow up a significant number of tracks at once. But given the Red Army's huge numerical and qualitative superiority by this time, it seems highly unlikely that the disastrous German defeat during Operation Bagration in July 1944 could have been avoided even without partisan activity. Another popular argument in favour of the partisans must also be challenged: of the 2.6 million German soldiers employed in the Soviet Union in October 1943, a mere 4 per cent (not more than 100,000) were used in the rear.<sup>105</sup> Altogether, the partisans killed between 35,000 and 50,000 Germans and local collaborators in the occupied territories. In comparison, an average of 2000 German soldiers died at the front *every day*. This means that the Soviet guerrilla forces during the whole war killed fewer Germans than were killed at the front in one single month.<sup>106</sup> And even though the

Germans wanted to destroy the partisan movement in order to have a secure hinterland that they could easily govern and exploit, they only deployed a small proportion of their total troop numbers for crushing the resistance movement.

But arguments like this never enjoyed a high priority in Stalin's calculations. In September 1942 he issued Decree No. 189, 'On the tasks of the partisan movement'. He described in minute detail the partisans' tasks and duties. Sabotage, intelligence and ambush were all listed, but the civilian inhabitants of the occupied territories were hardly ever mentioned.<sup>107</sup> For Stalin, the partisan movement was a means of winning the war, cleansing the re-occupied territories of political enemies and re-introducing Soviet ideology. For the sake of these aims, the Kremlin leader was ready to exploit every single Soviet inhabitant, if necessary to the point of death. In this sense, as in others, the Soviet Union waged a 'total' war.

## Notes

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2. B. V. Sokolov (2002) *Okkupatsii. Pravda i mify* (Moscow: AST-Press Kniga), p. 1.
3. L. Tsanova (1949–51) *Vsenarodnaia partizanskaia voina v Belorussii protiv fashistskikh zakhvatchikov* (Minsk: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo).
4. See P. Ponomarenko (1986) *Vsenarodnaia bor'ba v tylu nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov, 1941–1944 gg.* (Moscow: Nauka); A. T. Kuz'min et al. (1983–85) *Vsenarodnaia bor'ba v Belorussii protiv nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny* (Minsk: Izdatel'stvo Belarus).
5. See I. M. Strel'tsov and A. B. Sokolov (1978) 'Vmeste s naseleniem' in A. I. Zaleskii (ed.) *Za krai rodnoi! Vospominaniia partizan i podpol'shchikov Baranovichskoi oblasti* (Minsk: Belarus), pp. 127–31.
6. See Commander of Sipo and SD, Report from the occupied eastern territories No. 38, 22.1.1943, Natsional'yi arkhiv Respubliki Belarus' Minsk (NARB), 4683/3/947; Military Economic Commando (Wehrwirtschaftskommando) 'Minsk', War Diary, 1.10.-31.12.1943, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg (BA-MA), RW30/34; External branch of the Military Economic Commando 'Minsk' in Baranovich, War Diary No. 1, 1.10-31.12.1942, BA-MA RW30/39.
7. See L. Grenkevich (1999) *The Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941–1944* (London: Cass); V. A. Zolotarev and G. N. Sevost'ianov (eds) (1999) *Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina 1941–1945. Kniga 4: Narod i voina* (Moscow: Nauka). Although much better and much more critical, the overall assessment remained the same in the next follow-up project of the Russian Academy of



- Science: L. V. Pozdeeva and E. N. Kul'kov (eds) (2002) *Mirovye voiny XX veka. Kniga 3: Vtoraiia mirovaia voina. Istoricheskii ocherk* (Moscow: Nauka), especially the chapter on the partisan movement: V. A. Perezhogin, 'Sovetskoe partizanskoe dvizhenie'.
8. See the president's foreword to A. A. Kovalenia and N. S. Stashkevich (eds) (2004) *Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina sovetskogo naroda (v kontekste Vtoroi mirovoi voiny)* (Minsk: Isdatel'skii tsentr BGU), pp. 5–7.
  9. V. Khursik (2003) *Kroï i popel Drazhna. Historyia partyzanskaha zlachynstva* (Minsk: Khursik).
  10. H. Teske (1953) 'Partisanen gegen die Eisenbahn' *Wehrwissenschaftliche Rundschau* 3, 662–75; H. Rentsch (1961) *Partisanenkampf. Erfahrungen und Lehren* (Frankfurt a. M.: Bernhard & Graefe); F. W. Seidler (1999) *Die Wehrmacht im Partisanenkrieg* (Selent: Pour le Merite).
  11. See T. Richter (1998) "Herrenmensch" und "Bandit". *Deutsche Kriegsführung und Besatzungspolitik als Kontext des sowjetischen Partisanenkrieges (1941–1944)* (Münster: Lit); J. Förster (1983) 'Die Sicherung des "Lebensraums"' in H. Boog, J. Förster, J. Hoffmann, E. Klink, R.-D. Müller and G. R. Ueberschär, *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Bd. 4: Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion* (Stuttgart: DVA) pp. 1030–78.
  12. See K. Slepian (2006) *Stalin's Guerrillas* (Kansas: University Print of Kansas); A. Hill (2005) *The War behind the Eastern Front* (London and New York: Cass).
  13. Boradyn, *Niemen – rzeka niezgody*; K. Krajewski (1997) *Na ziemię nowogródzkiej "Nów" – Nowogródzki okręg Armii Krajowej* (Warsaw: Inst. Wydawn. Pax); M. Gnatowski (ed.) (1995) 'Dokumenty o stosunki radzieckiego kierownictwa do Polskiej konspiracji niepodległościowej na północno-wschodnich kresach Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1943–1944', in *Studia Podlaskie*, V, 211–317.
  14. Gogun, *Stalinskie kommandos*.
  15. B. Musial (ed.) (2004) *Sowjetische Partisanen in Weißrußland. Innenansichten aus dem Gebiet Baranoviči 1941–1944. Eine Dokumentation* (Munich: Oldenbourg).
  16. The covered region formed the so-called *Gebietskommissariat Baranowitsche*, the German-organised administrative unit.
  17. Throughout the text, 'Belarussian' and 'Belarus' pertain to modern Belarus, whereas 'Belorussian' and 'Belorussia' pertain to the wartime region.
  18. Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen*, pp. 10–2.
  19. V. E. Chernyshev (1986) 'Vo glave narodnykh mass protiv fashistskikh zakhvatchikov' in V. E. Lobanok (ed.) *Partiinoe pod'pole v Belorussii 1941–1944. Stranitsy vospominanii. Vileiskaia, Baranovichskaia, Pinskaia, Brestskaia, Belostokskaia oblasti* (Minsk: Belarus), pp. 110–25, here 125.
  20. Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen*, p. 105; Boradyn, *Niemen – rzeka niezgody*, p. 60.
  21. Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen*, pp. 33–4.
  22. A. Brakel (2007) "'Das allergefährlichste ist die Wut der Bauern" Die Versorgung der Partisanen und ihr Verhältnis zur Zivilbevölkerung. Eine Fallstudie zum Gebiet Baranowicze 1941–1944', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 55, 393–424, here 402.
  23. Regional Commissar (Gebietskommissar) Baranovich, Werner, Activity report 1941–1944, 11.8.1944, BArch, R93/13; A. Brakel (2009) *Unter Rotem*

*Stern und Hakenkreuz. Baranowicz 1939 bis 1944. Das westliche Weißrussland unter sowjetischer und deutscher Besatzung* (Paderborn, München [Munich], Wien [Vienna] and Zürich [Zurich]: Schöningh), p. 288; Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen*, p. 109.

24. Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen*, pp. 35–7.
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29. H. Smolar (1989) *The Minsk Ghetto: Soviet-Jewish Partisans against the Nazis* (New York: Holocaust Library), p. 128.
30. Memoirs of Estera Oprodejaka, Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego, Warsaw (further cited as AŻIH) 301/568.
31. Memoirs of Lejzer Tsaretskii, AŻIH 301/554.
32. Smilovitsky, 'Righteous Gentiles, the Partisans, and Jewish Survival', p. 314.
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36. Mendel Szczupak, Memories, AŻIH 301/49.
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41. See A. T. Kuz'min et al. (1983–5) *Vsenarodnaia bor'ba v Belorussii protiv nemetsko-fashistskich zakhvatchikov v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny v trekh tomakh* (Minsk: Belarus).
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57. Brakel, 'Das allergefährlichste', pp. 409–11.
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60. Report to Commander 'Donskoi', 18.12.43, NARB 1399/1/29; 'Platon', Order, 18.5.43, NARB 1329/1/29; Surkov, Commander of Detachment 'Suvorov', Order to Kovalev, Commander of brigade 'First of May', 25.12.43, NARB 4/33a/253.
61. Memories of Olga Bereśniewicz-Rajca, Archiwum Wschodnie, Warsaw (AW), II/1110.

62. Commander of brigade 'Frunze', Order, 15.11.43, NARB 1329/1/36, 183.
63. Surkov, Commander of Detachment 'Suvorov', Order to Kovalev, Commander of brigade 'First of May', 25.12.43, NARB 4/33a/253.
64. In February 1944, Grechanichenko, commissar to the Cosack-Detachment stated that marauding and alcohol abuse used to be commonplace. See report to Rayon-committee KP(b)B Mir, 2.2.44, NARB 1329/1/184.
65. Memo on the situation at the brigade 'Frunze', 3.6.43, in Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen*, pp. 53–4.
66. Brakel, 'Das allergefährlichste', p. 410.
67. Special representative of the Staff of the Partisan Movement, F Khotinskii, Report to the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement, 27.8.43, NARB 370/1/1313.
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71. Chief of the Special detachment of the brigade 'Stalin', verdict, 7.2.44, NARB 1329/1/33, 18–21.
72. Gaisarov, commissar to brigade 'Zhukov', Political report on the political and moral state of the partisan detachments of the brigade, January 1944, in Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen*, pp. 165–8; Tsariuk, Secretary RK KP(b)B Stolbtsy, Report to 'Platon', 31.1.44, NARB 1329/1/200.
73. History of brigade '25 years BSSR', 1944, NARB 3500/4/267; S. S. Rudenkova (1998) 'K voprosu ob organizatsii zhizni i byta partisan Belarusi' *Staronki vaennai historyi Belarusi. Vypusk II* (Minsk: Addzal Vaennei Historyi Instituta Historyi Akademii Navuk Belarusi), p. 251. In contrast, Soviet historiography claimed that large amounts of food, weapons and ammunition were shipped to the partisans in the western territories. See A. D. Zharikov (1973) 'Bol'shaia zemlia' snabzhaet partizan', *Voprosy istorii*, 4, 122–9.
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95. Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen*, pp. 221–6.
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97. Z. Boradyn (1995) 'Antyakowskie specjalne wydziały i wywiad baranowickiego zgrupowania partyzantki sowieckiej', in B. Polak (ed.) *Zbrodnie NKWD na obszarze województw wschodnich Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. Materiały I Międzynarodowej Konferencji Naukowej. Koszalin, 14 grudnia 1995* (Koszalin: Wydawnictwo Uczelniane Wyższej Szkoły Inżynierskiej), p. 70.

98. Alexander Hill also shows this for the Leningrad and Kalinin regions. Hill, *War*, p. 172. For the two most crucial antipartisan operations carried out in the Baranovichi region, 'Sumpffieber' and 'Hermann' see for example C. Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, pp. 884–918; Brakel, *Unter Rotem Stern*, pp. 318–23.
99. See C. Gerlach (2005) 'Die Verantwortung der Wehrmachtführung. Vergleichende Betrachtung am Beispiel sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener' in C. Hartmann, J. Hürter and U. Jureit (eds) *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht* (Munich: Beck) pp. 40–9; P. Lieb (2008) 'Repercussions of Eastern Front Experiences on Anti-partisan Warfare in France 1943–1944', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 31, 5, 797–823.
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# 4

## The German Gendarmerie and Partisans in Belorussia, 1941–4

*Erich Haberer*

Studies of partisan and anti-partisan warfare in Nazi-occupied Soviet Belorussia and Ukraine have largely ignored the central role of the Gendarmerie in areas under German civil government. Given that partisans were primarily a rural phenomenon and that the Gendarmerie was in charge of policing the countryside, this is a striking omission even in view of the fact that, until the early 1990s, pertinent Soviet archival holdings were inaccessible to researchers. Drawing extensively on these holdings, particularly Soviet-captured German police documents that have since become available, this study seeks to advance understanding of partisan warfare in Belorussia by focusing on the German Gendarmerie in one particular area – the third-tier civil administrative commissariat (*Gebietskommissariat*) of Baranovichi. It is thus a regional case study of rural policing in an area of uninterrupted partisan activity.<sup>1</sup>

Neither the Gendarmerie nor regional and/or local studies have traditionally been the focus of partisan historiography.<sup>2</sup> More recently, whilst regional studies fared better, the Gendarmerie has not received the attention it deserves. Either it is merely recognised as a civil enforcement agency involved in the killing of Jews and fighting partisans, or mentioned only casually in connection with the destruction of civilian life and property perpetrated alongside mobile SS and police operatives. This does not detract from the pioneering research of the work done in shifting the conventional ‘history from above’ approach to a ‘history from below’ that reaches down to the local level of everyday life, as most compellingly narrated by Bernard Chiari and Karel Berkhoff.<sup>3</sup> Yet it does not make up for the lack of studies focused specifically on partisan warfare in the ‘sub-regions’ (*Gebiete*) and districts (*raioni*) at the very bottom of German civilian government. Therein lies the originality of this contribution, centred as it is on Gendarmes, civilians and partisans in one such area.<sup>4</sup>

The study of this triangular relationship is based on Gendarmerie-generated documents that were seized by Soviet authorities during the re-conquest of Belorussia in summer 1944. Subsequently deposited in regional and central archives (Brest, Minsk and Moscow), their authenticity is beyond doubt.<sup>5</sup> Consisting of reports and communiqués, they were written in a matter-of-fact language by Gendarmerie post commanders or, conversely, addressed to the Gendarmerie by German agricultural and indigenous officials. Except for scattered racist references to Jews, Gypsies and 'Asiatics', these documents are devoid of ideological verbiage. Furthermore, the reports are not shaped by the expectation of what upper-echelon police agencies may have wanted to hear by, for instance, inflating partisan casualties. Their content is bland, forthright and critical, and as such offers an unfiltered and credible account of what happened on the ground in everyday policing.

The built-in bias of German reporting is balanced through the use of Soviet documents produced by and about partisan formations which operated in roughly the same area.<sup>6</sup> Although less reliable than the German sources due to ideologically tainted language and inflated claims of enemy casualties and material losses, they are nonetheless remarkably objective and critical about the conduct of partisan warfare and the savagery inflicted on the civilian population in this region.<sup>7</sup> This documentation allows for a comparative analysis of how the combatants fought and viewed each other. It also allows for a relatively high degree of objectivity in portraying the Gendarmerie-partisan encounter and how this affected the population.

Following clearly identifiable patterns of partisan and anti-partisan warfare as revealed in the above discussed sources, the principal themes of this study are: Gendarmerie deployment and organisation; partisan seizure and/or destruction of state farms and harvests; strategies and tactics of Gendarmerie anti-partisan warfare; and Gendarmerie and partisan treatment of, and relationships with, the local peasant population. What these themes demonstrate is that in spite of the partisans' superior numbers and relatively successful attacks against economic targets, the Gendarmerie remained more or less in control of the countryside well into 1943. This, as I shall argue, was largely due to their ability to adopt effective counter-insurgency measures and, simultaneously, retain the tacit support of much of the civilian population. With respect to the latter, the Achilles' heel of the partisans throughout was the procurement of provisions. This brought them into conflict with the peasantry, who resented their requisitioning of grain and livestock and whatever else was taken, often at gun-point.



These findings are at odds with the more recent literature which portrays the German conduct of anti-partisan warfare as an unmitigated, ideologically- and economically-driven campaign of genocide, exploitation and forced labour recruitment.<sup>8</sup> Whilst elements of this were certainly present in the region investigated here, particularly Gendarmerie involvement in killing Jews and Gypsies,<sup>9</sup> such reading of events is not supported by the evidence of this study. What it shows is that the Gendarmes were fighting *real* partisans for the control of the countryside and the protection of its inhabitants. This was certainly not the kind of 'bizarre situation' where a war was fought against fictitious opponents to justify the killing of civilians.<sup>10</sup>

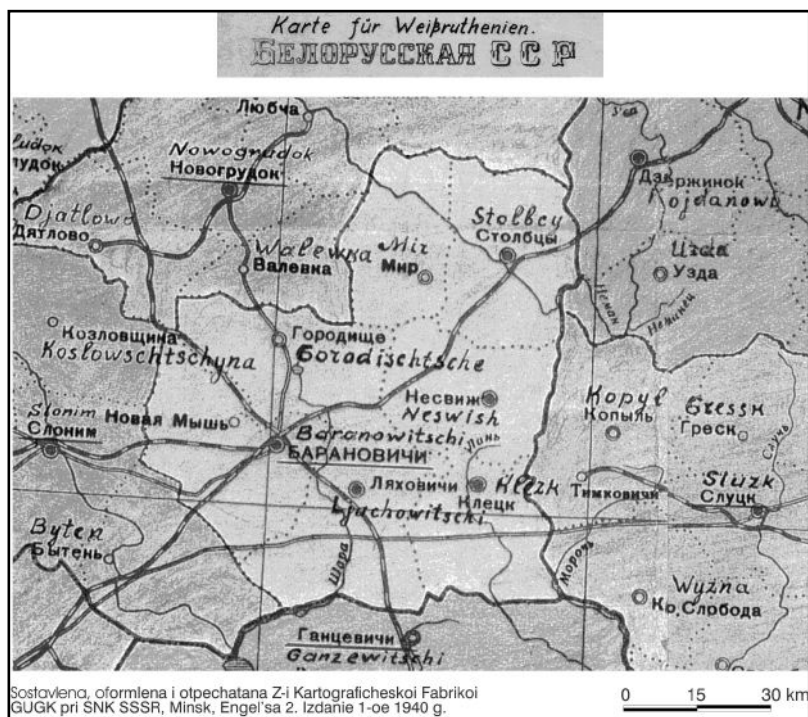
However, it should be kept in mind that the following discourse does not allow for uncritical generalisations, as it relates specifically to one region – Baranovichi *Gebiet* – which had fewer partisans (at least until mid-1943) and a more favourable terrain in which to fight them than other areas in Belorussia where the contrasting conditions of more partisans to fight, and less favourable terrain, helped fuel greater German brutality. Aside from the fact that geography did not favour the partisans insofar as this region was mostly made up of open farmland, it is also likely that the Germans benefited from nearly two years of prior Stalinist rule upon the Red Army's occupation of the area in 1939. This pleased neither the Poles nor the mainly Belorussian rural population and, as such, did not augur well for positive attitudes to Soviet-controlled partisans.<sup>11</sup>

## **Gendarmerie deployment and organisation**

The deployment of the Gendarmerie in Belorussia commenced in August–September 1941 with the establishment of a German civil administration, known as *Generalkommissariat Weissruthenien* (GKW). Distributed among its ten *Gebietskommissariate* (Lida, Novogrudok, Gantsevichi, Baranovichi, Vileika, Glubokoe, Minsk-Land, Borisov, Slonim and Slutsk), the Gendarmes were responsible for policing the rural districts of these areas. Of these, Baranovichi had the largest population (347,522) and was territorially the fourth largest *Gebiet* (5694 sq. km). In 1942–4, a force of roughly 75 Gendarmes was stationed in this most densely populated region of the GKW.<sup>12</sup> The ten *Gebietskommissariate* can be seen in Map 4.1, which shows the area of German Civil Government in Belorussia between 1941 and 1944. Baranovichi itself is shown in more detail in Map 4.2.

In charge of this force was Lieutenant Max Eibner, who was appointed *Gendarmerie-Gebietsführer* (GGf) in October 1941. Responsible for the





Map 4.2 Gebietskommissariat Baranovichi in the Generalkommissariat Weissruthenien, 1941–4.

Source: (1940) Map of the Belorussian SSR, 1st edition, printed by the Cartographic Factory GUGK (Minsk: SNK SSR). The map is in the private possession of the author.

rural districts of Baranovichi region – the *raioni* of Gorodishche, Kletsk, Liakhovichi, Nesvizh, Mir, Stolbtsy, and Baranovichi-Novaia Mysh – his men were organised into Gendarmerie posts located in the district towns of the same name, each under the command of a post-commander (*Postenführer*). As of November 1942, Eibner had 73 Gendarmes to man these posts.<sup>13</sup> Whilst this averages 10 or 11 Gendarmes per post, their actual strengths varied greatly depending on a district's size and population, and, over time, the amount of partisan activity. In any case, it shows Eibner in charge of 70 to 80 Gendarmes who manned a network of rural police stations that was to maintain German civil authority in the countryside. Indeed, as Bernhard Chiari stated, 'the police personified, for all to see, the occupying power [*Okkupationsmacht*]. Unlike other agencies of the German civil administration, their presence was

immediate and local'.<sup>14</sup> As such, they also bore the brunt of partisan warfare in the countryside.

Theirs was a tall order, quite apart from coping with the ever-increasing partisan threat. Made up of career officers and police reservists (conscripted policemen) aged between 30 and 50 years, most of these men were unprepared for the robust and increasingly militarised policing required of them. This was particularly true of reservists who had received only barely adequate training in the use of arms and policing methods.<sup>15</sup> Yet they were supposed to control an area where roughly 80 Gendarmes were assigned to 6000 square kilometres and a population of 350,000. Clearly, this was an impossible task considering that these figures yielded one policeman to 75 square kilometres of territory, or to a population of 4375 in what was a foreign cultural and social environment subject to occupation, exploitation and genocidal policies.

The answer was to recruit native auxiliaries. Barely a month into the war against the Soviet Union, it was recognised that the German Police could not 'carry out its tasks in the Occupied Eastern Territories with available Police and SS personnel'.<sup>16</sup> This led to the creation of Order Police auxiliaries, officially termed *Schutzmannschaft* or, in short, *Schuma*. Divided into paramilitary battalions and stationary units, it was the latter who served with the Gendarmerie in the countryside. Thus, as of November 1942, 816 local, mostly Belorussian, 'policemen' (*Schutzmänner*) reinforced GGF Eibner's Gendarmerie, with subsequent increases to 1065 in March 1943 and 2263 by June 1944.<sup>17</sup> Using the 1065 figure, these recruits redressed substantially the imbalance between manpower and policing requirements by dramatically improving the ratios from 1:75 to 1:5 square kilometres and 1:4375 to 1:306 in terms of population. They staffed altogether seven Gend-Posts and 20 *Schuma*-Posts or strongholds (*Stützpunkte*).<sup>18</sup>

Situated in an overall area which measured a little less than 100 kilometres in diameter from north to south and east to west, most posts were, on average, not much more than ten kilometres apart – a distance that patrols could cover routinely on foot. Whilst, in this context, the Gendarmes provided the leadership, the *Schutzmänner* provided the much-needed complement of young, able-bodied men to sustain the fighting power of the Gendarmerie. Mainly made up of reliable Belorussian peasants in their early to mid-20s who joined the police voluntarily during the great recruitment drive of 1942,<sup>19</sup> they garrisoned a district's network of posts – functioning as tentacles of the principal Gendarmerie post in the *raion* capital. Supervised by the Gend-Post commander, these men were organised into a *raion Schutzmannschaft* under the command of a native *Schuma* chief. For instance, the chief of

the Nesvizh *raion Schutzmannschaft* was Vladimir Sienko. He was subordinate to, and received his orders from, the Gendarmerie *Postenführer* in Nesvizh.<sup>20</sup> This arrangement provided the German police with the organisation, manpower and leadership to impose its authority throughout the rural areas of the Baranovichi region.

### **The Partisan crucible: State farm and harvest battles and the pillaging of the peasantry**

On the Gendarmerie's arrival in Baranovichi *Gebiet* in the autumn of 1941, it was not obvious that fighting partisans would be their principal preoccupation. The area was largely pacified and, whilst it would be misleading to define their service as ordinary law enforcement work, much of their daily activity dealt with routine police duties and various civil administrative assignments. But from early on, this 'ordinary' work was lethally compromised by the Gendarmerie's involvement in the genocide of the Jews. Already in spring 1942, Gendarmes and *Schuma* auxiliaries had killed Jews in the districts of Mir, Stolbtsy and Liakhovichi. The full-scale murder of the Jews in the district towns occurred in the summer and autumn of 1942 and claimed an estimated total of 15,000 people. By the order of the Baranovichi *Gebietskommissar*, Gendarmes participated in many of these actions.<sup>21</sup>

Fugitive Jews either formed partisan groups of their own or joined already existing ones made up of POW escapees and roaming Red Army soldiers who had evaded capture in the previous summer. The latter, like the Jews, had little choice but to become partisans due to the murderous nature of Nazi policy. By inadvertently driving their intended targets to coalesce into small groups to survive in forested areas from where they emerged periodically to forage food in nearby fields and villages, the Germans created their own partisan problem, which, by its very nature, was perceived as banditry. Indeed, it appears that the civilian victims of this 'foraging' used the catch-all label 'bandits' well before it became the *terminus technicus* for all partisans in accordance with Himmler's directive of 31 July 1942.<sup>22</sup> As for the Gendarmerie, the growing partisan reality quickly transformed the relatively benign nature of their work from the 'ordinary' to the 'extraordinary' – a change initiated and in parallel with the extermination of the Jews.<sup>23</sup>

The nature of partisan activity as it evolved in late 1941–early 1942 was defined by strategies of survival. The procurement of food, clothing, weapons and alcohol determined the actions of what were still small, disorganised and poorly armed groups. They avoided the police and

concentrated almost exclusively on 'foraging expeditions', targeting isolated villages and farms. However, already in the summer of 1942, with increasing Soviet control over the partisans, priorities shifted as these groups mushroomed and partially combined to form larger units. They sought to undermine the occupation regime and the population's confidence in its ability to maintain order and protection. Employing hit-and-run tactics, their objective was the destruction of the agricultural economy. Raids quickly multiplied, aiming at mills, grain storage facilities, and dairies. Meanwhile the partisans stepped up attacks on peasant farms and German-appointed local officials (village elders, mayors, and communal administrators). Their most favoured targets, however, were German 'estates' (*Staatsgüter*), that is, former Soviet state farms administered by the *Landbewirtschaftungsgesellschaft Ostland* (LO).

Gendarmerie reports and communiqués by LO officials show that in the three months of September to November 1942, at least 80 estates were raided and plundered in just four districts, in many instances repeatedly. Often plunder was combined with arson (nearly 20% of the total).<sup>24</sup> But rarely did an attack result in complete destruction (just 4% of the total) or the loss of life, although, in *Mir raion*, the Polish manager, his family and his Belorussian accountant were brutally murdered.<sup>25</sup> The only other recorded case took place in *Liakhovichi raion* where, according to the *Staatsgut* gardener,

three bandits appeared in the night of 10–11 November 42 around 1am. They went to the manager's living quarters, robbed it clean and then took the manager outside and shot him. Afterwards they went to the Dutch administrator and took away his rifle, coat and boots, and also stole the estate's administrative funds.<sup>26</sup>

Worrisome as these lethal attacks were, more disconcerting was that the escalating number of raids was not just motivated by plunder and pillage. Whilst random acts of 'banditry' did not necessarily level off, it was obvious that state farms were deliberately targeted in an effort to deprive the Germans of the 1942 harvest. What in fact transpired was that, with the onset of harvest season, a new front had opened up in Soviet partisan warfare where state farms, the key facilities in harvest operations and the storage of produce, became favoured targets. Now the battle was being fought on two fronts: one aimed at the seizure and/or spoilage of *Staatsgut* grain and the destruction of harvest machinery, and the other over who requisitioned the peasants' harvest in the first place – the partisans or the Germans.

The magnitude and seriousness of the partisan ‘harvest campaign’ became obvious to all concerned: LO agricultural officials, Gendarmerie and Wehrmacht authorities. By the end of August 1942, it had taken on such proportions that the LO official for the Nesvizh and Kletsk districts notified his superior in Baranovichi that the harvest would be destroyed unless police protection was forthcoming. He wrote on 28 August 1942 that in just one night three large estates had lost their complete harvest along with their barns and agricultural equipment, such as tractors and harvesters. Detailing these losses and the fact that the 30- to 50-strong bands were well armed and, in one case, uniformed, he listed particularly vulnerable estates that needed protection. He pleaded with his superior to have ‘the Baranovichi Gendarmerie provide guard units ... in order to be able to protect the harvest, at least to some extent’.<sup>27</sup>

Cognisant of the urgency of the request, the GGf Baranovichi, Eibner, promptly responded on 29 August 1942: ‘As of today, I have stationed 10 *Schutzmänner* for each of the endangered estates – even though’, he added, ‘it means a substantial loss of *Schutzmänner* for ordinary police duties and the fight against the bands’. To make up for this deficit, Eibner announced that he had already initiated the recruitment of more auxiliary police ‘to strengthen the *Schutzmannschaft* of the Gebiet’.<sup>28</sup> This went some way to ameliorate the severe manpower shortage experienced by his Gend-Post commanders, who faced the multiple tasks of maintaining *Stützpunkte*, protecting state farms and securing the harvest in the fields.

Even with additional *Schuma* recruitment, the Gendarmerie was hard pressed to prevent partisans from seizing the harvest. These confrontations were especially prone to turn into savage and deadly engagements. For requisition commandos, there was always the likelihood of enemy encounters as both sides sought to seize the same goods or reclaim what the other had already claimed. This occurred when the Mir *Postenführer* intercepted a band which had already carted away ten tonnes of grain only to return to load up another six tonnes. He fought off the partisans and seized what was left of their booty.<sup>29</sup> Just as easily, it could happen the other way around. For instance, a Liakhovichi requisition commando was ambushed on 14 October 1942. Racked with intense rifle and machine-gun fire, the commando scattered, leaving behind their two trucks and grain-loaded carts. Whilst the Gendarmes and nearly all *Schutzmänner* made it to safety, one *Schutzmann* and five civilians were killed.<sup>30</sup>

Whilst requisition, harvest and state-farm battles were in full swing, the partisans’ ‘foraging operations’ continued unabated. Large-scale

plunder was common and often turned vengeful, violent and deadly, especially if partisans encountered passive resistance or suspected cooperation with the Germans. Marie Waraschewitsch informed the Liakhovichi Gendarmerie that 'on 30–31 October 43 armed bands appeared in Lipsk, where they set three houses on fire and shot 20 inhabitants'.<sup>31</sup> In Gorodishche *raion*, the village of Savishche was surrounded by partisans, who 'put several houses on fire with tracer munitions which quickly spread to other houses, completely destroying thirty-eight'.<sup>32</sup> Around the same time a fairly strong 'band took over the village of Simakowa, Mir *raion* ... They burned down 14 houses ... 7 grain-filled barns, the community house, school and church ... Villagers working for the Germans were savagely beaten ... [and] even threatened to be shot'.<sup>33</sup> Whilst many such incidents took place,<sup>34</sup> one in particular is worth quoting at length for its graphic violence. Still recuperating in the city hospital of Baranovichi, Malvina Nestrowitsch told the Gendarmerie:

On 6 April [1943], around 11pm, partisans entered our home and demanded of my husband that he harness the horse. He told them that he could not very well do that as the horse was sick ... Instead, the brother of my husband ... went to the stable to ready the horse. In the meantime, they butchered 2 pigs, 2 sheep, 4 turkeys and several chickens ... I pleaded with them to leave us at least one pig, at which point one of them pulled out a pistol and fired three shots at me and my husband. Though not hit, I fell to the floor in fear ... Another partisan came close up and said: 'oh, they are still alive'. He loaded his gun and shot at me. The bullet passed through my breasts and lower left arm. I passed out. When I became conscious again, I noticed that the partisans had carried straw inside. They lit the straw and then left with various items of cloth ... I went to the bed of my child ... [and] picked up the child whose face and body already showed serious burns. I made it outside where neighbours brought me immediately to the hospital.

The document goes on to state in postscript: 'the husband of the injured woman died in the fire and his brother died from shot-wounds received that evening'.<sup>35</sup> This prompts the question of what the Germans actually did, short of guarding state farms, securing harvest quotas and writing reports whilst under their watch people were brutally killed and maimed, others robbed of their livelihoods and still others burned out of their homes? So who, in fact, ruled the countryside?



## Fighting the partisans: Strategies and tactics

The widely held notion that the Germans ruled by day and the partisans by night is not borne out by the evidence for Baranovich *Gebiet*. Partisans roamed the countryside by day as well, and, as we shall see, the Gendarmes by night. Significant in defining the struggle between the two was, however, on the one hand, the protection of what the Germans deemed of economic value and strategic importance and, on the other, the location and timing of partisan and anti-partisan actions. Districts that bordered on, or contained, large tracts of forests and swamps were more difficult to police. By the same token, those bordering on forested zones extending deep into neighbouring jurisdictions were particularly vulnerable to partisan incursions. Also, partisan groups were not stationary units. Operating out of forest camps, they constantly switched their activity from one area to another, depending on provisioning conditions, changing operational priorities and, last but not least, the ebb and flow of German counter-measures. In this context and speaking of these measures, how effective were the Gendarmes in fighting the partisans to protect economic assets and the civilian population at large?

To begin with, the stationary nature of German policing put the Gendarmerie at a distinct disadvantage in fighting mobile partisan groups of various sizes and capabilities. But this disadvantage was balanced by the advantage of a relatively stable presence, even if some areas were at times controlled by partisans. Local inhabitants set upon by partisans at night came to the Gend-Posts by day to inform, seek assurance, petition for restitution and plead for protection. For when the partisans were gone, the Germans were still there. In other words, occupation did not just mean exploitation, it also meant a modicum of stability and a degree of authority that was obeyed, if not respected, by much of the population in the first year and a half of occupation, and had not completely evaporated even by 1943–4. This was reflected in the willingness, even anxiousness, of locals to report on the whereabouts of partisans. For the most part, this information was not coerced from an uncooperative and frightened population, nor was it just in the nature of denunciations or long standing vendettas, though these undoubtedly did exist. The bottom line is that the informants were ordinary peasants rather than informers, that is, indigenous agents working for the Germans.<sup>36</sup> All this needs to be kept in mind when dealing with the Gendarmerie's onerous task of defending their turf and its inhabitants against the partisans. That said, what did the Gendarmerie do to stem the multitude of daily attacks on state farms, villages and

solitary peasant farms, considering their limited resources? Even under ideal conditions and ample manpower, it was simply not feasible to garrison all and protect everything. All that could be done was to protect selectively the more valuable and/or vulnerable estates and reinforce, as well as create, new *Schuma*-posts in areas particularly threatened by partisans.

Neither of these strategies resulted in much success, due to the unpredictability of partisan raids. Even where patterns could be discerned, especially with respect to attacks on state farms, the guards stationed there were often unable to withstand even anticipated raids in the face of superior enemy strength. In Novaia Mysh, the *Staatsgut* Luschniewa had already been set upon several times prior to 16 October 1942 when its seven-men-strong *Schuma* garrison was confronted by some 60 partisans. After a fire-fight of half an hour, they were forced to withdraw from the estate to escape certain 'encirclement and destruction'.<sup>37</sup> Although there were many such attacks with similar results and at times supported by mortar fire, on other occasions the police proved quite capable of withstanding these assaults.<sup>38</sup> In one case, *Schuma* guards not only put the invaders to flight, but also captured the partisans' wagon loaded with loot taken from elsewhere. Still, most estates could not be garrisoned and therefore were more likely to be raided. Even estates supposedly protected by nearby *Schuma* strongholds or assured of swift police intervention often shared the same fate.<sup>39</sup>

The Gendarmerie's inability to keep estates and peasant farms safe did not mean, however, that the partisans could roam at will. On the contrary, the countryside was a very dangerous place to be, arguably more so for the partisans than the Gendarmes. Here, in the cat-and-mouse game of partisan warfare, being one or the other changed quickly. More often the 'cat' was the police. In the open spaces of pastures and arable land, dotted with *Stützpunkte* and criss-crossed by daily patrols, great risks were involved for the partisans in venturing beyond the forest as the danger of being caught was very real. For all the disadvantages of stationary, garrison-like deployment, the Gendarmes and their *Schuma* auxiliaries were anything but sitting ducks. Moreover, they quickly adjusted to guerrilla methods of warfare.

Unlike the tedious and thankless task of guarding state farms, patrols of usually 15–25 men on foot, but increasingly mounted also, routinely intercepted raiding parties big and small. Caught unawares, the partisans were scattered with losses or destroyed altogether. And the night did not just belong to the partisans. Night patrols were sent out as well.<sup>40</sup> Patrol activity was at its most intense from late afternoon until nightfall,

during which the bands emerged from their forest hideouts. On sighting partisans, day patrols immediately attacked if feasible – as did for instance a 17-man Nesvizh patrol which, coming across 13 mounted partisans with six wagons, killed three and wounded five.<sup>41</sup> Still, numerous as these ‘chance encounters’ were, the majority of anti-partisan actions were in response to information the patrols received from villagers as they reconnoitred the countryside. Often *ad hoc* commandos or special patrols were despatched to follow up on leads. Acting on such information, the Nesvizh *Postenführer* headed a commando of 16 *Schutzmänner* to confront a band near the village of Pietuchowstschisna. In addition, 12 members of a nearby *Stützpunkt* were ordered to join the commando on bicycles. Although the partisans managed to escape in the nick of time, their camp was discovered and destroyed, whilst large quantities of food and some weapons were left behind. But on many other occasions, such engagements resulted in heavy enemy losses.<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, the flow of information which allowed these surprise attacks did not diminish even though partisan intimidation and terror were steadily on the rise.

In tandem with increased and more overt attacks, Gendarmerie tactics and strategies became more aggressive and inventive. There was a distinct shift from a largely reactive pattern to a proactive strategy, which, on the one hand, placed emphasis on greater mobility and, on the other, confronted the elusive enemy on its own turf through the adaptation and adoption of guerrilla-type stratagems.

Mobility had always been the Achilles’ heel of Gendarmerie anti-partisan warfare and was recognised as such from early on, eliciting constant complaints about the scarcity of motorised transportation, especially trucks. Though never satisfactorily remedied, they were used to provide the commandos and special patrols with greater speed and manoeuvrability. But it was crucial, and often more effective, to follow the lead of the partisans – the use of horses in the form of mounted Gendarmerie-*Schuma* units. Eventually, small squadrons (*Reitergruppen*) were maintained by all Gend-Posts, and some outposts as well. By 1943 some of these were organised into large squadrons or ‘hunting commandos’, fittingly called *Jagdzüge*.<sup>43</sup> This allowed greater flexibility to pursue and attack roving bands or, conversely, withdraw quickly when faced with superior forces. Several combat reports by the Gorodishche *Postenführer* in late 1943 provide a fascinating account of the exploits of the post’s *Reitergruppe* of nearly 20 men. These ranged from rescuing a small SS Security Service (SD) unit of the Baranovichi Security Police branch office from certain destruction by a strong partisan detachment to fighting off another large band resulting in the capture of three grain-loaded wagons.<sup>44</sup>

But it was the use of ambush tactics that was the most proactive form of anti-partisan warfare. Throughout 1943–4, this stratagem of concealment along routes travelled by partisan detachments was systematically employed with good effect.<sup>45</sup> Well armed, including by now the obligatory light and heavy machine-guns, patrols would lie in ambush (*Lauerstellung*) at river crossings, forest trails and fringes, and other places known to be traversed by partisans. Preferred timing was after midnight. Thus we read in one report:

It was known to the Gend-Post in Kletsk that in the area of the village Blaeczyn small bandit troops passed through and terrorised the population. For this reason frequent night patrols were deployed to ambush the bandits and to destroy them. On 21 June 43, just after midnight, a patrol of 28 *Schutzmänner* under the leadership of [the 49-year-old] *Oberwachmeister* Nitsch managed to surprise a small band. It came to an intense exchange of fire whereby one bandit was destroyed and 3 ... were taken prisoner.<sup>46</sup>

Another patrol of 25 men of the Zaostrowitsche *Schuma*-Post moved into *Lauerstellung* at the Lan river and around 10:30pm killed five partisans attempting to cross over.<sup>47</sup>

Regardless of the ever-present danger of nightly ambush operations due to partisan counter-tactics, including setting up their own ambush against Gendarmerie night patrols, there was no let up in the Gendarmes' *Lauerstellungskrieg*, which was aggressively pursued in other districts as well.<sup>48</sup> As in the case of mounted patrols, *Hauptwachmeister* Mlitzke – one of the most experienced and prolific *Postenführer* and eventually commander of the Baranovichi *Jagdzug* – had only good things to say about ambush operations. As well as praising the use of squadrons, which, in his opinion, were especially effective because of the 'support of the population in quickly conveying information', he emphasised that '*Lauerstellung* tactics presently achieve better results than is the case with large daytime operations'.<sup>49</sup> And elsewhere, he wrote: 'Experience shows that small operations of 20 to 40 men with good weapons (3–4 light machine-guns) are most promising if time is not a factor and the necessary endurance is maintained'.<sup>50</sup>

He was also highly appreciative of the men under his command, regardless of whether they were fellow Gendarmes, like Nitsch, or *Schutzmänner*. In reference to the ambush at the Lan river, he heaped praise on the leader of the Zaostrowitsche *Schuma*-Post for 'the prior destruction of a related and extremely active band, which has to be

attributed primarily to the tireless efforts of *Vizekorporal* Noamschik and his 54 strong *Schutzmannschaft* ... At times, he remains on patrol for 3–4 days and nights in succession patrolling fields and forests and, herewith, scores his successful raids'.<sup>51</sup>

Mlitzke was no exception in praising *Schuma* leaders and holding the rank and file in high regard – though sometimes with the qualification, 'if properly led by their German superiors'. There was real appreciation of their service, courage and loyalty. Although there were some 'bad apples', the number of which increased by 1943 due to forced recruitment and other contributing factors, the documents perused for this study reveal, on the whole, a good relationship between Gendarmes and *Schutzmänner*. One gets the impression of mutual respect and relations that often took on a personal touch that transcended officially mandated behaviour. Relatively rare are cases of cowardice or desertion in armed engagements, and these were more than compensated for by acts of bravery and self-sacrifice in which risking one's life for a German Gendarme was not an uncommon occurrence.<sup>52</sup> Although quartered separately, they went together on patrols and depended for success and survival on each other. This, and the fact that they operated in small units usually not exceeding 25–30 men, probably accounts for the sort of 'bonding' that took place.

### **Who took the 'last cow'? The peasants' relationship with Gendarmes and partisans**

The generally amicable relations between Gendarmes and *Schutzmänner* augured relatively well for the Gendarmerie's interaction with the local population. As shown earlier, peasants readily informed the police on the whereabouts of partisans and were quick to report on the pillaging and burning of property. In this, their relationship with the occupier cannot be divorced from that of their kin serving with the police. They bridged the divide between occupier and occupied, though not always to the benefit of the former as some were prone to abuse their status to rob those whom they were supposed to protect. In any case, they were the 'sons of the village' and, as an integral part of its social fabric, they have to be seen as belonging to the local population. Thus, their own relationship with the occupying power, as projected by the Gendarmerie on location, cannot be viewed in isolation when looking at the larger picture of the civilian population's perception of, and treatment by, the occupier.

Here the picture is mixed and becomes ever more blurred in the course of three years of occupation and partisan warfare. Still, it is quite apparent that the Gend-Posts were not uniformly surrounded by a hostile sea

of resentment and pro-partisan sentiment. Though their presence was not always felt in all corners of the districts – and there was a distinct shift in sentiment during 1943 – people would have been hard-pressed to choose between the Germans and their self-styled ‘liberators’. Both were invasive forces and predatory in their demand of goods and recruits. Yet the partisans were more disruptive, unpredictable and intrusive – and, thus, a more immediate threat to life and village. To protect themselves, peasants were inclined to call upon the imposed authority, however foreign, which appeared to represent ‘law and order’, as they understood it, to rein in the ‘banditry’ that engulfed their world.

The rural population’s trust in the occupying power is well documented in the sources consulted. As noted already, townspeople, villagers and peasants readily informed on the partisans. Whilst one needs to be cautious of the built-in bias of these sources, they do present a rather convincing case of the willingness of ordinary people to cooperate with the Gendarmerie to remove the terror that threatened their livelihood and disrupted their communities with devastating effect. It is not surprising then, that for all their suspicions of supposed partisan sympathisers among the population, the Gendarmes felt relatively comfortable and, by and large, trusted the local people much like they related to their *Schutzmänner*.<sup>53</sup>

The Gendarmerie treated rural populations fairly, within the parameters of an exploitative occupation regime. What transpired in the districts examined here does not square with the overall impression of unmitigated carnage and loss of civilian life caused by large-scale SS/Police, as well as Wehrmacht, anti-partisan operations elsewhere in Belorussia. With the obvious and important exception of Jews and Gypsies, people were not shot *en masse*. What is often overlooked is that whilst these murderous campaigns were pursued, the Gendarmerie meticulously investigated complaints by locals and, within limits, sought to verify the identity of people suspected of partisan sympathies or activity. As for the Baranovichi Gendarmerie, participation in large police and SS anti-partisan sweeps was rare.<sup>54</sup> Indiscriminate acts of collective punishment were equally rare. But farmsteads and villages were burned in the course of anti-partisan actions, and prisoners were not always taken – and some were even shot on surrender, although a directive issued on 12 August 1943 explicitly stated that they be treated as prisoners of war.<sup>55</sup>

But even when punishment was considered, and applied, the Gendarmerie was alert to implications this may have had in their relations with civilians. For instance, in August 1942, GGf Eibner refused to

torch a whole village implicated in the killing of two Wehrmacht soldiers as proposed by the army officer on the spot. As Eibner wrote in his report: 'I could not approve that without proper investigation the entire place of Nowa-Wies should be burned down and that 10 male inhabitants be randomly shot ... Instead, I spent hours of meticulous investigation in order to identify two suspects. These were then executed'.<sup>56</sup>

Another act of retribution occurred eight months later in the wake of a major engagement involving the combined forces of several Gendarmerie posts. The battle took place in and around three villages that had been held by partisans for some time. After fierce fighting, GGf Eibner re-took these strategically important villages. From this base, the partisans had been able to isolate the Turez *Schuma Stützpunkt* and disrupt vital communication links between Gendarmerie posts. Fearing that they would re-infiltrate the villages, he ordered their total destruction. No mention is made in the report as to the fate of the villagers other than that the young people had all been recruited by the partisans and that, therefore, only the elderly remained.<sup>57</sup> However, this seems to have been an extraordinary event, both in scope and in the fact that the villages were already largely de-populated. The increased scale and ferocity of the partisan war as it unfolded in 1943 may well have already begun to desensitise sensibilities with regard to the treatment of civilians caught between the front lines of partisans and Gendarmes.

But then again, in January 1944, Meister Mlitzke, just back from another of many *Jagdzug* sorties, devoted one-third of his combat report to the people he had just killed in battle, complaining that they had joined the partisans only because they were prohibited from cutting timber and were fined heavily for doing so.

These measures make no sense and serve no purpose other than turning the population into partisans. In particular, it adversely affects the service performance of the local *Schutzmänner* ... when 'their folks' are forbidden [using timber] to rebuild their frequently destroyed houses. Moreover, since the reinforced *Jagdzug* has arrived, the population in the partisan-endangered villages work most diligently in the delivery of lumber. This proves that as long as the necessary protection is granted, the peasants willingly perform their work.<sup>58</sup>

Obviously Mlitzke had not lost faith in the population's cooperation when he wrote this in January 1944. For him, the problem was not peasant disloyalty, but the hopelessness of their situation. On the one hand, German civil authorities imposed impossible demands and penalties

which drove some peasants into the partisan movement and, on the other hand, they deprived them of the 'necessary protection' required to retain credibility in the eyes of the population. Clearly, the partisans were well on their way to bringing home the message that the Germans were no longer capable of maintaining the order and security that had been the basis of their initial rapprochement with the civilian population.

On the question of the Gendarmes' and partisans' relationship with the local peasant population, there can be little doubt that initially the former fared better than the latter. To all appearances, at least for the first years of occupation, the partisans were not in a position to discredit the German-imposed order. During this time, they were at a distinct disadvantage in gaining the support of the rural population. Forced to live off the village, it was they who robbed the peasants of their proverbial last cow. Although objectives and priorities had changed over time as the partisan movement grew in strength and consolidated under Soviet leadership, the necessity of requisitioning food and livestock by whatever means remained a constant and crucial element in defining the relationship between partisan and peasant.<sup>59</sup> The arbitrary and rapacious – if not outright criminal character – of partisan 'foraging' was probably the single most important factor facilitating the population's preference for, and cooperation with, the Gendarmerie.

To this has to be added the brutal assaults perpetrated against peasant families that could be, and were, exploited by Gendarmerie propaganda to shore up pro-German sentiments, as for instance this incident which occurred on 17 May 1943:

five partisans appeared in the village of Wielki-Karazk. One of them went to the house of the peasant Theodor Budowiej. Here he demanded first food and drinks and then raped the peasant's highly pregnant wife and subsequently murdered her. Soon after the peasant appeared he overpowered the bandit, tied him up and then brought him to the *Schuma* post in Tucza ... On the next day in Kletsk, which was also market day, the peasants of the *raion* congregated and demanded that the culprit be severely punished. On 19 May 43, the bandit was publicly hung. The population enthusiastically expressed its mood to the effect that soon all Bolsheviks and bandits will hang from the gallows.<sup>60</sup>

Though one has to be cautious in accepting the language of the final sentence, there can be no doubt about the crowd's outrage at the crime and their resentment against partisans.



For the victimised population (just as for present day researchers) it was often difficult to distinguish between criminally and politically motivated partisan actions. Unquestionably, at one end of the spectrum were purely criminal gangs and on the other genuine partisans. But, in reality, the distinction remained vague since, the *modus operandi* of both was essentially the same and appeared so to the victims of their actions. Naturally, it did not help that the true ‘bandits’ rather self-consciously called themselves partisans to legitimise their robberies. Thus, ‘bandit’ and ‘partisan’ were perfectly interchangeable labels in the eyes of the population.<sup>61</sup> The Soviet partisan leadership was not oblivious to this popular perception. Numerous reports testify to their concern and measures taken to root out ‘banditry’ among partisans directly or nominally under their command. But judging from reports dated as late as 1944, the public image of partisans *qua* bandits persisted, for neither educational campaigns, nor ‘partisan courts’, nor even executions eradicated ‘banditry’.<sup>62</sup>

Ultimately, neither the partisans nor the Gendarmerie won the hearts and minds of the population. The mood in the *raioni* was marked by desperation best expressed by one peasant’s lament: ‘We find ourselves between two fires and don’t know which way to turn to save ourselves’.<sup>63</sup> Evidently, the Germans had forfeited the opportunity to keep the rural population on side. Yet, the wrath of the peasants – ‘*die Wut der Bauern*’ – against the partisans was still very much in evidence. To the end of occupation, this precluded a wholesale shift in favour of the partisan movement despite the erosion of German authority throughout 1943–4. notwithstanding gains made by the partisans in concert with Soviet military successes since Stalingrad, the population in Baranovichi Gebiet did not *en masse* join the ‘winning side’.

As for the Germans, any meaningful popular support was eventually undermined by escalating requisitions, forced labour and *Schuma* recruitment in their desperate efforts to mobilise all human and material resources to avert defeat.<sup>64</sup> But even then, and regardless of Soviet propaganda and efforts to reign in ‘banditry’,<sup>65</sup> the heightened exploitative and punitive proclivities of the occupier were easily matched by the partisans’ own requisitions, pillaging, beating and killing of civilians.<sup>66</sup> Most importantly, though, German occupation was still a reality. This, in the final analysis, shaped the civilian population’s perception and everyday concerns, including their behaviour towards Germans and partisans. Responding to constantly changing configurations of authority, peasants accommodated themselves to whoever was in charge and this, more often than not, still happened to be the Gendarmerie.

## Conclusion

The staying power and tenacity of the Gendarmerie is well documented in its struggle to maintain the *Schuma* outposts against concerted partisan attempts to either attack and destroy them directly or literally starve them into submission by cutting off all means of procuring provisions and ammunition. In the end the partisans did not succeed. Hardly any post was lost permanently, as heavily armed supply convoys routinely reached their destination, often fighting intense battles along the way.<sup>67</sup> Rarely were convoys lost to their assailants. At times, the '*Stützpunkt* battles' resembled military-style operations with relatively large engagements fought between hundreds of men on each side, supported by artillery, grenade-launchers and even tanks. Notwithstanding that the partisans were usually more numerous and, at least by 1943, militarily better-equipped and disciplined units, the Gendarmerie won out because of their logistics of concentration and coordinated deployment. Within hours' notice, Gendarmes and *Schutzmänner* could be mobilised from across the region, ready to engage partisan detachments in the nick of time to prevent the complete isolation or, as it may be, the destruction of a *Stützpunkt*. The strategy of concentration also buttressed the fighting morale and disciplined behaviour of the *Schutzmänner* as it provided them with a collective sense of security and purpose in actions where they enjoyed the rare opportunity of parity, if not superiority, in numbers and armaments.<sup>68</sup> By the same token, especially in 1944, mounted anti-partisan *Jagdzüge* were quick to respond to emergency situations to forestall convoy attacks or to reinforce Gendarmerie patrols unexpectedly confronted by superior forces.<sup>69</sup> Whilst the '*Stützpunkt* battles', centred on communications and supplies, assumed the contours of militarised warfare, the 'conventional' everyday struggle over state farms and requisitions continued unabated to the end of occupation.

In the end, the near total militarisation of the Gendarmerie was not enough to reclaim the authority squandered in the course of three years of occupation. Yet, 'squandered' also implies that such authority existed and that its existence was not solely predicated on arbitrary and ruthless power used indiscriminately against a fearful and exploited population deemed racially inferior and expendable. On the contrary, the most striking aspect of the partisan war uncovered in this study was the population's hostility towards the partisans and, conversely, their willingness to cooperate with the Gendarmerie in fighting them. Also, rarely does German racial stigmatisation of the population, apart from Jews and Gypsies, enter into the conflict or affect the Gendarmes'

relationship with local police auxiliaries. There was a real appreciation of their service and indispensability. This also explains why the Gendarmerie was able to retain control over much of the countryside until 1943 and, thereafter, fight the partisans successfully in major engagements well into 1944. Indeed, the rural police administration did not collapse; its district Gendarmerie and *Schuma* posts functioned to the end. Throughout occupation, they remained the pillars of German policing and anti-partisan warfare in the Baranovichi commissariat.

However, it is only prudent that we do not generalise these findings, based as they are on sources relating to one specific region. Although the nature of partisan and anti-partisan warfare described here bears many similarities with what occurred elsewhere in Belorussia, the Baranovichi Gendarmerie was blessed by several factors that help to explain their ability to maintain control over much of the countryside. For one, unlike any other commissariat, Baranovichi was spared large concentrations of partisans. No major formations resided on its territory until spring–summer 1943.<sup>70</sup> Another factor that favoured the Gendarmerie was the landscape of the area, which, whilst forested and swampy in many places, consisted of wide open spaces of pastures and arable land. Moreover, important road and rail connections passed through the region and thus it was better garrisoned by the *Wehrmacht* than some other places. Finally, the Gendarmerie seems to have been well served by competent officers who showed initiative and demonstrated good leadership. Last but not least, it appeared sensitive to local needs and sentiments. Keeping these peculiarities in mind, lest we generalise, should nonetheless caution us against clichés about the uniformity of ideologically-induced brutalisation to explain the genocidal propensity of German anti-partisan warfare. To echo Alexander Hill's critique of such generalisation in his study of partisan warfare in north-western Russia,<sup>71</sup> the Baranovichi Gendarmes, like the soldiers in army rear areas, were not fighting 'a partisan war without partisans', nor were they fighting this war indiscriminately against a civilian population that was equally, if not more, in fear of 'bandits and partisans' as of the Gendarmerie.

## Notes

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1. Place-names are given in Russian unless they appear in citations or could not readily be transposed from German, Belorussian or Polish spellings.
2. The case studies in J. Armstrong (ed.) (1964) *Soviet Partisans in World War II* (Madison: Allen and Unwin) deal with German anti-partisan warfare in

- areas under military jurisdiction. The same applies to A. Hill (2005) *The War behind the Eastern Front* (New York: Frank Cass); T. Schulte (1989) *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia* (Oxford: Berg); B. Shepherd (2004) *War in the Wild East* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), and the case studies of H. Heer and T. Anderson (2000) in H. Heer and K. Naumann (eds) *War of Extermination* (Oxford: Berghahn).
3. M. Dean (2000) *Collaboration in the Holocaust* (New York: St. Martin's Press); B. Chiari (1998) *Alltag hinter der Front* (Düsseldorf: Droste); K. Berkhoff (2004) *Harvest of Despair* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press); C. Gerlach (1999) *Kalkulierte Morde* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition). While these authors are cognisant of the role of the Gendarmerie, H. Nolte (2005) 'Partisan War in Belorussia', in R. Chickering, S. Förster and B. Greiner (eds) *A World at Total War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 261–76, and P. Blood (2006) *Hitler's Bandit Hunters* (Washington, DC: Potomac) ignore the Gendarmerie altogether.
  4. This is not to detract from A. Brakel's (2007) fine article on the relationship between Soviet partisans and the civilian population in the Baranovichi *oblast* ("Das allergefährlichste ist die Wut der Bauern." Die Versorgung der Partisanen und ihr Verhältnis zur Zivilbevölkerung. Eine Fallstudie zum Gebiet Baranovichi 1941–1944', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 3, 393–424). It differs from this study's focus on the Gendarmerie and concentration on the Baranovichi *Gebietskommissariat*. The Baranovichi *oblast* or region (prior to 1939 the Polish *Województwo Nowogódek*) encompassed a vastly larger territory (23,300 square kilometres), consisting of 26 districts (*raioni*) and a population of over one million, than the newly created sub-regional administrative unit or commissariat of Baranovichi (5694 square kilometres and consisting of seven districts), which along with the other commissariats of Lida, Novogrudok, and Slonim was part of the 1939–41 Soviet *oblast* of Baranovichi.
  5. The principal repositories of these documents are: fond 7021, State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF); fonds 4, 383, 384, 389, 658, 370, National Archive of the Republic of Belarus (NARB); fond 995, Brest State Regional Archive (SRA-Brest), and fond 1821, Minsk State Regional Archive (SRA-Minsk).
  6. NARB documents (fonds 750 and 4/33a) and from the same archive B. Musial's (2004) valuable edited collection of Soviet partisan documents (NARB: 1329, 3601, 3603, 3623, 3500) in *Sowjetische Partisanen in Weißrußland* (Munich: Oldenbourg).
  7. For a critical discussion of these sources, see Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen*, pp. 29–31.
  8. Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, pp. 859–1055. This is true as well for most of the other works noted above (note 3).
  9. E. Haberer (2001) 'The German Police and Genocide in Belorussia, 1941–1944, Part I: Police Deployment and Nazi Genocidal Directives' and 'Part II: Gendarmerie Killings of Jews and Gypsies', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 3, nos 1 and 2: 13–29, 207–18.
  10. H. Heer (2000) 'The Logic of the War of Extermination: The Wehrmacht and the Anti-partisan War', in H. Heer and K. Naumann (eds) *War of Extermination* (Oxford: Berghahn Books), pp. 93–126.
  11. J. Gross (2002) *Revolution from Abroad. The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

12. For the duration of occupation an aggregate number of 85 Gendarmes has been listed in 'Arbeitsvermerk', pp. 2–17, Bundesarchiv-Ludwigsburg (BA-L), 202 AR-Z, 16/67.
13. NARB, 383/1/3/138.
14. Chiari, *Alltag*, p. 162.
15. NARB, 658/1/2/76-79. See also, Dean, *Collaboration*, pp. 63–4.
16. Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (BA), R19/326/1+.
17. NARB, 389/1/3/140, 370/1/1265/20; Central Historical Document Collection (CIDK) 1323/2/223/16.
18. NARB, 370/1/1265/20.
19. Dean, *Collaboration*, pp. 66–8; Chiari, *Alltag*, pp. 163–5. After 1943, reliability was compromised due to forced recruitment practised and facilitated through the threat of forced labour service.
20. BA-L, 202 AR-Z 16/67 (Eibner File, 10: 1924).
21. BA-L, II 202 AR-Z 16/67 (Arbeitsvermerk); W. Currillia (2006) *Die Deutsche Ordnungspolizei und der Holocaust im Baltikum und in Weißrussland 1941–1944* (Paderborn: Schöning), pp. 352–88; E. Haberer 'The German Police and Genocide in Belorussia, 1941–1944', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 1 (March 2001): 13–29; 2 (June 2001): 207–18; and 3 (November 2001): 391–403.
22. 'Bezeichnung "Partisanen"', Central State Archive of Ukraine, 3206/1/3/ 60.
23. C. Browning (2004) *The Origins of the Final Solution* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press and Yad Vashem), pp. 213–373; P. Longerich (2010) *Holocaust: The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
24. SRA-Brest, 995/1/4.
25. SRA-Brest, 995/1/4/366.
26. *Ibid.*, 371.
27. SRA-Brest, 995/1/7/241-43.
28. *Ibid.*, 240.
29. SRA-Brest, 995/1/7/164.
30. SRA-Brest, 995/1/4/286.
31. *Ibid.*, 318.
32. *Ibid.*, 372.
33. *Ibid.*, 497.
34. Amply documented in the file cited here (995/1/4).
35. GARF, 7021/148/316/88-90.
36. So called 'trusted informers' (*Vertrauensmänner*), SRA-Brest, 995/1/7/402.
37. *Ibid.*, 293.
38. *Ibid.*, 205, 206.
39. *Ibid.*, 299, 254, 402, 398.
40. *Ibid.*, 143.
41. CSA-Minsk, 1821/1/1/11.
42. *Ibid.*, 191, 210, 255.
43. BA-L, Eibner, 10: 1937-8; SRA-Brest, file 995/1/11.
44. GARF, 7021/148/316/103-4, 109-10, 134.
45. SRA-Minsk, file 1821/1/1; GARF, file 7021/148/316.
46. GARF, 7021/148/316/149.
47. *Ibid.*, 152–3.
48. SRA-Minsk, file 1821/1/1.
49. GARF, 7021/148/316/151.

50. Ibid., 153.
51. Ibid., 152–3.
52. SRA-Brest, 995/1/2/18-20, 995/1/4/307-9; NARB, 389/1/3/135. Schuma reliability, performance and amicable relationships are documented *passim* in the following files: GARF, 7021/148/316; SRA-Minsk, 1821/1/1; SRA-Brest, 995/1/7 and 11.
53. SRA-Brest: 995/1/2/21-3.
54. It appears that only 'Operation Sumpffieber' included stationary Gendarmerie personnel (SRA-Brest, 995/1/4/253).
55. GARF, 7021/148/316/351.
56. SRA-Brest, 995/1/7/208-9.
57. Ibid., 15, 16–17.
58. SRA-Brest, 995/1/11/26-7.
59. On partisan procurement actions and associated criminality, including taking 'the last cow', see Brakel, 'Das allergefährlichste', pp. 397–411, 420; Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen*, pp. 52, 144–6, 152–5, 168–70.
60. GARF, 7021/148/316/138.
61. Report of Colonel Golovkin, Soviet army political section, confirms this state of affairs (NARB, 750/1/110/21-5). Equally revealing is the 27 August 1943 report of F. Khotinskii, special agent of the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement, wherein he states: '*Most dangerous is the wrath of the peasants* [emphasis in original]. The peasants no longer make a distinction between partisans and bandits. Hiding behind the partisans, the bandits rob the population clean. Many partisan units participate in this as well' (NARB, 370/1/1313/185-86).
62. Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen*, pp. 151–81; Brakel, 'Das allergefährlichste', pp. 412–17.
63. NARB, 750/1/11/110/24. For a nearly identical statement: SRA-Brest, 995/1/7/351.
64. How this impacted on the reliability of the *Schuma* clearly shows up in Gendarmerie reports for 1943–4 (CSA-Minsk, file 389/1/2).
65. Musial, pp. 153–4, 159–70.
66. For documented cases in January–February 1944, which routinely included raping women, see Musial, pp. 166–7, 170, 179–80. On killing of relatives and whole families of *Schutz Männer*: NARB, 389/1/4/42, 45; GARF, 7021/148/316/6-9, 13, 71, 77, 146.
67. While some *Schuma*-Posts were disbanded and others up-graded into Gend-Posts, the original 20 had increased to 24 by June 1944 (NARB, 370/1/1265/20; CIDK, 1323/2/223/16). Furthermore, none of the Gendarmerie's *raion* posts were ever seriously threatened. Recorded attacks took place against Kletsk on four occasions in January and April 1943 (GARF, 7021/148/316/123–24, 131), and on two occasions on Gorodishche, 1 November 1942 and 22 April 1943 (SRA-Brest, 995/1/4/320; GARF: 7021/148/316/87).
68. SRA-Brest, 995/1/7/15-17.
69. NARB, file 389/1, file 4, 5, 9; GARF; 7021/148/316/118; SRA-Brest, file 995/1/11.
70. NARB, 4/33a/524/69-70, 129-33.
71. Hill, *War*, pp. 3–5, 164–9 (in reference to Heer, 'Logic', p. 97).

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**Part II**

**Poland**

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# Foreword

*Paul Latawski*

On 1 September 1939, Germany invaded Poland and in the course of six weeks of fighting defeated the Polish army. The Soviet Union joined Germany's aggression on 17 September and together the two powers partitioned Poland and set into motion what was arguably World War II's most brutal occupation. Prior to the German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, there was not much to distinguish between the two occupiers of Poland. Each was driven by an ideology that sought to extinguish the Polish state and eliminate or remove its population. Whether classified as sub-humans (*Untermenschen*) by Nazi racial ideology or class enemies by Soviet Marxist-Leninist ideology, the consequences for the Poles ultimately meant that they would be the object of a 'systematic program of genocide' or removed from occupied Poland.<sup>1</sup> The most chilling example of the realisation of the aims of the Nazi racist ideology can be seen in the destruction of Poland's Jewish community in the Holocaust.<sup>2</sup> Although the outbreak of the German-Soviet war in 1941 led to a Polish-Soviet rapprochement and ameliorated the conditions of Poles on territory controlled by the Soviet Union, the discovery of the Katyn forest massacres in April 1943 highlighted the fact that the ideological impact on Polish society of the German and Soviet occupations were indistinguishable from each other between 1939 and 1941.<sup>3</sup>

Considerable territorial rearrangement of boundaries attended the German and Soviet occupations of Poland after September 1939. Germany and the Soviet Union partitioned the country along what became known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Line which very roughly approximates post-war Poland's eastern frontier. At the conclusion of its military operations, Germany annexed large parts of western Poland in the north and south and even parts of central Poland. The

territory was incorporated into three administrative entities. *Reichsgau Danzig*, *Westpreussen* and *Reichsgau Wartheland* comprised nearly 92,000 square kilometres and contained a population of 10.1 million, out of which 8.9 million were Poles. In the south, Polish Upper Silesia was incorporated into the German *Oberschlesien* province. The remainder of German-occupied Poland, containing 16 million Poles and a territory of 142,000 square kilometres, was designated the General Government (*Generalgouvernement*) and treated initially as a protectorate, with its effective status evolving towards full integration into Germany.<sup>4</sup> On the Soviet side of the partition boundary, eastern Poland was incorporated into the Belorussian and Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics after a referendum, the result of which was never in doubt. The Soviet share of partitioned Poland took in 202,069 square kilometres and a population of over 13 million.<sup>5</sup> After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the boundaries of the General Government were adjusted eastwards and the remainder of eastern Poland fell into the *Reichskommissariat Ostland* and the *Reichskommissariat Ukraine*. This placed all of pre-war Poland under German control until the Red Army swept westwards in 1944.

Changes to boundaries and administrative arrangements had a dramatic impact on the Polish population with deportations coming in their wake. The territories incorporated directly into Germany saw 923,000 Poles expelled, with most being dumped in the General Government.<sup>6</sup> Soviet deportation of Polish citizens to Central Asia and Siberia exceeded the numbers expelled by Germany prior to June 1940. Moreover, its impact on the Polish population who formed between a quarter and a third of the population in eastern Poland was more devastating as it comprehensively destroyed a pattern of settlement that had existed for centuries. The overall number of Polish citizens deported can only be estimated but the most reliable sources suggest 1.2 to 1.5 million were forcibly removed and sent to the Soviet hinterland.<sup>7</sup> By the end of the war, the casualties of Soviet 'liberation' included about one million Polish citizens who died as the result of Soviet action. Some of the surviving deportees were never repatriated to Poland after the war.<sup>8</sup>

The German terror against the Polish population began even before the end of military operations in Poland in 1939. Operation Tannenberg targeted the Polish intelligentsia, politicians, military officers and clergy for elimination right after the entry of German forces into Poland.<sup>9</sup> The initial efforts to decapitate Polish society by targeting its elite were soon enhanced by the establishment of an elaborate German security apparatus. Although large numbers of German army and Luftwaffe formations

were based on Polish territory and engaged in repressive action, the establishment of an elaborate network of security services and police formations was the most important element of control and terror. The security apparatus included the *Ordnungspolizei* or *Orpo* (public order police), which controlled a number of police formations including the *Grenzschutz* (border guard), *Bahnschutz* (railway police) and *Werkschutz* (factory police). In addition, the lowest tiers of the pre-war Polish police were retained to maintain public order and Ukrainian police were established in the eastern parts of Poland.<sup>10</sup> At the heart of the security apparatus of the German occupation was the *Sicherheitspolizei* or *Sipo* (Security Police), which contained the 4th Bureau, known as the Gestapo. Staffed by particularly ruthless and ideologically-driven functionaries, the Gestapo created networks of informers that numbered in the thousands in its effort to carry out German occupation policy. Claire M. Hubbard-Hall's chapter examines the role of the informer networks in Tomaszów Mazowiecki between 1939 and 1945. Her chapter places the use of informers within the wider framework of German efforts to dominate Poland until such time that it could be ethnically cleansed.

The use of informers, however, represented a subtleness of policy not generally practised in German efforts to control Poland. The legal structures of occupation placed no real limits on the application of terror. Poles were subjected to curfew and many more infractions were now capital crimes. Moreover, reprisal and summary execution were instruments used with regularity as a pacification measure.<sup>11</sup> The overall numbers of police formations ranged between 50,000 and 80,000 during the course of the occupation, with the Wehrmacht presence in occupied Poland fluctuating between 400,000 and 2 million.<sup>12</sup>

German occupation policy was driven by two major factors: economic exploitation and an ideologically-driven policy of genocide directed at the inhabitants of Poland. Expropriation of goods and businesses took place on a massive scale. By 1943, of the 195,000 commercial enterprises in existence in Poland before the war only 51,000 remained.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the German takeover of all financial institutions ensured that fiscal exploitation brought maximum economic advantage to Germany while impoverishing the Polish population and pushing it to the level of subsistence. With the dismantling of the education system above primary school level, the General Government was to become one large, if gradually diminishing pool of unskilled labour.<sup>14</sup> Accompanying economic exploitation was a policy of genocide, which was underpinned by the Nazi regime's racial ideology and had the ultimate aim of the elimination of Poland's pre-war population. The overall population

losses of Poland during World War II provide vivid testimony to the ferocity of the German occupation. Poland lost in six years of war over six million people or 22 per cent of its pre-war population. In percentage terms, this was the greatest loss of life of any European country during World War II. Most telling regarding the population losses is the fact that 90 per cent of these deaths were incurred as a result of oppression of some kind or another, including death camps, executions, starvation and ill-treatment.<sup>15</sup>

The brutality of the German and Soviet occupations was an important catalyst to Polish resistance. The result was arguably the most comprehensive civil and military resistance organisation in occupied Europe, which established an underground state. The underground state was closely linked to the Polish Government-in-Exile that was resident in Paris and then later in London. In occupied Poland the Government Delegation (*Delegatura*) ran the administrative structures of the underground state organised along the lines of shadow ministries. Most of the pre-war political parties had representation on the Consultative Political Committee (*Polityczny Komitet Porozumiewawczy* – PKP) barring the extreme right and left (Communists) who deliberately excluded themselves. The PKP was the principal political body between 1940 and 1943, when it was replaced by the Council of National Unity (*Rada Jedności Narodowej* – RJN).<sup>16</sup> The scale of the civil resistance directed by the underground state can be seen in the establishment of a clandestine school system that had more than 100,000 pupils in secondary schools by 1944.<sup>17</sup>

The military wing of the Polish underground state evolved and developed between 1939 and 1942 and adopted its definitive wartime name of the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*). The earliest underground military organisation was the Service for Poland's Victory (*Służba Zwycięstwu Polski* – SZP), which lasted about two months before being replaced by the Union for Armed Struggle (*Związek Walki Zbrojnej* – ZWZ).<sup>18</sup> Colonel Stefan Rowecki emerged as the leading figure with his appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the ZWZ-AK in 1940. It was a post he held until his arrest in 1943. Colonel Tadeusz Komorowski replaced Rowecki in July 1943 and remained the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Army until he became a German prisoner-of-war at the end of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944.<sup>19</sup> The strength of the Home Army peaked at around 400,000 members.<sup>20</sup> The Home Army was not only the most important resistance movement, but also the only one that was truly representative of the broadest base of Polish politics and society. In comparison, the Communist People's Army (*Armia Ludowa* – AL) never fielded more

than 10,000 in its resistance movement.<sup>21</sup> Its weakness meant that the Communists could only come to power in post-war Poland on the back of Soviet bayonets.

Partisan warfare was a major feature of resistance in occupied Poland. The Home Army's approach to partisan warfare, however, followed a more measured policy that balanced potential gain against the reality of German reprisal, thereby seeking the greatest military impact with the smallest cost to the civilian population. This pragmatic military policy was a product of the Home Army leadership's consideration of what could be realistically achieved under the conditions of occupation. Paul Latawski's chapter examines the genesis and development of the Home Army's partisan warfare strategy between 1939 and 1943. His chapter looks at the military approach adopted and how partisan units developed with a view to providing the military means to conduct a national insurrection in the wake of a German collapse in the closing stages of the war.

The hostility of the Soviet Union to the Polish Government-in-Exile and the Home Army meant that their role in the future Poland was being marginalised by Soviet policy. The assumptions of an eventual German collapse were replaced with the reality that the Red Army would liberate Poland and thus be in a position to dictate the nature of post-war Poland. The Home Army found itself in an invidious political and military position. This geopolitical context set the scene for the Home Army's launching of the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944, to try to claim a place in the shaping of post-war Poland. The Uprising, however, ended in tragedy in October with its suppression by the Germans. Warsaw was destroyed and hundreds of thousands of Poles perished while the Red Army stood aside and offered no substantial help. By the end of 1944, the Home Army had been dealt a political and military blow from which it could not recover. The new Poland that emerged would be a Soviet client state of limited sovereignty and, in the eyes of many Poles, under a renewed occupation that did not end until 1989.

## Notes

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2. L. S. Dawidowicz (1975) *The War Against the Jews 1933–1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston).
3. J. T. Gross (1979) *Polish Society under German Occupation. The General-gouvernement 1939–1944* (Princeton: Princeton University Press); J. T. Gross



- (1988) *Revolution from Abroad. The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press); R. C. Lukas (1986) *Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles under German Occupation 1939–1944* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky); Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust*.
4. Lukas, *Forgotten Holocaust*, pp. 6–7.
5. Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust*, p. 9.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
7. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad*, p. 194.
8. Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust*, p. 20.
9. A. B. Rossino (2003) *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology and Atrocity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas), pp. 14–5.
10. S. Korbonski (1978) *The Polish Underground State: A Guide to the Underground, 1939–1945* (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 10–1; (1950) *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w drugiej wojnie światowej Tom III Armia Krajowa* (London: Instytut Historyczny im. Gen. Sikorskiego), pp. 426–8.
11. Korbonski, *The Polish Underground State*, pp. 9–11.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 27–32.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 38–9.
16. N. Davies (1981) *God's Playground: A History of Poland Vol. II 1795–Present* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 466.
17. Korbonski, *The Polish Underground State*, p. 50.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–33 and pp. 58–9.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Davies, *God's Playground*, p. 466.
21. *Ibid.*

# 5

## The *Armia Krajowa* and Polish Partisan Warfare, 1939–43

Paul Latawski

Partisan warfare in Poland during World War II differed in some significant ways from the other case studies considered in this book. The focus in this chapter is not so much at the tactical or operational level, but rather the strategic-level thinking that guided the development of Polish partisan warfare between 1939 and 1943. Indeed, it is the strategic-level policy that shaped what happened at the operational and tactical level regarding partisan warfare in the Polish context. Although there was major armed resistance to the occupation of Poland, the Polish Union for Armed Struggle (*Związek Walki Zbrojnej* – ZWZ) and its successor the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa* – AK)<sup>1</sup> with their close link to the Polish Government-in-Exile in London followed a measured and calculated policy of resistance. Such an approach, it was thought, offered the greatest military impact with potentially the smallest cost to the civilian population.

This chapter will examine the development of strategic thinking regarding the role of partisan warfare within the operations of the *Armia Krajowa* (and its predecessors) from the beginning of the occupation of Poland in 1939 to the arrest of the Home Army's Commander-in-Chief, Stefan Rowecki, in 1943. The issue of partisan warfare in Poland will be considered in three parts: the first examines what is understood to be partisan warfare in the Polish context, through historical examples and the body of Polish military theory developed in the nineteenth century. The second will concentrate on the preparation for a national insurrection and its impact on the development of partisan warfare within the *Armia Krajowa*'s planning. The final section examines the organisational structures and operational approach in conducting partisan warfare.

The published document series on the *Armia Krajowa* produced by the *Studium Polski Podziemnej* – SPP (The Polish Underground Movement 1939–1945 Study Trust) provides the underpinning primary source

material for this paper. The SPP in London contains the most important collection of material related to Poland's wartime underground. The archive holds the records of the 6th Bureau of the Polish General Staff in London that was responsible for liaison with the underground leadership in occupied Poland. The 6th Bureau was the key organisational body charged with managing the link between the *Armia Krajowa* and the highest political and military levels of the Polish Government-in-Exile. Contained in these papers are the documents that passed between London and Warsaw that provide a critical understanding of the evolution of wartime policy on resistance in Poland from 1939 to 1945. Between 1970 and 1989, the SPP published the bulk of the key policy documents in a six-volume set entitled *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945* (The Home Army in Documents 1939–1945).<sup>2</sup> Although published document collections are by their very nature selective in what they contain, the volumes consulted for this paper present a very comprehensive view of decision-making at the highest levels of the *Armia Krajowa* and Polish Government-in-Exile as related to the evolving strategy on national insurrection and partisan warfare.

Wartime memoirs are another important resource to complement the primary sources of the document collection. The most important of these for the purpose of this chapter has been the memoir of Tadeusz Bor-Komorowski, the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Army during 1943–1944. His account not only sheds light upon his time in post as the military head of the *Armia Krajowa*, but also upon the earlier wartime period critical to the development of policy on Polish partisan warfare. Although, inevitably, parts of the book are tinged with bitterness caused by Soviet policy towards the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, Komorowski's memoir nevertheless provides valuable and balanced insight into the problems of resistance and the dilemmas posed by a brutal occupation. In terms of secondary sources, the most valuable one for this chapter has been *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w drugiej wojnie światowej Tom III Armia Krajowa* (The Polish Armed Forces in the Second World War, volume III: Home Army).<sup>3</sup> This volume forms part of a series on the Polish armed forces that can be considered the closest thing to an official history of the *Armia Krajowa*. Produced by the Historical Commission of the Polish General Staff in London in 1950, this 972-page work draws on primary sources found at the SPP, and was drafted by a team of former military officers and *Armia Krajowa* figures. Like so many official histories, the style is measured and reads in places like a military report, but its authors were thorough in preparing a narrative that contains much organisational and statistical information on the *Armia Krajowa*.

Drawing on critical Polish source material, it is the contention of this chapter that the development of Polish partisan warfare between 1939 and 1943 reflected a military approach that was pragmatic and realistic about what could be achieved under the conditions of the German occupation. Given the large price to be paid by the civilian population in the form of reprisals for *Armia Krajowa* armed action, partisan warfare was something to be conducted by specialist formations and only where military gains could justify civilian losses. The *Armia Krajowa*'s strategic thinking on the role of partisan warfare also linked this form of armed resistance to plans for a national insurrection to be launched in the event of a German political and military collapse, or in aid of the liberating Allied armies advancing into Poland in the closing stages of the war. Although preparations for a national insurrection necessitated the formation of partisan units, their purpose was to be a force held in reserve for future deployment rather than an instrument for conducting an ongoing struggle against the occupier.

The historiography of the Polish underground state in all of its aspects is very large. The topic of partisan warfare is no exception, with much of the literature looking at partisan activity in specific regions or particular units. Despite this rich vein of historical literature, it is striking how much of what has been written at the strategic level focuses more on political than military questions. As a consequence, the strategic-level thinking that underpinned the *Armia Krajowa*'s approach to partisan warfare up to spring 1943 has been overshadowed by later wartime developments. Moreover, the strategic-level military factors in the Polish case have received little, if any, English-language treatment in historical literature. Events in the last two years of the war including the Warsaw Uprising of August to October 1944, Soviet policy towards the *Armia Krajowa* and the emerging civil war in Poland have tended to place political issues rather than military ones at the forefront of historical consideration.<sup>4</sup> One of the earliest works that considered in parts the strategic-level thinking on Polish partisan warfare was *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w drugiej wojnie światowej Tom III Armia Krajowa* (The Polish Armed Forces in the Second World War, volume III: Home Army), published in 1950 and already mentioned above. Sections of this book examined *Armia Krajowa* thinking on general uprising and partisan warfare. Although it provided an important outline of developments, the book supplied only a very basic, albeit essential, narrative on strategic issues. More recently, Marek Ney-Krwawicz has written on the *Armia Krajowa*'s conception of armed action and general insurrection. He examined the issues of *Armia Krajowa* strategy in greater detail, concluding that the policy on national

insurrection and armed action served Polish national interest and society.<sup>5</sup> Another recent work is that of Włodzimierz Borodziej. In his work on the Warsaw Uprising, he considered the *Armia Krajowa's* strategic thinking on partisan warfare and a national insurrection as a prelude to the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. Borodziej recognises the reluctance of the *Armia Krajowa* leadership and the Polish Government-in-Exile to engage in armed resistance because of the cost to civilians and poor prospects for military success. However, he argues that the emergence of specialist structures to conduct diversionary action in the *Armia Krajowa* was less due to the leadership wishing to control armed action than to a heightened desire for a more active resistance policy.<sup>6</sup> This interpretation rests upon the notion that the basic assumptions about the utility of armed action were changing in the thinking of the *Armia Krajowa*, and formed a backdrop to the subsequent decision to launch the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. This author considers that basic assumptions on the doubtful utility of armed action did not, in military terms, fundamentally change, at least until 1943; rather it was political factors that led to more active resistance and the Warsaw Uprising, military doubts notwithstanding. Because of the emphasis on the political issues that shaped the experience of the *Armia Krajowa*, this chapter, by considering the strategic-level military factors, fills an important gap in the historiography and provides essential context to regional case studies on Poland.

## Polish partisan warfare: Theory and legacy

Polish partisan warfare in the middle of the twentieth century was underpinned by a body of experience and military theory developed in the nineteenth century. The failure of more regular military operations in the national insurrections of 1794 and 1830, and the elimination of a Polish state entity in the form of the post-Vienna settlement Congress Kingdom and its supporting conventional army, effectively removed the option of using regular forces to regain national independence. This reality meant that the final nineteenth-century insurrection launched in 1863 was fought as a guerrilla war with armed groups operating in the countryside against the Russian Army. Although 1863 was not the last occasion on which partisan-like formations emerged, the Socialist Party's armed groups of the 1904–5 revolution and the clandestine World War I *Polska Organizacja Wojskowa* (Polish Military Organisation – POW) were all faint echoes of the insurrection of 1863.<sup>7</sup>

It was, however, the earlier failure of the November insurrection of 1830 that triggered the development of a body of Polish military

thought advocating and developing a doctrine of partisan warfare. The impetus given by the failed uprisings, the lack of foreign military support and the impossibility of a conventional Polish military solution to the problem of national liberation meant that guerrilla doctrine became not only a fashionable arena of debate but, in military terms, one of the few realistic options.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Polish partisan warfare theory was tied to the idea of a general national insurrection seeking to regain an independent Polish state lost at the end of the eighteenth century.

Polish military theory also tends to reflect the wider problem of the absence of an agreed understanding of the meaning of partisan warfare. Polish dictionaries tend to translate a *partyzant* as a 'partisan' or 'guerrilla' and, predictably, *partyzancka wojna* as 'partisan warfare' or 'guerrilla warfare'.<sup>9</sup> The plural *partyzanci* can be rendered as 'underground army' as can *oddziały partyzanckie*.<sup>10</sup> Polish military dictionaries are not necessarily any more illuminating. However, an English-Polish/Polish-English Military Dictionary produced by the Polish Army's *Centralna Komisja Regulaminowa* (Central Regulations Commission) in London during World War II translated *partyzancka [wojna]* as 'guerrilla warfare'.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the definitional ambiguities, Polish partisan warfare in World War II does draw on its nineteenth-century thinkers in some critical respects, including the fact that it remained tied to the idea of a national insurrection. Although, on the surface, viewing Polish partisan warfare as irregular military formations operating in support of regular armies is a definition that seems to fit the Polish context, the link to the idea of national insurrection places partisan warfare in a different framework in terms of its overarching military purpose.

## **ZWZ-AK: Strategic thinking on a national insurrection and its impact on the role of partisan warfare**

The development of Polish partisan warfare began soon after the end of the disastrous September 1939 campaign. Among the most important examples to emerge in the period of autumn 1939 to spring 1940 was the partisan unit led by Major Henryk Dobrzański, known by the pseudonym Hubal. His desire to launch partisan operations was driven by a fierce patriotism, an unwillingness to accept the military verdict of 1939 and an unbreakable will that he conveyed to those under his command. Rather than accepting the capitulation of the last major Polish military units in October 1939, Dobrzański took his cavalry squadron into the countryside in the Kielce region and continued armed resistance.

Designating his formation a 'Detached Unit of the Polish Army (*Oddział Wydzielony Wojska Polskiego*), Hubal mounted hit and run attacks from the autumn of 1939 to spring 1940 with his unit finding support among the civilian population in the countryside. Although he had some success against the German occupation forces, his actions led to brutal reprisals against the rural civilian population in the region where his unit operated. German security forces eventually trapped and destroyed his force near the village of Anielin near Opoczno in April 1940, killing Dobrzański but creating a partisan legend.<sup>12</sup>

Hubal, however, was not viewed favourably by the Polish underground military leadership. Instead, his partisan activities were viewed as counter-productive and costly in terms of German reprisals against the rural peasant population. Rather than a model of resistance, Hubal was viewed as a rogue partisan, operating outside military structures and acting irresponsibly in terms of the consequences of his unit's actions. The Polish underground's military leadership attempted to bring his operations to a halt. Two weeks before his death, it recommended in a communication to the Polish Government-in-Exile based in Paris that Hubal be brought before a military court if he escaped abroad to Allied-controlled territory, in order to be held accountable for his actions.<sup>13</sup> The case of Hubal's freelance partisan warfare served to illustrate the dissonance of this approach with the developing strategic thinking of the Polish underground on the role of partisan warfare.

The military wing of the Polish underground state evolved and developed between 1939 and 1942 before it reached its definitive form and name of the *Armia Krajowa*. The earliest resistance structure was the Service for Poland's Victory (*Służba Zwycięstwu Polski* – SZP), which lasted about two months and was replaced by the the Union for Armed Struggle (*Związek Walki Zbrojnej* – ZWZ). The launch of ZWZ marked the assertion of control by the Polish Government-in-Exile, led by General Władysław Sikorski, over policy shaping the underground, to ensure the development of a non-partisan military organisation, not tied to any political grouping, which acted within the framework of a coherent strategy of resistance to German occupation. By February 1942, the renaming of the ZWZ into the *Armia Krajowa* marked the consolidation of resistance groups representing various strands of political opinion into a unified structure, with the exception of the extreme right and left of politics. In practice, the right-wing grouping cooperated with the *Armia Krajowa*, though it retained its autonomy, while the Communist Party, which represented a political fringe, preferred to take its orders from Moscow.<sup>14</sup>

Three military figures played an important role in shaping the ZWZ-AK in the initial phases of its development. General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, a prominent officer in the inter-war military establishment, was made a distant Commandant-in-Chief of the ZWZ from Paris and London. The leader of the Polish Government-in-Exile, Sikorski, worked through Sosnkowski to ensure that the ZWZ-AK reflected his political and military priorities. However, despite Sikorski's and Sosnkowski's efforts to command ZWZ from abroad, the organisation's military leadership in occupied Poland would, in practice, have the final word in the development of strategy, given their responsibility for implementing it in the conditions prevailing in occupied Poland. Moreover, the difficulty in rapid communication between the Polish Government-in-Exile and the ZWZ leadership inevitably conferred autonomy on the underground leadership in occupied Poland. In the formative period of the ZWZ's development, particularly regarding its strategy of partisan warfare, Colonel Stefan Rowecki emerged as the leading figure with his appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the ZWZ in June 1940.

Forty-five-year-old Stefan Paweł Rowecki was intellectually and temperamentally well suited to developing the military wing of the Polish underground state. His career in the inter-war army marked him out as an officer who combined the qualities of a military intellectual and a soldier who held command appointments that kept him in touch with the sharp end of his profession. In the 1920s, he worked in the Polish army's research-publishing institute and served as editor and on editorial boards of most of the key military journals of the inter-war period.<sup>15</sup> He was a highly prolific author of articles on a wide range of topics that distinguished him as a respected military intellectual.<sup>16</sup> An important strand in his inter-war research interests clearly equipped him for his subsequent wartime role. In 1928 he published a number of articles in the popular military journal *Przegląd Wojskowy* concerning military aspects of the civil war in Russia that brought the communists to power.<sup>17</sup> One of these pieces considered class war, civil war and partisan war in the light of the Soviet experience. Moreover, in the same year, he published what was to be his most important book, *Walki Uliczne (Street Fighting)*.<sup>18</sup> The book was a comprehensive military study of urban warfare and included a section on communist doctrine for insurrectionary fighting, along with case studies of attempted Communist uprisings in Tallinn in 1924 and Hamburg in 1923. Although little known outside Poland, the book stands out as one of the earliest comprehensive studies of urban warfare in the twentieth century. This strand of Rowecki's intellectual interests gave him a thorough grounding in the problems



of irregular warfare in both its urban and rural settings. His work also examined the phenomenon of revolutionary national insurrection.

In the months before the outbreak of war, Rowecki was given command of the Warsaw Armoured-Motorised Brigade (*Warszawska Brygada Pancerno-Motorowa*), the second such motorised unit to join the Polish order of battle. As the unit was still in the process of formation when war broke out in September 1939, it briefly experienced heavy fighting before losing its operational effectiveness. With the disintegration of his command, Rowecki with some other officers returned to Warsaw, where he embarked on his conspiratorial career that would eventually see him rise to the leadership of the ZWZ-AK. He was known by a variety of pseudonyms including Grot, Rakoní, Grabica, Inżynier, Jan, Kalina and Tur until his arrest by the Gestapo in June 1943.<sup>19</sup> This very able and intelligent army officer was well suited to commanding an underground organisation. He ensured that a realistic military approach, rather than purely political considerations, prevailed in the *Armia Krajowa's* strategy and operations, while also understanding that soldiers served their political masters. More than any other figure in occupied Poland, Rowecki shaped the strategy of Polish resistance on the role of national insurrection and the employment of partisan warfare between 1939 and 1943.

In the wake of the catastrophic defeat in September–October 1939, the emerging military wing of the underground state in Poland received its initial direction from the Polish Government-in-Exile, then based in Paris. The first major instruction, dated 15 November 1939, issued by the Council of Ministers (the Cabinet) of the Polish Government-in-Exile, provided guidelines for Polish society's response to German (and Soviet) occupation. Its key theme was one of non-cooperation with the occupation authorities. The instruction also addressed the question of armed resistance to occupation and recognised that any partisan or diversionary action was likely to be weak and lead to heavy repression directed against the civilian population.<sup>20</sup> The ferocity of the German occupation was illustrated by the targeting of the Polish intelligentsia. As early as 15 November 1939, 115 members of the Jagiellonian University were dispatched to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. By the close of 1939, civilian deaths in German-occupied Poland amounted to 45,000.<sup>21</sup> So soon after the defeat of 1939, the Polish Government-in-Exile was still taking stock of the situation and seeking to develop a long-term and coherent strategy towards the employment of armed force by the nascent Polish underground state. It was doing this not only as a government-in-exile, but as a government of national unity also. It was

based in Paris.<sup>22</sup> Given the likely cost of armed action, the policy of the Polish Government-in-Exile was one of caution. As armed action could not be associated with any clear and realistic political goals at that stage of the war, the Government-in-Exile believed that it would only lead to the 'extermination of Poles' according to the November 1939 directive.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the Government-in-Exile had reason for caution. As Hans Frank, the Governor General of the *Generalgouvernement* minuted at a session with his department chiefs, 'Upon the slightest attempt by the Poles to start anything, an enormous campaign of destruction directed against the Poles would follow ... I would not hesitate to institute a regime of terror with all its consequences'.<sup>24</sup>

A month later, the Polish Government-in-Exile issued a more comprehensive set of guidelines on the development of military resistance to the occupation. In a directive (Instruction no. 1) dated 4 December 1939, Sosnkowski, now the titular Commandant-in-Chief of the Polish underground military organisation, called for the creation of the ZWZ. His directive provided guidance on the 'paths and forms of operations' for ZWZ regarding armed action against Poland's occupiers. The document postulated armed resistance in two forms: 'combat-diversion action' and 'armed insurrection in the rear area of the occupying army'.<sup>25</sup> The 'combat-diversion action' was to be centrally directed and not left to local command. Indeed, the time, character and scale of such action was dependent only on the decision of the Commander ZWZ in Poland and the Premier and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces.<sup>26</sup>

Underpinning this strong central control of 'combat-diversion action' was concern over the potential cost in the form of violent reprisals directed against the civilian population. In another section of the document, the disinclination to engage in armed action at this stage of the war because of perceived military weakness and the lack of clear political goals represented a reaffirmation of the instruction of 15 November 1939.<sup>27</sup> The reason for setting up strong central command structures to direct 'combat-diversion action' was the need to balance military gains against cost to the civilian population. In contrast, 'armed insurrection' was clearly a long-term aspiration that posed few pressing dilemmas. Preparation of armed units for the initiation of a general uprising in the closing stages of the war was the immediate task, while the launching of 'armed insurrection' was only to coincide with the return of regular Polish armed forces from abroad in the closing stages of the war.<sup>28</sup> Although these two forms of armed action were not formally linked in Sosnkowski's directive, the two would become closely intertwined as policy evolved on the Polish underground's concept of armed action.

Sosnkowski's second directive, (Instruction no. 2) dated 16 January 1940, focused on organisational structures and the regulations indicating the conditions of service in the organisation. Members of the ZWZ were considered as part of the Polish armed forces and held military rank determined by the Commander-in-Chief ZWZ.<sup>29</sup> In the fourth section of the document entitled 'Operational Plan', Sosnkowski outlined five key tasks: systematic collection of intelligence, sabotage, reprisals, diversion and insurrection. This second directive gave further indication of the priorities of sabotage, targeting industrial and fuel storage facilities above all. Similarly, diversionary action was to disrupt transportation of petroleum products.<sup>30</sup> In this formative period of the ZWZ, the results of diversionary action were modest and locally driven. Between December 1939 and April 1940 two military trains were derailed near Kraków, and one ammunition train and one train transporting oil were destroyed near Łódź.<sup>31</sup> The emphasis in Sosnkowski's directive on making oil resources a priority target may have reflected wider Allied concerns, but in terms of the ZWZ it pointed to the need to develop partisan-type structures to conduct diversionary operations. Such partisan activity, however, had to meet the strict command and control requirements of the Commandant-in-Chief ZWZ and the Polish Government-in-Exile set out in Instruction no. 1 of 4 December 1939.

Rowecki extracted the key points of the directives of December 1939 and January 1940 and incorporated them into his own 'Organisational Directive No. 1', dated 7 February 1940, to the ZWZ military regions covering occupied Poland. While most of the document was a verbatim summary of the directives Rowecki received from the Polish Government-in-Exile in Paris, the goal of a national insurrection was set out in more categorical terms: 'to prepare in occupied territory a national insurrection [*powstanie narodowe*]'. Rowecki made clear that laying the groundwork for a 'national insurrection' was one of the main goals of the ZWZ. 'Combat-diversionary' action remained, as in the directives from the Polish Government-in-Exile in Paris, a type of operation.<sup>32</sup> The tenor of Rowecki's thinking in this period was confirmed by Tadeusz Bor-Komorowski, a senior figure in the ZWZ who succeeded Rowecki upon his arrest by the Gestapo in 1943. Komorowski recalled his meeting with Rowecki who noted that 'in general, the aims of our Army [ZWZ-AK] were to prepare for an armed uprising and, more immediately, to support the Allied effort by sabotage and diversionary activity and above all by maintaining an intelligence service'.<sup>33</sup> Thus, Rowecki seemed to elevate the preparation for a national insurrection to a key objective, making it the culmination of Polish underground military

efforts. As in the case of 'combat-diversionary' action, the long-term preparations required for 'national insurrection' suggested the creation of an extensive network of partisan units to provide the military means necessary for a general uprising. The mounting of a national insurrection was clearly a long-term objective, and was designed to deal with conditions in the closing stages of the occupation of Poland.

On 6 September 1940, Rowecki issued his 'Organisational Directive No. 3' that outlined ZWZ military planning for the end of the occupation in German-controlled Polish territory. Rowecki's directive in part addressed the need for the creation of an extensive network of military units that would form the basis of a reconstituted Polish Army. The plan postulated the formation of first and second category reserves of manpower assigned to a network of units. Initially, these units would be on the smallest scale of organisation built around the section and platoon, but eventually would evolve to the company level. The units would be territorially based within the ZWZ's military regions. Rowecki's development of the underground military structure clearly aimed at establishing the building blocks of a conventional army. However, its basic structure of small units in the meantime lent itself well to the conduct of partisan warfare.<sup>34</sup>

'Organisational Directive No. 3' had the operational goal of seizing control of Polish territory from the German occupying forces. Built into this goal was the requirement that the occupation had to be on the verge of collapse or in the process of disintegrating. The mobilised network of ZWZ units would then have the role of exploiting the conditions of a crumbling occupation to seize garrison points and communication facilities, destroy Gestapo and police establishments, paralyse conventional military units, secure magazines and storage sites and control railway lines.<sup>35</sup> The assumption underpinning Rowecki's planning was that the end of the war would resemble the conditions that led to the creation of Poland in 1918. The collapse of the Central Powers controlling the Polish lands in 1918 had created a political and military void that was successfully exploited by the various political and military elements seeking a Polish state.<sup>36</sup> Building on the national cohesion established over two decades of Polish statehood, Rowecki undoubtedly believed that the ZWZ was in a strong position to create the clandestine military infrastructure necessary to fill a power vacuum at the end of World War II. Undoubtedly, Rowecki's view was conditioned by his own experience in November 1918, when he witnessed how rapidly 'demoralisation' set in to a German Army battalion that he and a few other Polish soldiers managed to disarm.<sup>37</sup>

The Rowecki directive of September 1940 represented only a preliminary effort to establish organisational infrastructure for a national insurrection. At the turn of 1941, the high command of the ZWZ turned its attention to preparing a first draft of a plan for a national insurrection. Entitled 'Plan for a General Insurrection – Operational Report No. 54', the four sections of the plan considered scenarios in the closing phase of the war, an uprising against the Germans, a defence against the Soviets and possible future revisions of Poland's western frontier.<sup>38</sup>

The Polish Government-in-Exile had by then moved to London after the collapse of France in June 1940. The reality of the French capitulation drove home to the exiled Polish political leadership that the war would be of protracted duration. More changes were also on the horizon as, a year after the exiled government's arrival in London, Germany invaded the Soviet Union. The German invasion opened the way for a Polish-Soviet rapprochement that developed in 1941.<sup>39</sup> The consequences of these momentous political changes meant that Rowecki's draft plan required further revision.

In February 1942, the ZWZ was renamed the *Armia Krajowa*, signifying the growth and consolidation of organised Polish resistance as the ZWZ had reached 100,000 members, who were assigned to organised units.<sup>40</sup> With this growth in strength, the military leadership of the AK was able to further develop its thinking on a national insurrection. By September 1942 a second and more definitive plan had emerged for a national uprising. Operational Report No. 154, as it was initially known, addressed one of the critical issues to be faced – namely the criteria for launching a national insurrection. Rowecki saw two necessary preconditions: firstly, the collapse of the German administration, party apparatus and population in occupied Poland, and secondly, the voluntary or forced withdrawal of the German armed forces. With these conditions met, the aims of the national uprising would be to capture arms and war material from the occupying German forces, either voluntarily or by compulsion. Other objectives included opposing Ukrainian armed action, beginning to build regular armed forces, re-establishing Polish state administrative structures, maintaining public order and establishing sovereign control over all Polish territory (pre-1939).<sup>41</sup> In the plan, Rowecki argued that a catastrophic German defeat at the front, or the internal collapse of Germany, were likely to lead to the conditions favourable to the launch of a national insurrection.<sup>42</sup> The plan envisaged the national uprising concentrating its efforts initially on ethnographic Poland, with its base being in the General Government (*Generalgouvernement*). It would then expand both westwards into Polish

territory incorporated into Germany and eastwards into territory seized by the Soviet Union. Operational Report No. 154 contained an appreciation of enemy strength that included analysis of German, Italian, Hungarian, Slovak and national minority forces in occupied Poland. Not surprisingly, the Germans were considered the main threat.<sup>43</sup>

Operational Report No. 154, Rowecki's plan for a national insurrection, considered the resources available to sustain a general uprising from both an external and internal viewpoint. Rowecki viewed the help of the western powers as being indirect and the product of Allied operations focused against Germany. Thus Allied military efforts would weaken Germany, thereby creating conditions favourable to an uprising.<sup>44</sup> This is not to say that Rowecki did not expect some level of direct assistance. In an October 1940 memorandum on 'Plans for a Future Insurrection', Sikorski envisaged the transport by air to Poland of the largest possible army contingent to aid a national insurrection, and the use of the Polish air force to fly missions in support of the uprising.<sup>45</sup> Undoubtedly Sikorski was then giving assurance to Rowecki and the ZWZ leadership that, in the event of an uprising, the Polish Government-in-Exile and the armed forces abroad would do all in their power to offer assistance to their compatriots. Given the exiled government's dependence on their British and American allies, not to mention the practical difficulties given Poland's distance from Allied-controlled territory, it was questionable how much it could deliver in the way of external support for a national insurrection. Rowecki recognised that the Soviet Union was going to be the most likely source of military aid. When he produced Operational Report No. 154, the Polish Government-in-Exile had reached a political rapprochement with the Soviet Union. However, by autumn 1942 Polish-Soviet political relations were showing strains.<sup>46</sup> While recognising that the Soviet Union was in the best position to offer help to a national uprising, Rowecki indicated in his plan that Soviet help was problematic. The Soviet Union, Operational Report No. 154 observed, was a formal ally but one that still posed a threat to Poland.<sup>47</sup>

The internal resources for a national insurrection outlined in Operational Report No. 154 had more immediate significance to the success or failure of a Polish uprising. The plan acknowledged that there existed real challenges posed by the shortage of arms available for the Home Army. For example, many of the arms buried in 1939, particularly automatic weapons, were in a poor state of repair or had deteriorated beyond use. Clandestine production of hand-grenades and explosive material was reasonably satisfactory. Indeed, between May 1940 and July 1944

115,000 hand grenades were produced.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, Rowecki's planning anticipated that a sizeable number of ill-armed units would be in place at the onset of a national insurrection. In the base area of an uprising in the General Government, the probable number of platoons was about 2000; in western Poland, in the areas incorporated into Germany, about 350; and in eastern Poland, in the Wilno and Lwów regions, about 120.<sup>49</sup> Whatever the limitations in combat power faced by these small units, they were crucial to any future national uprising. By adopting a long-term strategy of building strength, the utility of these units and effectiveness of their manpower could improve over time. In the short to medium term, these units provided a network of small units often in rural areas or complex terrain such as the forests, mountains or urban centres of Poland. The development of the AK's small units provided an organisational foundation for the development of partisan operations.

During the formative period of the military wing of the Polish underground state between September 1939 and spring 1943, a conception of armed resistance to the occupation emerged that made preparations for a national insurrection in the closing stages of the war the focus of ZWZ-AK efforts. It was a strategy that accepted that the war was likely to be of long duration and that the ZWZ-AK could not confront the occupation with armed action in a way that unleashed the military power of German occupation forces with devastating consequences on the civilian population. The focus on the long-term strategy of preparation for a national uprising had important consequences in terms of shaping the ZWZ-AK's approach to partisan warfare. First, it meant that partisan warfare would be under strong central command and control so as to not invite reprisals through armed actions yielding little gain and provoking bloody reprisals. Second, the creation of a network of small units in support of a future national uprising created a necessary infrastructure for partisan warfare that the ZWZ-AK could employ in aid of the wider war effort until German weakness would trigger a national uprising.

### **ZWZ-AK: Organisational structures and the development of partisan operations**

It is not the intention in this section to examine in detail the vast and complex canvas of ZWZ-AK partisan operations in the course of the war, but to look at the evolving organisational structures and the operational approach employed in order to indicate how they reflected the strategic

thinking set out in the previous section. In keeping with the desire to conduct partisan operations under strong central control, the earliest organisational expression of ZWZ-AK partisan operations was the formation of the Union for Retaliation (*Związek Odwetu* – ZO) in April 1940, under the close direction of the High Command (*Komenda Główna*) of the ZWZ. Although regional districts had their own ZO structures, direction on target selection and materials needed to conduct operations were supplied centrally.<sup>50</sup> The overall policy of the ZWZ-AK High Command was to employ ZO to attack industry contributing to the German war effort, rail transport, and petroleum products, and to take action against Gestapo agents or military units engaged in repression of the Polish population.<sup>51</sup> Claire Hall's chapter in this collection deals with the Gestapo's efforts to run and recruit Polish informers in Tomaszów Mazowiecki. The ZWZ-AK also had an effective counter-intelligence effort that saw in 1943 alone the elimination of 1246 individuals working for the Gestapo.<sup>52</sup> The ZO achieved growing success in terms of sabotage and diversionary actions in the course of 1940–2 before it was subsumed into its successor organisation.<sup>53</sup> In the second half of 1941, the ZO destroyed or damaged over 3000 railway wagons.<sup>54</sup> Following Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, a second, separate organisation was also set up to conduct diversionary operations to disrupt German lines of communications, particularly railways, on Soviet territory east of Poland's 1939 frontier. Called *Wachlarz* or the Fan operations, this unit was again centrally controlled, consisted of about 300 men in total, and operated between the 1939 Polish–Soviet frontier and the line of the Dvina and Dnepr rivers. Given the absence of a Polish population from which to draw support, and the hostility of other Soviet or nationalist partisan groups, the Fan operations achieved only limited success.<sup>55</sup> As German armies retreated westward, the Fan personnel formed the nucleus of ZWZ-AK partisan units established in eastern Poland.<sup>56</sup>

The most fundamental change to the organisational structures occurred in a process beginning in 1942 and concluding in 1943. Both the ZO and *Wachlarz* organisations were subsumed into a new structure that was better integrated and offered improved command and control arrangements to the AK High Command (KG). With the new name of Diversionary Command (*Kierownictwo Dywersji* – *Kedyw*), all 'combat diversionary' operations now became the responsibility of this organisation which in fact was a subordinate command of an overarching organisation called the Directorate of Underground Struggle (*Kierownictwo Walki Konspiracyjnej* – *KWK*).<sup>57</sup> The KWK additionally included in its structure units that produced propaganda and conducted psychological warfare.



Nevertheless, despite the more integrated approach to active resistance, it was *Kedyw* that engaged in armed action against the occupation forces in Poland. The mission of *Kedyw* was unchanged in most respects from its predecessors. Conducting sabotage, diversionary activity and special operations that targeted traitors or key German officials responsible for terrorising the Polish population all continued to be *Kedyw*'s responsibility. In line with the requirement to prepare for a future national insurrection, *Kedyw* now assumed the responsibility for establishing, training and controlling AK partisan units.<sup>58</sup> What is more, the assumption by *Kedyw* of responsibility for partisan warfare did mark a turning point in terms of the rapid formation of dedicated AK partisan units in rural areas. In mid-1943, over 40 *Armia Krajowa* partisan units with fighting strength varying between 30 to 100 men operated in Poland. Although specific numbers are not available, by the summer of 1944 *Armia Krajowa* units dominated large tracts of the forested countryside.<sup>59</sup> In particular, the growth in the number of these bands took place in the context of the complex terrain and isolation afforded by Poland's tracts of forests and southern mountains. The forest complexes and mountainous terrain of south-east Poland provided concealment for partisan units and reduced the mobility and firepower advantages of the occupation forces.<sup>60</sup> The organisational model adopted ensured that AK partisan warfare would remain centrally controlled. Partisan formations conducting armed action would act under military discipline and would develop and preserve partisan units as a force in being available for a future national uprising.<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusion

Dominating the development of ZWZ-AK strategic thinking between 1939 and 1943 was the idea of preparing for a future national insurrection in the closing stages of the war. Indeed, armed action in terms of a national uprising was seen as most effective in the context of a German collapse or defeat. This strategic vision was also linked to the idea that armed resistance should have practical military utility either in terms of ameliorating the situation in occupied Poland or aiding the wider Allied war effort. Ill-conceived armed actions, in the view of the ZWZ-AK leadership, simply led to German atrocities whose consequences fell heavily on the civilian population. Such a policy was shaped by an occupation where 'the ultimate aim of German policy in all Polish territory, whether the annexed areas or the General Government, was the same – enslavement and extermination'.<sup>62</sup> This conceptual development of the ZWZ-AK had a decisive impact on Polish partisan warfare.

Partisan warfare in the strategic thinking of the ZWZ-AK fell under the rubric of 'combat-diversion action'. Rather than indiscriminately lashing out at the occupiers, 'combat-diversion action' focused effort on higher-value targets related to the wider Allied war effort, such as disruption of railways or targeting of oil supplies, or protecting the Polish population through counter-reprisals. ZWZ-AK partisan formations operated, whether in the context of the ZO or its successor *Kedyw*, according to a strict policy that focused on such things as sabotage, diversionary action or defence of the Polish population. Another key feature of ZWZ-AK partisan operations was the strong efforts by the ZWZ-AK High Command to exercise command and control of operations, and to preclude freelance armed actions such as those of Major Dobrzański in 1939–40. Thus, partisan warfare for the ZWZ-AK was to be conducted as a well-conceived military operation, rather than an amateur and ill-guided popular attempt to strike out at the occupier. In the first three-and-a-half years of the occupation of Poland, the foundation was laid for the dramatic increase in Polish partisan warfare in the last year-and-a-half of the war. The tragic failure of the Warsaw Uprising between August and October 1944 has tended to obscure the fact that the ZWZ-AK's view on partisan warfare could be scarcely described as romantic or reckless. Polish partisan warfare reflected more than anything else a pragmatic military approach towards what could be achieved under the conditions of one of Europe's most brutal occupations.

## Notes

1. Henceforth either *Armia Krajowa* or ZWZ-AK will be employed.
2. (1970–1989) *Armia Krajowa w Dokumentach 1939–1945*, 6 vols (London: Studium Polski Podziemnej).
3. (1950) *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w drugiej wojnie światowej Tom III Armia Krajowa*, (London: Instytut Historyczny im. Gen. Sikorskiego), pp. 439–40 (hereafter referred to as PSZIII).
4. For example see J. Ciechanowski (1974) *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); A. Prażmowska (2004) *Civil War in Poland, 1942–1948* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).
5. M. Ney-Krwawicz (2001) 'Koncepcje walki i powstania', in K. Komorowski (ed.) *Armia Krajowa: Szkice z dziejów Sił Zbrojnych Polskiego Państwa Podziemnego* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza), p. 233. Some of the principal works on the Warsaw Uprising include: J. Ciechanowski (1974) *The Warsaw Rising of 1944* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); N. Davies (2003) *Rising '44* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan); J. Kirchmayer (1960) *Powstanie Warszawskie* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza), and J. Zawodny (1978) *Nothing but Honour* (London: Macmillan).
6. W. Borodziej (2001) *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), p. 43.

7. See R. Blobaum (1995) *Rewolucja: Russian Poland, 1904–1907* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press) and T. Nałęcz (1984) *Polska Organizacja Wojskowa 1914–1918* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich).
8. W. Laquer (1977) *Guerrilla: A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson), p. 132.
9. J. Stanisławski (1982) *Wielki Słownik Polsko-Angielski P – Ź* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Wiedza Powszechna), p. 18; W. Doroszewski (ed.) (1964) *Słownik Języka Polskiego Tom Szósty* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe), pp. 151–2.
10. Stanisławski, *Wielki Słownik Polsko-Angielski P – Ź*, p. 18.
11. (No date) *Angielsko-Polski i Polsko-Angielski Słownik Wojskowy* (London: Centralna Komisja Regulaminowa), p. 94.
12. See Z. Koszyła (1987) *Oddział Wydzielony Wojska Polskiego Majora 'Hubala'* (Warszawa: Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej); M. Wankowicz (1967) *Hubalczyki* (Warszawa: Pax); T. Wyrwa (1974) *W cieniu legendy majora Hubala* (London: Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy).
13. Report Rowecki to Sosnkowski, 15.4.40 (1970) in *Armia Krajowa w Dokumentach 1939–1945 Tom I Wrzesień 1939 – Czerwiec 1941* (London: Figaro Press), p. 211 (hereafter referred to as AKDI).
14. S. Korbonski (1978) *The Polish Underground State* (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 22–33, 58–9.
15. A. Kunert and T. Szarota (2003) *Generał Stefan Rowecki 'Grot' w relacjach i w pamięci zbiorowej* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM), pp. 11–21.
16. See (2003) *Bibliografia Zawartości Bellony 1918–1939* (Warszawa: Centralna Biblioteka Wojskowa).
17. Kunert and Szarota, *Generał Stefan Rowecki*, p. 14.
18. S. Rowecki (1928) *Walki uliczne* (Warszawa: Wojskowy Instytut Naukowy-Wydawniczy).
19. Ibid.
20. Directive Council of Ministers, 15.11.39 in AKDI, p. 6.
21. T. Piotrowski (1998) *Poland's Holocaust* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Company, Inc.), p. 23.
22. R. F. Leslie, A. Polonsky, Z. A. Pelczynski and Jan M. Ciechanowski (1980) *The History of Poland since 1863* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 222.
23. Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust*, p. 23.
24. Session of Department Chiefs, 8.3.40 in S. Piotrowski (1961) *Hans Frank's Diary* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe), p. 216.
25. Sosnkowski to Rowecki, Instruction no. 1, 4.12.39 in AKDI, p. 11.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., p. 18.
28. Ibid., p. 11.
29. Sosnkowski to Rowecki, Instruction no. 2, 16.1.40 in AKDI, p. 11.
30. Ibid., pp. 75–6.
31. *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w drugiej wojnie światowej Tom III Armia Krajowa*, p. 438.
32. Rowecki, Organisational Directive no. 1, 7.2.40 in AKDI, p. 145.
33. T. Bor-Komorowski (1951) *Secret Army* (London: Victor Gollancz), p. 30.
34. Rowecki, Organisational Directive no. 3, 6.9.40 in AKDI, pp. 290–2.
35. Ibid., p. 289.

36. See J. Pajewski (2005) *Odbudowa Państwa Polskiego 1914–1918* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie).
37. Kunert and Szarota, *Generał Stefan Rowecki*, p. 61.
38. Plan for a General Insurrection – Operational Report No. 54, 1941 in AKDI, p. 437.
39. Leslie, Polonsky, Pelczynski and Ciechanowski, *History of Poland*, p. 225.
40. Bor-Komorowski, *Secret Army*, p. 69.
41. (1973) Operational Report No. 154, 8.9.42, *Armia Krajowa w Dokumentach 1939–1945 Tom II Czerwiec 1941 – Kwiecień 1943* (London: Gryf Printers), pp. 328–9 (hereafter referred to as AKDII).
42. Ibid., p. 329.
43. Ibid., pp. 330–1. Some of these ideas on the geographical base of the uprising were earlier discussed by Rowecki in his Report no. 32, 22.6.42 in AKDII, pp. 273–8.
44. Operational Report No. 154, 8.9.42 in AKDII, p. 332.
45. Sikorski, Plans for a Future Insurrection, 10.10.40 in AKDI, pp. 301–3.
46. E. J. Rozek (1958) *Allied Wartime Diplomacy: A Pattern in Poland* (New York: John Wiley & Sons), pp. 95–115.
47. Operational Report No. 154, 8.9.42 in AKDII, p. 332.
48. J. Kirchmayer (1973) *Powstania Warszawskie* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza), p. 140.
49. Ibid., p. 333.
50. PSZIII, pp. 439–40.
51. Rowecki, Report no. 61a, 27.3.41 in AKDI, p. 480.
52. *Polskie Siły Zbrojne*, p. 473.
53. PSZIII, p. 441.
54. *Polskie Siły Zbrojne*, p. 447.
55. Ibid., pp. 492–3.
56. Korbonski, *Polish Underground*, pp. 88–9.
57. Rowecki, Organisational report no. 190, 1.3.43 in AKDII, pp. 430–1.
58. PSZIII, p. 462.
59. Korbonski, *Polish Underground*, p. 92.
60. M. Jasiak (1995) 'Działanie partyzanckie na terenach górskich Polski południowo-wschodniej 1942–1945 Cz. I' in *Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny*, XL, 57–8.
61. PSZIII, pp. 521–2.
62. R. Lukas (1986) *Forgotten Holocaust* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky), p. 8.

# 6

## 'A Game of Cat-and-Mouse': The Gestapo Spy Network in Tomaschow Mazowiecki, Poland 1939–45

*Claire M. Hubbard-Hall*

On 6 September 1939, Nazi troops moved into the town of Tomaszów Mazowiecki,<sup>1</sup> located within the area of Radom, Poland. The Nazi occupation of the town and surrounding area began with a wave of unprecedented terror. Implemented by the Gestapo (the Nazi secret police), many Poles, Jews and members of the intelligentsia were either imprisoned, sent to concentration camps, deployed as forced labourers or were simply shot. During the next two years, Nazi racial policy was put into full force with the creation of a ghetto for the Jews of Tomaszów and its neighbouring villages. The last few months of 1942 saw the ghetto 'cleared', with surviving Jews being transported to the Nazi death camp of Treblinka. Initially, the Nazis faced fierce resistance from the Polish population, but within a year the ruthless counter-tactics of the Nazis had paid off. However, Polish resistance had not been completely eradicated and soon 'secret societies were springing up all over the place, like mushrooms after the rain'.<sup>2</sup> The Nazis' genocidal policy had ensured that opposition grew on an unprecedented scale. The Gestapo responded by adopting a 'hands-on-approach' to policing in Nazi-occupied Poland by proactively recruiting Polish citizens as paid informers, known as *Vertrauensleute* (people of confidence). Through its network of paid spies, the Gestapo was able to eliminate partisan groups, but those groups soon mimicked the methods of the Nazi occupiers. As each side unleashed terror on the other, a game of cat-and-mouse soon came into play that would continue to the bitter end in 1945.

Declassified German police files<sup>3</sup> for the area of Tomaszów (Radom) testify to the fact that issues of collaboration and infiltration played a significant role in the calculations of the Gestapo and the Security Police as a whole throughout the occupation of Poland. The files of the Gestapo

in Poland are of a fragmentary nature due to their destruction by the Nazis at the end of World War II. Gestapo case files, informer personnel files and daily police reports indicate how the Gestapo spy network was structured and the nature of the informers' work is revealed through their own reports, which would have been compiled by their handler. Small pockets have survived for major Polish cities and for those parts of Poland incorporated into the Third Reich such as Ciechanów.<sup>4</sup> The General Government of Poland only assumed its final dimensions after the invasion of the Soviet Union and was divided into the following five districts: Cracow, Warsaw, Lublin, Radom and Galicia.<sup>5</sup> The rest of Poland was annexed to the Third Reich. To reinforce the information gathered from surviving police files, evidence contained within this study has also been taken from partisan memoirs and reports contained within contemporary publications such as underground press and *The Times*, a British daily newspaper, in an attempt to shed light upon the activities of Gestapo informers in occupied Poland. Although contemporary works such as these cannot be seen as a true representation of the past on their own, the overall sum of the source material portrays a more complete picture which counteracts any inherent bias and weaknesses.

The main premise of this study is that Nazi terror in the General Government of Poland was not simply a blunt instrument of revenge.<sup>6</sup> It was part of a system of intelligence and political calculation designed to maintain Nazi control until such time as a more thorough ethnic cleansing of Poland could be effected. Through an exploration of past works on the Gestapo in Poland, the structure and 'modus operandi' of the Gestapo spy network in Poland, as well as the social characteristics and motivations of its informers (*V-Leute*), this study will examine the actions of Gestapo *V-Leute* in response to partisan activity within Tomaszów and the area of Radom. The study will consider whether there were any winners or losers in the 'game of cat-and-mouse' that developed between the Nazi occupiers and local partisan groups.

## Past studies

The findings of this study support the conclusions of Polish historian Włodzimierz Borodziej.<sup>7</sup> In his ground-breaking work on the German police in the General Government of Poland during the period 1939–44, he focuses on the interaction between the Gestapo and Polish resistance in the district of Radom, drawing upon surviving files of the Radom Security Police. He argues that the Gestapo juggled a multitude of different occupation polices in its battle to establish a new Nazi order

in Poland. Borodziej reveals that its operations were hindered due to a lack of staff, but the key to its success was the intelligence gathered by its paid informers. By placing the focus on the political infrastructure, Borodziej effectively demonstrates how the interaction between the Gestapo and Polish partisans shaped the Nazi occupation policy for Poland.

When Borodziej's Ph.D. thesis was first published in Polish in 1984, it was 'ahead of its time', as the files would not become declassified in America until the 1990s.<sup>8</sup> This was in part due to its thorough analysis of Gestapo-paid informers. My own analysis of recently released German police files for Tomaschow addresses this missing dimension in Borodziej's study. Unlike Borodziej, who argues that the Security Police had no plan for fulfilling its multiple missions, my analysis of the Tomaschow police files reveals that the Gestapo did develop some kind of plan to deal with local partisans. With the aid of other German police organisations such as the Uniformed Police (*Ordnungspolizei* – Orpo), the Gestapo's plan was to perfect its spy network in the hope of eliminating all opposition. In Nazi-occupied Poland, the Gestapo was able to adapt to the hostile conditions, by making subtle changes to its organisational structure, a structure that Borodziej claims worked well in Germany but was ill-suited to the General Government of Poland.

The activities of the Gestapo in Poland were certainly of a proactive nature. Currently historians working on Germany see the Gestapo as a mainly reactive organisation reliant upon denunciations from the German people. Recent works by Robert Gellately, Eric Johnson, Gerhard Paul and Klaus-Michael Mallmann<sup>9</sup> take a revisionist approach away from the 1950s totalitarian argument, arguing against the notion of a police state in favour of a 'self-policing' society. However, a recent study detailing the reach of the Gestapo spy network and its activities within Germany and Europe shows that the Gestapo was proactive as well as reactive, challenging the notion of a society policing itself.<sup>10</sup> This study hopes to move the debate concerning consent and coercion within the Third Reich away from Nazi Germany to include those countries occupied by the Nazis, in an attempt to gain a clearer understanding of the internal workings of the Gestapo in both a domestic and foreign context.

Past and present research on the German police in Poland has rightly focused on the role the German police played within Nazi campaigns of racist genocide. The eminent Holocaust historian, Christopher Browning gives an astute analysis of how a group of ordinary men significantly contributed to the genocide of hundreds of thousands of Jews in his

definitive study *Ordinary Men: Reserve Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*.<sup>11</sup> Edward Westermann's study of the Uniformed Police in the East<sup>12</sup> focuses on the relationship between the police and the army with a particular emphasis on the mindset of police officers, taking a similar approach to Browning. However, with the recent release of new archival sources, current studies have gone beyond looking at motivations and have now started to focus on the activities of the Nazi occupiers by looking more closely at how the Nazis enforced their policy in the East.<sup>13</sup>

By looking at Gestapo-paid informers in the General Government of Poland, it is the aim of this study to gain a clearer understanding of how the Nazi terror functioned in Poland. By examining the nature of Nazi occupation policy at a micro level, it is possible to see how the Nazis undertook a campaign of collective terrorisation and assess the part played by intelligence in its successes and failures against oppositional groups. Historians have always drawn attention to the work of paid informers in relation to the activities of the German police in Poland, but due to the fragmentary nature of surviving sources, they have never been able to delve any deeper. Historians such as Anita J. Prazmowska and Marek Jan Chodakiewicz,<sup>14</sup> like many other historians, make the reader aware of Gestapo *V-Leute* and the role they played in the policing of Nazi-occupied Poland, but due to a lack of available evidence at that time the historians have had to resort to speculation. For instance, Chodakiewicz highlights that the efficiency of Nazi terror was 'facilitated by the existence of Polish collaborators and informers'. He further adds that 'informing was a serious problem during the occupation. The Nazis encouraged and rewarded it, and there seem to have always been enough eager collaborators. Because the pertinent Nazi archives were destroyed, however, we can only speculate about the size of this cohort'.<sup>15</sup> Even though there is a vast amount of literature on the Nazi occupation of Poland, there are relatively few publications which have addressed the issue of German police intelligence networks. This chapter aims to fill this gap in the historiography.

## The structure of the Gestapo spy network in Poland

The security police apparatus of the Third Reich was very complex. Nazi organisations which usually would have operated independently within Germany were brought together during the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe. The Gestapo entered Poland as part of the Security Police and SD<sup>16</sup> (*Sicherheitspolizei* – Sipo and *Sicherheitsdienst* – SD), which also consisted of



the Criminal Police (*Kriminalpolizei* – Kripo). Interestingly, the Uniformed Police (Orpo) remained independent under the leadership of Kurt Daluege, but they all came under the watchful eye of Heinrich Himmler, the chief of the German police. Within the General Government of Poland, the Security Police and SD had headquarters located in each of the districts. Each central base (comprising Gestapo, Kripo and SD officers) would then have had a number of supporting outposts strategically located in small towns in the surrounding area. These subordinate outposts were supported by even smaller rural posts which would have been operated by only a handful of officers. The headquarters in Radom was supported by ten outposts: Tschenstochau, Radomsko, Petrikau, Tomaschow, Kielce, Konskie, Jedrzejow, Busko, Starachowice and Ostrowiec. Each of these outposts had a chain of smaller more rural local police (Gendarmerie) posts under their command, which were often run by Polish personnel. Radom can be found in Map 6.1, showing Poland in 1941.

As the collation and dissemination of intelligence became a vital and necessary component in the Nazi battle against Polish partisans, the work of the intelligence department of the Gestapo, known as IV N or *Referat Nachrichtendienst* (Gestapo counter-intelligence department) became shrouded in secrecy. Each outpost and rural post would have had a counter-intelligence department coordinated through the chain of command in that particular district of Poland. This practice was very similar to that used by the Gestapo within Germany, except for one subtle difference. In an attempt to simplify the *V-Leute* system in Poland, the Nazis decreed that the Uniformed Police (Orpo) and the Gendarmerie (local police) were to recruit informers in a similar fashion to that of the Gestapo, following the same procedures, but they were to pass all informer reports on to Gestapo Referat N, in effect making them part of the Gestapo spy network.<sup>17</sup>

Informers belonging to the Uniformed Police<sup>18</sup> and Gendarmerie<sup>19</sup> were all classified '*Z-Leute*' (*Zuträger* – informer and also interpreted by some posts as *Zuverlässigermann* – reliable/trustworthy man).<sup>20</sup> This category of informer was specific to Poland. It perhaps made it easier for the Gestapo to distinguish between its own informers and those of another police organisation. It appears that the Gestapo viewed their value on a similar footing to those informers it personally recruited. But this system of cooperation did not run smoothly. A Tomaschow report dated 3 April 1944 details how the Gendarmerie were struggling with the *V-Leute* system as only a few, incomplete informer reports had been received by Gestapo Tomaschow. It also seems that the local



Map 6.1 Poland, 1941.  
Source: author's own map

police experienced some confusion when describing an informer's rank. A local police informer categorised as a 'Z-Person' was within the space of several months referred to as an 'A-Person' (information person).<sup>21</sup> It could be possible that there was no confusion as he could have been 'headhunted' or 'poached' from the Gendarmerie by the Gestapo, hence a change in his informer rank. Similar practices happened in Germany<sup>22</sup> making such suppositions possible, as the Gestapo would surely have carried out old practices elsewhere. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to support such conclusions.

Those informers who were recruited specifically by the Gestapo were categorised as either a V- (*Vertrauens* – confidential), A- (*Auskunfts* – information), or W- (*Werks/Wahrmann* – Works/Truth) Person.<sup>23</sup> If an

*Table 6.1* Categories of Gestapo informer used by specific German police outposts in Poland 1939–45

Category of Gestapo informer	Gestapo outposts	Local police outposts
<i>V-Mann</i>	✓	×
<i>A-/W-Person/Mann</i>	✓	×
<i>Z-Person/Mann</i>	×	✓

informer was categorised as a 'V-Person' or 'V-Mann', then this denoted a particular importance over the other categories of informers. The Gestapo's attempt to put in place some kind of system of informer classification failed to some extent, as like the Uniformed Police, it too experienced a certain level of confusion. For example, 'Jan Stannek' had worked as an informer for Gestapo Radom since December 1942. As an elite informer he was classed as a 'V-Person', but throughout 1943 he was described by Gestapo Tomaschow as being an 'A-Person' as well as a 'W-Person'.<sup>24</sup> The various categories of Gestapo informer are outlined in Table 6.1.

It is possible that Gestapo Tomaschow was simply confused or it points towards the fact that during 1943–44 certain informers were either promoted or demoted, for reasons unknown. Historians are at this point unable to distinguish any kind of hierarchical system relating to informer categories, apart from discerning the top level of paid informer – 'V-Person/V-Mann'.

## Recruitment of Gestapo *V-Leute*

The Gestapo actively recruited informers within Poland through various sources, but it appears to have been a policy of the Gestapo to use people on whom direct pressure could be exerted. Favourite candidates for the jobs were arrested persons in the custody of the Gestapo. The case files of Gestapo Tomaschow reveal that it recruited a small number of informers through arrests, other informers, Gestapo questioning or through an acquaintance with a police officer. In some cases they simply volunteered by making themselves personally available. Those who were recruited were in most cases arrested members of partisan groups or local people who had links with such groups. The resolve of possible new recruits soon crumbled when they were subjected to the brutal interrogation methods of the Gestapo. Interrogation methods ranged from beatings (including on the buttocks with a stick), sleep deprivation, a simple diet of bread and water, a pitch-black cell and exhausting

exercises.<sup>25</sup> Those who chose to defy the Gestapo by not collaborating ultimately signed their own death warrant.

### **Social characteristics and motivations of Gestapo V-Leute**

The Gestapo was selective about whom it chose to act as informers. It seems that the Gestapo did not trust certain categories of people to act as reliable informers. The Nazis passed a decree in Germany dated 13 November 1943 which forbade the employment of Jews or half-Jews as Gestapo informers. The decree stated that 'the Gestapo must be extremely cautious of those Jews/ half-Jews employed as informers in the occupied countries as their reliability is strongly doubted'.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, Gestapo Tomaschow did not employ any Jews or half-Jews as informers. In fact, the majority of informers recruited by Gestapo Tomaschow were Catholic men born during the period 1906–1919. Very few women were recruited to act as informers. This may well have been due to the Nazis' misogynistic view of the narrow and subordinate role women should play in society, a role restricted to the spheres of *Kinder, Kirche, Küche* (children, church, kitchen).<sup>27</sup>

Contrary to assertions made by Jewish historian Emmanuel Ringelblum,<sup>28</sup> the majority of Tomaschow informers were Polish (albeit ones who exhibited strong Aryan characteristics), rather than ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*). In fact, ethnic Germans would have found it very difficult to gain the trust of the local Polish population. A Radom Security Police and SD report, dated early 1943, provides evidence on the difficulty of informers, who were ethnic Germans, in infiltrating enemy circles. Informer 'Jan Ryba' had been issued a notice of departure by the Gestapo, as since his employment in February 1942 he had only managed to submit two short reports. The reason for this was that, as an ethnic German, he had been unable to gain the trust of local partisan groups, which naturally consisted of Poles. He was at a later date re-employed by the Gestapo, as he had finally managed to infiltrate the 'enemy'.<sup>29</sup>

The subject of Polish collaboration during World War II is one which is much debated.<sup>30</sup> There is a general consensus that Poles collaborated very little with the Nazis, as Poles did not form SS Divisions or Polish Militias and more importantly there was no Polish 'Quisling' or 'Pétain'. Unfortunately, the files remain silent about the motivations of Gestapo informers in Poland and why they chose to collaborate with the Nazis. Possible motives could have ranged from revenge, greed, and a strange sense of obligation to the Nazi occupiers to a duty to protect their family. Viewed by the Nazis as an inferior race, the Poles were accorded a

particularly lowly status within the hierarchy of occupied peoples in Nazi-occupied Europe. Of course, in most cases, these 'inferior' informers were assisted in their acts of collaboration by the firm hand of the Gestapo, through torture, blackmail and the common threat of death. Hence, there are good grounds to suggest that the question of collaboration by Polish spies and informers is a special case which demands further investigation by scholars.<sup>31</sup>

Those Poles who did collaborate by acting as informers were strategically recruited from all sectors of society. Many occupied jobs which would have placed them well within the social network of the area and in positions of trust. They therefore had a good chance of knowing everything that was happening in their village or town. Informers worked in a wide range of different jobs: there were mechanics, office workers, a barber, a miller, a pub landlord, a vet, a gardener, a baker and an x-ray assistant. As well as holding down an 'ordinary' job, informers also continued as members of partisan groups, acting as double agents.

### **'Modus Operandi'**

Once their reliability had been tested and they were active in the collation of intelligence, informers were 'officially announced'.<sup>32</sup> As soon as they were recruited by the Gestapo, personal files were compiled. To ensure that their identity remained secret, the Gestapo only used code names and numbers of informers within police files, which were always deemed 'Top Secret'. *SS-Scharführer* (Staff Sergeant) Wiese of Gestapo Tomaschow was responsible for the majority of Tomaschow's informers. As their handler he was one of only a few who would have known their true identity. He would also have met an informer, in a designated 'safe' place, to collect their reports, either verbally or in writing. In some cases, if the informer did not speak German, translators were present. Only two Gestapo Tomaschow informers spoke German as their first language.<sup>33</sup>

Most informers worked alone, but there are examples of family members working together,<sup>34</sup> as well as informers being partnered with another informer under the direction of the Gestapo. Florian Mayevski, who was active as a partisan in the Polish Home Army in Blogie (15 kilometres away from Tomaschow), recalls how the location of his camp had been given away to the Germans. However, they had no idea of who was supplying the Germans with information, until one day when a fellow partisan remembered seeing a well-dressed woman and a man who, he had assumed, were holidaymakers picking mushrooms in the forest. His unit soon found out that they were teachers from Tomaschow who were

staying in the village behind the forest. There were doubts as to who they really were, so an order was given by the Home Army (armed wing of the Polish Underground) for their interrogation. The couple soon confessed to working for the Gestapo. Apparently, Gestapo Tomaschow had wrongly arrested them, on accusations of working for the Polish underground (a common accusation). They had been threatened by the Gestapo, who had given them the option of either being sent to a concentration camp or working for them as informers. They had agreed to the latter option. They had begun informing in the town of Tomaschow, but the Gestapo had ordered them to go on holiday to a village adjoining the forest in Błogie and gather information on partisan groups. Unsurprisingly, the villagers had been suspicious of these newcomers. The teachers revealed that they had been forced together to act as a married couple as the Gestapo believed such a disguise would attract less attention. They were later sentenced by the Home Army and shot by firing squad.<sup>35</sup>

As this example illustrates, being a Gestapo informer in Poland was a dangerous job. For this reason the Security Police and SD drew up guidelines for the safety of its informers. A circular dated 19 May 1942 was sent to all outposts stating that the following guidelines should be adopted regarding the survival of informers. It stated that the successes of the Polish espionage system had revealed that necessary measures of caution had not been practised by the German police. It forbade the use of untrained officers in Referat N as there had been a substantial number of cases where officers, through maladministration, had endangered the lives of their informers. The circular also stated that meetings with informers were to be carried out locally and on a temporary basis, so that danger of discovery was virtually impossible.<sup>36</sup>

## **Informer payments**

Informers in Poland risked their lives and for this they were well recompensed. They were paid far more than any other police informer in Germany or elsewhere in Europe during this period. This is significant as it completely overrides the Nazi ideological view of the Poles as being racially inferior. Just as the Gestapo in Berlin was forced to use Jews as informers to rid the city of those Jews living illegally,<sup>37</sup> the Gestapo in Poland took the only logical option of recruiting Poles as spies so that it could effectively engage with the opposition and then eliminate it. In the eyes of the Gestapo this was the lesser of two evils. Monetary payments, allowances, reimbursement of expenses and certain privileges were all available to police informers in the employ of Gestapo

Tomaschow. V-Mann Piotr Banczyk (alias 'Marian Krul') was very privileged. As an elite informer, he received a substantial regular payment of 150 RM a month during the period June 1942 to August 1943.<sup>38</sup> He also had the use of a bicycle to travel within the area of Tomaschow,<sup>39</sup> a popular means of travel during this period, and in 1944 he was reimbursed 250 RM for his stay (reasons unknown) in 'Hotel Europa' in Tomaschow. The hotel invoice revealed that he had stayed for over a month (42 nights) which cost 241.60 RM plus 15 per cent tax.<sup>40</sup> The Gestapo counteracted such large payments for some informers by only paying newly recruited informers per report submitted, out of a special fund, until they could agree a salary.<sup>41</sup>

In some cases Polish informers were paid to kit themselves out. A report, dated February 1944, from headquarters Radom to SS *Hauptsturmführer* Thiel of Gestapo Tomaschow, concerned the payment of W-Mann Tadeusz Miller alias 'Roman Sculz' (Figure 6.1). It reveals that he was paid 150 RM a month (a substantial amount for the time), as well as two one-off payments of 300 RM and 500 RM, 'to kit himself out' – possibly with much needed firearms and ammunition.<sup>42</sup> As a former Polish officer, Tadeusz Miller had spent seven months in prison for illegally crossing the Polish border. It is probable that during his imprisonment he was coerced into working for the Gestapo. As well as receiving goods as payment, the Gestapo also provided him with money for clothes. Evidence has survived which reveals he was reimbursed by the Gestapo for a purchase of socks and underwear bought at a local clothes shop located on Adolf Hitler Allee in Tomaschow. Interestingly, he was able to travel freely around the district of Radom on intelligence missions as the Gestapo had issued him with a personal pass.<sup>43</sup> This was a privilege awarded to very few. 'Sculz', like most informers, was paid with luxury items such as vodka and cigarettes. In one case, informer 'Antek Domb' (no. 126) received ten bottles of vodka during 1942 along with a steady supply of cigarettes.<sup>44</sup> In some cases the Gestapo purposely fed an informer's addiction to alcohol, in a ruse to get them to continue to inform for them.<sup>45</sup>

The high maintenance of informers probably explains why requirements for luxuries and food for informers frequently rose in numbers. A late report compiled by outpost Tschenstochau, dated 31 January 1945, concerning the counter-intelligence service, revealed some of the procedures taken by the police to cut down on the number of luxuries and food given to informers. The report stated that a plan was to be drawn up following economic criteria so that no future increases would occur. Through simple cost-effective measures informers were to be given lesser luxuries.<sup>46</sup> It is not known whether any other Gestapo



*Figure 6.1* Photograph of Gestapo Informer Tadeusz Miller (b. 7.12.1912) who worked under the alias 'Roman Sculz' in the Tomaszów area.

*Source:* This photograph was attached to his Gestapo informer personnel file. Reproduced with NARA permission.

post in Poland suffered the same problems with increasing demands for luxuries and foodstuffs by informers, but it is highly possible that Gestapo police outposts in Radom did, due to heightened partisan activity in the area.

### **Partisan activity**

The war against the partisans in the East (whom the Nazis insisted on calling 'bandits') was fought with great ferocity and brutality on both sides. Within the General Government of Poland, the district of Radom was the second largest centre of partisan activity. The geographical conditions here were very suitable for partisan activity, as forests covered about 25 per cent of the district.<sup>47</sup> Denunciations were of little use here,<sup>48</sup> as the levels of opposition experienced in Poland left the



Gestapo with no option but to find a solution to the problem as quickly as possible. The Gestapo successfully 'turned' arrested members of opposition groups, or recruited informers who were able to successfully infiltrate groups active within the area. They did so with some success, but a number of informers acted as 'double agents', feeding partisan groups information on Gestapo operations, and even giving details of other informers (who had infiltrated other groups). This had fatal consequences for the exposed informer.<sup>49</sup>

The Gestapo had to deal with a plethora of different partisan groups within the area of Tomaszów, Radom. The Home Army (ZWZ/AK) was the largest. The AK (*Armia Krajowa*) was established in February 1942 from remnants of the ZWZ (*Związek Walki Zbrojnej* – Union for Armed Struggle). It was the armed wing of the Polish Underground in Poland, acting under orders from the Polish Government-in-Exile (based in London during the war). Other partisan groups active in the area were the National Alliance (SN – *Stronnictwo Narodowe*), a pre-war political party based on principles of national democracy, along with the communist Polish Workers Party (PPR) and its partisan army 'the People's Army' (AL – *Armia Ludowa*). There was also a variety of other smaller independent partisan groups such as the '*Huballabande*', named after the famous partisan leader Major Henryk Dobrzański de Hubal (considered by some to have been the first partisan leader in Poland).<sup>50</sup> These groups all differed in their approach towards how to fight the Nazi occupiers. The communists branded the AK as fascists who preferred a strategy of hoarding arms and waiting,<sup>51</sup> whereas the Communists favoured a more direct approach. Partisan activity took various forms ranging from the distribution of illegal newspapers and pamphlets, to illegal meetings, acts of sabotage (lines of communication, railway lines, ammunition, food supplies and so forth), and lastly armed revolts against the Nazis.

Each opposition group pursued its own goals but their sheer numbers made up for their disunity.<sup>52</sup> This enabled them to pursue acts of sabotage, subversion and resistance unrelentingly. Their resolve was indeed iron-clad. However, such groups were sensitive to the fact that such hostile actions would initiate Nazi reprisals. Indeed the Nazi terror campaign reached a high point in autumn 1943 when Hans Frank (Governor of the General Government of Poland) introduced public executions in Warsaw. His decree also carried a proviso that allowed the police to kill anyone on the spot who looked suspicious.<sup>53</sup>

There were four AK partisan groups in Radom, which had been established in response to the large number of Poles deported from the area in 1942. These armed mobile irregular units consisted of platoons and

companies each comprising between 30 and 100 men.<sup>54</sup> It was the sabotage-diversionary units and the partisan groups of the AK which were responsible for most of the operations against the Nazis. They were usually armed to some degree, but because poor finances limited their operations, they rarely engaged with the enemy. Instead they had to concentrate on intelligence, sabotage-diversionary and reprisal operations.<sup>55</sup>

AK soldiers were always on guard against possible infiltration by the Gestapo. Gestapo informer 'Jan Biala', a painter in the employ of Gestapo Tomaschow, reported on the activities of an unnamed partisan group, most likely the AK. In his report dated 16 February 1942, he revealed that he had been sent on a mission to collect a letter in the village of Koluski. He was instructed that upon arrival there he would be asked a coded question to which he must reply with the correct password.<sup>56</sup> His mission was a success, demonstrating the importance of stealth and secrecy if partisan groups were to remain 'underground'. That is if they had not already been infiltrated by the Gestapo.

### 'A Game of Cat-and-Mouse'

Partisan groups operating within the area of Tomaschow had opted for stealth instead of open armed resistance. The Gestapo relied heavily on its network of paid spies to uncover the cloak-and-dagger activities of the partisans, and a game of cat-and-mouse soon developed between the two. As the Gestapo took repeated strikes at partisans, it only strengthened popular support for the partisans, whose defensive reflexes sharpened. While prominent leaders of partisan groups were arrested alongside their members at a later date, many more Poles were waiting in the wings to replace them. To a significant extent the Polish nation sought to frustrate, delay, damage or destroy whatever the Germans needed.<sup>57</sup> Further research into this particular area of Polish occupation history will undoubtedly reveal that this was a trend that was repeated all over Poland. To a certain extent, the success of the Gestapo (and the Security Police) relied heavily on the support of the local police (Gendarmerie).<sup>58</sup> Information collated and disseminated by the local police posts (often run by Polish police officers) ensured that the Gestapo had some success in the countryside.

The example of Stanislaw Witecki, a former local Polish police officer, demonstrates how effective the work of local police informers was to the Gestapo. Witecki was the former *Hauptwachtmeister* (Head Watch Master) of the Polish police post in Drzewica. As a police officer, he had enjoyed considerable success against communist partisan groups in his

locality. It is implied in the reports of Gendarmerie Przysucha that the reason Witecki went on the run from the Polish police in early August 1944 was because 'the party (AK/ZWZ) had demanded he leave the police'.<sup>59</sup> Demonstrating the animosity that existed between the Home Army and Communist partisan groups, Witecki informed the German authorities of known communist partisan members in the area. In his written report dated 10 December 1944<sup>60</sup> (but translated by the Gestapo a day later), Witecki reveals that Anton Lisek, a Communist, had been shot early that evening and that his body had been buried in a forest near Zychorzym. The following day, he communicated through a middle-man that two more Communists had been shot. Their bodies were later discovered by a police patrol. Witecki, acting as judge and executioner, had taken matters into his own hands.

His work during the previous month had resulted in a number of successes for the Gestapo who had, on his intelligence, arrested members of a local Bolshevik partisan group. On 18 November 1944, Witecki sent a letter to the police, again through a middleman (identity unknown). Within this letter he named individuals as being Communist rebels. He planned to turn them over to the police at a wedding to be held the following day in Bieliny. Witecki advised the police to make the arrests with the help of German soldiers stationed in Bieliny, as the rebels would most certainly be armed. He further informed the police that if they failed to carry out the arrest, then he would be forced to undertake the arrest. His letter arrived a day late and so he was forced to carry out the arrest himself.<sup>61</sup> It is not known if Witecki survived the war.

Informers were of particular use in stamping out those groups who were involved in the publication and distribution of clandestine newspapers and pamphlets. The police files of Gestapo Tomaschow are littered with reports from informers naming individuals responsible for such subversive acts. The *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (News Bulletin), a newspaper published by the Home Army, was widely distributed in Radom. On 3 September 1943, informer 'Jan Stannek' revealed the names of a number of its distributors.<sup>62</sup> The surviving informer reports of Gestapo Tomaschow for the period 1942–4 reveal the many successes it had through the work of just one informer. The reports of 'Marian Krul' give the reader some impression as to the number of people arrested for distributing illegal pamphlets. On 18 March 1942 'Krul' reported to the police that a certain individual known as 'Mijas' was distributing illegal leaflets called *Walka* (The Struggle) at illegal meetings. These illegal leaflets, edited by the well-known Catholic writer Jan Dobraczyński, were the central organ of the rightist National Alliance (SN).<sup>63</sup> The following

month, 'Krul' reported the names of further 18 individuals suspected of distributing illegal pamphlets.<sup>64</sup>

The files reveal that 'Krul' regularly reported on suspected publishers and distributors of illegal leaflets. He named the distributors of the following illegal leaflets: an unlawful pamphlet entitled *Odezwa Do Młodzieży* called young people to look to the future, to not assist the Germans, and to not hinder the work of the partisans 'as soon the day of reckoning will come'.<sup>65</sup> The *Trybuna Wolności* was also widely distributed within the area. It was the freedom of speech organ of the Polish Workers Party (PPR).<sup>66</sup> Another illegal pamphlet, *The Spraw Chłopskie*, called on the farmers in the region 'to not sleep the time away'.<sup>67</sup> Krul was clearly effective in his work as he informed the police in late 1942 that the prohibited leaflet *Walka* was not being distributed at that time due to all the arrests in Opoczno. It is highly probable that the arrests were initiated by V-Leute reports.

Informer reports also shed light on the more confrontational side to partisan activities such as illegal firearm training, illegal weapon caches and armed revolts.<sup>68</sup> 'Marian Krul' had been active as an informer since March 1942, gathering intelligence in the area of resistance and communism. He had successfully managed to infiltrate the Home Army, and a significant amount of its members including its leaders had been arrested due to his work for the Gestapo. In his reports to the Gestapo, he detailed how the AK was planning an armed revolt throughout the entire area of Radom in June 1942;<sup>69</sup> its members were apprehended by the Gestapo before the revolt could take place. The following year he informed the Gestapo that the AK was growing fast in numbers,<sup>70</sup> and that consequently the AK was finally gaining the confidence to take collective action against the Nazis. A report compiled by the local police at Przedborz provides details of an attack carried out by 'bandits' on 13 September 1943. That day, at approximately 11:30am, the village of Dombrowska was completely occupied by rebels and nobody was allowed to leave. A day prior to the rebel occupation, an attack had taken place on a German police patrol by rebels. The rebels consisted of approximately 19 men, between 25 and 30 years of age. The police revealed that some spoke Polish, but others had a strange accent. A total of seven police officers were killed in the attack. The police recorded that the rebels had worn white armbands with writing on them, signifying that they belonged to the Home Army.<sup>71</sup>

The Gestapo had some success in arresting members of the Home Army who had helped paratroopers dropped into Radom in early 1943. 'Marian Krul' informed the police that he had been given reliable information that paratroopers of the Polish Government-in-Exile had been

dropped into the area during the night of 16 February 1943. One of the paratroopers had not survived the drop, but the remaining three had made their way to Warsaw. 'Krul' revealed the names of those AK members who had assisted them.<sup>72</sup> The Gestapo later arrested them, as well as uncovering a weapons and ammunition cache.<sup>73</sup>

## Winners or losers?

There are no set figures for the total number of Gestapo arrests within other parts of occupied Poland which specifically relate to the arrests of resistance or partisan members/groups. But surviving fragmentary sources detailing the various Gestapo successes indicate that, as a proactive police organisation, it was able to fulfil its goal of eliminating Polish opposition to a certain extent. In the case of Tomaschow there is substantial evidence that supports the view that the Gestapo enjoyed a great deal of success in combating and eliminating partisan groups in the area. The police files of Gestapo Tomaschow's counter-intelligence department are testament to such successes. Informers revealed the names of hundreds of partisan members who were subsequently tracked down and arrested. Some of those arrested were then recruited as informers, ensuring that the Gestapo had a constant supply of available recruits. The police register of all arrests made by Gestapo Tomaschow reveals that local partisan groups were to some extent outnumbered. The register details the number of arrests made during the period from 1 June 1943 to 20 December 1944. Over two thirds of the total arrests (2200 out of 3500) made were of members of resistance or partisan groups.<sup>74</sup> An undated Gestapo Tomaschow card-file index lists over 300 individuals who were either connected to or were members of local partisan groups. It is clear that 46 of those named worked as informers for the Nazis.<sup>75</sup> Surviving informer personnel files indicate that Gestapo Tomaschow could have employed as many as 520 informers, and its supporting local police posts employed over a thousand informers. It is clear that the Gestapo enjoyed a high arrest rate due to the work of its informers. A register listing 92 arrested members of partisan groups (mainly AK as well as a few SN and PPR members) demonstrates that information supplied by informers to Gestapo Tomaschow led to over a third of the arrests.<sup>76</sup>

The success of the Gestapo was dampened by the perpetual game of cat-and-mouse being played out with local partisan groups. Despite its efforts to eliminate partisan groups, the 'Polish spirit of resistance'<sup>77</sup> meant that there was always another partisan group waiting in the wings to take the place of one that had been destroyed. Just as partisan

groups felt the wrath of the Gestapo, so too did the Gestapo feel the wrath of the partisans. A report dated 8 January 1945 from Gendarme Koluszki to outpost Tomaschow, concerning an informer working under the alias 'Jan Gawara', reported that he had been shot by bandits in a wood.<sup>78</sup> It was a fate that befell many informers in Poland; their crime of collaboration ultimately cost them their lives. A post-war report suggests that, during the period January 1943 to June 1944 the Polish Underground pronounced 2015 death sentences on informers and collaborators.<sup>79</sup> Gestapo officials were also at risk from partisan reprisals. On 1 February 1944, the Chief of the Warsaw Gestapo was killed when members of the Home Army bombed his car and followed it up with a hail of machine gun bullets. Death was instant.<sup>80</sup>

As each side attempted to rid itself of the other, there were no winners or losers. The ability of the Gestapo to recruit new informers quickly was matched by the partisans' talent to kill them off just as rapidly. The Gestapo may have been the all-powerful 'cat' but the high replacement rate of the 'mouse' ensured that the 'cat' was plagued by the continual activity of a great number of 'mice'. As lives were lost on both sides, a stalemate was reached. The Gestapo may have had the upper hand through the work of its informers, but the perseverance and determination of partisan groups, uncoordinated but united in their cause, ultimately ensured that neither side was an outright winner.

## Notes

1. The German spelling of Tomaschow is used throughout as this is how it appeared within German police files. The Polish name is Tomaszów Mazowiecki.
2. A Polish partisan recalls his memories of partisan activity in Poland in M. Mazower (2008) *Hitler's Empire* (London: Allen Lane), p. 471.
3. Copies of these files (microfilm) are held in the National Archives Record Administration (NARA) in Washington DC, US. They were declassified in 1999 under the Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act.
4. For works on the Gestapo in Ciechanow see J. Grabowski (2004) 'The Holocaust in Northern Mazovia (Poland) in the Light of the Archive of the Ciechanów Gestapo', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 18, 460–76; J. Grabowski and Z. R. Grabowski (2004) 'Germans in the Eyes of the Gestapo: The Ciechanów District, 1939–1945', *Journal of Contemporary European History*, 13, 21–43.
5. See M. Burleigh (2000) *The Third Reich: A New History* (London: Macmillan), p. 435.
6. The 'revenge' view can be seen within the following literature produced at the time. See J. Evans (1941) *The Nazi New Order in Poland* (London: Victor Gollancz); G. M. Godden (1941) *Nazi Rule in Poland* (London: Catholic Truth Society).

7. (German edition) W. Borodziej (1999) *Terror und Politik* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern).
8. G. C. Browder (2001) 'Review of *Terror und Politik: Die deutsche Polizei und die polnische Widerstandsbewegung im Generalgouvernement 1939–1944* by Włodzimierz Borodziej', *American Historical Review*, 106, 1901.
9. See R. Gellately (1990) *The Gestapo and German Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); E. Johnson (2000) *Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews and Ordinary Germans* (New York: Basic Books); G. Paul and K. Mallmann (1995) *Die Gestapo* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft).
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12. E. Westermann (2005) *Hitler's Police Battalions* (Kansas: Kansas University Press). Also see his articles (1998) 'Ordinary Men or Ideological Soldiers? Police Battalion 310 in Russia, 1942', *German Studies Review*, 21, 41–68; (2008) 'Partners in Genocide: The German Police and the Wehrmacht in the Soviet Union', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 31, 771–96.
13. See P. Blood (2006) *Hitler's Bandit Hunters* (Washington: Potomac).
14. See A. Ptazmowska (2004) *Civil War in Poland, 1942–1948* (London: Palgrave Macmillan); M. Chodakiewicz (2004) *Between Nazis and Soviets* (Maryland: Lexington Books).
15. Chodakiewicz, *Between Nazis and Soviets*, p. 118.
16. For works on the Security Police and SD in Poland see: A. Ramme (1970) *Der Sicherheitsdienst der SS. Zu einer Funktion im faschistischen Macht-apparat und im Besatzungsregime des sogenannten Generalgouvernements Polen* (Berlin: Deutscher Militärverlag); H. Krausnick and H. Wilhelm (1981) *Die Truppen des Weltanschauungskrieges. Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt).
17. NARA RG-175 EAP 173-b-20-10. Security Police and SD Outpost Tomaschow report, 17.1.44, concerning the 'simplification of the V-Leute system'.
18. Additional to Browning and Westermann see the following works on the Uniformed Police: K. Heller (1971) *The Reshaping and Political Conditioning of the German Ordnungspolizei, 1933–1945* (Michigan: Ann Arbor); J. Matthäus (1996) 'What about the Ordinary Men? The German Order Police and the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Union', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 10, 134–50; K. Kwiet (1993) 'Auftakt zum Holocaust', in W. Benz (ed.) *Der Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer), pp. 191–208; P. Klein (1994) "'Da hätte man schon ein Tagebuch führen müssen": Das Polizeibataillon 322 und die Judenmorde im Bereich der Heeresgruppe Mitte während des Sommers und Herbstes 1941' in H. Grabitz, K. Bästlein and J. Tuchel (eds) *Die Normalität des Verbrechens* (Berlin: Edition Hentrich), pp. 325–85.
19. For a detailed study of the local police in Nazi-occupied Ukraine see M. Dean (1996) 'The German Gendarmerie, the Ukrainian Schutzmannschaft, and the Second Wave of Jewish Killings in Occupied Ukraine: German policing at the Local Level in the Zhitomir Region, 1941–1944', *German History*, 14, 168–92.
20. NARA RG-175 EAP 173-b-20-10. Correspondence from Security Police Headquarters in Radom to local police posts, 24.2.44. instructs local police posts to use the letter 'Z' when describing their informers.

21. NARA RG-175 EAP 173-b-20-10. Gendarmerie Koluszki reports concerning police informer Jozef Podlesny dated 10.3.44, 25.6.44.
22. NARA RG-75 EAP 173-b-16-12. Gestapo Trier police files. Informer personnel file for Matthias Beck. Beck was active for a short time for SD Trier (1937–8) before working for the Gestapo.
23. Borodziej, *Terror und Politik*, p. 142.
24. NARA RG-175 EAP 173-b-20-10. Security Police and SD Outpost Tomaschow report, 3.9.43.
25. Document L-89: Intensified Interrogations (trans.) in (1947) *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* Vol. III (District of Columbia: United States Government Printing Office), pp. 868–9.
26. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) RG-15.063M. Security Police and SD Outpost Kielce records, 1940–44. Security Police and SD Radom circular dated 13 November 1943 issued to all police concerns the use of Jews as informers.
27. For works on women in Nazi Germany see J. Stephenson (2001) *Women in Nazi Germany* (London: Longman); M. Stibbe (2003) *Women in the Third Reich* (London: Arnold); C. Koonz (1987) *Mothers in the Fatherland* (New York: St. Martin's Press).
28. E. Ringelblum (1976) *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War* (New York: Howard Fertig), p. 226. He asserts that most denouncers and informers in Poland were *Volksdeutsche* (ethnic Germans).
29. NARA RG-175 EAP 173-b-20-05. Security Police and SD Outpost Tomaschow reports, 22.3.43, 25.2.44.
30. For works on Polish collaboration see: K. Friedrich (2005) 'Collaboration in a "Land without a Quisling": Patterns of Cooperation with the Nazi German Occupation Regime in Poland during World War II', *Slavic Review*, 64, 711–46; J. Connelly (2005) 'Why the Poles Collaborated so Little: And Why That is no Reason for National Hubris', *Slavic Review*, 64, 771–81.
31. For an interesting overview of the debate concerning the terms 'cooperation' and 'collaboration' in relation to the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe see: B. Quinkert, C. Dieckmann and T. Tönsmeier (1999) *Kooperation und Verbrechen. Formen der Kollaboration im östlichen Europa 1939–45* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag).
32. See NARA RG-175 EAP 173-b-20-10. Communication from Gestapo Tomaschow IV N to Security Police and SD headquarters Radom, 30.7.43.
33. NARA RG-175 EAP 173-c-10-20. Security Police and SD Outpost Tomaschow Informer personnel files.
34. There are several cases of brothers and sisters and husbands and wives informing together in the Radom/Tomaschow police personnel files. For instance, Marion, Anton and Wladyslaw Spansinski, all resident at 9 *Przedborkastrasse* in Zarnow, appear to have been in the employ of Tomaschow Gestapo. It was not noted how they were related. NARA RG-84 EAP 173-b-16-12. General Gouvernement district of Tomaschow. A card index of individuals possibly employed as German intelligence agents by the Gestapo and SD.
35. F. Mayevski (2003) *Fire without Smoke: The Memoirs of a Polish Partisan* (London: Valentine Mitchell), pp. 104–9.



36. USHMM RG-15.063M. Security Police and SD Outpost Kielce records, 1940–44. Circular from Security Police and SD headquarters Radom, 19.5.42, concerning guidelines for the safety of informers.
37. See P. Wyden (1992) *Stella: One Woman's True Tale of Evil, Betrayal, and Survival in Hitler's Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster).
38. NARA RG-175 EAP 173-c-10-20. Security Police and SD Outpost Tomaschow files detailing payments made by Gestapo Tomaschow to its informer Piotr Banczyk during 1942–3.
39. *Ibid.*, an acknowledgement of receipt for a bicycle, 19.8.42.
40. *Ibid.*, receipt for accommodation in a hotel, 22.6.44.
41. NARA RG-175 EAP 173-b-20-05. Secret report of Gestapo Tomaschow report dated 16 April 1941. Five informers (under alias 'Jan Biala', 'Wacław Jenschik', 'Stefan Noga', 'Josef Kuta' and 'V-Mann Ness') were to be paid out of a special fund according to the information they supplied as their salaries had not been agreed.
42. *Ibid.*, Gestapo Tomaschow report to Security Police and SD headquarters Radom, 2.3.44.
43. NARA RG-175 EAP 173-c-10-20. Security Police and SD Outpost Tomaschow. Informer personnel file of 'W-Mann' Roman Sculz' which included a receipt for clothes purchased in Tomaschow on 5 January 1943.
44. *Ibid.*, informer payments made to 'Antek Domb'.
45. Mayevski, *Fire without Smoke*, p. 93.
46. NARA RG-175 EAP 173-b-20-05. Tschenschow report dated 31 January 1945.
47. S. Krakowski (1984) *The War of the Doomed: Jewish Armed Resistance in Poland 1943–44* (New York: Holmes and Meier), p. 101.
48. Only 2 per cent of Gestapo Tomaschow cases were initiated by denunciations in spring 1943 compared to 16 per cent of cases initiated by reports from *V-Leute*. See Borodziej, *Terror und Politik*, p. 136.
49. NARA RG-175 EAP 173-b-20-05. Secret Tomaschow report, 10.6.44, reveals that the informer Stanisław Kowalski (alias 'Stefan Walczak') had been shot by partisans for passing information to the police about the partisans' smuggling activities.
50. For a recent study of 'Major Hubal' (1896–1940) and his men see A. Ziolkowska-Boehm (2005) *A Polish Partisan's Story* (California: Military History Press).
51. R. Lukas (1997) *Forgotten Holocaust* (New York: Hippocrene), p. 74.
52. J. Gross (1971) *Polish Society under German Occupation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 291. Gross places heavy emphasis on the large number of partisan groups rather than focusing on their disunity.
53. Lukas, *Forgotten Holocaust*, p. 36.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
55. For recent works on the Polish Home Army, see M. Ney-Krwawicz (2001) *The Polish Home Army 1939–1945* (London: The Polish Underground Movement Study Trust); M. A. Peszke (2004) *Polish Underground Army, the Western Allies, and the Failure of Strategic Unity in World War II* (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company).
56. NARA RG-175 EAP 173-c-10-20. Security Police & SD Outpost Tomaschow files. V-Mann 'Jan Biala' report, 16.2.42.
57. Lukas, *Forgotten Holocaust*, p. 66.

58. Westermann, *Hitler's Police Battalions*, p. 205.
59. NARA RG-175 EAP 173-c-10-20. Security Police and SD headquarters Radom report to local police post Przysucha, 13.12.44, concerning Stanislaw Witecki.
60. Witecki submitted his reports to the police in writing as he was worried he may have been watched. Ibid.
61. Ibid., secret report of Gestapo Tomaschow, 22.12.44, concerning Stanislaw Witecki.
62. NARA RG-175 EAP 173-b-20-05. Gestapo Tomaschow V-Mann 'Jan Stannek' report dated September 1943.
63. L. Dobroszycki (1994) *Reptile Journalism: The Official Polish Language Press under the Nazis 1939–1945* (Yale: Yale University Press), p. 120.
64. NARA RG-175 EAP 173-c-10-20. Gestapo Tomaschow V-Mann 'Marian Krul' report, 1.4.42.
65. Ibid., Gestapo Tomaschow V-Mann 'Marian Krul' report, 17.9.42.
66. Ibid., report, 24.6.42.
67. Ibid., report, 16.7.42.
68. Ibid., reports, 17.9.42 and 15.5.42.
69. Ibid., report, 4.6.42.
70. Ibid., report, 16.12.43.
71. The Home Army wore armbands with writing on them to distinguish themselves from the enemy as they usually wore stolen German helmets and uniforms.
72. NARA RG-175 EAP 173-c-10-20. Gestapo Tomaschow V-Mann 'Marian Krul' report, 7.3.43.
73. Ibid., report, 6.4.43.
74. *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* Vol. III, p. 208.
75. NARA RG-84 EAP 173-b-16-12. Undated card-file index of Security Police and SD Outpost Tomaschow.
76. NARA RG-175 EAP 173-c-10-20. Security Police and SD Outpost Tomaschow register of arrested functionaries of the AK and other illegal organisations, compiled 3.4.43.
77. Article entitled 'The Polish Spirit of Resistance', *The Times* 28.10.40, p. 5.
78. NARA RG-175 EAP 173-b-20-05. Security Police and SD Outpost Tomaschow report, 8.1.45.
79. See Lukas, *Forgotten Holocaust*, p. 250.
80. Article entitled 'Warsaw Gestapo Chief Killed in "Underground" Execution', *The Times*, 8.2.44, p. 3.

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## **Part III**

# **Yugoslavia**

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# Foreword

*Klaus Schmider*

The following three chapters deal with partisan and anti-partisan warfare in the territory of occupied Yugoslavia. The primary emphasis is upon the political and military challenges which the insurgency presented to the Axis Powers in general and Germany in particular, and the ways in which units on the ground dealt with it.

The invasion and conquest of the kingdom of Yugoslavia (6–16 April 1941) was by a wide margin the most one-sided victory achieved by the Wehrmacht in the Blitzkrieg years. In stark contrast to the heroic resistance with which Serbia during World War I had faced three successive invasions by the Central Powers (August 1914 to October 1915), the Yugoslav Army collapsed before the Blitzkrieg in less than a fortnight and managed to inflict only a minute number of casualties in return. The king and government, along with elements of the air force and navy, were forced to flee abroad. The smoothness of this campaign was to stand in stark contrast to the occupation regime which followed – nowhere was the fallacy of the Axis policy to enforce loyalty by coercion alone more starkly revealed than here.

In blatant violation of international law (Yugoslavia was after all still at war with Germany), Hitler proceeded to carve up the country in a rough and ready manner which saw a truncated Serbia come under German military administration, Macedonia annexed by Bulgaria, Slovenia partitioned between Germany and Italy and central Dalmatia likewise incorporated into Italy. Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina were united as the Independent State of Croatia (ISC) at the behest of Mussolini, who also insisted on handing over the new state to a small group of Croat ultra-fascists (the Ustaša) beholden to him by virtue of their decade-long exile in Italy. Momentous changes like these might of course have been used to defuse some of the ethnic conflicts which

beset pre-war Yugoslavia, but this was hardly an Axis priority. Of all the alterations made to the existing borders, only one – the unification of Kosovo province with the Italian protectorate of Albania – did bring a measure of stability to a troubled region; all others either created new problems or exacerbated existing ones. Of these, the one with the most far-reaching consequences was the creation of the ISC. Even though the Ustaša and their leader Ante Pavelić had but a narrow power base, after a brief hiatus of less than two months they initiated a programme of ethnic cleansing aimed at reducing the number of ethnic Serbs living within the borders of the new state (1.95 million, or nearly a third of the total) to proportions deemed to be more acceptable to the new rulers.<sup>1</sup> Since many of their victims settled in fairly compact groupings in rural areas which offered ideal hideouts (usually in the form of heavily wooded mountain ranges) and were able to draw on weapon stocks from the defeated Royal Army, the perpetrators were soon faced with armed resistance that took on a more organised form with every passing week. By September 1941, large areas of the newly minted state were effectively no longer under the control of the Pavelić regime. Almost by default, the restoration of control devolved on the occupying powers, with the Italian Second Army in the south of the country being in a rather better position to spare men for this task than the single understaffed German 718th Infantry Division in the north.<sup>2</sup>

Across the border in neighbouring Serbia, the German invasion of the USSR, the abrupt evacuation of most German first-line divisions and the news of the outrages committed against the Serbs of the ISC had led to a spontaneous insurgency which in August/September 1941 led to most of western Serbia being wrested from German control and garrisons being put under siege.

The political allegiance of many insurgents was at this point in time somewhat unformed; a few *Odreds* (detachments) of guerrillas were put in the field by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, but others showed no clear political allegiance or were drawn over to the cause of Yugoslav colonel Draza Mihailović, who tried to exercise a restraining influence in order to avoid casualties similar to those suffered by the Serb nation in World War I (one million dead out of a population of less than five million).<sup>3</sup> In due course the degree to which the Communists or the 'Četniks' under Mihailović were able to bring over to their cause uncommitted detachments by means fair or foul would become the yardstick for measuring success in the civil war which broke out between both sides in November,<sup>4</sup> just as the Germans were gathering their forces for their main effort.

Fierce German reprisals directed against civilians found in operational areas as well as the Serb Jewish community succeeded in terrorising many potential supporters of the rebellion into subservience, while the brief re-deployment of two frontline infantry units, the 342nd and 113th Infantry Divisions, dealt the insurgency a number of crushing blows. The joint nature of repression and military power as exercised by the Wehrmacht in 1941 is thrown into stark relief in Ben Shepherd's chapter on the campaign waged by the 342nd. Medium-term stability, however, was only achieved by two political changes. In addition to many Serbs turning against what they perceived to be the Communist agenda of the insurgency, the Germans decided to give a new collaborationist administration under General Milan Nedić a somewhat higher profile than his predecessors had enjoyed. As a result of these events, the Četniks ended up dispersing, with many of their men gaining employment in newly constituted police and militia-like formations of the Nedić government,<sup>5</sup> while the Communist Partisans suffered a serious military defeat and fled into neighbouring Bosnia and Montenegro.<sup>6</sup> For the next two-and-a-half years, German-ruled Serbia would enjoy relative peace and quiet, something made all the more remarkable by the fact that troop levels declined markedly after December 1942.

No such stability would be forthcoming in the case of the ISC across the Drina. This was partly due to the more mountainous topography of its terrain and often poor liaison between German and Italian occupiers. The priorities of the Italian regime, however, would play a much more baleful role. While Mussolini and his foreign office made a few half-hearted attempts to turn Croatia into a genuine partner, the body actually implementing most of Italian policy (the Second Army, or as it came to be called in May 1942, *Comando Supersloda*) east of the Adriatic soon took advantage of the insurgency to impose an occupation regime which had as its ultimate aim the plundering of the country and the annexation of yet more territory to Italian Dalmatia. General Vittorio Ambrosio (April 1941 to January 1942) and his successor Mario Roatta (January 1942 to February 1943) were supported in this by the Army General Staff and the Armed Forces High Command (*Comando Supremo*), as well as the King, who obviously all felt more at home practising the sort of straightforward imperialism which the 1915 Treaty of London had originally envisaged.<sup>7</sup> When Croats and Germans managed to foil an attempt by Second Army to establish a permanent presence in Sarajevo (the ISC's second city) in May 1942, Roatta and his bosses tired of this game so abruptly that they decided on divesting themselves of their responsibilities as an occupying power. Starting in the last



days of May, they began to evacuate a series of key positions in central Bosnia, some of which they had only been able to hold at great cost throughout the preceding winter, while keeping this move a secret from their German allies. In addition, they came to rely more and more on the Partisans' domestic enemy – the Četniks – to take the brunt of the fighting, supplying them with large amounts of weapons and ammunition in the process. While the Germans in northern Croatia and Serbia would also enter into similar deals, they always showed a much greater willingness to closely monitor the numbers and actions of their 'allies' and intervene whenever it appeared that a Četnik unit appeared to adopt a doubtful attitude.

The retreat of spring 1942 would be followed by three others in November 1942, April 1943 and August 1943 until the territory held by Second Army on the eve of Italy's surrender to the Allies was reduced to the part of Dalmatia annexed in 1941. Most importantly, for a period which lasted from about June 1942 to January 1943, the territory thus vacated was effectively handed over to the Partisans since the Italians lacked the will and the Germans the numbers to secure this area. For the Partisans' main force which around that time was reeling from serious defeats in Serbia (November/December 1941) and Montenegro (May/June 1942), this constituted a godsend, since it provided them with a safe base area in their greatest hour of need. Arriving in Western Bosnia with approximately 5000 men, they had multiplied this force by a factor of nearly ten by the end of the year.<sup>8</sup> By the time Germans and, to a lesser extent, Italians made a concerted attempt to crush this 'Partisan state' and its armed forces in one major military effort involving more than half a dozen divisions (Operations 'Weiss 1', 'Weiss 2' and 'Schwarz', January to June 1943), the insurgent movement had acquired a resilience which allowed it to absorb losses which would have crushed it beyond redemption the year before.

A factor which boosted the Partisans' cause to an even greater extent than Italian capriciousness was the longevity of the Pavelić regime. Long after it had become obvious that it was a dubious asset to the cause of the Axis, it managed to hold onto power for the simple reason that a regime change would have raised the question of what sort of successor regime to establish. This in turn would have turned the spotlight on the reality of the military situation in the ISC, with Italy's status as the 'hegemonic power' of the western Balkans revealed for the fallacy that it was. Even though Ustaša atrocities never quite reached the level of 1941 again, they nonetheless continued, particularly in areas not yet touched by the earlier pogroms, as demonstrated by Alexander Korb in

his analysis of one such case in 1942. In any case, the sense of outrage among Serb survivors had reached such a level that only a highly visible removal of both Pavelić and his regime would have sufficed to bring to Croatia levels of stability comparable to those of Serbia.<sup>9</sup>

Another Yugoslav province where the occupiers' policy flew in the face of common sense usually needed to promote the most basic form of collaboration was Slovenia. In this instance the attempt, no matter how misguided, to install a collaborationist regime was not even made; instead Germany and Italy annexed the northern and southern half of the territory respectively and made them part of their metropolitan territory. The only possible excuse for this – the presence of a large body of ethnic expatriates – was barely credible in the German case; ethnic Germans numbered around 29,000, 12,000 of whom lived outside the German zone of occupation. It was utterly hollow in the case of the Italian claim; the number of Italians 'rescued' in this fashion from foreign domination came to a grand total of fewer than 500.<sup>10</sup> Adding insult to injury, both occupiers then went on to enact a number of measures aimed at banishing the Slovene language and culture from public life. The Germans went one step further and deported several thousand Slovenes who appeared to be 'politically unreliable' (mostly to Serbia), although this measure was later stopped when the insurgency in the areas of destination made this impractical. The total impact of these measures was to generate a deep-rooted insurgency which was able to draw on the support of Slovenes from all walks of life; only the influence of the Catholic Church and Communist excesses allowed the Germans to generate some support for the idea of an anti-Communist movement once they had to take control of the entire province in September 1943.<sup>11</sup> As Gregor Kranjc makes clear in his chapter, the marked deterioration of the situation in the province and their unwillingness to make major political concessions left the Germans and their allies in a position where their efforts at conducting an effective propaganda campaign were hamstrung from the start.

By late 1943, the Partisan movement had developed a size and momentum which made any attempt to smash it in a series of multi-divisional drives completely illusory. This was mainly due to the loot acquired in the days after 8 September 1943 when Italian Second Army, left without clear orders from either its own commander (who had gone into hiding) or the Army Chief of Staff in Rome who was on the run from the Germans, basically disintegrated as an organised fighting unit. Although many divisions were surrounded and disarmed by the Germans in a matter of days,<sup>12</sup> five of the others put their weapon stocks

at the disposal of the Partisans or in some cases joined them as auxiliary troops. The weapons captured from an increasingly demoralised Croat army had always played an important role in keeping the Partisan brigades in business, but after the Italian collapse they essentially achieved self-sufficiency.

By 1944, leaving aside a few areas almost exclusively populated by Croats, the German high command in the south-east was essentially reduced to holding the major towns of the ISC and the roads and railways connecting them;<sup>13</sup> the second tier of defence was Serbia, where the Nedić regime and a number of numerically small but highly effective collaborating formations still guaranteed a measure of stability. Taking Serbia before the arrival of the Allied armies was a main priority for the Partisans in order to establish their political legitimacy as the successor regime of the monarchy. In the end, they failed with a rather premature attempt at invasion in March/April 1944, but succeeded in September/October with stronger forces and aided by the happy coincidence of the simultaneous arrival of the Red Army. The latter operation also saw the annihilation of the main force units of Četniks loyal to Mihailović which had been beefed up by some eleventh-hour arms supplies from the Germans. During the same period, several Partisan brigades with British support landed in Dalmatia, leaving the Germans to defend what technically still constituted the bulk of the ISC, but with the proviso that the countless detachments and brigades which had always infested it now had in the guise of Serbia and Dalmatia acquired a proper rear area they could turn to for rest, recuperation and replenishment.

The transition to a regular army was a painful one for the Partisans, who suffered a couple of embarrassing defeats at the hands of numerically inferior German forces throughout the winter of 1944/45. However, by April 1945 they were ready to reunite all Yugoslav territories with only minimal Soviet help. The ensuing offensive, though strategically a rather dubious (as well as costly) endeavour, led to the taking of all of Yugoslavia by mid-May 1945 and the surrender of around 170,000 German personnel.<sup>14</sup>

## Notes

1. Until very recently, the Pavelić regime and its fighting formations had been poorly served by historians with an almost disproportionate share of the scholarly interest concentrating on the Royalist Četniks instead. For recent accounts of the Ustaša state at war see J. Tomasevich (2001) *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia. Vol. 2: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press); T. Dulić (2005) *Utopias of Nation* (Stockholm: Uppsala

University); A. Korb (2009) 'Construction nationale et Shoah. Les déportations dans l'État indépendant de Croatie (1941–1945)', in T. Bruttman, L. Joly and A. Wiewiorka (eds) *Qu'est-ce qu'un déporté? Histoire et mémoires des déportations de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale* (Paris: CNRS), pp. 197–224. Publication details of Korb's forthcoming monograph on German-Croat relations in 1941/2 were not available at time of writing. A thoroughly researched order of battle for the armed forces of the ISC (both Ustaša and regular army) can be found on [www.axishistory.com](http://www.axishistory.com).

2. The German and Italian zones of influence within the new state were divided by a demarcation line that followed a northwest-southeast axis.
3. An endeavour made more difficult by the fact that Mihailović's writ was very much limited to Serbia proper, with Četnik groups in Montenegro and particularly the ISC retaining a strong sense of independence throughout the war. The issue of Serb war losses in World War I is discussed in A. Mitrović (2007) *Serbia's Great War, 1914–1918* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd.).
4. The best account of the parting of ways of both movements is still L. Karchmar (1987) *Draza Mihailović and the Rise of the Chetnik Movement, 1941–1942* (New York: Garland).
5. A fact the Germans were fully aware of, but powerless to do much about. By the summer of 1942, the breaking of the codes used by Draza Mihailović to encrypt his wireless traffic put the Germans in a position where they were able to single out for dissolution police and militia units deemed to be of doubtful loyalty. A summary of these events can be found in K. Schmider (2002) *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien* (Hamburg: Mittler & Sohn), pp. 442–8.
6. The use of a capital 'P' for partisan is due to the fact that this was the actual name the Communist Partisans gave to their armed movement.
7. Said treaty had promised large chunks of Croat territory then in possession of Austria-Hungary to Italy in exchange for entering the war on the Allies' side. By the end of the war, the Allies' public commitment to ethnic self-determination and the creation of Yugoslavia made this impractical and limited the 'reward' for Italy to a small foothold around Zara (Zadar). The resentment this caused in Italy contributed in some measure to the rise of Mussolini. For an account of these events see J. H. Burgwyn (1993) *The Legend of the Mutilated Victory: Italy, the Great War and the Paris Peace Conference 1915–1919* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press).
8. For an analysis of the social and ethnic dynamics of West Bosnia which favoured this move see M. Hoare (2006) *Genocide and Resistance in Hitler's Bosnia: The Partisans and the Četniks, 1941–1943* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/British Academy).
9. In the context of the 'Weiss' operational cycle the *Oberbefehlshaber Südost*, Generaloberst Alexander Löhr, put forward a proposal which, while still insufficient, was the closest any senior representative of an occupying power ever came to demanding the removal of Pavelić and his party. See Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BA MA) RW 4/667 Denkschrift: Vorschlag für notwendige politische, verwaltungsmässige und wirtschaftliche Reformen in Kroatien nach Durchführung der militärischen Operationen (27.2.1943).
10. This was out of a total of 1.2 million people who lived in Slovenia in April 1941. A. Suppan (1999) *Untersteierer, Gotscheer und Laibacher als deutsche*

*Minderheit zwischen Adria, Karawanken und Mur (1918–1948)*, in A. Suppan (ed.) *Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas. Zwischen Adria und Karawanken* (Munich: Seidler), pp. 363–4.

11. Perhaps to a greater degree than other territories of the old Yugoslavia, present-day Slovene society still reflects the divisions which are a legacy of the war, traces of which can even be found in scholarship of recent vintage such as T. Griesser-Pecar (2004) *Das zerrissene Volk. Slowenien 1941–1946. Okkupation, Kollaboration, Bürgerkrieg, Revolution* (Vienna: Böhlau).
12. By and large, this process proceeded quite smoothly, with the Germans making full use of the disorientation then reigning in the upper echelons of most Italian corps and divisions. Only in the coastal town of Split did elements of the 'Bergamo' division cooperate with the 9th Partisan Division in an attempt to defend the port against the 7th SS Division. Sixty of its officers were afterwards shot in reprisal by the Germans. O. Talpo (1994), *Dalmazia. Una cronaca per la storia, 1943–1944* (Rome: AUSSME), pp. 1135–69.
13. The only exception to this rule was an attempt to pacify northeast Bosnia by garrisoning it with the newly established 13th SS Division in the spring and summer of 1944. Even though partially successful, the rationale of tying up more than 20,000 heavily armed soldiers in this fashion was questioned by many senior officers. See the excellent account by G. Lepre (1997) *Himmler's Bosnian Division: The Waffen-SS Handschar Division* (Atglen PA: Schiffer).
14. K. Schmider (2007) 'Der jugoslawische Kriegsschauplatz (Januar 1943 bis Mai 1945)', in K. H. Frieser (ed.) *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg, Bd. 8: Die Ostfront 1943/44. Der Krieg im Osten und an den Nebenfronten* (Munich: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt), pp. 1008–88, here p. 1069.

# 7

## Bloodier than Boehme: The 342nd Infantry Division in Serbia, 1941

*Ben Shepherd*

*Your objective is to be achieved in a land where, in 1914, streams of German blood flowed because of the treachery of the Serbs, men and women. You are the avengers of those dead. A deterring example must be established for all of Serbia, one that will have the heaviest impact on the entire population. Anyone who carries out his duty in a lenient manner will be called to account, regardless of rank or position, and tried by a military court.<sup>1</sup>*

Thus ordered General Franz Böhme, the Wehrmacht's plenipotentiary commanding general in Serbia, in a September 1941 directive to his troops. This quote epitomises the brutality which the Wehrmacht unleashed during its anti-partisan campaign in Yugoslavia, and the historical and racial enmity that contributed to it.

The anti-partisan operations that took place in Yugoslavia, particularly from late 1942 onward, were among the largest of the European war.<sup>2</sup> The brutality which Wehrmacht anti-partisan forces perpetrated during their course came from various directions. Some of it can be attributed to conditions which fuel excessive severity in many counter-insurgency campaigns: occupation troops, often ill-equipped, ill-trained and lacking in numbers, brutalised by the fear and frustration they feel in an unfamiliar country, facing an unseen enemy employing ruthless and underhand methods against them, encountering a population of, at best, suspect reliability, and living and fighting amid the kinds of terrain that are ideal for insurgents and a bane for the forces facing them.<sup>3</sup>

But the brutality was not down to conditions alone. The Wehrmacht's leadership, through ideological belief and careerist calculation, had hitched their wagon to the Nazi star, and sought to instil in their

troops an intensity of ideological conviction that would make them willing executors of the 'Nazi' way of war.<sup>4</sup> What this entailed when it came to anti-partisan warfare was that the troops victimised and killed the Reich's purported ideological enemies – Jews, communists and 'Gypsies' – as scapegoats or reprisal victims for partisan attacks. More generally, it meant that Wehrmacht security troops practised the belief that terror was the answer to any unrest that arose in occupied territory – particularly in the 'racially backward' Slavic regions of eastern and south-eastern Europe. It helped that the German military had maintained that terror was the surest answer to unrest since the Franco-Prussian War. This was a mind-set which, though not unique to the German military, was especially pronounced within it.<sup>5</sup> Nazi ideology fused with this mind-set, and, via a series of remarkably harsh directives for the conduct of security in the field, radicalised it even further.<sup>6</sup>

The collective effect of this process was a plethora of 'anti-partisan' directives and measures which were often brutal in the extreme, encompassing among other things hugely disproportionate reprisal shootings, mass destruction of allegedly pro-partisan villages and sometimes the laying waste of whole areas. Such actions were inflicted not upon the partisans themselves, but against the civilian population whom the Wehrmacht believed, rightly or wrongly, was aiding and abetting them.

Yet not all Wehrmacht units followed these dictates blindly and uniformly. After all, the Wehrmacht's higher command levels themselves increasingly recognised, as the war continued, that constructively engaging the population and reining in their troops' excesses were a surer means of securing that popular cooperation which is crucial to any participant in an insurgency conflict. Indeed, the failure of these more far-sighted officers to decisively overturn the Wehrmacht's ongoing institutional predilection for terror contributed to the ultimate failure of the Wehrmacht's anti-partisan effort.

Yet the mixed messages that came from the top were only one reason why lower-level Wehrmacht anti-partisan units behaved with varying degrees of ruthlessness and restraint. Many recent studies have investigated the conduct of lower-level units. Most have investigated not the ordinary soldiers, for whom sources are scant,<sup>7</sup> but the officers and units comprising the Wehrmacht's 'middle-level' command: divisions and their subordinate units. This level is low enough to enable the historian to examine what shaped the conduct of individual officers and their units; high enough for it to generate a rich source base; and wide enough for its behaviour to be representative of a significant chunk of the Wehrmacht in general.<sup>8</sup> The studies have produced a picture considerably

more nuanced than those earlier accounts which tended to depict the Wehrmacht in blanket terms and exonerate or condemn it wholesale.<sup>9</sup> It is a picture which reveals that it was not just higher-level orders that shaped motivation and conduct, but also the conditions Wehrmacht units in the field faced and the personal attitudes of their commanding officers. These attitudes could in turn be shaped by such biographical influences as social and regional background, and potentially brutalising experiences during World War I and its chaotic aftermath.<sup>10</sup>

This chapter examines the conduct of a Wehrmacht anti-partisan division in one of the most infamous examples of Wehrmacht counter-insurgency warfare during World War II – the suppression of the Serb national uprising of 1941. Despite historians' relative neglect of Wehrmacht counter-insurgency warfare in Yugoslavia compared with their treatment of its counterpart in the Soviet Union, there are important works on the Wehrmacht's response to the uprising. Firstly, Richard Fattig's excellent 1980 Ph.D. thesis examined how far Wehrmacht reprisal policy's extraordinary severity was shaped by the German military's counter-insurgency tradition, and the horrific results of the policy as it was implemented in Yugoslavia.<sup>11</sup>

During the 1990s, Walter Manoschek illuminated the role which anti-Semitism and anti-Slavism, specifically of the anti-Serbian variety, played in shaping Wehrmacht reprisal policy in Serbia during 1941.<sup>12</sup> Manoschek not only examined the scapegoating and mass execution of Serbian Jews, whom Wehrmacht propaganda depicted as the puppet-masters of the predominantly Communist-led uprising. He also illuminated the toxic role of historical anti-Serbian enmity in embedding a perception within Wehrmacht units in Yugoslavia that the Serbs were a backward race who responded satisfactorily not to constructive engagement, but to terror – and whose 'historical crimes' morally justified using terror as a tool not just of deterrence, but of retribution also. This enmity, Manoschek argued, was strongest among Wehrmacht personnel of Austrian origin, incorporated into the Reich's armed forces upon Hitler's annexation of their country in 1938.<sup>13</sup> It was after all Austria which, for several years before World War I, had engaged in increasingly antagonistic rivalry with Serbia over control of the Balkans, and whose heir to the throne had been assassinated by a Serb in 1914, thus sparking a conflagration eventually culminating in the Austro-Hungarian Empire's total destruction. It was also Austria whose forces had experienced both ruthless Serb irregular fighting methods and military humiliation at the hands of Serbia's field armies during their unsuccessful attempts to subdue Serbia without German help in 1914.<sup>14</sup> Even if



Austrian Wehrmacht officers serving in Yugoslavia during World War II had not served in Serbia during World War I, there was a strong possibility that, for reasons of collective memory, they would respond to exhortations to ruthless brutality against the Serbs – something which General Böhme, himself Austrian-born, was clearly counting on.

Most recently, Klaus Schmider's 2002 study of Axis counter-insurgency warfare in Yugoslavia examined the additional importance of pressure of circumstances, such as problematic command structures, the overstretch suffered by often inadequate Wehrmacht formations, and the effectiveness of the irregulars they were facing. These circumstances restricted the Wehrmacht's ability to combat the uprising, and it exercised brutal terror among other things as a means of compensating.<sup>15</sup>

This chapter focuses not upon the higher command levels on which these previous studies have largely concentrated,<sup>16</sup> but upon the command level of a specific formation which played a leading role in suppressing the 1941 uprising. By combining unit-level and individual-level sources, it illuminates the importance of the conditions in which particular units found themselves, the role that was played by the personal attitudes of the officers who commanded them, and the biographical influences which shaped those attitudes.

Much of the source material hails from the official files of the Wehrmacht occupation divisions. Wehrmacht divisional files were generated by a number of departments; the main type utilised here is the operational files of divisional section Ia, which contain orders and reports on both general security matters and particular anti-partisan operations. Also utilised are files from the divisional quartermaster's section (Ib), and the divisional intelligence section (Ic), which was responsible, among other things, for gathering information on the mood of the civilian population and the activities of enemy irregulars. These sources are not without their weaknesses. One is a lack of completeness, extensive material having been destroyed during or after the war. Another is that units may have exaggerated the scale of the partisan threat facing them, or their own shortcomings, in an effort to obtain more equipment or reinforcements. Moreover, reports of enemy body counts in anti-partisan operations were often inaccurate, whether due to incomplete information or to a tendency by some units to exaggerate the body counts they had inflicted in order to conceal their lack of success.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, these sources provide the most detailed available picture of a division's conduct and the conditions that helped shape it. They also yield important clues as to the individual-level forces which shaped officers' own motivation and conduct.

Further indications are provided by individual-level sources relating to particular officers, such as their Wehrmacht personnel files from World War II, personnel files from predecessor institutions, and the official histories of the regiments to which they belonged during World War I. Collectively, these sources enable the historian to build a picture of those individual-level factors which shaped an officer's prior life experiences and influences in ways which, in turn, contributed to shaping his approach to and conduct of anti-partisan warfare during World War II.

### **The Serb national uprising, the Wehrmacht, and the 342nd Infantry Division**

The chapter investigates the behaviour of the divisional command of a particular Austrian-led Wehrmacht division, the 342nd Infantry, during the Wehrmacht's suppression of the national uprising in autumn 1941.<sup>18</sup> The conduct of the 342nd and other Wehrmacht divisions operating in Serbia was fostered in part by higher-level directives. These were issued at the highest level by Hitler himself through the Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* or OKW), or through the High Command of the Army (*Oberkommando des Heeres* or OKH), and at the theatre level by the Wehrmacht Command South-East (*Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Südost*). Within Serbia itself, three occupation divisions – the 704th, 714th and 717th – had arrived in the late spring, shortly after the Wehrmacht had conquered Yugoslavia. At the outset of the occupation, these divisions had been charged with straightforward static security duties, primarily guarding supply lines. This was just as well; as Category Fifteen divisions formed hurriedly in May 1941, they possessed only two regiments instead of the usual three, the majority of their men were over 30 years old, and their training and equipment were considerably inferior to those of front-line infantry divisions.<sup>19</sup>

The first weeks of occupation in Serbia were fairly uneventful. Yet across the border in the Axis-affiliated Independent State of Croatia, vicious persecution initiated by the newly-installed fascist Ustaša regime against ethnic Serbs sparked a wave of terror and upheaval which threatened to destabilise the entire region. Then, at the beginning of July, the Yugoslav Communists acted on instructions from Stalin for Communists across Europe to take up arms against the forces of fascist oppression which had recently invaded the Soviet Union. Thus did the Yugoslav Communists unite with demobbed Yugoslav army personnel to launch a Serb national uprising. The occupation divisions in

Serbia, outnumbered as they were, were desperately overstretched. By September, they had effectively relinquished control of the majority of territory in western Serbia, falling back to defend the main urban centres and supply lines. Yet their ability to defend even these was severely under threat. When large numbers of Serb nationalist fighters, the Četnik movement of Draza Mihailović, temporarily shelved their antipathy towards the Communists and joined the uprising, partly in the hope of halting the Ustaša persecution of ethnic Serbs, the situation for the Axis grew acutely dangerous.<sup>20</sup>

OKW now took measures to quell the uprising. Firstly, General Böhme was despatched as the plenipotentiary commanding general. Böhme's arrival heralded an approach to the uprising far more ruthless than that which the Germans had hitherto employed. In addition to the brutal general directive cited at the beginning of this chapter, Böhme issued an order on 10 October which directed his units to shoot 100 Serb hostages for every German killed in the insurgency, and 50 for every German wounded.<sup>21</sup> OKW also despatched the 342nd Infantry Division to Serbia, to bolster the German defenders, launch offensive operations against the insurgents, and act as the Wehrmacht's main hatchet man in bringing terror to the Serbs.

The 342nd Infantry Division was formed under Austrian-born *Generalleutnant* Walter Hinghofer in November 1940.<sup>22</sup> Its personnel, however, were a mixture of Austrians, incorporated into the Reich in 1938, and Germans from the Reich's pre-1938 lands. They came partly from the Twelfth Military District, in the region around Koblenz, and partly from the Seventeenth Military District in the region around Linz in present-day Austria. As one of eight Category Fourteen divisions formed that month, the 342nd comprised three regiments, each consisting of 12 companies rather than the usual 14 and possessing reduced scales of equipment. Its rank-and-file troops' ages ranged between 27 and 32. But whilst it was not among the highest-quality Wehrmacht formations, it was not among the poorest-quality either – at least when compared to the 700-number occupation divisions already on the scene.<sup>23</sup>

Spearheaded by the mobile operations which the 342nd now launched, the Wehrmacht was able to turn the tables and suppress the uprising by the end of the year. It was to be a temporary reprieve – the Communists fled westward into Bosnia and Herzegovina, where they would regroup and expand into a markedly more formidable force over the next two years. But by the end of 1941 the immediate danger for the Germans in Serbia had passed. And during the preceding months of

September to December, it was the 342nd Infantry Division which was the Wehrmacht's main sword arm.

It was also the 342nd which translated General Böhme's exhortations into by far the bloodiest practice. None of the Wehrmacht divisions on Serbian soil behaved with moderation that autumn; all carried out vast, fearful reprisal shootings and bloody mobile operations, a disproportionate amount of the victims of which were Jews, communists and unarmed civilians more generally. But whilst other divisions remained within the confines – such as they were – of Böhme's directives, the 342nd went even further.

### The butcher's tally, September – November 1941

The first of the 342nd's mobile operations, during late September, targeted the region between the River Drina and the River Save. General Böhme himself established the tenor of the operation: 'The population in the dip between the Drina and the Save has joined the uprising. Women and children are running messages and maintaining the bandits' basis of supply ... [The area] is to be cleansed by exterminating any bands that appear, so as to deny the bandits the area's supply in the long term'. Most ominously, Böhme expressed the hope that 'ruthless measures will set a terrifying example which will very soon resonate across all Serbia'.<sup>24</sup> When it came to specifics, the order declared that '(a)ny person involved in the fighting in any way is to be seen as a guerrilla and handled accordingly. Any settlement from which German soldiers are fired upon, or in the vicinity of which weapons and munitions are found, is to be burned down'. Böhme also directed on 23 September that '(t)he shooting of captured and condemned irregulars is to be presented to the population as an exemplary spectacle'.<sup>25</sup>

For the 342nd's own part, a key divisional directive of 25 September, attributed unusually to the divisional commander rather than to the operations section, defined even more explicitly who constituted an irregular and what treatment they could expect: 'Anyone who raises a weapon against the occupier *or* supports corresponding resistance', it declared, 'is an irregular. Accordingly, *every member* of a rebellious band against whom the division fights is to be treated as an *irregular*. The *juridical punishment* of a member of a rebellious band is to be carried out ... *with execution in every case* ... Our opponents should be regarded by us without exception as irregulars ... Only those who do not oppose us *in any way* are to be excepted'.<sup>26</sup> But it was also in the level of terror it was explicitly sanctioning that the 342nd went further even than Böhme: a follow-up order

of 29 September stressed that mere suspicion was reason enough to kill anyone. It declared that 'the nights pass quietly ... (but) no-one should be fooled by this. Attacks must be reckoned with. Every man encountered in no-man's land is to be shot without delay'. Over prisoners also, 'the slightest suspicion' was justification enough for killing.<sup>27</sup>

During the last ten days of September the 342nd Infantry Division accordingly notched up a grim tally of 'enemy' dead, accompanied by minuscule hauls of weapons and at minuscule cost to itself – clear signs that vast numbers of those dead were in fact unarmed civilians. Admittedly, some of the contrast between recorded numbers of 'enemy' dead and recorded weapons captured may be explained by insurgents retrieving or burying the weapons of their dead before they retreated. It should also be remembered that some among the insurgents' own number – communications personnel, medics and pioneers, for example – are unlikely to have been armed anyway. But so massive is the shortfall that the only reasonable conclusion, these caveats notwithstanding, is that large numbers of unarmed civilians numbered among it.<sup>28</sup>

In a typical day's work, on 27 September, the division shot 250 of its prisoners and ordered its subordinate 698th Infantry Regiment to exterminate the village and male population of Metković in response to unspecified 'hostile activities' which had taken place there at the beginning of September.<sup>29</sup> Two days later, the division shot 84 prisoners, among whom only one machine-gun and a few rifles were found.<sup>30</sup> That most of the division's victims were indeed unarmed civilians is also suggested by reports that Serb refugees fleeing the region were being driven onto the anvil of allied Croatian troops securing the Drina, and were being forced to take refuge in islands and woods on and around the river.<sup>31</sup>

Harsher treatment still, albeit ordered by Böhme rather than the division, was reserved for the town of Šabac. On 23 September German soldiers had 'incurred losses' after being fired upon in the town. The 342nd was ordered to clear Šabac of its menfolk aged from 14 to 70, and despatch them to a concentration camp north of the Save. But this was only the prelude to the town's ultimate fate. Böhme ordered 'the immediate shooting of *all inhabitants* who participated in the fighting or set themselves against the troops, and of the *male inhabitants* in whose homes weapons or munitions were found, from whose homes shots were fired, or who tried to escape arrest'.<sup>32</sup> The division attacked Šabac on 27 September, burning down 40 houses in Šabac itself and launching attacks by Stuka dive-bombers on the surrounding villages. Its own losses were minimal, with one man killed and one lightly wounded at

the enemy's hands, and a reserve policeman killed accidentally when his gun went off.<sup>33</sup>

Such deeds were not unusual for the Wehrmacht in Serbia during autumn 1941. What is unusual is that the 342nd was not merely following General Böhme's lead, but also following up initiatives of its own. Indeed, as Klaus Schmider points out, the reprisal ratios which Böhme stipulated on 10 October were actually milder than the ratio of Serbs to Germans killed by the division during the preceding weeks.<sup>34</sup>

During operations in the Cer Mountains in October, the 342nd Infantry Division remained true to form. On 13 October it reiterated the command to kill on the merest suspicion: '(a)ll those in uniform, as with all civilians encountered in no-man's land, who are suspected of belonging to the insurgency, are to be shot ... The villages south of the Cer Mountains are to be burned. The villages north of the Cer Mountains are to be burned ... only Bela Reka and Petkovica are to be spared'.<sup>35</sup> These operations inevitably yielded further hugely disproportionate body counts and mass destruction of settlements. During the last ten days of October, for example, the 342nd lost six men, with a further four officers and 20 men wounded. In turn, it reported that it had inflicted enemy losses of 200 killed in combat and 100 shot after capture – a total of 300 persons, from whom only 37 guns were retrieved.<sup>36</sup>

By the time it had relieved the town of Valjevo in early November, the division had suffered total losses of ten dead and 39 wounded; in reprisal, it declared that 1000 hostages were to be shot in retaliation for those of its men killed, and 3950 shot for those wounded. It strongly reminded its troops of the 1:100 and 1:50 killing ratios stipulated by General Böhme – a sign, it is worth pointing out, that not all the division's rank-and-file troops had observed those ratios as thoroughly as the division wished.<sup>37</sup> But simple calculation shows that, here too, the 342nd was exceeding Böhme's stipulated ratios – aiming, as it was, to shoot 100 hostages for every German wounded as well as for every German killed. In fact, the division had to report on 11 November that, having already shot 1600 hostages, it had now run out of prisoners to kill in order to make up the rest of the 3950 total.<sup>38</sup>

## **The division's motives**

Clearly, the 342nd Infantry Division was doing more than just following General Böhme's ruthless dictates. There were other factors besides simply obeying orders, then, that were motivating its conduct.

It may at first seem grotesque to argue that the practical conditions which the 342nd encountered on the ground contributed to its exceptionally ferocious behaviour; the travails of counter-insurgency warfare in Yugoslavia, onerous though they were, do not even begin to justify the scale of slaughter which the division was perpetrating. Even so, their effect alongside other factors should not be discounted. By the time of the October operations in the Cer Mountains, the division was aware that it faced increasingly difficult practical conditions – appalling weather, impenetrable terrain, and an irregular opponent who was growing ever more resourceful and elusive.

Progress was hindered from the onset of the Cer operations by the fact that retreating insurgents were themselves razing villages in order to deny the division's troops the food and shelter they would otherwise provide, and by a road system resembling a 'baseless mass of mud'.<sup>39</sup> The troops were also severely strained by having to undertake a hard slog through extremely difficult terrain, sleep under canvas in heavy rain, cold and snow, and subsist on invariably cold rations.<sup>40</sup> The division's Četnik opponents, meanwhile, were becoming an increasingly challenging prospect. They were able, sometimes, to equip every one of their men, even though they usually only achieved a rate of 50 to 70 per cent in this regard.<sup>41</sup> This of course falls well short of the armament levels which a conventional opponent would have been able to muster, but the fact remains that the division faced an opponent whose level of armament was on an upward trajectory, in a situation in which the overall conditions which the division faced were growing ever more arduous. The Četniks' epicentre was around Krupanj, with 3000–4000 insurgents reportedly gathered there.<sup>42</sup> This region was regarded by the 342nd Infantry Division as a 'primeval forest', ideal bandit country penetrable only with great difficulty. The toll of trying to negotiate such conditions became ever clearer; by mid-November the division judged itself as badly needing a reasonably long period of peace and quiet in which to re-establish its fighting worth and immunise its troops against infection.<sup>43</sup>

Units fighting in such conditions were likely to feel both mounting fear of the insurgents, and hatred of the civilians whom they suspected of collaborating with them. They were also likely to feel very keenly the intense pressure from above for results. Such conditions, as already pointed out, were likely to harden a unit's conduct at the lowest tactical level, brutalising the rank-and-file troops further and making them even more receptive to higher-level exhortations to ruthlessness. But difficult and brutalising though these conditions were, they do not adequately

explain why the 342nd alone chose not just to follow higher-level exhortations faithfully, but also to exceed them.

After all, the other Wehrmacht occupation divisions in Serbia during this period – the 704th, 714th and 717th Infantry Divisions – had if anything even greater reason to lash out in frustration at their conditions. Not only did they face the same opponent as the 342nd, but also, as has already been pointed out, their own inadequacies were more acute. For significant periods between August and October 1941, their predominantly static units were rapidly isolated, sometimes overwhelmed, by the insurgents. And, whilst the primarily static nature of their duties meant that these divisions had fewer opportunities for mass violence than the 342nd, they too conducted some mobile operations and had numerous opportunities for mass violence. And the 700-number divisions certainly did not conduct themselves with restraint; on 28 September, for instance, a regiment of the 704th Infantry Division reported that it had shot 2200 Serbs in reprisal for the killing of ten Germans and the wounding of a further 24.<sup>44</sup> Most notoriously, the 717th Infantry Division committed one of the worst atrocities of the war in south-east Europe, in the town of Kraljevo in October.<sup>45</sup>

Yet fearful though such conduct was, neither these divisions nor the division-level orders which directed them actually exceeded the remit set out by General Böhme. In this respect, the 700-number divisions contrast with the 342nd Infantry Division.

If conditions alone do not fully explain the 342nd's particularly obdurate behaviour, then it remains to examine the specific attitude which existed at the divisional command level. It is clear from the above orders that the 342nd was not a division whose subordinate units were violently out of control; the impetus for their brutal behaviour was coming from the division's very apex – the divisional command, and in particular, the key, driving and coordinating figure of the divisional commander, *Generalleutnant* Hinghofer.

One clear feature of the divisional command's mindset was that it implemented brutal measures not just out of obedience, but also out of conviction. The division was convinced that its harsh measures were working; among other things, it reported that it was due to its extreme use of terror that suspects among the population were lining up, sometimes willingly, to be transported to concentration camps.<sup>46</sup> Its summary of the situation at the end of the Drina-Save operation of September displayed both a profound faith in the efficacy of terror and a clear indifference to the plight of the civilian population caught up in the fighting: 'It is clear that the population of the Save-Drina bend,



due in part to being terrorised by bandits and Communist groups, has by and large cooperated in the uprising. The division's harsh and vigorous action has seriously weakened its moral power to resist'.<sup>47</sup> In addition, divisional command also clearly subscribed to historically-based anti-Serb prejudice. It claimed not only that its Četnik opponents were employing underhand insurgent tactics and avoiding direct confrontation, they were also highly receptive to 'the leaders' constant appeals to the old Serbian tradition of taking up arms in 'small wars' against 'the other'.<sup>48</sup> Their conduct was described as characterised by 'fanaticism and desperation' in their desire to break out from the division's encirclements.<sup>49</sup>

How far the 342nd Infantry Division's attitude differed from that of the 700-number divisions in these respects is difficult to establish with complete certainty, for there are significant gaps in the records of the 714th and 717th Infantry Divisions. What can be stated, however, is that those 700-number division orders and reports that survive in archives – material which, in the 704th's case at least, is extensive – do not convey either terroristic zeal or historically founded anti-Serb sentiment to the same extent as that of the 342nd. And the most striking set of clues as to what in turn lay behind the 342nd's attitude can be found in the pivotal, commanding figure of *Generalleutnant* Hinghofer. Indeed, when Hinghofer was replaced in mid-November, because his superiors perceived him as not having pressed the attack home energetically enough on one particular occasion,<sup>50</sup> the 342nd's approach began to incorporate an element of hitherto entirely absent moderation.

Hinghofer was not dismissed, but required to swap his divisional command with that of the 717th Infantry Division, commanded by *Generalmajor* Paul Hoffmann.<sup>51</sup> One of the first significant operations following Hinghofer's departure, when the Dirauf combat group attacked the Mihailović Četniks operating in the division's jurisdiction, signalled a change to a more balanced approach.<sup>52</sup> To an extent the impetus came from above, with Hoffmann invoking an OKH directive of 25 October: '(t)he population must be shown clearly that it is pointless to resist the troops and their instruments of power. Harsh conduct is required in guilty or doubtful cases. On the other hand, practical support and good setting of examples are essential to the reestablishment of peace, confidence and trust'. Whilst the usual litany of harsh measures was issued, there was also a new stress on 'protecting the population against Communists, and against unpermitted attacks on their property from any side [including, presumably, from rank-and-file German troops], help with agriculture through the commitment of personnel

and equipment, support over rebuilding of houses, [and] propaganda to promote, peace, quiet and work, as well as defence against disruptive elements'.<sup>53</sup> The 342nd also stressed that '[s]uspects are to be taken prisoner if there is no reason to shoot them'.<sup>54</sup> Correspondingly, the units taking part in Operation Mihailović did not inflict killing on a scale anything like that of earlier operations; the operation saw 12 enemy dead, and 745 men, seven officers and two women taken prisoner. Three hundred and seventeen rifles and seven machine-guns were seized – a massive contrast with earlier operations.<sup>55</sup> In a sign that a relatively more measured attitude was beginning to permeate down through the division, the units involved in the operation also perceived the population with a more nuanced eye. 'The speediest way to achieve success was through ruthless offensive action', wrote *Panzerjägerabteilung* (anti-tank detachment) 342, but whilst it also described the population as 'difficult to figure out', it judged them as being 'friendly for the most part'.<sup>56</sup>

An order of late November, meanwhile, placed new importance on protecting workers from partisan attack so as to improve their willingness to work.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, reprisals, though they continued to mete out human misery on a large scale, were becoming more restrained than before; under *Generalleutnant* Hinghofer, a violent assault on a member of the division's personnel would probably have incurred a reprisal shooting of 50 or 100 victims; under *Generalmajor* Hoffmann, the division responded to such an incident – the victim being a lieutenant – by shooting 25 hostages and inflicting a fine of 500,000 dinars upon the local population.<sup>58</sup> More generally, a note from the division to General Böhme's successor, General Paul Bader, on 9 December emphasised the general importance of using propaganda to help win the population over.<sup>59</sup>

Whilst some of the impetus for this new approach did come from above, some of it clearly came from divisional command itself. And the fact that divisional command had just changed hands can hardly have been coincidental. The crucial question, then, is what biographical forces helped shape Hinghofer's singularly brutal approach to counter-insurgency warfare in Serbia. The key to answering this question appears to lie in his experiences during World War I.

Throughout the whole of World War I, Hinghofer served as an artillery officer on the Eastern Front, both for the duration of the fighting from 1914 to 1917 and in the Habsburg army of occupation in Ukraine following the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918.<sup>60</sup> This is significant; Johannes Hürter's study of the 25 Wehrmacht army and army group commanders serving on the Eastern Front in 1941 places considerable importance upon personal experience of the Eastern Front during

World War I as a determinant of senior officers' behaviour during World War II.

Both Eastern and Western Fronts during World War I were of course the scene of protracted, bloody combat in often hellish conditions – an experience which was likely to have a brutalising effect, and in many cases did, upon officers forced to endure it at a formative time in their lives. But the Eastern Front also exposed impressionable young officers to an array of further experiences which, if anything, could play an even greater role in heightening their receptivity to brutalising Nazi ideology in later years. These experiences included what were widely perceived by prejudiced German eyes to be the 'primitive' living conditions of eastern Slavs and eastern Jews, and the 'bestial' conduct of Russian troops during their invasion of eastern Prussia in August 1914. Following the 1917 Russian Revolution, moreover, the Eastern Front experience often included violent conflict with the Bolsheviks.<sup>61</sup>

In other words, service on the Eastern Front during World War I could ingrain within officers a series of radicalising formative experiences, on top of brutalising combat and harsh day-to-day conditions. These experiences in turn incubated, with particular force, the tendency to radical ideological conviction which informed the Wehrmacht's conduct of anti-partisan warfare during World War II. And previous studies conducted by this author have shown that it was not just army and army group commanders, but divisional and regimental anti-partisan commanders also, who were susceptible to such influences.<sup>62</sup>

Experience on the Eastern Front during World War I, then, probably played a major role in driving Hinghofer's conduct in the Balkans during World War II. It is less clear, however, whether it was enough to make the decisive difference between his behaviour and that of his fellow divisional commanders operating in Serbia that autumn. *Generalmajor* Heinrich Borowski, commander of the 704th, spent significant periods on the Eastern Front during World War I, as did *Generalmajor* Hoffmann, commander of the 717th, before he replaced Hinghofer as the head of the 342nd.<sup>63</sup> The fourth divisional commander under scrutiny here, *Generalmajor* Stahl of the 714th, interspersed homeland-based staff posts with periods of active service in Zeppelins and observation balloons in a variety of theatres, including the Eastern Front.<sup>64</sup>

If Eastern Front service during World War I was a formative influence in shaping the ruthless mentality that would find an ideal outlet in General Böhme's campaign to terrorise the Serbs during 1941, then it was a formative influence to which all four generals, not just Hinghofer, were exposed – with the caveat that Stahl was undertaking a type of

active service that was less likely to expose him to brutalising, radicalising experiences in battle or through contact with eastern populations. But it could be argued that it was the *duration* of Hinghofer's 1914–18 Eastern Front experience which was decisive in giving him a brutal edge over his colleagues. Borowski's and Hoffmann's World War I service records were less peripatetic than Stahl's, but they spent significant periods of time on the Western Front;<sup>65</sup> Hinghofer's Eastern Front service, by contrast, was uninterrupted.<sup>66</sup>

Regarding the contrast between Hinghofer and Hoffmann in particular, a further factor comes into play. In September 1943, when Hoffmann was serving in the Ukraine, he was judged by the Wehrmacht's Ukraine Command as lacking the 'necessary harshness for the war in the East'. Ukraine Command formed this judgement when Hoffmann refused to obey an order to decimate by firing squad a hitherto mutinous Turkic unit which had been fighting in German service. It should be clarified that the term 'to decimate' was not meant figuratively in this case, but literally, as in the ancient Roman punishment of executing every tenth legionary in a unit that had mutinied or deserted. The reason Hoffmann gave for his refusal to carry out the order was that he did not wish to inflict the moral burden for the killing upon his men, and in particular did not wish to employ older personnel for the task. The incident resulted in Hoffmann's removal and the end of his military career.<sup>67</sup>

The significance of this show of moral courage should not be exaggerated. Hoffmann, as is already clear, was no dove when it came to anti-partisan warfare; it was under him, after all, that the 717th Infantry Division committed the appalling mass killing in Kraljevo.<sup>68</sup> But the episode in the Ukraine shows there was some limit to how far Hoffmann was prepared to go; at the very least, it may have helped ensure that he did not actually exceed his superior's calls for vengeful terror in the way that Hinghofer did. Whilst such a distinction would have been no comfort to the dead of Kraljevo, it is a distinction which historians need to recognise in order to properly quantify and explain Wehrmacht brutality.

Hinghofer's particularly lengthy Eastern Front experience aside, there is a further, perhaps still more decisive reason why his behaviour in the context of the 1941 Serb uprising was more ruthless than that of his fellow divisional commanders. Of the four of them, Hinghofer was the only one who was Austrian-born.<sup>69</sup> Thus, even though Hinghofer himself did not actually fight in Serbia during World War I, he is more likely than his three German-born colleagues to have felt the decades-old anti-Serb sentiments which General Böhme invoked in the cause of ferociously suppressing the Serb national uprising. The contrast between

Hinghofer and his colleagues on this score is perhaps the strongest testimony which the evidence provides as to the brutal insistence with which personal experiences and influences could manifest themselves in the ruthless actions of Wehrmacht anti-partisan commanders.

## Conclusion

Such are the source limitations that it is not possible to ascertain how willingly the 342nd Infantry Division's rank-and-file troops subscribed to their commander's singularly brutal approach to the Serb uprising. The fact that significant numbers of them were not Austrian meant that some may not have felt the same degree of corrosive hatred toward the Serbs.<sup>70</sup> And there is at least one indication that some did not implement their commander's directives as savagely as he would have liked.<sup>71</sup> Yet the overall record is clear: of all the Wehrmacht anti-partisan divisions fighting in Serbia during 1941, the 342nd Infantry Division was the most brutal by some way. It behaved thus not just because of higher-level directives, but also because of the conditions it faced and, most significantly, the singular ruthlessness of its commander.

There is every sign that Hinghofer's attitude was in turn shaped by the influences and experiences that had been brought to bear upon him earlier in his life. Hinghofer saw service during World War I in a theatre which was a particularly strong incubator of the ideologically coloured, radicalised attitudes that fuelled excessively severe anti-partisan warfare in Yugoslavia, as elsewhere in occupied Europe, during World War II. But even if this alone was not enough to spur him to such exceptional ruthlessness, a further and perhaps decisive impetus came from another source. Hinghofer, alone of the divisional commanders involved in combating the Serb uprising, was Austrian-born. As an ex-officer of the Royal and Imperial Army of the Habsburg monarchy, and likelier therefore to have been imbued with anti-Serb sentiment before and during World War I, he was also likelier than any of the others to be exceptionally receptive to General Böhme's brutal anti-Serbian exhortations.

This is certainly not to argue that the approach to anti-partisan warfare of those other divisional commanders was moderate or restrained in the normally accepted sense. All their respective divisions displayed great ruthlessness and brutality, in accordance with General Böhme's dictates. The point is that Hinghofer's 342nd went even further; it was the only one of the four divisions serving in Serbia during this period actually to exceed Böhme's directives. All told, the case of the 342nd Infantry Division in Serbia during autumn 1941 demonstrates with sobering force

the effect which individual-level experiences and influences could have in brutalising the behaviour of Wehrmacht units in the field.

## Notes

1. W. Manoschek (2000) 'The Extermination of the Jews in Serbia', in U. Herbert (ed.) *National Socialist Extermination Policies 1939–1945* (Oxford: Berghahn), pp. 163–85, here p. 170.
2. The most comprehensive English-language treatments of the war in Yugoslavia are J. Tomasevich (1975) *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945: The Chetniks* (Stanford: Stanford University Press); idem. (2001) *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).
3. For wider context see J. Ellis (1995) *From the Barrel of a Gun: A History of Guerrilla, Revolutionary, and Civil Warfare from the Romans to the Present* (London: Greenhill); B. Vandervort (1998) *Wars of Imperial Conquest in Africa, 1830–1914* (London: University College London Press); I. Beckett (2001) *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies* (London: Routledge).
4. See notes 15 and 16, Introduction, this volume.
5. See in particular J. Horne and A. Kramer (2001) *German Atrocities 1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
6. B. Shepherd (2004) *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), pp. 34–57.
7. Though for rank-and-file studies of great merit, see O. Bartov (1992) *Hitler's Army* (New York: Oxford University Press); C. Rass (2003) *Menschenmaterial: Deutsche Soldaten an der Ostfront* (Paderborn: Schöningh).
8. T. Schulte (1989) *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia* (Oxford: Berg), pp. 28–40.
9. Recent historiographical surveys include R.-D. Müller (1999) 'Die Wehrmacht: Historische Last und Verantwortung' in R.-D. Müller and H.-E. Volkmann (eds) *Die Wehrmacht* (Munich: Oldenbourg), pp. 3–35; B. Shepherd (2009) 'The Clean Wehrmacht, The War of Extermination, and Beyond', *Historical Journal*, 52, 455–73.
10. On biographical influences, see B. Kroener (1994) 'Strukturelle Veränderungen in der Militärischen Gesellschaft des Dritten Reiches', in M. Prinz and R. Zitelmann (eds) *Nationalsozialismus und Modernisierung* (Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchgesellschaft), pp. 267–96; J. Hürter (2006) *Hitlers Heerführer* (Munich: Oldenbourg). This author's current research forms the basis of a forthcoming study of biographical influences upon Austrian Wehrmacht officers. B. Shepherd (forthcoming) *Terror in the Balkans: German Armies and Partisan Warfare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
11. R. Fattig (1980) *Reprisal: The German Army and the Execution of Hostages during the Second World War* (San Diego: Ph.D. thesis, University of California).
12. W. Manoschek (1995) 'Serbien ist Judenfrei': *Militärische Besatzungspolitik und Judenvernichtung in Serbien 1941/42* (Munich: Oldenbourg).
13. W. Manoschek (2000) '"Coming Along to Shoot Some Jews?": The Destruction of the Jews in Serbia', in H. Heer and K. Naumann (eds) *War of Extermination* (Oxford: Berghahn), pp. 41–51, here p. 43.

14. R. Jerabek (1991) *Potiorek: General im Schatten von Sarajevo* (Graz: Styria).
15. K. Schmider (2002) *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien 1941–1944* (Hamburg: E. S. Mittler).
16. Though see W. Manoschek and H. Safrian (1995) '717/117 ID: Eine Infanterie-Division auf dem Balkan', in H. Heer and K. Naumann (eds) *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht, 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition), pp. 359–73.
17. B. Shepherd (2000) *German Army Security Units in Russia, 1941–1943: A Case Study* (Birmingham: Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham), pp. 19–36.
18. In this chapter, the term 'partisan' is used with a lowercase 'p', as a generic term for the opponents the 342nd Infantry Division was facing during this period. These opponents consisted of both Communist Partisans (see Schmider, 'Foreword', this volume, note 6) and Serbian nationalist 'Četniks'.
19. Wehrmacht infantry divisions were assigned to categories according to the strength of their composition and when they were raised. The highest-quality divisions were designated Category One. B. Kroener (2000) 'The Manpower Resources of the Third Reich in the Area of Conflict between Wehrmacht, Bureaucracy, and War Economy, 1939–1942', in B. Kroener, R.-D. Müller and H. Umbreit, *Germany and the Second World War, Volume 5: Organization and Mobilization of the German Sphere of Power. Part 1: Wartime Administration, Economy, and Manpower Resources 1939–1941* (Oxford: Clarendon), pp. 787–1154, here pp. 810–16, 964–1000. On Category Fifteen divisions specifically, see *ibid.*, p. 987.
20. Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg*, pp. 54–103.
21. Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BA-MA), film MFB4-72333, frame (hereafter fr.) 650-1. Der Bevollmächtigte Kommandierende General in Serbien (BKG Serbien), 10.10.41. Betr.: Niederwerfung kommunistische Aufstandsbewegung.
22. *Generalleutnant* was the Wehrmacht equivalent of a British major-general. Böhme, whose full title was *General der Infanterie*, outranked Hinghofer, being the Wehrmacht equivalent of a British lieutenant-general. The Wehrmacht rank one below *Generalleutnant* was *Generalmajor*, to which there was no direct British Army equivalent, though it was approximate to brigadier.
23. A. Seaton (1982) *The German Army* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson), pp. 159–60; Kroener, 'Manpower Resources', pp. 971, 987.
24. BA-MA, MFB4-72332, fr.1191-3. BKG Serbien, 22.9.41, p. 1.
25. BA-MA, MFB4-2332, fr.1102-3. BKG Serbien, 23.9.41. Betr.: Gerichtliches Verfahren gegen Freischärler, p. 2.
26. BA-MA, MFB4-72332, fr.1098-1101. Der Gerichtsherr und Kommandeur der 342. Infanterie-Division, 25.9.41. Betr.: Behandlung der Freischärler. Emphasis in original.
27. BA-MA, MFB4-72332, fr.997. 342. Infanterie-Division (ID) Ia (offen), 29.9.41.
28. On the ambiguities involved in interpreting numbers of 'insurgent' dead in Wehrmacht anti-partisan operations, see Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg*, pp. 253–4; C. Hartmann (2004) 'Verbrecherischer Krieg – verbrecherische Wehrmacht? Überlegungen zur Struktur des deutschen Ostheeres 1941–1944', in *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 52, 1–75, here 24–30; P. Lieb (2006) *Konventioneller Krieg oder NS-Weltanschauungskrieg?* (Munich: Oldenbourg), pp. 567–73; Shepherd, *Wild East*, pp. 240–2. See also note 17, this chapter.

29. BA-MA, MFB4-72332, fr.1028-9. 342 ID Ia, 27.9.41. Fernschreiben! An Gen. Kdo. XVIII. Tagesmeldung 27/28.9..
30. BA-MA, MFB4-72332, fr.969-70. 342 ID Ia, 30.9.41. Fernschreiben! An Gen. Kdo. XVIII. Tagesmeldung 29/30.9..
31. BA-MA, MFB4-72332, fr.1000, 30.9.41. Betr.: Kroatische Sicherung an der Drina.
32. BA-MA, MFB4-72332, fr.1154. BKG Serbien, 23.9.41.
33. BA-MA, MFB4-72332, fr.1077-8. 342 ID Ia, 27.9.41. Fernschreiben! An Gen. Kdo. XVIII. Tagesmeldung 26/27.9..
34. Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg*, p. 71.
35. BA-MA, MFB4-72333, fr.630-2. 342 ID Ia, 13.10.41. Div. Befehl, 14. und 15.10.41.
36. BA-MA, MFB4-72333, fr.33-7. 342 ID Ia, 30.10.41. Betr.: 10-Tagesbericht vom 20.-30.10.41.
37. BA-MA, MFB4 72334, fr.188. 342 ID Ia, 11.11.41. Betr.: Meldungen über Erschießungen, Festnahmen und Sühnemaßnahmen.
38. Ibid.
39. BA-MA, MFB4-72333, fr.522-4. Tagesmeldung 14/15.10.41.
40. Ibid.
41. BA-MA, MFB4-72333, fr.481-8. 342 ID Ic, 17.10.41. Betr.: Feindnachrichten, p. 2.
42. Ibid., p. 7.
43. BA-MA, MFB4-72333, fr.179-80. 342 ID Ia, 12.11.41 Betr.: Einsatzwert der Truppe.
44. BA-MA, MFB4-72353, fr.298. Infanterie-Regiment (IR) 734, 28.9.41. Betr.: Sühnemaßnahmen.
45. Manoschek and Safrian, '717/117 ID'.
46. BA-MA, film MFB4-72333, fr.522-4. Tagesmeldung 14/15.10.41, p. 3.
47. BA-MA, film MFB4-72332, fr.905-7. 342 ID Ib, 2.10.41. Wirtschaftliche Ausnützung des Gebietes in Save-Drina Bogen.
48. BA-MA, MFB4-72333, fr.481-8. 342 ID Ic, 17.10.41. Betr.: Feindnachrichten, p. 4.
49. Ibid.
50. BA-MA, MFB4-72334, fr.148-58. 342 ID Kommandeur, 14.11.41.
51. See note 21 for explanation of rank.
52. BA-MA, MFB4-72335, fr.880. IR 699 Ia, 9.12.41. Gefechtsbericht über das Unternehmen Mihajlovic.
53. BA-MA, MFB4-72335, fr.756-7. 342 ID Ia / op. Nr. 951/41 geh. vom 14.12.41. Anlage 2. Befriedung.
54. BA-MA, MFB4-72335, fr.729-30. 342 ID Ia, 15.12.41. Betr.: Unternehmen Mihajlovic.
55. BA-MA, MFB4-72335, fr.855. 342 ID Ia, 9.12.41. Verluste und Beute während Unternehmen Mihajlovic, 5.12.-7.12.41.
56. BA-MA, MFB4-72335, fr.550-1. Panzerjägerabteilung 342 Ia, 22.12.41. Betr.: Fernspruch Nr. 32 v. 17.12.41. Erfahrungsbericht über Unternehmen Uzice und Mihajlovic.
57. BA-MA, MFB4-72335, fr.523-4. 342 ID Ia Nr. 927/41 geh. vom 27.11.41. Anweisung für die Zusammenarbeit zwischen militärischen Führer und Betriebsführer.



58. BA-MA, MFB4-72335, fr.496. 342 ID Ia, 30.12.41. Betr.: Überfall auf Lt. Lange 2/699.
59. BA-MA, MFB4-72338, fr.244. 342 ID Ia/Ic, 9.12.41. Betr.: Propaganda.
60. BA-MA, RH7, file on Walter Hinghofer; Austrian State Archives, *Bundesheer* (Federal Army) file on Walter Hinghofer, Personal-Nachweis; E. Glaise von Horstenau (1932) *Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg 1914–1918* (Vienna: Verlag der Militärwissenschaftlichen Mitteilungen). See: order-of-battle entries for 11th Artillery Regiment: Vol. I, pp. 62–91, Vol. II Beilage 14; order-of-battle entries for 11th Field Artillery Brigade: Vol. III Beilage 2, Vol. IV Beilage 2, Vol. V Beilage 7, Vol. VII Beilage 3; index entries for 11th Artillery Regiment and commanding formations, Vols. I and II; for 11th Field Artillery Brigade and commanding formations, Vols. III–VII.
61. Hürter, *Hitlers Heerführer*, pp. 80–3. See also P. Jahn (1991) 'Russenfurcht und Antibolschewismus: Zur Entstehung und Wirkung von Feindbildern', in P. Jahn and R. Rürup (eds) *Erobern und Vernichten. Der Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion 1941–1945* (Berlin: Argon), pp. 47–64; V. Liulevicius (2000) *War Land on the Eastern Front* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Shepherd, *Wild East*, pp. 11–13.
62. On the 221st Security Division, see Shepherd, *Wild East*, pp. 129–218. On comparison between the 221st and the more hard-line 203rd Security Division during the second half of 1942, see *ibid.*, pp. 155–7. The 203rd's commander at this time, *Generalmajor* Gottfried Barton, served on the Eastern Front during World War I. BA-MA, MSg 9, file on Gottfried Barton; Glaise von Horstenau, *Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg*, order-of-battle entries for 6th Lancer Regiment: Vol. I, pp. 62–91; for 8th Cavalry Division: Vol. II Beilage 14, Vol. III Beilage 2, Vol. IV Beilage 2, Vol. V Beilage 7; for 12th Mounted Rifle Division: Vol. VII Beilage 3; index entries for 6th Lancer Regiment and commanding formations, Vol. I; for 8th Cavalry Division and commanding formations, Vols. II–V; for 12th Mounted Rifle Division and commanding formations, Vol. VII.  
 On the 369th and 373rd Infantry Divisions, see B. Shepherd (2008) 'With the Devil in Titoland: A Wehrmacht Anti-Partisan Division in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1943', *War in History*, 16, 77–97. Although the rank-and-file personnel of the 369th and 373rd were actually Croatian, their senior officers and some of their junior officers and NCOs were German.  
 A synthesised analysis of the officers of these and other occupation divisions in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia will feature in Shepherd, *Terror in the Balkans*.
63. BA-MA, MSg 9, file on Heinrich Borowski; Hermann Köhn (1928) *Erstes Garde-Feldartillerie-Regiment und seine Reitende Abteilung* (Berlin: Gerhard Stalling Verlag); BA-MA, RH7, file on Paul Hoffmann; BA-MA, Pers 6, file on Paul Hoffmann. Personal-Nachweis; Georg Dorndorf (1923) *Das Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 43* (Berlin: Gerhard Stalling Verlag).
64. BA-MA, RH7, file on Friedrich Stahl.
65. See note 63.
66. Shepherd (forthcoming) *Terror in the Balkans* examines at greater length the different patterns of Eastern Front experience which officers underwent during World War I. For an excellent example of how individual-level sources illuminate a particular middle-level Wehrmacht commander's

motives and actions, see P. Lieb (2002) 'Täter aus Überzeugung? Oberst Carl von Andrian und die Judenmorde der 707. Infanteriedivision 1941/42', *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 50, 523–57.

67. BA-MA, RH7, file on Paul Hoffmann. Der Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Ukraine, 13.9.43.
68. Manoschek and Safrian, '717/117 ID'.
69. BA-MA, RH7, files on Walter Hinghofer, Paul Hoffmann and Erich Stahl; BA-MA, MSg 109, file on Heinrich Borowski.
70. The 342nd's divisional files are not sufficiently detailed to enable a meaningful comparison of the different levels of brutality, in terms of numbers of 'insurgents' reported killed, displayed by each of the division's three subordinate regiments.
71. See note 37.

# 8

## Integrated Warfare? The Germans and the Ustaša Massacres: Syrmia 1942

*Alexander Korb*

In early August 1942, Croatian militiamen and police in a convoy consisting of 20 cars, 20 motorcycles and eight blue public buses provided by the city transport authorities left the Croatian capital of Zagreb. Simultaneously, a combat force of the German Wehrmacht designed for counterinsurgency operations began to move also. Both were heading to a region called Syrmia, with the aim of destroying a small Partisan force operating there.<sup>1</sup> But what the Wehrmacht had planned as a military operation turned into massacres that left up to 7000 Serbs dead.<sup>2</sup>

This article deals with the Independent State of Croatia (henceforth ISC), a German satellite which had been instituted after the Axis attack on Yugoslavia and the destruction of the state in April 1941. The ISC was governed by the fascist Ustaša movement under its leader, Ante Pavelić. Ustaša translates as 'insurgent' – for since the 1930s, extreme Croatian nationalists had subverted the Yugoslav state by which they had felt oppressed.<sup>3</sup> Their violent and terroristic opposition resulted most infamously in the assassination of the Yugoslav King Alexander I in 1934. After the Ustaša came to power, its militias and state agents unleashed a campaign of ethnic cleansing directed against the two million Serbs who lived on the soil the Ustaša claimed was part of Greater Croatia. In April 1941 the regime established the first Ustaša concentration camps and introduced discriminatory laws against Serbs, Jews and Roma; in May and June 1941 the first mass expulsions and massacres took place. During the summer of 1941 alone, more than 100,000 Serbs were killed in the countryside by Ustaša units, and up to 200,000 were expelled to Serbia. The Serbs in the ISC reacted with a large-scale uprising, and the Croatian government soon lost control of about a third of its territory. The Serb nationalists among the insurgents now committed mass violence of their own against Croats and Bosnian Muslims.<sup>4</sup>

German complaints about the Ustaša's perpetration of massacres began to multiply. The Wehrmacht realised that the Ustaša was driving Serb peasants into insurgency. This irritated the Germans, because – despite occasional anti-Serb harangues by Hitler and his generals – mass murder of Serbs was not a goal of the German occupation.

In general, the Germans explained the Ustaša's violence in terms of ancient tribal hatreds. They regarded it as something inevitable, and therefore did not feel motivated to reflect upon their own responsibilities and their own role in the violent disintegration of Yugoslav society in the aftermath of the German attack. Local versions of mass violence were accepted as long as they fitted into German tactical plans. But once they became counter-productive, German figures began to depict them as 'savage', giving detailed accounts of local brutality and sadism. As a consequence, their Croatian allies appeared more and more monstrous to them, whilst in contrast violence committed by German troops was depicted as orderly and stabilising.<sup>5</sup>

The Wehrmacht began to tighten their control over the Ustaša. German pressure on the ISC to soften its anti-Serb policies did produce a gradual decline in the mass killing of Serbs. Non-lethal methods such as the forced conversion of Serbs to Catholicism and forced assimilation became dominant nationalisation policies.<sup>6</sup>

But in Syrmia, the Ustaša once more hijacked an operation originally aimed against Communist Partisans and transformed it into a violent persecution of the Serb middle class of Syrmia. The German military was unable to control the Ustaša militias. For the Germans, this was the last straw. In the aftermath of the operation several key figures of the Ustaša state were eventually replaced. By September 1942, the Croatian State was effectively no longer independent and was transformed into a Wehrmacht protectorate.

Even though the history of wartime Yugoslavia has been extensively researched, the number of useful case studies of Ustaša mass violence is very limited. Case studies within Yugoslav historiography generally tended to neglect regional specifics. Instead, they mostly applied a certain historiographical canon, which had been produced for the whole of Yugoslavia, to the regions under consideration. Yugoslav historians were barely interested in analysing the conflicts between the fascist partners themselves, and they therefore failed to explain how it was possible that the Croat forces could display such a high level of independence in committing mass murder, in contravention of German tactics.<sup>7</sup>

In focusing on the Syrmian operation, this chapter aims to establish how it was possible that, in an integrated operation by German and

Croatian forces, the latter were able to commit massacres that the Wehrmacht sought to prevent. By doing so, the chapter addresses wider issues of collective violence, collaboration and anti-partisan warfare. First, by examining the German–Croatian relationship, the chapter makes a contribution to existing literature on collaboration during World War II. During the 1990s, historical perspectives on collaboration changed: whilst collaborators were previously depicted as national traitors and German sidekicks,<sup>8</sup> the independent agendas, the degree of autonomous agency and the conflicts that arose from the relationship of cooperation have come into focus in recent studies.<sup>9</sup> This perspective is useful for the troublesome relations between Germans and Croats in Syrmia and elsewhere. The Wehrmacht and the Ustaša needed to cooperate in order to destroy the Partisans in Syrmia, but this cooperation was ultimately a failure, because the German goal of ‘pacifying’ the region failed whilst the Ustaša vision of extreme violence against Serbs prevailed. By analysing the interaction between the Germans and the Ustaša, this chapter demonstrates a considerable degree of Ustaša independence. Mass murder was the tool with which this independence was achieved. Once mass violence was implemented, the situation became extremely difficult for the Germans to control.

Second, the chapter makes a contribution to the literature on anti-partisan warfare during World War II. The military aspects of Partisan warfare and civil war within the territory of the former Yugoslavia have been researched extensively from various perspectives. This includes the ruthless German occupation policies,<sup>10</sup> the ways in which warfare in Axis-controlled Yugoslavia differed from warfare in the occupied Soviet territories<sup>11</sup> and the particularities that shaped partisan warfare in occupied Yugoslavia – which included the complicated interaction between Serb nationalist Četnik militias and Tito’s Communist forces, all of whom used partisan tactics and strategies.<sup>12</sup> This chapter draws from this literature whilst aiming to expand it by showing how an anti-partisan military operation turned into a massacre.

Third, by describing the historical context of collaboration, partisan warfare, food shortages and security concerns in Croatia during the summer of 1942, the chapter focuses on a historical situation in which the Ustaša took the decision to commit mass murder of civilians. Historians have established a generic narrative on the genocide of Serbs, Jews and Roma by the Ustaša.<sup>13</sup> The Syrmian case helps to introduce some differentiations to the framework of genocide for two reasons. First, comparative genocide studies imply that most genocides were stopped by the military defeat of the perpetrators. In Croatia, however, Ustaša mass

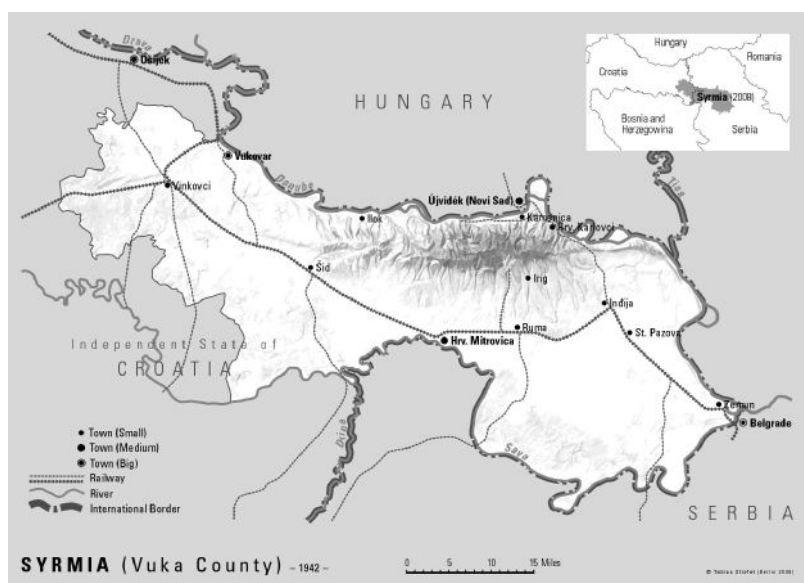
murder of Serbs had been aborted, or at least limited, by the autumn of 1941. But the analysis of massacres committed during 1942 shows how twisted and complicated such a de-radicalizing policy was, because the perpetrators never entirely abstained from their violent visions of ethnic cleansing and national homogeneity. Although a process of de-radicalisation had already started, leaders within the ranks of the Ustaša remained who were committed to a radical course of action through the use of mass violence. Second, the different characteristics of the persecutions of the three groups – Serbs, Jews and Roma – have not yet been established. This contribution shows that a violent attack on one of the victim groups did not necessarily mean simultaneous mass murder of the others. As the chapter shows, the persecutions of the various groups were intertwined and radicalised each other, but they were not identical.

As the Ustaša did not leave behind many written records, uncovering the actual decision-making process which led to the killings is a complex process. The lack of documentation can to some extent be balanced by reports, memoranda and minutes of meetings from the Croatian State Archives (HDA) and the Serbian Military Archives (AVII). Moreover, the Croatian gendarmerie oversaw a network of posts throughout the country which frequently provided accounts of Ustaša actions. German reports and war diary entries from the collections of the Federal Archives of the Foreign Office (PA-AA) and the Federal Military Archives (BA-MA) help to reconstruct the course of military events and the German perspective of the Ustaša. It must nevertheless be recognised that these documents shed a less than full light on the killings; indeed, sometimes they seek to play them down or conceal them. Survivor testimonies and eyewitness accounts, recorded in Yugoslavia and in Israel between 1944 and 1956, are able to close the documentary gap to some extent. Yet this source material must be treated with caution also. This is especially true of the accounts collected by the Yugoslav War Crimes Commission, located in the Archives of Yugoslavia (AJ), for the post-war Yugoslav Secret Service interrogated its prisoners ruthlessly and used the results to help affirm the Yugoslav founding myth. Accounts given by defendants are therefore highly problematic. Only statements given by witnesses are truly valuable in depicting the massacres and the various ways in which the Germans and the Ustaša used violence.

## Syrmia in 1942

Syrmia is a former Austro-Hungarian borderland region, situated between the Danube and Sava Rivers, the western half of which today belongs to

Croatia and the eastern half to Serbia (see Map 8.1). Syrmia possessed symbolic, strategic and economic importance for the Axis powers: indeed, the German Foreign Office perceived it as a vital section of a line connecting Zagreb to the Suez Canal.<sup>14</sup> Syrmia's military importance stemmed from the fact that it contained former Austro-Hungarian fortresses, situated opposite Belgrade across the Danube, which could afford control over the Serbian capital. Syrmia was also Croatia's bread basket. Aside from the Fruška Mountains, a 50 mile-long mountain range south of the Danube River, the region consisted of fertile lowlands. According to the Yugoslav census of 1931, Syrmia was home to 210,700 Serbs, 117,900 Croats, 68,700 Germans, and 54,000 Hungarians, Slovaks, Ruthenians and others, including 2600 Roma and 1958 Jews.<sup>15</sup> Syrmia had been awarded to the ISC in 1941, but unlike other parts of Croatia, it remained relatively calm during the first year of the Ustaša regime. Admittedly, in Syrmia as elsewhere, the Croatian authorities had expropriated and deported the Serb elite and begun forcibly converting the peasants to Catholicism. But they had not initiated massacres or other forms of mass violence of the kind seen across the rest of the ISC. Even some orthodox



**Map 8.1** Syrmia, 1942.

Source: Tobias Stiefel. Produced by illustrator especially for this volume.

churches remained open. This was because of a greater German military presence due to the region's proximity to Belgrade. Eastern Syrmia had remained under German military administration until October 1941, and had only become an integral part of the Croatian state after the first wave of mass killings of summer 1941 had passed. Moreover, it seems that the Serb, Croat, German, Hungarian and Slovak population were living in a better inter-ethnic climate than in other regions of the ISC. The pro-Nazi German minority organisation, which had much to say at the local level, was not interested in massacres of Serbs. The Croatian county chief (*Veliki Župan*), Jakob Elicker, who was an ethnic German, frequently complained about the violent persecution of Serbs. Almost half of the region's mayors were German, and many of them had good relations with their Serb neighbours. Members of the German minority did not hesitate to act extremely violently when their security concerns were threatened,<sup>16</sup> but their policies were not directed against the Serbs as a group. The anti-Communist Serb elite was a potential partner for the German community, and subsequently their representatives accused the Ustaša of persecuting 'the wrong Serbs'. In response, they were accused of being pro-Serb by the Ustaša.<sup>17</sup> The German minority restrained Ustaša power in Syrmia and thus softened anti-Serbian policies.<sup>18</sup>

In the spring of 1942, the Communist Partisans under Tito formed two detachments in the Fruška Mountains.<sup>19</sup> They operated in small units consisting of up to 100 combatants. The wooded ravines in these mountains gave excellent cover. During their raids into the lowlands, they were able to hide in the cornfields, which by July had grown high enough for them to move unseen. In mid-July 1942, the Syrmian command of the Partisans decided to expand and form new detachments. Forty fighters were sent to other parts of Syrmia. They pursued three strategic goals. Firstly, they wished to disrupt Ustaša rule in Syrmia. They stopped buses and cars and shot alleged pro-fascist passengers. Partisans raided towns and villages, killing individuals known to be Ustaše. In July and August 1942, for example, 200 Croatian soldiers or police officers were wounded or shot. Secondly, the Partisans directly threatened the German war effort. The railroad from Belgrade to Zagreb, which constituted the main German line of supply, was attacked 17 times in May 1942 alone.<sup>20</sup> Thirdly, the Partisans called for a 'battle for the harvest' in the spring of 1942, declaring their intention to leave 'no seed grain for the occupier'.<sup>21</sup> Peasants stopped harvesting the fields for fear of being shot. Increasingly focusing on the destruction of fields, mills, threshing machines and mowers, they aimed to cause a famine in Croatian cities and thus to destabilise the Ustaša state.



The Ustaša's predisposition towards mass violence grew rapidly due to Partisan activities. The Croatian government became increasingly fearful of losing Syrmia to its enemies. They even assumed that the Četnik leader, Draža Mihajlović, was hiding there, thus implying that Syrmia was the actual nerve centre of resistance in the ISC. In addition, the regime was not sure if it could continue to rely on German support. Rumours were spreading that the Wehrmacht planned to push the Ustaša aside and re-install a greater Serbian state. Indeed, officials belonging to the collaborationist Serbian government under Milan Nedić were lobbying Wehrmacht generals. They were eager to obtain the Serb-populated borderlands Croatia had gained in 1941.<sup>22</sup> On the local level, the Ustaša feared being marginalised by an accommodation between the Serb and German minorities. Ustaša violence in Syrmia can therefore also be understood as a strategy to destroy any possible positive developments in inter-ethnic relations. Overall, such findings indicate that the Ustaša perceived its violence as an act of self-defence. Ustaša militias felt justified in taking hostages, burning villages and committing killings. In doing so, they believed they would prevent the loss of part of the Croatian national homeland.<sup>23</sup>

The 'battle for the harvest' which the Partisans imposed on the Croatian forces was a matter of survival of the state. Axis army and police units were unable to prevent attacks on villages, pillage and theft of crops. Ustaša militias attacked Serb-populated areas for supplies.<sup>24</sup> The situation grew extremely severe; in a reversal of the German strategy of importing food from the allied and occupied countries, Germany even had to transport corn into the ISC. The shortage of seeds also put the next planting season at risk.<sup>25</sup> The competition for food fuelled mass violence in the countryside. Often the location of a village was crucial. Villages situated next to the main railway line bore a higher risk of being attacked.<sup>26</sup> Villages situated in-between the Partisan-controlled mountain crest and the Axis-controlled lowlands were also likely to be affected by violence. An example is the village of Grgurevci (see Map 8.1), where the Wehrmacht committed a massacre in June 1942.

The voices calling for an Axis strike against the Partisans grew louder; the Croatian administration, the Ustaša, the ethnic Germans and the German Wehrmacht all joined in. Preparations for war were visible everywhere, as the Wehrmacht intensified their efforts to control the region: armoured trains were taken into service, trees near the railway tracks were cut and neighbouring villages evacuated in order to prevent Partisan attacks on trains.<sup>27</sup> The hostile conditions, the fear of ambush and their own casualties resulted in an escalation of German violence

also. On 5 June 1942, German soldiers clashed with Partisans near the aforementioned village of Grgurevci and suffered two dead and three wounded. During the next two days, they shot at least 280 male inhabitants of the village.<sup>28</sup> Throughout Syrmia, villagers fled either to the mountains or to neighbouring Serbia. Ethnically-mixed villages quickly became deserted as Serbs grew afraid of attack by Ustaša militias, whilst Croats feared the same from the Partisans. The small Četnik detachments decided to avoid the fight and left the area.<sup>29</sup>

## Layers of violence

The intensifying tensions culminated in three intertwined operations in August and September 1942 conducted by German and Croatian forces: firstly, the Wehrmacht's 'Operation Fruška Mountains', during which it destroyed the Partisan strongholds; secondly, the Ustaša and police raids of the countryside in August and September 1942, during which a number of massacres were committed and thousands of additional prisoners were taken; and thirdly, the Ustaša mass shootings of the prisoners referred to as the 'Tomić Action'.

### 'Operation Fruška Mountains', 20–30 August 1942

Before 'Operation Fruška Mountains' began, German officers expressed their concern at reports they had received that the Ustaša was planning new massacres and expulsions, and that some commanders were even planning the annihilation of the Syrmian Serbs.<sup>30</sup> In fact, the Croatian government had asked the Germans for permission to expel 12,000 Serbs from Syrmia to Serbia. Most German protagonists strictly opposed such plans. This time, they seemed anxious to prevent Ustaša massacres.<sup>31</sup> Even though the Croats had independent lines of command, the Wehrmacht hoped to be able to control them through liaison officers and delegates.<sup>32</sup> The Croats demonstrated their goodwill to the Germans, officially asked for German military support and declared most of Syrmia an Operational Zone of the Wehrmacht.<sup>33</sup> The allies agreed to share the tasks: the Ustaša was to police the hinterland and cleanse the Syrmian towns of resistance groups, whilst the Germans would focus on conquering the Partisan basis in the mountains. A task force was formed and named after its commander, the German Major-General Borowski. It comprised 17,000 men and was a patchwork of various German, Croatian army and Ustaša units. The Partisans comprised two detachments with 400 armed men and women, but the reports of the Wehrmacht command inflated the figures to up to 5000 insurgents, of whom 2000 were supposedly armed.<sup>34</sup>

The German and Croatian forces encircled the Fruška Mountains and attacked from the south on 26 August. They pushed the Partisans northwards into the River Danube, whilst the escape route via the river was blocked by the Hungarian river monitors and border troops.<sup>35</sup> The German troops quickly accomplished their mission. By 31 August the positions of the Partisans were destroyed. Following their orders German units shot all the captured combatants and their alleged supporters, and deported all non-Partisans to detention camps in the lowlands.<sup>36</sup> The number of Partisans and civilians killed during the operation is hard to determine. Historians of the Partisan movement have estimated roughly 90 casualties,<sup>37</sup> but it is possible that this is an attempt to downplay the disaster that the Partisans suffered, or that these were the only figures available. During the operation, Axis forces committed occasional killings of civilians, for example in the village of Bukovac (Map 8.1) on 25 August 1942.<sup>38</sup> However, the military character of the operation in general prevailed, as no large-scale massacres occurred. What the German command did not realise was that the Ustaša was preparing simultaneously to commit mass killings in the lowlands, from which the Wehrmacht was mostly absent during the operation.

### **The Tomić Action**

On 10 August 1942, ten days before the Wehrmacht attacked, Colonel Viktor Tomić and his aforementioned convoy arrived in the county capital Vukovar (see Map 8.1). Tomić was a 32 year-old former insurance agent who had spent years with the Ustaša in Italian exile. After 1941, he had become chief of the Ustaša presidential guard and of the intelligence division within the Ministry of the Interior. Pavelić appointed him higher police commissioner for the Bilagora and Vuka Counties (Slavonia and Syrmia) in July 1942, with orders to purge both regions of Partisans.<sup>39</sup> After his arrival, he addressed the population in public speeches, declaring that he had come to Syrmia as a friend, and that he would protect the citizens and treat them equally and lawfully regardless of their religion, and to protect them from the opponents of the Croatian state. Yet Tomić's tone changed when he met with the regional commanders. He told them how unsatisfied the Ustaša leadership in Zagreb was with their conciliatory attitude towards local Serbs, and he threatened to court-martial them if they continued to tolerate Partisan activities.<sup>40</sup> A month later, the district chief of Mitrovica and his wife were shot because of alleged pro-Communist activities.<sup>41</sup> Tomić's attempts to purge the administration of 'moderate' officials reflect an ongoing conflict, the origins of which reach back to the founding days

of the ISC. After the Ustaša had become the ruling party in 1941, it had to rely on the existing bureaucracy and police and on the support of the conservative Peasant Party militias in order to run the state and form a Croatian army. A competition developed: whilst the Ustaša militias accused these institutions of being pro-Serb and not committed to the Ustaša-state, the latter often blamed the Ustaša for destabilising the independent Croatian state by committing massacres of peaceful Serbs.<sup>42</sup>

By subordinating or threatening the local staff Tomić quickly assumed power in Syrmia. His activities were coordinated with the Ustaša leadership: he was appointed by Pavelić himself; Eugen Kvaternik, supervisor of the Ustaša secret police (UNS) and one of the highest ranking Ustaše, visited Syrmia and attended at least one execution; finally, Tomić himself travelled to Zagreb three times during the days of the Syrmian operation.<sup>43</sup>

The Croatian forces were highly mobile. Tomić dispatched Ustaša units throughout the region, and moved his own headquarters first from Vukovar to Ruma, then to Irig and to Mitrovica last (Map 8.1). The arrival of the fleet of cars, a spectacle which exuded technical superiority and power, usually created a sensation.<sup>44</sup> A mobile court, which was attached to the police convoy, attributed Tomić with the symbols of state power. It consisted of three judges, a state attorney and several aides, technical experts and investigators.

Local Ustaša youth and militia men felt attracted to Tomić's activities and wanted to participate. Local leaders took the hint that the time for violent action had come. They started arresting Serbs, and conducted raids into Serb villages all around Syrmia. Mostly, the Serb population was surprised and astonished when the Ustaša began with the arrests, as they really had believed the action would only target Communists.<sup>45</sup> Following a similar pattern each time, the police imposed a curfew, and combined local and external Ustaša agents into patrols which conducted night-time arrests. They brought the prisoners to preliminary detention centres, and to larger structures in Vukovar and Mitrovica after a few days. Soon, 3000–4000 predominantly male prisoners were in custody in the main prison of Mitrovica. Conditions there were chaotic and extremely brutal. Prisoners were interrogated and sometimes raped, beaten or tortured.<sup>46</sup> Survivors reported that alcohol often fuelled the Ustaša violence.

High-ranking Ustaše, such as Viktor Tomić or Eugen Kvaternik, actively participated in the interrogations, the aim of which was to prove that the local Serb community was responsible for the Communist activities.<sup>47</sup> This ideological presumption explains why the Ustaša undertook

an assault on the Serb ethnic group rather than a concentrated action against Communist groups. The Germans later accused Tomić and his troops of systematically having tried to exterminate the Serb elite.<sup>48</sup> In Mitrovica, Tomić asked for a list of all Serb house owners.<sup>49</sup> Most of those arrested were wealthy peasants and members of the middle class. But Jews and Roma became targets as well. Both groups were often equated with the Partisans or depicted as their agents. In August 1942, the nationwide arrest of the Croatian Jews and their deportation to Auschwitz took place. Sixty Jews were deported from Mitrovica. Interestingly, Jews had to dig mass graves for Serbs in Mitrovica, but nevertheless the Ustaša perpetrators chose not to shoot them also, but rather to deport them.<sup>50</sup> Further, according to post-war testimonies, the Croatian army arrested several hundred Roma in the village of Grčanac on 8 September 1942. They were deported to the Jasenovac concentration camp. Only seven of the deportees returned after the war.<sup>51</sup> The persecution of Jews and Roma was not the primary goal of the Ustaša in Syrmia in the summer of 1942, but undoubtedly, the massive presence of Axis forces in Syrmia and the violence they used also radicalised and accelerated the persecution of the remaining Jews and Roma in Syrmia.

Yet the question of whom to arrest involved constant negotiation. Mostly, it was the local leaders of the Ustaša or the German minority organisation who submitted lists of suspects. As mentioned, within the ethnic German environment, Viktor Tomić's power was restricted. Granted, mass shootings occurred there as well, but local constraints finally prevented the Ustaša from attaining its goals, because overall fewer killings occurred under ethnic German command.<sup>52</sup> Tomić's staff moved the headquarters from Ruma to Mitrovica in mid-August 1942 due to constant complaints by the local German community about the Ustaša actions.<sup>53</sup> These findings show that constraining the Ustaša from below proved to be more effective than the regulations from above which the Wehrmacht command was trying to impose.

### **Ustaša raids**

Whilst the main body of Tomić's force covered the towns in Syrmia, Ustaša, police and Croatian army units raided the countryside and arrested thousands of additional prisoners. Villages were surrounded at night and searched in the early morning. Non-Serbs were released, young male Serbs fit for military service were arrested and brought to the nearest detention camp by army trucks or buses. Sometimes the entire Serb population was taken hostage. But in most villages, especially those close to the mountains, the male population were already gone.<sup>54</sup>

Young Serbs wanted to avoid the conscription into labour battalions of the Croatian army, fearing they would either be deported to Germany or forced to fight against their own people.<sup>55</sup> The Croatian soldiers hunting Partisans were extremely frustrated when they came across only aged, juvenile and female villagers. In reaction, they often arrested them as helpers of the Partisans. Sometimes massacres occurred.<sup>56</sup>

The village of Pavlovci is an example of how intensely the violence on the countryside could manifest itself: the village was attacked various times by Croatian police, by the Partisans and by the German minority militia. Every unit confiscated food and stock, and the population became utterly impoverished. At the end of August 1942, Ruma police chief Antun Bauer raided the village and arrested 142 men and one woman. Finally, after a Partisan attack on Ruma, Pavlovci was burned down by a Croatian army unit.<sup>57</sup> Many other villages were completely destroyed in the summer of 1942. The local population took over the property of the deported Serbs, and conflicts arose around the distribution. Croatian refugees from Dalmatia or impoverished ethnic Germans moved into the emptied houses.<sup>58</sup> Croatian soldiers transported large quantities of goods they had stolen to their homes.<sup>59</sup> Such dynamics did not stop in 1945, but were renewed when the German minority was expelled and when parts of the Hungarian minority left for Hungary during and after the end of the war. The Ustaša-imposed violence created a dynamic which devastated and transformed rural society.

### Prisoner shootings

The Ustaša detention centres housed a variety of prisoners, taken by various units for a multitude of reasons. After the German assembly camp in Ruma became overcrowded, the Germans handed over their prisoners to the Croat authorities for further treatment.<sup>60</sup> The Croatian forces simply did not know where to put the thousands of prisoners. There was no place for new prisoners in the Croatian concentration camp system in the summer of 1942 – partly due to the simultaneous deportation of Jews to Auschwitz. Transports of prisoners that had departed to the concentration camp of Jasenovac were sent back to Syrmia because of the overcrowding of the camp.<sup>61</sup> This implies that the Croatian authorities were faced with a self-inflicted dilemma: they could either release their prisoners or kill them. As the former was often not an option, this situation added to the Ustaša's willingness to kill. A self-produced crisis seems to have accelerated the Ustaša's path towards mass murder.

Again, it does not seem that there was a precise plan of how to proceed. The Croatian police divided the prisoners into groups. Fewer than

10 per cent of the prisoners were released after a few days. Local authorities or the Germans had intervened on the behalf of some; others were set free for reasons such as gender, nationality, age or professional skills, or because they served in labour battalions of the Croatian army.<sup>62</sup> But the majority of the prisoners were shot. A small number were sentenced to death, whilst most were shot as hostages. Probably the judges had at least some kind of evidence against those whom they sentenced, such as a denunciation or a pre-war political record. Many of them were actually Communists. The hostage shootings, on the other hand, mainly targeted Serbs regardless of their political record. The procedure of the courts martial followed a specific method. The judges could choose to sentence prisoners to death (to be carried out within three hours by law) or to a three-year sentence in a concentration camp, or to acquit them, although this rarely happened. The verdict was posted publicly. A doctor and a judge attended the executions. In August 1942 the court sentenced to death at least 120 persons in Vukovar alone.<sup>63</sup> The hostages, by contrast, were chosen more arbitrarily. In one case, all 250 Serb workers whose names happened to be on a list to work on a railway were selected.<sup>64</sup> Some victims were taken from the pool of Communists already arrested or registered. However, the decisive reason why the Ustaša chose a hostage was that the person was Serbian.<sup>65</sup>

The largest mass killing was the shooting of more than 1000 prisoners on 4 and 5 September 1942 in the Orthodox cemetery of Mitrovica. Petar Milošević, a 47-year-old Serb from Mitrovica, gave a detailed account. He was part of a group of 60 citizens who were picked up at their homes by local police at dawn on two consecutive days in order to dig mass graves. According to him, Tomić, local police chief Eugen Đurić and two German officers inspected the mass graves after they were excavated. The prisoners arrived at the cemetery on buses after sunset. Most of the prisoners were peasants, many of whom the Wehrmacht had taken as prisoners during its operation in the Fruška Mountains. A few young men and women belonged to a Communist youth group. Another victim was a ten-year-old boy. The prisoners had been beaten and maltreated; some of them had open wounds or broken limbs. They remained seated in the cars until they were escorted one by one to the execution site. Their hands were tied with wire behind their backs. Ustaša men put lights around the graves and positioned themselves around them. The victims were forced to lie down on the corpses of those already shot. An Ustaša soldier followed, stood behind the victims and shot each one in the head. On the second day of the mass killing, Milošević counted 24 busloads with 1360 prisoners arriving at

the cemetery. This time, some Ustaše lost their temper and started cursing and stabbing prisoners. At 3am, after the killings were finished and the graves sealed, Tomić told the gravediggers to go home and not to speak about what had happened. Milošević's account ends the next day, when the Ustaša soldiers cleaned their blood-spattered boots in the Sava River. The German embassy also reported the shootings, and reported a slightly lower number of 1036 victims.<sup>66</sup>

The pattern at other executions was similar: the execution sites were in the outskirts of towns; local Jews or ordinary citizens were forced to dig the mass graves; Tomić or his local deputies supervised the shootings. According to eyewitness reports, Ustaše and police officers reluctant to kill were forced to participate in the massacres. Sometimes the Ustaša had conflicts regarding whom to shoot and whom to let live, and on at least one occasion Ustaše started a fight over whether a group of women should be killed or not. The victims were buried immediately, whether they were dead or injured.<sup>67</sup>

Altogether, according to most sources, the Croatian forces had shot 2000 to 3000 Serbian civilians. Some Wehrmacht branches estimated 7000 victims, which might constitute the total number of losses in Syrmia during that period.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, at least several hundred hostages were deported to the Jasenovac concentration camp on at least three transports. Many of these hostages died in the camp; most children of these deportees were sent to Croatian orphanages.<sup>69</sup>

## Reactions

German-directed mass killings in the context of anti-partisan warfare in Eastern Europe cost thousands of lives each month. In occupied Yugoslavia the Wehrmacht committed numerous massacres as well, such as the shooting of approximately 4000 Serbs in the Serbian towns of Kraljevo and Kragujevac in October 1941.<sup>70</sup> Why, then, was the Wehrmacht perturbed by Ustaša massacres? Obviously, the Germans' and the Ustaša's understanding of when violence should be used, and to what extent, differed markedly. The Wehrmacht held retaliation, in accordance with the German code of conduct, and mass killings of alleged partisans to be militarily necessary and useful. Ustaša massacres, in contrast, were viewed as barbaric and counter-productive. A comparison of the Syrmian operation with another massive Wehrmacht operation against a partisan stronghold in the Kozara Mountains in northern Bosnia in July 1942 serves as an example. During the Kozara operation, German troops and their Croatian auxiliaries shot hundreds



of prisoners, depopulated the entire region, and deported the survivors to concentration camps or scattered them throughout Croatia.<sup>71</sup> But the Kozara operation was deemed a military success, because the overall use of violence followed the German code of conduct. Apart from some exceptions, the operation did not provide room for independent Ustaša mass violence.

In Syrmia, by contrast, the German military was unable to control the Ustaša militias. The Germans realised this only after the mass killings had begun. The attitude of the Germans changed during the prisoner shootings. What was initially perceived as 'legal execution', as the aforementioned presence of German officers at the mass shooting in Mitrovica underlines, soon became a cause of German alienation and revulsion. German observers became increasingly affronted and underwent a clear change of perspective, describing the mass shootings as 'massacres, accompanied by drunkenness on the part of the perpetrators' and as 'slaughters and sadistic riots'.<sup>72</sup>

However, the German change of mind came too late, because the mass killings had reached a level of destruction beyond control.<sup>73</sup> The perception that it was not possible to stop the dynamics of mass violence in Croatia also corresponded with the German depiction of Ustaša violence as wild, chaotic and bestial. Where mass killings were viewed as an expression of ancient hatreds, the identification, replacement or intimidation of key figures responsible for the massacres seemed useless. In addition, this perception helped the Germans to legitimise their own mass violence as orderly and constructive. The paradigm of the Germans as bearers of order and stability partly prevented a sustained analysis of why the partisans were so successful.<sup>74</sup>

Besides this, the few Wehrmacht officers attempting to limit the killings were not backed by their superiors. Hitler was extremely reluctant to intervene in internal Croatian affairs.<sup>75</sup> Further, the strength and manpower of German units on the ground was limited, especially after the withdrawal of the bulk of the German troops prior to the attack on the Soviet Union. The Wehrmacht possessed too few means to effectively supervise the Ustaša on the ground, and the German security divisions were mostly over-aged and poorly motivated and equipped.<sup>76</sup> On a higher level, the Foreign Ministry, the SS, the military administration of Serbia and the German embassy in Zagreb all had different political agendas. Competition and a lack of clear lines of authority among German agencies weakened their ability to intervene, and enabled the Ustaša to play off German officials against one another. They often just ignored German restrictions. Finally, there was no political movement

available with which the Ustaša could be replaced. It was the only movement willing to side with the Germans, and the Wehrmacht could not replace the Ustaša because they needed their militias for fighting the partisans. The Germans and the Ustaša depended on each other.

Tomić's massacres nevertheless generated severe conflicts between the Germans and the Croats. The number of protests and interventions on many levels was high. Not only the Germans, but also the Croatian county chief and even some local Ustaše protested sharply against some of the killings.<sup>77</sup> Further, the spouses of the arrested men held a rally in front of the Ustaša headquarters on 1 September 1942.<sup>78</sup> None of these protests, however, seem to have softened the outcome of the Ustaša activities significantly. The Wehrmacht's concerns for prisoners they had handed over to the Ustaša mostly came too late. Many were shot anyway.<sup>79</sup> Only protests on a higher level forced the Croatian leadership to react. When even Serbia's prime minister Milan Nedić threatened to resign in protest against the treatment of his fellow nationals in neighbouring Croatia, the German minister in Croatia, Siegfried Kasche, finally intervened with the Croatian head of state on 11 September 1942 in order to stop the mass killings and to bring about Viktor Tomić's dismissal. Ultimately, the police action was aborted, and several hundred prisoners were released.<sup>80</sup>

This time, the Germans decided to take the opportunity for some more significant changes regarding the structure of the Ustaša state. At a meeting in Sofia on 17 September 1942, the most important German officials of southeast Europe, minister Kasche, the Wehrmacht representative in Croatia General Glaise von Horstenau, and the Wehrmacht commander of southeast Europe Colonel General Löhr, called for a 'rational solution of the Serb problem'. They stated that it was impossible to kill the two million Serbs living in the ISC, and made the Ustaša police chief Eugen Kvaternik the scapegoat for the persecution of Serbs there. As the Wehrmacht was also frustrated with Croatia's lack of military achievements, the Croatian marshal and minister of war Slavko Kvaternik, who was the father of the former, was forced to resign too. Here, it becomes evident how easily the Germans could enforce major changes, if the military and diplomats spoke with one voice and if they were backed by Hitler. The Croatian head of state, during his visit to Hitler's headquarters in Ukraine on 23 September 1942, had no alternative but to consent.<sup>81</sup> But the Ustaša remained in power, and the changes were therefore gradual rather than structural. The Germans had found their scapegoats, and the Croatian side once more downplayed massacres as local vendettas, or even presented them as German-ordered

persecutions.<sup>82</sup> The Germans were shocked to find out that Tomić's militia conducted another massacre near Bjelovar on its way back to Zagreb.<sup>83</sup> Kasche now called Tomić the most unpleasant type of Ustaša leader, 'a sick kind of person capable of any kind of crime'.<sup>84</sup> Only after a new round of protests did Tomić and some other notorious Ustaša leaders leave for temporary exile in Italy and Hungary.<sup>85</sup> However, most of them kept a low profile only for a short time, and regained power in 1943 or 1944. Tomić, for instance, became head of the intelligence department of the Ustaša militia in 1944. In 1947 he committed suicide in British custody in Rome.<sup>86</sup>

## Conclusion

When the attack on the Syrmian partisans was launched in the summer of 1942, the German military were confident that they could control the Ustaša militias. However, it was the Ustaša that directed the course of events: with its mobility, its swiftness and its absolute commitment to use violence against the Serbs, whom it perceived as a threat to the unity of the state, it proved to be the dominant actor. They were especially eager to act ruthlessly in Syrmia as they believed they were about to lose the region to Serbia. The use of violence was perceived as the remedy for an uncertain situation. Furthermore, many massacres stemmed from the fact that Ustaša units went to Serb villages in order to supply themselves. This was a crucial factor in a time of food shortages. The Ustaša used its room for manoeuvre in order to pursue its own goals. It perceived the entire Serb population as its enemy and equated the Communist partisans with the Serb population. Consequently, they believed that their violent assaults against Serb civilians were as justified as the Wehrmacht campaign against the partisans. The German units were too preoccupied with anti-partisan warfare, and their commanders did not intervene forcefully. The German perception of Ustaša violence as the expression of ancient ethnic hatreds beyond any outside control was particularly important in preventing effective German intervention. This mechanism can also be observed during the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s, when the fear of being unable to control tribal hatreds made Western politicians very reluctant to intervene in Bosnia.<sup>87</sup>

The Syrmian operation ultimately proved a failure. The German operation was a military success, but German prestige had suffered a serious blow due to the Wehrmacht's inability to prevent Ustaša mass killings. This had added to the population's sympathy for the partisans. Ustaša terror generated new unrest and waves of refugees, many of whom

combined into new partisan units operating from the Fruška Mountains as early as in January 1943.<sup>88</sup>

Finally, in September 1942, the Germans imposed a major political restructuring on the ISC. This was made possible because, for the first time, various German factions operated in a state of unity. From that time on, the ISC lost much of its independence due to German political and military control. However, local Ustaša militias continued to be an independent factor, and the Germans had to recognise that they were unable to control Croatia effectively. The Ustaša was not replaced due to its indispensability to the German war effort within a civil war which the German occupation had caused to emerge.

## Notes

1. In this chapter, Partisans are referred to with a capital 'P' in the case of the Yugoslav Communist Partisans specifically, and with a small 'p' in the case of partisans generically.
2. Arthur Haefner to German General in Zagreb, Glaise von Horstenau, 10 October 1942, BA-MA, RH31 III/13, p. 127.
3. The members of the Ustaša are called 'Ustaše' (insurgents). For the classification of the Ustaša as fascist see S. Payne (2006) 'The NDH State in Comparative Perspective', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 7, 409–15.
4. M. Broszat and L. Hory (1964) *Der kroatische Ustascha-Staat 1941–1945* (Stuttgart: DVA); J. Tomasevich (2001) *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press); H. Sundhaussen (1995) 'Der Ustascha-Staat: Anatomie eines Herrschaftssystems', *Österreichische Osthefte*, 37, 497–533; T. Dulić (2005) *Utopias of Nation* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis).
5. J. Gumz (2001) 'Wehrmacht Perceptions of Mass Violence in Croatia 1941–1942', *Historical Journal*, 44, 1015–38. For a typical example of the simultaneous depiction of Ustaša violence as bestial and German violence as orderly, see a German soldier's letter from Croatia quoted in W. Thirring (2008) *Lust am Forschen. Lebensweg und Begegnungen* (Vienna: Seifert), pp. 54ff.
6. M. Biondich (2008) 'Religion and Nation in Wartime Croatia: Reflections on the Ustaša Policy of Forced Religious Conversions, 1941–1942', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 83, 71–116.
7. See for example D. Lukać (1968) *Banja Luka i okolica u ratu i revoluciji* (Banja Luka: Savez udruženja boraca NOR-a); Ž. Atanacković (1968) *Srem u narodnooslobodilačkom ratu i socijalističkoj revoluciji* (Beograd: Mesna zajednica-Mesni odbor SUB NOR-a).
8. For collaboration see D. Littlejohn (1972) *The Patriotic Traitors: A History of Collaboration in German-occupied Europe, 1940–45* (London: Heinemann).
9. Some authors even advocate abandoning the term 'collaboration' as such and replacing it with the more neutral term 'cooperation'; see C. Dieckmann, B. Quinkert and T. Tönsmeier (eds.) (2004) *Kooperation und Verbrechen. Formen*

- der, *Kollaboration' im östlichen Europa 1939–1945* (Göttingen: Wallstein), pp. 11ff. For empirical studies see T. Tönsmeier (2003) *Das Dritte Reich und die Slowakei 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh); K. Berkhoff (2003) *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap).
10. For the Balkans see especially W. Manoschek (1996) *Die Wehrmacht im Rassenkrieg* (Vienna: Picus); K. Schmider (2002) *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien 1941–1944* (Hamburg: Mittler); B. Shepherd (2009) 'With the Devil in Titoland: A Wehrmacht Anti-Partisan Division in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1943', *War in History*, 16, 77–97.
  11. On partisan warfare in German-occupied Eastern Europe see M. Cooper (1979) *The Phantom War: The German Struggle against Soviet Partisans 1941–1944* (London: MacDonald and Jane's); B. Shepherd (2004) *War in the Wild East* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press); P. Blood (2006) *Hitler's Bandit Hunters* (Washington, DC: Potomac).
  12. 'Četnik' is the word for a member of a četa, a Serbian military unit that became eponymous for Serb nationalist militias. Their members are called 'Četnici'.
  13. J. Steinberg (1994) 'Types of Genocide? Croats, Serbs and Jews 1941–5' in D. Cesarani (ed.) *The Final Solution* (London: Routledge), pp. 175–93; H. Hirsch (1999) 'Genocide in Yugoslavia' in I. Charny (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Genocide, II* (Jerusalem: ABC-CLIO Inc), p. 634. T. Dulić has presented a differentiated approach: he classifies the Ustaša persecution of Jews and Roma as a genocide and the persecution of Serbs as an 'ethnocide' (ethnic cleansing) or an attempted genocide. See T. Dulić (2006) 'Mass killing in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941–1945: a case for comparative research', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8, 255–81.
  14. Luther to Ribbentrop, 5.11.42, reproduced in Bundesarchiv (ed.) (1992) *Die Okkupationspolitik des deutschen Faschismus in Jugoslawien, Griechenland, Albanien, Italien und Ungarn (1941–1945)* (Berlin: Hühig), p. 215.
  15. Publikationsstelle (1943) *Die Gliederung der Bevölkerung des ehemaligen Jugoslawien nach Muttersprache und Konfession nach den unveröffentlichten Angaben der Zählung von 1931* (Vienna: Publikationsstelle).
  16. For testimonies regarding the German ethnic group see AJ/110/683, pp. 133f., 193, 268.
  17. Moser to Requard, 19 September 1942, PA-AA, German Embassy Rome/Quirinal (GER), secret/152, fr.E302619.
  18. For Syrmia in 1941 see German Embassy in Zagreb (GEZ), report, 26.10.42, BA-MA, RH31 III/7, no. 2; Ustaša Stara Pazova to Ustaša Irig, 10.12.41, HDA 223/39, 475 I.A; Glaize to Armed Forces High Command (OKW), 13.9.41, BA-MA, RH31 III/8, no. 155; Ustaša Mitrovica to the Minister of War, 11.9.41, AVII record group NDH/61, 17/3-4; for the German ethnic group in Syrmia see AJ, record group War Crimes Commissions (110), file 677 pp. 235, 281. See also proceedings April 1942, Ia/714 ID, 11.6.42, US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) T-315/2258, fr.519.
  19. Vojnoistorijski Institut (ed.) (1963) *Oslobodilački rat naroda Jugoslavije 1941–1945. Od sloma Kraljevine Jugoslavije do drugog zasedanja AVNOJ-a, I* (Beograd: Vojnoistorijski Institut), p. 324.
  20. Headquarter for Transportation Zagreb no. 778.42/secret, 5.6.42, NARA T-120/5797, fr.H309971.
  21. Vojnoistorijski Institut, *Rat*, p. 323.

22. Consular ambassador of the ISC in Belgrade to Croatian Foreign Office, 26.8.42, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA) M.70/122, pp. 32ff.
23. See Ustaša Hv. Kamenica to Ministry of Interior Affairs, 22.11.41, HDA 223/36, I-A, 3807/41; Commissioner Golubović, Mitrovica, to State Secretary for Public Labour, 12.1.42, HDA 223/42, I-A 313/42, pr.1; County Chief Elicker to GEZ, 6.8.42, NARA T-120/5781. On paranoid perceptions of genocide as self-defence see D. Moses (2008) 'The Fate of Blacks and Jews: A response to Jeffrey Herf', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 10, 269–87, here 280.
24. See Croatian Gendarmerie Command (VOZ), report, 10.10.42, AVII/NDH/75, 4/2-1; Croatian Board of Trade to the Poglavnik's Headquarters, 14.8.42, HIA Tomasevich/1, no. 539/42.
25. German ethnic group to Commanding General in Serbia (CGS), 1.8.42, NARA T-120/250; Dr von Reisinger to Field Headquarters, 3.8.42, NARA T-120/250; Croatian Embassy Berlin to German Foreign Office (AA), 1.7.42, HDA 227/1, dep.4.
26. For the military activities see VOZ to Military Office of the Poglavnik, 10.9.42, HDA 223/30, no. 1180; Kasche to Hungarian ambassador, 22.1.43, NARA T-120/5787.
27. Report, June 1942, Ia/714 ID, 2.7.42, NARA T-315/2258, frame (fr.) 658; Glaise, notes, 10.11.42, BA-MA RH31 III/9, p. 5.
28. For a Croatian account see 4<sup>th</sup> Gendarmerie regiment to VOZ, 15.6.42, AVII/NDH/146, 4/27. For a German account see Glaise to CGS, 8.6.42, BA-MA RH31 III/2, no. 118/42.
29. See Četnik leaflet, 16.9.42, PA-AA/GEZ secret/2, no. 1241.
30. Testimony Zević, former district chief, 14.9.45, AJ/110/683, pp. 14–17.
31. German Embassy Belgrade (GEB) to AA, 18.8.42, PA-AA/GEB/673, fr.153664; district Ruma to Vuka County, 30.7.42, 6.8.42, NARA T-120/5781, no. 68/42.
32. Police attaché Helm to RFSS Himmler, 9.9.42, NARA T-120, fr.H300155.
33. Kasche to Croatian Foreign Minister Lorković, 11.1.43, PA-AA/GER secret/152, fr.E259549ff; CGS, no. 4583/42, to Task Force Borowski, 26.8.42, NARA T-120/250; CGS to Glaise, 23.8.42, NARA T-120/250, fr.537.
34. Vojnoistorijski Institut, *Rat*, pp.323ff; War diary (KTB) CGS, 20.8.42, BA-MA/RW40; report Katschinka to Kasche, 16.9.42, PA-AA/GEZ secret/2, no. 1241; Atanacković, *Srem*, p. 246.
35. 718. ID, order no. 193/42, 24.9.42, NARA T-120/250; CGS to Royal Hungarian liaison officer, 29.8.42, NARA T120/250; Atanacković, *Srem*, p. 247.
36. Katschinka to Kasche, 16.9.42, PA-AA/GEZ secret/2, no. 1241; KTB MB Serbien, 24 August 1942, BA-MA RW40.
37. Atanacković, *Srem*, 255. However, the human losses German units inflicted during other operations at the same time imply that the numbers of those killed in Syrmia might have been significantly higher; for the killing of 480 alleged partisans by the 714th Infantry Division on 5 September 1942 in the Samarica region see Gumz, 'Wehrmacht', 1016.
38. 718. ID Ia, order, 17.8.42, NARA T-120/250; see testimony AJ/110/683, p. 202.
39. D. Kovačić (2005) 'Osnivanje Župskih Redarstvenih Oblasti u NDH i Djelovanje Višeg Redarstvenog Povjerenstva u Srijemu 1942', *Scrinia Slavonica*, 5, 254–85, here 269.
40. See verdict on Tomić, AJ 110, fasc. 3380, no. 121.4
41. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 18.9.42.

42. See M. Hoare (2006) *Genocide and Resistance in Hitler's Bosnia* (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 19; see also Glaise to OKW, 19.5.42, BA-MA RH31 III/2, without number, p. 11.
43. See various testimonies, AJ/110/683, pp. 14ff.; 687, pp. 105, 135 and 194; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives (USHMMA) 1998.A.0028/1, K. 320/51. According to these testimonies, Kvaternik attended interrogations and executions and undertook torture himself. It sometimes seems that post-war investigators aimed to blame key figures such as Pavelić and Eugen Kvaternik for all the violence committed, and thus were interested in testimonies giving evidence that they were personally involved, some of which may have been fabricated.
44. Haeffner to Glaise, 27.9.42, BA-MA RH31 III/13, pp.108ff; file on Tomić by the Yugoslav War Crimes Commission, AJ/110/683-217.
45. See various testimonies in HDA 1521/35; report Dr Moser to GEZ, 19.9.42, PA-AA/GER secret/152, fr.E302619.
46. Haeffner to Glaise, 27.9.42, BA-MA RH31 III/13, pp.108ff; see also Kasche's report to Lorković of 11.9.42, PA-AA/GER secret/152, fr.E302618.
47. District Court Zagreb, testimony Šablić, 29.3.56, USHMMA 1998.A.0028/1, K. 320/51; testimony Vinek, 4.12.45, AJ/110/683-130.
48. Kasche to AA, 11.1.43, PA-AA/GER secret/152, fr.E259549ff.
49. See various eyewitness reports in HDA 1521/35/133.
50. J. Dražić (1998) *Jevreji u Mitrovici* (Sremska Mitrovica: Muzej Srema), pp. 52ff. For deportations from Zemun see City Commander to Ministry of War, 28.7.42, Jewish Historical Museum Belgrade (JIMB), 71, 20/3-1.
51. Testimony Mitrović, 2.4.45, AJ/110/683-215. The location of the village could not be identified.
52. Unlike in Serbia, Croatian and German forces in the ISC generally followed a one-to-ten execution ratio for every Axis casualty. See decree 331/1941, 2.10.41, USHMMA 1998.A.0028, without number.
53. Altgayer to CGS, 1.8.42, NARA T-120/250. On 14 August 1942, Antun Bauer, the police chief of Ruma, ordered the shooting of 93 young Serb peasants from the neighbouring villages as retaliation for partisan attacks that left nine dead. Testimony Zević, 14.9.45, AJ/110/683, pp. 14-17; Kasche to AA, 11.1.43, PA-AA/GER secret/152, fr.E259549ff.
54. General Luethers to High Command South-East, 19.1.43, AVII/Na. 8, 3/12.
55. City Commander Zemun to Ministry of War, 28.7.42, JIMB, 71, 20/3-1.
56. Testimony Zorić, 8.2.45, AJ/110/687, 241/46; testimony Mitrović, 2.4.45, AJ/110/683 p. 215; testimony Zević, 14.9.45, op. cit., pp. 14-17.
57. Testimony Pavlović, 1.3.45, AJ/110/683, p. 75; testimony Todorić, 3.3.45, op. cit.
58. For refugees from Dalmatia see testimony Rašić, 10.4.45, AJ/110/683, p. 193. For ethnic Germans see op. cit., p. 202.
59. Helm, note, 11.9.42, HDA 1521/35, p. 133.
60. Report Task Force Borowski to GEZ, Ia 4588/42, 21.8.42, NARA T-120/250.
61. See Gumz, 'Wehrmacht', 1022; German Minister in Croatia, Kasche to Glaise, 10.7.42, NARA T-501/250, fr.115ff.
62. Testimony Mahovac, 26.3.45, AJ/110/683, pp. 134, 210; Haeffner to Glaise, 27.9.42, BA-MA RH 31 III/13, pp. 108ff.

63. F. Jelić-Butić (1977) *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941–1945* (Zagreb: Liber), p. 159; Kovačić, 'Osnivanje,' p. 271; testimony Dr Šimunović, AJ/110/683, p. 110. Šimunović had to attend 15 executions on 31 July 1942.
64. Testimony Zević, 14.9.45, AJ/110/683, pp. 14–17.
65. Glaise to GEB, 22.10.41, BA-MA RH31 III/1, p. 245.
66. Testimony Milošević, without date, AJ/110/683; report Katschinka to Kasche, 16 September 1942, PA-AA/GEZ secret/2, no. 1241.
67. Testimony Šablić, County Court Zagreb, 29 March 1956, USHMMA 1998. A.0028/1, K. 320/51; American Joint Distribution Committee, report on Mitrovica, Belgrade, 13.3.46, YVA O.10, 3-1-8; testimony Vajs, 4.9.45, AJ/110/22-2a-1/5; testimony Vinek, 4.12.45, AJ/110/683-130; testimony of the former police officer Lompar, 15.12.44, AJ/110/683, p. 21.
68. Kasche to AA, 11.1.43, PA-AA/GER secret/152, fr.E259549ff; KTB CGS, 27.9.42, BA-MA RW40/33, pp. 14ff; a Yugoslav state commission which investigated the mass crimes found 2180 bodies in various mass graves.
69. 714 ID Ia, proceedings, September 1942, NARA T-315/2258, fr.887; 714 ID, Ia, report October 1942, NARA T-315/2258, fr.887.
70. K. Schmider (1999) 'Auf Umwegen zum Vernichtungskrieg? Der Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien, 1941–1944' in R.-D. Müller and H.-E. Volkmann (eds) *Die Wehrmacht* (München: Oldenbourg), pp. 901–22.
71. For the Kozara operation see Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg*, pp. 147ff.; Dulić, *Utopias*, pp. 243ff.
72. Kasche to AA, 11.1.43, PA-AA/GER secret/152, fr.E259549ff; Helm, note, 11 September 1942, HDA 1521/35, p. 133.
73. Dr. Krainer, report, 11.1.1943, PA-AA/GER secret/152, fr.E302619; Helm to RFSS, 25.9.42, PA-AA Inland II g, R 100.766, fr.H300193.
74. Gumz juxtaposed the Wehrmacht's perception of Ustaša violence with the perceptions of their own violence. See J. Gumz (1998) 'German Counterinsurgency Policy in Independent Croatia 1941–1944', *The Historian*, 33, 1–16.
75. Gumz, 'Counterinsurgency', p. 7. For an unsuccessful intervention see 718th Infantry Division, Ic, report, 20.6.42, BA-MA 26-118/21, no. 824.
76. Shepherd, 'Devil', p. 83.
77. Haeffner to Glaise, 27.9.42, BA-MA RH31 III/13, pp. 108ff.
78. Testimony Willhammer, former director of the sawmill in Vukovar, 19.9.45, AJ/110/683, p. 20; testimony Zević, 14.9.45, op.cit., pp. 14–17.
79. Von Reisinger to Field Headquarters 725, report, 3.8.42, NARA T-120/250; Field Headquarters Zagreb to CGS, 8.8.42, NARA T-120/250.
80. AA, note for Hitler, 5.10.42, PA-AA, R 29.664, Bureau Secretary of State, Yugoslavia/4, fr.153790ff; Kasche to AA, 12.9.42, NARA T-120/5786, fr.H300833.
81. GEZ on the conference with Supreme Commander Löhr in Sofia, 17.9.42, Institut für Zeitgeschichte, MA 515, pp. 620–3; Tomasevich, *War*, p. 440.
82. AA, 6.10.42, PA-AA, R 29.664, Bureau Secretary of State, Yugoslavia/4, fr.153796; report no. 5, 25.9.42, PA-AA/GER secret/152, fr.E302618.
83. CGS, 27.9.42, BA-MA RW40/33, pp. 14f.
84. Kasche to AA, 16.12.43, NARA T-120/5792, fr.H306055ff.
85. Kasche to AA, 11.1.43, PA-AA/GER secret/152, fr.E259549ff.



86. Haeffner, report, 29.5.43, BA-MA RH 31 III/13, no. 201 and 235. For Tomić's promotion see M. Grčić (ed.) (1997) *Tko je tko u NDH. Hrvatska 1941–1945*. (Zagreb: Minerva), p. 401; see further J. Jareb (ed.) (1995), *Eugen Dido Kvaternik. Sjećanja i zapažanja, 1925–1945: prilozi za hrvatsku povijest* (Zagreb: Starčević), p. 284.
87. See R. Kaplan (1993) *Balkan Ghosts* (New York: St. Martin's Press), and its assumed influence on the Clinton administration.
88. Commander German Troops in Croatia to High Command South-East, 19.1.43, NARA, Nuremberg Trials Records, Doc. NOKW-958.

# 9

## Propaganda and the Partisan War in Ljubljana 1943–45

Gregor Joseph Kranjc

Marching into the Province of Ljubljana in September 1943 on the heels of the capitulating Italians, the Germans hoped quickly to re-establish order and pacify this strategic central European communication and transportation nexus. Instead they were absorbed, willingly or not, into a pre-existing vicious civil war between the Communist-led resistance force, the *Osvobodilna fronta* (OF – Liberation Front), and their anti-Communist opponents, many of whom had collaborated with the Italians. The Germans would enter as the third and least convincing element in a triangular propaganda struggle for the hearts and minds of the Slovene population of the province. The propaganda that was utilised by the three belligerents in the province would reflect not only each faction's ideological predisposition, but also their relationships with one another, the mindset of their intended target and the growing realisation that Germany would lose the war.

The Axis invasion of Yugoslavia began on 6 April 1941. Within days Slovenia would be occupied and partitioned between Germany, Italy, and Hungary. Compared to the rest of occupied Slovenia, the Province of Ljubljana, or the *Provincia di Lubiana* as the Italians called their stake of Slovene territory, had a rather atypical experience under occupation. It included the Slovene capital of Ljubljana as well as relatively poor agrarian regions to the south and south-east, inhabited largely by politically conservative Catholic farmers. The province held approximately 25 per cent of Slovenia's pre-war industry and some 340,000 inhabitants, a quarter of whom lived in Ljubljana.<sup>1</sup> Unlike their chauvinistic rule over Slovene- and Croat-populated territories that were awarded to Italy after World War I, the Italians were initially relatively lenient in their occupation of the Province of Ljubljana and allowed some Slovene cultural

autonomy, including the use of the Slovene language in education and administration. Of the three occupiers, the Italians were the most willing to collaborate with Slovenes. This stood in stark contrast to the violent Germanisation occurring in the neighbouring German-occupied regions of Gorenjska and Štajerska. Some 55,000 Slovenes, including a number of Catholic priests and most of the national elite, were deported to make way for ethnic *Volksdeutsche* settlers in 1941 and 1942, Slovene cultural institutions were closed and the Slovene language was banned in schools.<sup>2</sup> A less exacting but nevertheless chauvinistic Magyarisation campaign characterised the Hungarian occupation of the small eastern Prekmurje region.<sup>3</sup>

Taking advantage of the Italians' relatively lenient occupation of the province, OF guerrilla-style resistance would emerge in the late summer of 1941, incubated in the province's forested and hilly terrain. Yet OF sabotage and attacks upon Italians were met with ever more savage reprisals upon the civilian population of the area, who as the former Partisan Emil Weiss-Belač remembered were 'up until the Italian offensive [...] all for the Partisans'.<sup>4</sup> In early 1942, the OF also turned to assassinating prominent Slovenes who had entered into dialogue with the seemingly willing Italians. For the established pre-war political parties – especially the Catholic-oriented Slovene People's Party which dominated inter-war politics – as well as for religious leaders in the province, OF tactics and the reprisals they provoked undermined their policy of passivity. This strategy avoided costly armed resistance, focusing instead on underground preparations for a future revolt when the occupiers were weak and certain to be overthrown. In their eyes, the OF's impetuosity and Communist ideology threatened the relative autonomy of the province and the post-war political future of Slovenia. Thus, in the midst of the Italians' violent counter-insurgency campaign in the summer of 1942, which saw thousands of civilians deported to Italian concentration camps, hundreds killed and villages burned, some representatives from the established parties and some leaders of the Catholic Church stepped forward to help pacify the OF. The largest of these collaborating units came to be known as the *vaške straže* (Village Sentries), which would number over 5000 men at their height in 1943.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, when the Germans entered the province in September 1943, it had been the scene of the bitterest fratricidal strife in Slovenia for well over a year. Chastened by reversals on the Eastern Front and the collapse of their Italian allies, the Germans would reverse their previous aversion to collaborating with Slovenes. Highest Commissar Friedrich Rainer of the Operation Zone Adriatic Littoral (*Operationszone Adriatisches Küstenland* – OZAK) – the new German creation that encompassed

Italy's northeastern Adriatic littoral (Primorska in Slovene) as well as the Province of Ljubljana – deemed Germanisation impractical in an area where Germans constituted only 3.5 per cent of the population.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the Nazi treatment of Partisans and the OZAK's Jewish minority, the latter of whom were mostly murdered in Trieste's Risiera di San Sabba concentration camp or deported to other death camps, the Germans offered Slovenes a limited degree of cultural and administrative autonomy. Rainer hoped to transform 'the Slovenes, if properly treated, into possible collaborators, or at least passive participants of the Third Reich'.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, he maintained the boundaries of the Province of Ljubljana and appointed Leon Rupnik, a general in the pre-war Yugoslav armed forces and the mayor of Ljubljana during the Italian occupation, as the president of a newly formed Provincial Administration (*Pokrajinska uprava* – PU).<sup>8</sup> Using the Slovene language, the PU administered parts of the province with branches devoted to health care and education, including one devoted to propaganda. Ultimate control, however, was always in the hands of Rainer's German military and civilian advisors, while People's Committees administered mostly rural areas liberated by the Partisans.<sup>9</sup>

To provide security and eliminate the Partisan insurgency in the province, the Germans created an enhanced anti-Partisan force known as the *Slovensko domobranstvo* (Slovene Home Guard) that was much better armed, organised and far more aggressive than their *vaške straže* predecessors. Under the supreme command of SS-*Obergruppenführer* (General) Erwin Rösener, the Home Guard's officers and their language of command were Slovene. The force numbered over 13,000 men at its height in the summer of 1944.<sup>10</sup> While the Germans sponsored two additional collaborating units in neighbouring Gorenjska and Primorska, these two regions' experience under German occupation and two decades of Italian Fascist misrule may account for the chronic recruitment problems that limited their numbers to 2500 and 2000 men respectively.<sup>11</sup> These same experiences also explain, in part, significant civilian support for the OF in these two regions.

In comparison, public sympathy for the Partisans appeared weakest in the Province of Ljubljana – the by-product of months of sectarian violence. Moreover, the German occupiers were also less draconian in their treatment of the province's Slovene civilians – with the exception of the few remaining Jews, more numerous Roma and, of course, Partisans – and 'pursued a policy of occupation that was less ambitious than that in northern Slovenia [Gorenjska and Štajerska]'.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the German armed forces in September 1943 were certainly not the juggernaut of

April 1941. As historian Alistair Parker noted, '(u)ntil the summer of 1943 Hitler could still reasonably hope to win ... After the summer of 1943 he could only hope to delay defeat until the Allies fell apart'.<sup>13</sup> In this period of military decline, the Germans appeared, at least in the province, less of an occupier and more of a manipulable political factor in the pre-existing Slovene civil war. According to the Home Guard propagandist Stanko Kociper, it was not the Germans that used the Slovenes in the province; rather, it was anti-Communist Slovenes who were too weak on their own against the OF, who took advantage of German assistance.<sup>14</sup> Thus, for all of these unique reasons the struggle for the hearts and minds of Slovenes was most intense in the Province of Ljubljana.

This study aims to highlight the competing propaganda strategies that each of the three players in the Province of Ljubljana used to appeal to the population from September 1943 to May 1945, through a comparative and chronological analysis of the content of OF propaganda, and Home Guard and German propaganda that had been seized by the OF and Yugoslav Communist authorities during and after the war. This diverse collection of leaflets, pamphlets, speeches, radio broadcasts and illustrations housed at the National Archives of Slovenia reveals that the Germans, the Home Guard and the OF were influenced to varying degrees by their own perceived ideological handicaps in vying for the support of civilians. Additionally, their messages were conditioned by the increasing likelihood that the Germans were going to lose the war and that the post-war political orientation of Slovenia and Yugoslavia would therefore be in limbo. As a result, their respective propaganda would reveal some pragmatic experimentation with their inherent ideological rigidities, as their opponents were only too quick to point out. The focus here is not on the impact of propaganda upon the civilian population, an 'accurate measure' of which, as the historian of Nazi propaganda Ian Kershaw noted, 'is naturally impossible'.<sup>15</sup> Nor is it focused per se on the reliability of the propaganda, which is by its very definition 'unreliable'. Rather, the attention is squarely on the messages of the three belligerents and the degree to which their war of ideas took on a life of their own, divorced from their own respective political and ideological compasses and, very often, the hard realities of their actual military capabilities and prospects.

In his 2002 study of Nazi propaganda in Germany, David Welch noted that 'Nazi propaganda has only recently come to receive the attention of historians commensurate with its importance'.<sup>16</sup> This conclusion is even more relevant with respect to Nazi propaganda in occupied states. The post-war historiography in most formerly occupied European states

assumed that the vast majority of their populations rejected German propaganda, with the exception of a handful of fascist fellow travellers and, in the case of Communist historiography, opportunistic bourgeoisie. Beginning in France in the 1960s, historians began to question this comforting perception of overwhelming resistance to the Nazis.<sup>17</sup> Under closer examination, it was revealed that the societal response to German occupation had also been one of accommodation.

A similar reassessment was delayed in Communist Eastern Europe until the late 1980s. By giving greater attention to accommodation and collaboration, this belated reappraisal of Slovenia's wartime history not only challenged the Communist-era resistance mantra that 'from the first day in our country, the occupier was welcomed with war',<sup>18</sup> but it also enlarged the assumed audience for Nazi propaganda. Moreover, the recognition that German propaganda in the province involved a degree of dialogue with Slovene collaborators in an effort to win the allegiance of the civilian population challenges the earlier totalitarian notions of Nazi propaganda as a top-down imposition of their views upon an atomised population.<sup>19</sup> Instead German propaganda was not only imposed, but also responded to the political and ideological predisposition of the occupied population.

## German propaganda

By way of this historiographical preamble, we indeed turn first to the Germans. Despite their military supremacy, German propaganda had arguably the least impact on the Slovene population. The reasons for this may not be profound; after all, the Nazis *were* still the Nazis and their coercive power, as demonstrated in the following leaflet distributed during their anti-Partisan operations in the fall of 1943, brought fear and obedience, not respect and allegiance:

**Attention!** The battle of the German armed forces against the bandits has begun and will be ruthlessly carried out. **For those who assist the bandits, we will deal with them as we would with the bandits.** It is forbidden to give food to the bandits, deliver arms, bring them reports or agitate for them. Whoever works against these rules, will be punished as a bandit. [...] Whoever is caught with weapons will be guilty of supporting the bandits, and we will deal with them as we would with the bandits. Whoever spreads news and reports, distributes leaflets or scrawls slogans on walls or city corridors, will be punished.<sup>20</sup>

Apart from a few Slovene followers of the Serb fascist Dimitrije Ljotić and his *Zbor* party, the vast majority of Slovenes were not interested in the racial tenets of National Socialism, nor did they share Germans' faith in the Führer. Moreover, the thousands of Slovene refugees from Gorenjska and Štajerska who had sought sanctuary in the Province of Ljubljana in 1941 and 1942 brought with them harrowing accounts of German brutality. The Slovene émigré Metod Milač reminisced how, as a young student during the Italian occupation of Ljubljana, his principal had admonished him for reciting a prayer in Slovene against the wishes of his Italian teacher: he 'did not spare us, telling us how we endangered the entire status of school curricula, which we still enjoyed, unlike other occupied regions of Slovenia, where even speaking Slovene in public is prohibited'.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the pre-existing animosity of the local population, German propaganda in military decline faced further obstacles. The scarcity of the war economy translated into paper shortages, distribution problems and a staffing crisis as officials left their posts or were transferred to other departments.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the fact that Germany was losing the war could not simply be willed away by rosy propaganda predictions. As Welch noted, 'the final two years of the war were in general a period of decreasing propaganda effectiveness and increasing dependence on the substitution of myth for reality'.<sup>23</sup> If this was true for Nazi propaganda in the *Reich*, it was even more so for the Province of Ljubljana, where few were mourning the prospect of Germany's collapse. For example, the Germans distributed leaflets in the province that described the V1 and the V2 weapons programme as 'God's punishment', claiming that 'it cannot fail!'<sup>24</sup> When these exaggerated claims of impending revenge upon the Allies and the Soviets did not materialise as reality, the legitimacy of German propaganda deteriorated. In other cases German propaganda would simply lie. In the aftermath of the D-Day invasions, a bilingual German/Slovene leaflet entitled 'Germany Strikes' optimistically proclaimed: 'Hardest losses to Anglo-American invasion forces ... Germany is winning!'<sup>25</sup> The following weeks and months revealed that Germany was not winning. In the search for alternate reliable news sources, some Slovenes turned to foreign broadcasts and Partisan papers. Not only the Germans but also the Home Guard leadership was concerned about the effects, as seen by their vigorous 'counter-propaganda' against the BBC which aired the Yugoslav Government-in-Exile's autumn 1944 broadcasts urging the Home Guard to cease their collaboration and join the Partisans.<sup>26</sup> The effectiveness of German propaganda was further eroded by rumours and misinformation

that ran rampant among a population anxious about the future and starved of accurate information on events in Slovenia and abroad. One such rumour circulating in the small farming community of Ambrus in the autumn of 1944 purported that the Russians were in Zagreb and that the war would be over in 14 days,<sup>27</sup> while another in February 1945 claimed that rations were about to end and that Ljubljana's population would starve.<sup>28</sup> German propaganda that ignored the province's cultural and ideological uniqueness, and simply translated re-hashed propaganda from Germany, also persuaded few of its inhabitants. Thus it is not surprising that the Germans' belated attempts to transfer Hitler's personality cult to the province, as seen in the elaborate celebrations in Ljubljana marking Hitler's fifty-fifth birthday in April 1944 complete with orchestra and choir, had little resonance.<sup>29</sup>

Despite these glaring weaknesses, not all German propaganda was irrelevant to the province and the needs and opinions of its inhabitants. Hitler's minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels recognised that Nazi propaganda in the post-Stalingrad period needed to be less dismissive of its enemies and cognisant of the long and difficult struggle that Germans faced.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the caricatured Slavic *Untermenschen* had defeated the seemingly invincible German army at Stalingrad and were now rolling back German conquests. Not surprisingly, German propaganda in the Slavic-inhabited Province of Ljubljana appeared to enjoy its greatest success with its 'strength through fear'<sup>31</sup> campaign that emphasised the mortal danger of Bolshevism, not the racial inferiority of Slavs. For as Kershaw noted, Nazi propaganda resonated most when it fed off 'values which were unquestioned'.<sup>32</sup> For many pious land-owning farmers and propertied businessmen, as well as some right-wing intellectuals in the province, opposition to Communism was one of these values, drummed into their heads for decades from the pulpits and by conservative politicians. Goebbels hoped that emphasising anti-Communism could 'right a potentially dangerous deterioration of morale by a return to a repetitive and intensive hammering of the few fundamentals of Nazi teaching, presented in a form that everyone could understand'.<sup>33</sup> In Slovenia, this tactic stood the greatest chance of success within the Province of Ljubljana, which had the longest history of armed opposition to the OF and which fielded the largest anti-Partisan force.

In pursuing this agenda, German propaganda in the province emphasised alleged Soviet and OF atrocities as a taste of what was in store for Slovenes should the Partisans and Communism triumph. Leaflets showing maps of the Soviet Union and locations of its main labour camps appeared along with illustrations of a Red Army executioner carrying a



bloody sickle under the slogan 'Red Death is on the March'.<sup>34</sup> German propaganda also internationalised the plight of Slovenes by linking them to the struggles of other alleged anti-Communist peoples, such as the Romanians and Poles, who were resisting Communist aggression.<sup>35</sup> The Germans sensationalised the OF attack on the small town of Hinje in January 1945 in a leaflet entitled, 'Hinje is Calling for Revenge'. It accused the Partisans of burning homes, stealing livestock, and expelling the population. 'During this time', the leaflet observed, 'when they persecuted the tortured inhabitants, the "liberators", the OF brigades, had an orgy of drunkenness and gluttony in the pillaged homes'.<sup>36</sup> In what would become one of the most common refrains of German propaganda in the province, the Germans promised the beleaguered inhabitants of this war-racked territory the one thing that many undoubtedly craved – 'order in your land'.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, as early as their September 1943 campaign, which regained territory that had been seized by the OF after the Italian collapse, the Germans had urged the population of the province not to support the 'bandits', but rather to convince their fathers and sons to leave the ranks of the OF 'so that order and peace will return to the country'.<sup>38</sup> The promise of order would remain a fixture of German propaganda until the occupiers' last days in the province, offering a simple and clearly understood message, 'Bolshevik chaos – or German order in Europe!'<sup>39</sup>

Other potentially repugnant elements of Nazi ideology, such as its genocidal anti-Semitism, appeared to have been tailored to fit the anti-Communist thrust of German propaganda, focusing on the assumed connection between Jews and Communism, the so-called Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy, which was a common pre-war belief in the region.<sup>40</sup> German and Home Guard propaganda would routinely describe their OF opponents and their communist ideology as funded by and benefiting 'Jewish international tyranny'.<sup>41</sup> This despite the fact that Slovenia's tiny pre-war Jewish population of some 1500 individuals lived mostly in Prekmurje and Slovene anti-Semitism, while certainly established, had not achieved the widespread virulence of that of other inter-war eastern European states.<sup>42</sup>

Under the duress of military decline, German propaganda exhibited additional streaks of pragmatism and knowledge of local customs and conditions in the province. Perhaps most striking was its tolerance of the Catholic Church, a favour the province's Catholic hierarchy returned with their accommodation to German rule and their support of the Home Guard. Abandoning the intentions of the *Gauleiter* of Štajerska Sigfried Überreiter, who in 1941 had promised to 'do

away with the former religion and introduce here our new religion of Germanic blood and the Germanic race',<sup>43</sup> German propaganda in the province appeared to recognise the importance of Catholicism to Slovenes and the anti-Communist cause. One German leaflet produced in the OZAK showed two Partisans armed with axes, chopping a large wooden cross with the caption 'Your faith is in danger!';<sup>44</sup> while another claimed that Bolshevism wanted Rome as its seat in order to 'disgrace the Pope, religion and all Christians'.<sup>45</sup> Overall, the intention of this pragmatic tinkering with Nazi ideology remained the same – to win the acquiescence of the anti-Communist-oriented section of the province's population in order to isolate the Partisan resistance.

### Home Guard propaganda

Despite the general mistrust and in many cases hatred of the German occupiers in the province, their anti-Communism and their promise of order and stability appeared to have some traction at a time of civil war and political uncertainty. As the American intelligence operative Franklin Lindsay concluded from his six-month sojourn with the Slovene Partisans in the second half of 1944, '[t]he Germans, playing upon the strongly conservative Catholicism of the Slovene population [of the Province of Ljubljana], had expanded the White Guard for the proclaimed purpose of defending the church and conservative institutions against Communism. In this respect they were quite successful: they had probably recruited a greater number of Slovenes than had the Partisans'.<sup>46</sup> Indeed 'White Guard' propaganda – the Partisan name for the Home Guard that alluded to the Whites in the Russian Civil War – was also based on these two concepts, in addition to its promise to protect all of the supposedly cherished ideals of conservative Slovenes, such as hard work, private ownership, religiosity, Slovene culture and paternal authority. However, the fact that both the Home Guard and the Germans propagated somewhat similar counter-revolutionary arguments also acted to undermine the legitimacy of Home Guard propaganda. As Partisan propaganda was quick to point out, the Home Guard were Hitler's hirelings and the ideological partners of the Nazis. Here was the 'catch' of Home Guard propaganda and indeed the fatal dilemma of collaboration: like their very existence, any attempt at independent Home Guard propaganda was ultimately dependent upon the Germans. In the eyes of the German rulers, the Home Guard were not the Slovene national army that many post-war émigré supporters claimed, but rather a local auxiliary police force fighting a shared enemy.<sup>47</sup> Thus, the

Germans saw Home Guard propaganda as an extension of their own propaganda and as a particularly useful medium in relaying German intentions to the bewildered masses in their own language. For example, during the German anti-Partisan offensive in the autumn of 1943, Rupnik appeared to soothe public anxieties:

The German army is pursuing the fleeing Partisan bands and has saved a number of areas after cleansing actions [...]. The German army is not coming to pillage, steal from or murder innocent people; rather it wants to inexorably destroy the criminal bandits [...]. Do not fear the German troops and the Home Guard who accompany them! They are your saviours [...]. Trust your wishes to the Home Guard, who are your Slovene compatriots.<sup>48</sup>

As an extension of German propaganda, the Home Guard were certainly not allowed to take on an anti-German or even an overly nationalistic stance. Nevertheless, a distinctive, albeit often cryptic Home Guard ideology managed to squeeze itself through imposed German restrictions. A note of caution is, however, necessary. While this distinct ideology may be extracted retrospectively by an historian, it is not entirely certain that the division between German and Home Guard propaganda was as clear to the harried inhabitants of the province. First, German overseeing of Home Guard propaganda makes such categorising difficult. What was Home Guard propaganda if, as Kociper claimed during his interrogation at an English POW camp in Austria in 1947, '(e)verything went through a censor'?<sup>49</sup> However, even Kociper acknowledged that German supervision of Home Guard propaganda was initially relatively lax, and the province was the only region in OZAK that did not have a branch office of the central propaganda department in Trieste.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, Kociper observed an increase in German surveillance in the spring of 1944, particularly after the uncovering of pro-Allied intelligence networks among the Home Guard.<sup>51</sup> The Germans would accuse collaborating Slovene propagandists of nationalist 'excesses' and of 'ignoring the Germans'.<sup>52</sup> In June 1944, Rösener ordered that Section VI of the Home Guard's Organisational Headquarters, which was responsible for the 'world view and political cultivation of the Home Guard', be placed under the leadership of SS *Untersturmführer* (Second Lieutenant) Franz Wolfs and the 'orders of the national leadership of the SS'.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps the most damaging display of the Home Guard's subordinate position was their oath of allegiance to Germany on the morning of 20 April 1944 – Hitler's birthday (and a subsequent oath taken on 30 January 1945, the

anniversary of Hitler's appointment as German Chancellor). The Home Guard were ordered to gather in the Ljubljana sports stadium, and, after a mass presided over by the Bishop of Ljubljana, Gregorij Rožman, and in the presence of Rupnik and Rösener, they announced in unison:

I swear to almighty God that I will be faithful, brave and obedient to my superiors, that in the common war with the German armed forces, under the command of the leaders of Great Germany, SS units and the police, I will faithfully fulfil my duty to my Slovene homeland, which is a part of free Europe, against bandits and Communism as well as their allies.<sup>54</sup>

While the oath remains a contested event, criticised by the Home Guard's opponents as pathetic servility and an example of German coercion by their sympathisers, it endures as a coup for the Germans and the most harmful public propaganda image of German and Home Guard coalescence.

The second reason for concern is that as the Germans' power declined, only the most 'trustworthy' Slovene propagandists remained, particularly in the second half of 1944 when they arrested a number of Home Guard who were allegedly plotting against the Germans.<sup>55</sup> For example, Izidor Cergol, a follower of Ljotić, was appointed to head the PU's propaganda branch in December 1944, a branch which produced pro-German and pro-Home Guard propaganda and which had as one of its founding principles a commitment to operate 'in the closest accordance with the instructions of the head of German propaganda'.<sup>56</sup> He used his position to spew pro-German, anti-Allied and anti-Semitic vitriol, denounced 'sectarian' Slovene political parties and attempted to create a Führer-like cult of personality around Rupnik, who was awarded the largely ceremonial position of General Inspector of the Slovene Home Guard in October 1944. All of Europe's problems were heaped upon the 'Jews, the owners of the world's gold, who want to establish their self-rule over the world' and he warned that the Bolsheviks 'were systematically liquidating behind the lines all people with positive racial and national markings'.<sup>57</sup> Yet Cergol's views, as well as those of Kociper and other propagandists that gathered around Rupnik, represented Slovenia's far right fringe. Could they speak to the sentiments of most rank-and-file in the Home Guard?

Hamstrung by its servility to the Germans and led by ever more compromised collaborators, Home Guard propaganda was in a poor position to attack the OF on its strongest cards – its nationalism and its resistance

record. While they chided the OF as lackeys of Moscow and lampooned its resistance as ineffectual *beži-brigade* (runaway brigades) that fled at the first sign of danger, Home Guard propaganda could nevertheless offer no real alternatives to the OF's message of national liberation. The Germans permitted Home Guard propaganda to promote elements of their national distinctiveness, such as its use of the Slovene language and flag, its defence of Catholicism and its self-identification as a Slovene fighting force. This was evident in the declaration announcing the creation of the Home Guard in the early autumn of 1943: 'Under the leadership of our Slovene officers, who will direct us in our mother tongue, we will destroy the Bolshevik murderers and arsonists in our land'. Yet as always, the same announcement also had to emphasise who was ultimately in charge, noting that, 'the great German military force, by the orders of Hitler, has arrived to protect us'.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, while the Home Guard were allowed to sing folk songs during patrols to capture the attention of civilians and to facilitate the transmission of their propaganda,<sup>59</sup> the most they could officially promise was Slovene autonomy within an equally vague German-led new European order, as in the following leaflet from 1944: 'We must recognise the reality and count ourselves among the small European nations under German leadership, in which we find the reality and future of our nation, and therefore the path to a brighter, free homeland'.<sup>60</sup> Kociper's attempt to elevate the local publication of the Novo Mesto Home Guard unit *Za blagor očetnjave* (For the Welfare of the Fatherland) to the status of the official organ of the Home Guard, was opposed by the Germans who found the title and the linden branch that adorned its cover to be overtly nationalistic and pan-Slavic. Instead the Germans chose the less ambiguous title *Slovensko domobranstvo* and insisted on it being published in bilingual German/Slovene.<sup>61</sup> Other symbols of the Home Guard, such as the Carniolan eagle on its emblem, and German restrictions on cooperation between the Home Guard and the neighbouring collaborating units in Gorenjska and Primorska, emphasised the force's provincial character and further undermined the credibility of its claim to represent all ethnic Slovenes.<sup>62</sup> Not until 3 May 1945, when the German army was already in retreat, could Home Guard propaganda claim to be truly fighting for a Slovenia free of Nazi control. On that day in Ljubljana the National Committee, a collection of prominent non-Communist politicians, 'seized' power from the Germans and proclaimed Slovenia to be part of a democratic and federalised Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The Home Guard were publicly renamed the Slovene National Army as a constituent part of the Royal Yugoslav Army, while the Partisans were rather ironically called upon

'to suspend immediately all actions against the Slovene National Army and the peace-loving Slovene people, and, thus to bring to an end the terrible bloodshed among brothers'.<sup>63</sup> Yet until these last few days of the war, it was the Germans who ultimately set the parameters of Slovene nationalism within Home Guard propaganda.

Yet despite such restrictions, Home Guard propaganda nevertheless attempted to position itself as representative of Slovenia's cultural and ideological values. On the economic front, the Home Guard warned that the OF would introduce collectivisation. One leaflet entitled 'Slovene Peasant. You Carry the Responsibility', threatened:

Do you know that communism does not recognise private ownership? Do you know that these fields will no longer be yours, if our homeland falls under communism? Your house, fields and homeland, all, all will belong to the nation ... You will be a hireling, on your own land a hireling.<sup>64</sup>

The Home Guard promised to protect the small peasant landholder. This issue appeared to resonate among the rural population, where many owned their own land and where there was some opposition to OF requisitioning.<sup>65</sup>

The Home Guard's defence of Catholicism was perhaps the most unique attribute of their movement, as it separated them from both the Nazis' quasi-pagan ideology and Communism's atheism. Much of the province's Catholic hierarchy, led by Bishop Rožman, publicly supported the Home Guard and even attached military chaplains to their units. The defence of religion had a prominent place in the Home Guard rallying cry 'God, Nation, Homeland', and their propaganda frequently warned that the OF would outlaw religion. OF claims to the allegiance of certain priests were dismissed as having been achieved at gunpoint.<sup>66</sup> Home Guard propaganda drew comparisons with the Turkish invasions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and called upon 'crusading' Slovenes to once again defend the true faith against the OF infidels.<sup>67</sup> Home Guard battle songs such as 'Hura' proclaimed, 'We march into battle for our holy faith', while so-called morality hours instructed the rank-and-file on the proper moral conduct towards women, obedience to their bishop, and to refrain from cursing, particularly with religious overtones.<sup>68</sup> Rupnik also struck a pious note in his speeches, urging his men to 'diligently work for God' in his New Year address of 1945.<sup>69</sup> As the local Home Guard commander in Logatec noted in justifying his unit's mandatory attendance at Sunday mass: 'only with disciplined

behaviour will we show that we are fighting not only militarily against communism, but also ideologically'.<sup>70</sup>

By positioning themselves as defenders of the rural, Catholic masses, the Home Guard also cast the OF as emanating from a 'warped intelligentsia which has become enslaved by foreign ideas'.<sup>71</sup> In fact urban areas in general and Ljubljana in particular had provided the OF with many of its intellectual and political leaders. Home Guard propaganda castigated Ljubljana as being deaf to the suffering visited upon the surrounding countryside by OF 'banditry'. The Home Guard in the town of Ribnica, for example, reported that its inhabitants cursed Ljubljana 'for having sent these Partisan bandits on their criminal work'.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, this anti-urban bias was common to the 'rural, autarkic, ethnic conception of the nation' that historian Kevin Passmore identified as distinctive of most World War II-era movements of the extreme right.<sup>73</sup>

Similar to this urban–rural divide was a defence of traditional gender roles and mores.<sup>74</sup> Home Guard propaganda derided the OF's intentions to emancipate Slovene women, and routinely described female Partisans as prostitutes, who, according to the leaflet of an affiliated anti-Communist workers union, 'understand all this swinishness as something completely natural, they think ... this is sanctioned by equal rights and some imaginary equality'.<sup>75</sup> In contrast, Home Guard propaganda abounded with recurring images of the pure Slovene mother, sitting near the hearth, dressed in a traditional national costume and surrounded by religious motifs. This presentation of the 'traditional' woman was in keeping with Passmore's observation that '[a]ll over Europe, movements and regimes of the extreme right idealized the chaste mother in peasant costume'.<sup>76</sup>

Like that of the Germans, Home Guard propaganda also fabricated or exaggerated Partisan brutality in its determination to distinguish itself from the OF, portraying them as morally inferior 'gluttons, drunkards, war-mongers, rumour mongers ... people without honour and feeling'.<sup>77</sup> A pamphlet wryly entitled 'Partisan Paradise' claimed that when the OF occupied the town of Preserje on the outskirts of Ljubljana, they slaughtered and ate all the livestock, used children as beasts of burden, engaged in all sorts of sexual deviancy and carried out horrible medical experiments.<sup>78</sup> Judging from the experience in Germany, where the 'real live Russian was set against the stereotyped Bolshevik monster and the result was a propaganda failure',<sup>79</sup> one must be equally suspicious of such preposterous exaggerations of the Home Guard ideologues. Unlike in Germany, the partisans were not foreigners, but brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, and neighbours. In sum, Home Guard propaganda, and

to a lesser degree German propaganda, appeared most convincing when it exploited real popular fears and concerns about a future Communist Slovenia. Special Operations Executive operative Lieutenant Colonel Peter Moore summarised in a 14 February 1945 report that in the Province of Ljubljana, 'peasants outside [OF] liberated areas who hate and fear any form of practical communism have been easy prey to German and White Guard propaganda'.<sup>80</sup> The thousands of Slovene civilians that would flee the Partisans and pour over the border into Austria in May 1945 attest to the fact that not all these fears were illusory.<sup>81</sup>

## Partisan propaganda

Just as Nazi ideology constricted the latitude of German propaganda, doctrinaire Communism limited the appeal of OF propaganda as it introduced social, economic and political practices that were undeniably 'foreign' to many rural, conservative Slovenes. However, unlike the Home Guard's self-professed battle 'alongside the shoulders of Germany's army',<sup>82</sup> the OF could rightly claim to be the only successful resistance force to have consistently opposed the foreign occupation of Slovenia since 1941.

Partisan propaganda against the Germans was probably the least convoluted campaign in the otherwise muddy war of ideas in the province. The Germans were the outsiders and the oppressors, and it was the duty of every true Slovene patriot to oppose them. Their slogan was simple and powerful: 'Death to fascism! Liberty to the people!' Their description of Germans as 'the greatest executioners and enemies of humanity'<sup>83</sup> was supported in Slovenia by a litany of uncontested abuses: the deportation of tens of thousands of Slovenes, the execution of hostages and the assault on Slovene cultural heritage.

Problems with this rather straightforward liberationist ideology grew in tandem with an evolving power struggle within the OF. As its name implies, the Liberation Front emerged at the beginning of the war as a coalition of leftist organisations and individuals, including Catholics such as the Christian Socialists, who were united in their opposition to the occupation. However, the Communist Party of Slovenia had always formed the nucleus of the front, and as the war progressed it convinced or coerced the other factions to recognise its authority, culminating in the Dolomite Declaration of 1 March 1943 which declared the Communists as the leading force in the movement. Thus, the easily digestible anti-occupier programme of the OF became more difficult for Slovenes both inside and outside the province to swallow when it



became clear that Communism would be replacing Fascism. In short, 'Death to Fascism – Liberty to the people' was complicated by 'Down with Fascism! For a free Communist Slovenia!'<sup>84</sup>

OF propaganda, like its German and Home Guard counterparts, also experienced the struggle between pragmatists and ideologues. Evidence of doctrinaire Communism was not difficult to find in the leaflets, illustrations and slogans that surreptitiously appeared scattered and staining the walls of the province's towns and cities. Vilification of the Germans was increasingly accompanied with challenges to the Western 'capitalists', who ironically were the greatest material supporters of Tito's movement: 'With Tito to a new future! London and Washington will not hinder us in this!', or 'Down with Imperialists and Capitalists! Long-Live Communist Democracy! Long Live Tito! Long Live Stalin!'<sup>85</sup> Equally disconcerting was the common OF refrain: 'Down with the clergy and all traitors!'<sup>86</sup>

Of course, such ideologically rigid propaganda only fed into popular pre-existing anti-Communist prejudices and appeared to confirm German and Home Guard accusations that the OF was in the service of Moscow and committed to eradicating religion. As a result, the OF also distributed much less abrasive propaganda, revealing in the same way as its opponents a degree of pragmatism in attempting to convince the population that it had little to fear from OF rule. For example, counteracting German and Home Guard charges of atheism and anti-Church intentions, the Partisans highlighted the fact that some Slovene priests, such as Metod Mikuž, had joined their ranks.<sup>87</sup> A remarkable leaflet appeared in the spring of 1944 that chronicled the left-wing Polish-American priest Stanislaus Orlemanski's visit with Stalin as part of the Roosevelt administration's efforts to improve relations between Moscow and the Vatican. In bold letters, the leaflet highlighted Orlemanski's impression of the visit: 'I am also offering an historic declaration, that the future will reveal that Marshal Stalin is amicably disposed to the Roman Catholic Church'. Ignoring the fact that both American Poles and the American Catholic hierarchy were incensed with Orlemanski's public support for Stalin,<sup>88</sup> the OF nonetheless highlighted its relevance to Slovenia: 'These words once again bear witness that all agitation by the White Guard clergy against Soviet Russia and Communism is only an excuse for the treasonous support of the German occupier'.<sup>89</sup> Countering charges of being mere lackeys of Moscow, OF propaganda emphasised that only the Partisans were 'the true fighters for the freedom of the Slovene nation' and Yugoslavia, and that all who supported them were 'conscious that they are of Slovene blood, that they were born of Slovene mothers and ... that they do not want to be subservient to German bandits'.<sup>90</sup>

A survey of OF propaganda in the province in the years between 1943 and 1945 reveals that it was targeted primarily at its internal domestic opponents rather than at the Germans. Even without the hindsight of modern historians, the Nazis appeared to be firmly on the road to defeat in the second half of 1944, which left the Home Guard and anti-Communist politicians and religious leaders as the single greatest obstacle to a Partisan seizure of power in Slovenia. It was crucial, therefore, to dissuade civilian acceptance of the Home Guard. Accordingly, descriptions of the Nazis as the ultimate evil were utilised not to persuade Slovenes to beware the Germans – they required little convincing on this issue – but rather to discredit their Home Guard collaborators:

You ignored the nation's voice, not enough blood had been spilled for you, which is why you surrendered like dogs to the executioner of all freedom-loving peoples, Hitler, who had and still has as his aim the destruction of the Slovene nation. You assist him in this undertaking! You betray and offer our families to the mercy and mercilessness of the vampire Hitler.<sup>91</sup>

The Home Guard oath of April 1944 therefore appeared as a gift for Partisan propaganda, confirming the grand motif that they were '*švabobranci* [defenders of Germans] and not Home Guard'.<sup>92</sup> In their response to the oath, an OF leaflet accused the Home Guard of having sworn 'an oath to the greatest hangman of all nations, you swore faithfulness and obedience to those criminals who destroyed churches and the priesthood in Štajerska and Gorenjska, in whose rivers drips the blood of unknown victims, men, women and children'.<sup>93</sup> In addition to reaffirming the OF's concern for 'churches and the priesthood', the leaflet also attacked the province's anti-Partisan religious elite by reminding Slovenes that the oath 'was administered by the Ljubljana bishop Dr Rožman', and was sworn 'in his presence'.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, the oath severely, if not fatally, undermined the 'tactical' faction within the Home Guard who had maintained covert ties with Yugoslavia's Government-in-Exile and hoped to redeem itself by turning against its Nazi masters at the opportune moment and linking with an anticipated Allied invasion of Germany via the Ljubljana Gap. OF propaganda undermined this hope as illusory, emphasising that the Home Guard also swore to:

fight against the allies of your people, against England, the Soviet Union, America, as well as whomever Hitler will deem necessary ... Now it is finally clear to you [Home Guard], that all the declarations

and threats from leading British and American politicians, and from Prime Minister Churchill himself, apply in all measures also to you.<sup>95</sup>

The psychological impact of the OF's taunts must not be underestimated. Indeed, in the final months of the war, OF propaganda attempted to paralyse opposition groups by continuously repeating that the Partisan army was on the cusp of taking power – the numbing effects of a *fait accompli*. The OF was portrayed as part of the Grand Alliance which in 1944 and 1945 was forcing the Germans into a continuous retreat. Cutting through German and Home Guard misinformation and fabrications, the Partisans distributed leaflets highlighting Allied successes: 'Invasion: Hitler's defensive walls in Europe demolished! The Allied Army has made it into France'.<sup>96</sup> And yet as a movement on the brink of victory, the OF's propaganda also became less inventive and pragmatic, replaced with a certain arrogance and increasingly crude and dire warnings urging its opponents to switch sides or face the consequences. As Tito noted in his 'Last Warning' of 30 August 1944 – by no means his last – all opposition to the Partisans 'will be punished most severely'.<sup>97</sup> An illustration in the official organ of the OF *Slovenski poročevalec* (Slovene Reporter) unceremoniously derided Yugoslavia's King-in-exile Petar Karadjordjević as a marionette manipulated by Hitler and domestic reactionaries for his reluctance to endorse Tito. An April 1945 leaflet, grimly entitled 'It is Already Too Late', declared: 'Communist fighters for freedom stand already in the heart of Europe, stand before Berlin, in Budapest, Bucharest, Sofia, Belgrade [...] [T]heir flags will soon flutter in Zagreb, in Rijeka, in Trst [Trieste] and in Gorica [Gorizia]'.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, by naming the final three 'Yugoslav' cities, all of which had been under Italian rule in the inter-war era and which would soon be occupied by Tito's forces, the Partisans revealed not only their unstoppable momentum but also their right to rectify Slovenia's unjust post-World War I territorial settlement with Italy. In short, they were stating that they already were Yugoslavia's new government.

In comparison, the Home Guard were fatally hitched to 'an army which today stands on the brink of collapse on all fronts'.<sup>99</sup> Having already achieved decisive Allied support in late 1943, OF commanders attempted to dissolve any lingering doubts that the Home Guard may have had towards Allied intentions, announcing in a leaflet that 'our national liberation army and Partisan detachments are recognised as the only national army not only by the majority of the Slovene nation, but also by the Allies: the Soviet Union, England and America'.<sup>100</sup> Tito crudely dismissed Home Guard hopes as 'stupidity'.<sup>101</sup> The Home Guard

could look forward only to defeat and the prospect of being judged as war criminals by the free world. In an eerie premonition of Britain's forced repatriation of the Home Guard from their Austrian refuge to Tito's government in late May 1945, an act that would lead to the summary execution of over 10,000 of them, an OF leaflet declared:

When they met in Tehran, Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin ... sealed the fate of every war criminal in Yugoslavia with the words: 'All who are responsible, or who freely took part in aggression, murder and battles will be sent back to the place where they committed these crimes, to be judged by the liberated authority, which will be established there'.<sup>102</sup>

## Conclusion

The Province of Ljubljana in the period from 1943 to 1945 stands as a fascinating laboratory of competing German, Home Guard and Partisan propaganda. In the absence of modern day polling, it is difficult to assess how the province's civilian population reacted to their propaganda. Nevertheless, their content and the frequency of certain messages and slogans were revealing in their own right. The propaganda of all three sides, but especially that of the Germans and the OF, was weighted with a persistent tension between ideologues and pragmatists. However, doctrinaire Nazism and Communism were potential liabilities in winning the support or at least the accommodation of the masses, for as Kershaw observed, the 'dominant aim of Nazi propaganda' – and perhaps also Communist propaganda – 'was so extraordinarily ambitious – amounting to the reconstruction of a value-system in [...] an impossibly short time – that the attempt might be thought to have been doomed to failure from the start'.<sup>103</sup> For the Germans, the degree to which they were willing to replace ideological rigidity with more populist messages suggests that during this late phase in the war their propaganda was influenced by their own military decline, and the consequent need to tap into the assistance of their Slavic collaborators and the anti-Communist tendencies of the masses. A similar willingness on the part of the Partisans and Home Guard was influenced by the looming domestic struggle for post-war political power. Experimentation in propaganda also suggests that all three factions were conscious of their potential vulnerabilities in vying for the support of the civilian population, a conclusion which could only be drawn by studying and evaluating the priorities and mindset of their opponents and the inhabitants of

the province. All of this underscores the responsive and less totalitarian nature of propaganda in the province in the final two years of the war.

It is not entirely unexpected that the propaganda of all three players became less revealing and 'interesting' in the last weeks of the war. German and Home Guard propaganda increasingly bore the shrillness of desperation and the inflated expectations of wishful thinking. The Partisans relied less on their earlier subtle art of persuasion and more on diktat – obey or else. Yet it is not always the propaganda itself that becomes less interesting or convincing as the war nears its conclusion. The historian of propaganda, armed with the power of hindsight, also becomes far less interested in the propaganda of defeat because they already know how the play will end. The historian's attention becomes focused on the new goal of propaganda – in the case of Slovenia, the post-war consolidation of Communist control – before the war has finally been decided. The 'has-beens', the anti-Communist opposition, become marginalised to a powerless nuisance sniping at the new Communist order with words and worn slogans. However, even in the eclipse of this uncivil war of ideas, the Province of Ljubljana remained unique in Slovenia for the intensity of this 'war'. Indeed, the bloody post-war settling of accounts would help fuel a much longer propaganda war between the new Communist government and its Partisan veterans, and the defeated and exiled remnants of its wartime opposition, ripping open a wound in the body politic that is only now beginning to heal.

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# Index

- 121st Infantry Division (Wehrmacht):  
anti-partisan activities, 62–4, 66–8;  
comparison with other Wehrmacht  
divisions, 72–4;  
relations with population, 64–6,  
70–1;  
ruthlessness towards civilians,  
66–8;  
sources for, 59–60
- 342nd Infantry Division  
(Wehrmacht):  
anti-partisan activities, 195–7;  
command of, 194, 200–5;  
comparison with other Wehrmacht  
divisions, 199–205;  
condition of, 197–9;  
origins and composition, 193–4;  
reprisal policy, 197;  
ruthlessness towards civilians,  
195–7;  
sources for, 192–3
- Alexander I, King, 210
- All-people's war, 36, 38, 40–1, 53
- Armia Ludowa / AL (Communist  
People's Army, Poland), 134,  
168
- Armia Krajowa / AK (Home Army,  
Poland):  
in Baranovichi region, 82–3, 92–3;  
foundation, 148;  
growth, 134, 148–50;  
leadership, 134, 148–9;  
organisation, 150–2;  
origins, 141–2;  
relations with Polish  
Government-in-Exile, 144–5;  
sources for, 137–8;  
strategy, 17, 20, 135, 139–41,  
144–50, 152–3;  
and Warsaw Uprising, 135, 153
- Auschwitz, 220–1
- Austro-Hungarian Empire, 8, 187,  
191, 201, 204, 213–14
- Bandits:  
bandit-like behaviour by Soviet  
partisans: in Baranovichi  
region, 88–9, 109, 115, 117,  
119–20, 122; in general, 48;  
depictions of partisans as bandits  
in Axis propaganda, 237, 240,  
242–3, 246;  
German military's perception of  
irregular fighters as: historical  
development of, 60–61; in  
Poland, 167, 171; in Soviet  
Union, 9, 15, 108, 119; in  
Yugoslavia 195, 198, 200;  
popular perceptions of, 48
- Baranovichi region:  
civilian population, 85–95, 108–11,  
116–19; *see also* Baranovichi  
region, partisan activities in;  
emergence of partisan movement,  
84;  
Gendarmerie activities in, *see*  
Gendarmerie;  
in general 53, 82;  
geography, 82, 104;  
partisan activities in: brutality,  
111, 119; procurement and  
plunder, 87–91, 108–11, 113;  
recruitment, 91; sabotage, 94;  
targeting of collaborators,  
92
- Bauer, Antun, 221
- Belgrade, 214–15, 250
- Belorussia:  
anti-Semitism, 85;  
civilian population, 43;  
in general, 27–9;  
German administration, 104–5;  
German brutality, 117;  
impact of war upon, 47;  
partisan activity, 51, 85, 91, 104;  
*see also* Baranovichi region
- Bielski, Tuvia, 52–3

- Bilagora County, 218
- Boehme, Franz, 189, 192, 194–7, 199, 203, 206
- Borowski, Heinrich, 202, 217
- Bosnia:
- Axis anti-Partisan operations, 223; geography, 11;
  - as part of ISC, 181, 184;
  - as Partisan refuge, 18, 183–4, 194
- Bukovac, 218
- Central Staff of the Partisan Movement (Soviet Union), 31, 37, 41, 80, 83, 88–9
- Cer Mountains, 197–8
- Četniks:
- collaboration with Axis, 183–4, 186;
  - role in 1941 uprising, 194, 198, 200;
  - role in inter-ethnic conflict, 18, 182
- Collective farms (in Soviet Union), 40, 43, 45
- Communists:
- place in Nazi ideology, 27;
  - in Poland, 134, 142, 168–70;
  - in Slovenia: Axis propaganda against, 237–47; propaganda activities of, 247–51; relations with population, 235–6; role in Partisan movement, 234, 240;
  - in Soviet Union: Axis measures against, 29, 68; relations with population, 31, 37; role in partisan movement, 31, 38, 46, 88–90;
  - in Yugoslavia (other than Slovenia): Axis measures against, 16, 190, 200, 219–20, 222, 226; role in inter-ethnic conflict, 212; role in Partisan movement, 9, 18, 182–3, 193–4, 200, 215
- Communist Party of the Soviet Union, *see* Communists, Soviet Union
- Duka, M. I., 51–2
- Đurić, Eugen, 222
- Einsatzgruppe A, *see* Sicherheitspolizei und SD (Security Police and SD)
- Elicker, Jakob, 215
- Ethnic Germans, *see* Volksdeutsche
- Final Solution, *see* Holocaust
- Fruška Mountains, 214–15, 217–18, 222
- Gestapo:
- historiographical debate over, 157–9;
  - in Poland: organisation, 159–62; recruitment of informers, 162–4; sources for, 156–7; successes against partisans, 170–2; as target of partisans, 147, 151, 173; *see also* Informers, Gestapo, classifications of
- Gendarmerie:
- in Soviet Union: general role, 102–4; organisation, 104–5;
  - in Baranovichi region: operations against partisans, 112–16, 121; organisation, 104–6; recruitment and deployment of native auxiliaries, 107–8, 110, 121; relations with population, 116–20; sources for, 103
- Glaise von Horstenau, Edmund, 225
- Habsburg Empire, *see* Austro-Hungarian Empire
- Hinghofer, Walter, 194, 199–204
- Hitler, Adolf:
- role in Soviet Union, 28–9, 66;
  - role in Yugoslavia, 8, 181, 193, 211, 224–5;
  - use in propaganda of, 239, 241–4, 249–50
- Hoffmann, Paul, 200–3
- Holocaust, 6, 8, 131, 158–9
- Home Army, *see* Armia Krajowa / AK
- Hungerpolitik, 65
- Independent State of Croatia (ISC), *see* Ustaša

Informers, Gestapo, classifications of:

Auskunftsperson, 161;

Vertrauensleute (V-Leute) /

Vertrauensmann (V-Mann), 156,  
159–64, 166, 171, 176;

Werks/Wahrmann, 161;

Zütrager/Züverlässigermann, 160

Jasenovac, 220–1, 223

Jews:

Axis measures against: across

eastern Europe, 8, 15–16, 190;

in ISC, 10, 210, 212–14, 220–1,

223; in Ljubljana, 235; in

Poland, 131, 156, 158–9, 163;

in Serbia, 9, 16, 183, 191, 195;

in Soviet Union, 29, 45, 61, 73,

81, 93, 108, 121;

place in Nazi ideology, 8, 27, 29, 240;

role in partisan warfare, 45, 52–3,

84, 94;

as target of Axis propaganda, 240, 243;

treatment by Soviet partisans, 51,

85–6, 93;

in World War I, 202

Kasche, Siegfried, 225–6

Kozara Mountains, 223–4

Kriminalpolizei, 160

Kvaternik, Eugen, 219, 225

Kvaternik, Slavko, 225

Keitel, Wilhelm, 68

Kovpak, S. A., 51

Ljubljana, *see* Slovenia

Mihajlović, Draža, 182, 186, 194,

200–1, 216

Milošević, Petar, 222–3

Nedić, Milan, 183, 186, 216, 225

NKO Order 189, 41, 43, 52

Oberkommando des Heeres (OKH),

193, 200

Oberkommando der Wehrmacht

(OKW), 193–4

Operations:

Bagration, 94

Barbarossa, 27, 58, 61, 65, 68, 72

Order Police, *see* Ordnungspolizei

Ordnungspolizei, 107, 133, 158

Osvobodilna Fronta / OF, *see*

Communists, Slovenia

Pavelić, Ante, 182, 184–7, 210, 218,

219, 230

Pavlovsk, 63, 66–7, 69–72

Poland:

economic exploitation of, 133;

geography, 11, 18;

civilian population: collaboration

with Germans, 163–7;

treatment by Germans of, 8,

13, 131–4, 142, 156; treatment

by Soviets of, 131–4

Ponomarenko, Pantaleimon:

appointed head of Central Staff of

the Partisan Movement, 31;

and civilian population, 41, 47, 50,

90;

opposition to scorched earth policy

and plunder, 43, 49–50;

post-war career, 80

Pravda, 38, 40

Propaganda:

Gendarmerie propaganda, 119;

in general, 83;

Nazi propaganda, 64–5;

Polish propaganda, 151;

Soviet propaganda, 30, 42, 46, 54,

80, 120;

Wehrmacht propaganda, 191,

201;

*see also* Slovenia, propaganda in

Requisition commandos, 110

Roma:

in general, 81

in Yugoslavia, 10, 210, 212–14, 220,

228, 235

Scorched earth policy, 40–1, 43

Schutzmänner / Schutzmannschaft,

107–8, 110, 114–18, 121, 125

Schutzstaffel, *see* SS

Serbia:

collaboration with Axis in, 13, 183;

- liberation, 186;
- national uprising, 182, 193–4;
- population, treatment by
  - Germans of, 16, 189, 194–7, 203;
- Serb population in ISC, treatment by Ustaša of, 210–12, 218–23, 226–7
- Sicherheitspolizei und SD (Security Police and SD):
  - in Poland, 133, 156–60, 163, 165, 169;
  - in Soviet Union: Einsatzgruppen, 29, 56, 67, 69; in general 61, 67–8, 114;*see also* SS
- Slavonia, 218
- Slovenia:
  - Axis occupation of, 181, 185, 233–4;
  - propaganda in: by Germans, 237–41; by Home Guard, 241–7; by Partisans, 247–51
- Slovensko domobranstvo (Slovenian Home Guard), 235–6; *see also* Slovenia, propaganda in: by Home Guard
- Smolensk Province, 43, 46, 49
- SS (Schutzstaffel), 5–6, 67, 102, 117; *see also* Sicherheitspolizei und SD (Security Police and SD)
- Stahl, Friedrich, 202–3
- Stalin, Joseph:
  - and Jews, 85;
  - orders by, 40–1, 95, 193;
  - role in partisan policy, 41–3, 50, 95, 248;
  - ruthlessness of, 17;
  - speeches by, 39–40
- Stronnictwo Narodowe / SN (National Alliance, Poland), 168
- Sumy Province, 49
- Syrmia:
  - civilian population, 214–15;
  - geography, 213–14
- Tito, 212, 215, 248, 250–1
- Tomić, Viktor, 217–18, 220, 222–3, 225–6
- Ukraine:
  - economic importance, 70;
  - German occupation of, 29, 132–3;
  - nationalism, 32, 42, 47;
  - in Operation Barbarossa, 27–9
- Ustaša:
  - assumes power in ISC, 181–2;
  - brutality, 10, 13–14, 18, 184, 193–4;
  - campaign in Syrmia, 216–23;
  - German reactions to, 211–12, 223–6;
  - sources for, 213
- Volksdeutsche, 163, 175, 234
- Wehrmacht:
  - army groups: Centre, 72–3, 82; North, 66, 70;
  - attempts at constructive engagement, 9, 14;
  - divisions of (*infantry divisions unless otherwise specified*):
    - 58th, 66; 62nd, 72; 126th, 72; 203rd Security, 208; 221st Security, 73, 208; 253rd, 72–3; 369th (Croatian), 208; 373rd (Croatian), 208; 704th, 199; 707th, 73; 714th, 199; 717th, 199–200, 203; 718th, 182; *see also* 121st Infantry Division (Wehrmacht), 342nd Infantry Division (Wehrmacht);
  - historiographical debate over, 5, 58;
  - Hungerpolitik, role in, 66;
  - ideology of, 64;
  - in Independent State of Croatia:
    - anti-Partisan operations, 216–18, 222–3; relations with Ustaša, 211–12, 216, 220, 223; response to Ustaša killings, 22–35;
  - in Serbia: attitude towards
    - population of, 189, 191; defeat of Serb national uprising, 194;
    - reprisal policy, 183, 190; *see also* 342nd Infantry Division (Wehrmacht);
  - in Soviet Union: ‘Criminal Orders’ issued by, 29, 61; relations with population, 63; *see also* 121st Infantry Division (Wehrmacht);
- SS, cooperation with, 67

World War I, legacy of:

in general, 2, 9;

in Germany and Austria,  
8–9, 191–3, 201–5;

in Poland, 140;

in Yugoslavia, 181–2, 233, 250

Związek Walki Zbrojnej / ZWZ

(Union for Armed Struggle,  
Poland), 134, 137, 142–150,  
168