The partisans of the Great Patriotic War have, in the years since 1945, occupied a central place in the pantheon of Soviet heroes. The official narrative is straightforward; left in the wake of the sweeping German advances of 1941-42, the citizens of the Soviet Union took up arms behind enemy lines, committing courageous acts of sabotage and resistance against the fascist invader, battling heroically against all odds for the motherland. While this is a politically convenient story, it leaves many of the more complex aspects of the partisan war unexplained. Those who fought, hailed as heroic defenders of the Soviet Union, often had no other option. The brutality of the German program of racial genocide in the East and the harsh retaliatory measures by the partisans themselves made everyday life for the local population unbearable. The partisan movement was initially conceptualized and implemented by the Soviet high command as a force of dependable Communists, appointees who often had difficulty adapting to the realities of working alongside Red Army soldiers and civilians. The composition of the average partisan unit would shift only by the final years of the war into a genuine movement of mass participation, as more citizens sought to prove their loyalty to the victorious Soviet Union and distance themselves from the hated German occupiers. The tension between Soviet authorities, Red Army troops, and the local populations caused by the partisan war would also act as catalysts for decades of social stratification, exacerbated by Soviet attitudes toward those who had lived in occupied territory. As a result, the partisan movement not only contributed directly to the war effort and the restructuring of occupied territory, it brought issues of societal division to the attention of
authorities, soldiers, and civilians alike. This would have an enduring effect on society in the Soviet Union for decades after the war’s official conclusion.

The basic circumstance that made the partisan movement unique in World War II is the tremendous scope of the initial German invasion, and the subsequent loss of such a massive amount of territory to the Wehrmacht. Inexplicably surprised by the beginning of Operation Barbarossa on 22 June 1941, the Red Army was decimated by the lightning assault of the German Army. Degen Lazarevich, an infantryman hastily attached to the 130th Rifle Division, recalled a demoralizing atmosphere: “The rifle companies were melting away before our eyes…total desertion began. How could this happen? Where is the front? Is the war still being waged? Why do I exist while my army and my country have collapsed?”

Across the length of the Soviet frontier, this attitude was pervasive. Nikolai Obrynba, a prisoner who would later join the partisans, painted a grim picture of life under German authority in 1941, lamenting that “humankind had fallen apart here…each of them had to be responsible for himself” – a fitting description for the beginning of the guerrilla movement in the Soviet Union.2

It was out of these dire circumstances that the first partisan units were formed, largely by chance. Red Army units caught in the wake of the advance fought for their very survival. Panicked, with no way of knowing what was happening on the front lines, many units lived off the land, posing a menace to both civilians and occupiers alike. More importantly, however, many avoided surrender. The Wehrmacht was stunned by such persistent resistance; the victories of 1939 and 1940 had convinced them that their opponents would sooner surrender than fight a hopeless war. Hitler’s Directive No. 21, issued in late 1940, even predicted the German forces would “crush Soviet Russia…before the end of

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1 Lazarevich, Degen Ion. Interview. I Remember.
the war against England”. The reality in the East, according to one German soldier, was that “Red Army rearguards would fight to the last man...[and] behind the German line in those regions in which they had been welcomed civilian-supported partisan activity would spring up and produce actions of so bitter a nature than any act of clemency could almost be construed as aiding and abetting the enemy”. This was essentially the nature of the conflict in the East, in stark contrast to the German experience in the West. Surrender and cooperation with the occupier were not an option; it was a simple and brutal war of annihilation, facilitated by the occupiers themselves through their own harsh policies. The Germans already began to suffer serious logistical issues in 1941; in advancing so quickly, they had left many Red Army units behind in areas like the Pripet marshes, units that would form the core for partisan bands that made logistics such a difficult situation. One Wehrmacht officer at the front recalled in his memoirs the “transportation crisis” which even in 1941 was “greatly aggravated by regular partisan attacks on the front-line troops” as the army stalled in front of Moscow. Unprepared for the scope of the occupation, German reserves were being drained at an unsustainable rate even in the first year of war. Rolf-Dieter Muller states in his work on the war in the East, “virtually no strategic reserves were left...the power of any German offensives would steadily erode, especially as more and more troops were tied down behind the lines fending off partisan attacks”. Though unorganized and

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5 Klaus A. Friedrich Schüler. Logistik Im Russlandfeldzug: Die Rolle Der Eisenbahn Bei Planung, Vorbereitung Und Durchführung Des Deutschen Angriffs Auf Die Sowjetunion Bis Zur Krise Vor Moskau Im Winter 1941/42 (Frankfurt Am Main: P. Lang) 1987, cited in Hitler’s War in the East, p. 97.
unsanctioned by the Soviet state in 1941, these first “partisans” nonetheless had the Germans worried as the initial tide of their victory began to subside.\(^7\)

It is easy to see, then, how one might be inclined to believe the Soviet legend of a partisan movement instantly materializing in response to the invasion. German General Heinrici himself reported with consternation on 23 June 1941 – one day into the invasion! – “lost soldiers are sitting everywhere in the great forests…and often enough shooting from behind. The Russians in general are fighting the war in an insidious manner”.\(^8\) This frustration is evident in reports throughout the Soviet Union, from which one could conclude that the partisans were already enjoying a popular base of support. This was, however, pure fantasy. Despite their apparent success, the inexperience of the partisans and their political officers in conducting successful operations stymied the initial efforts of the Soviet leadership at creating an effective guerrilla force. As previously indicated, most of the success of the “partisan” war in 1941 came from the Red Army soldiers left behind in the German advance; less effective were the partisans approved by the Communist Party, and a popular resistance from the people was virtually nonexistent. This was especially illustrated in the western reaches of Belorussia and Ukraine, the latter having one communique that estimated “99 percent of the population hates the Bolsheviks… [they] especially hate the kolkhoz system, the NKVD, and that they confiscate all the bread.”\(^9\) Only recently brought under Soviet control, the antipathy toward the Communist system is evident in reports throughout the western territories subjugated to the Germans. It is worth noting that this communique was sent from Vinnytsia Oblast, the region just south of Berdichev – the city where Vasilii Grossman

\(^7\) The term “partisan” here is used loosely. The Red Army soldiers left behind in German territory were obviously not intended to be a part of the Soviet partisan movement. As it turned out, they would eventually develop into its most effective leaders.

\(^8\) *Third Reich at War*, p. 195.

would describe liberation in 1944 as a scene where “old men, when they hear Russian words, run to meet the troops and weep silently.”

Popular sentiment had clearly swung, if not necessarily in favor of the Soviets, then certainly against the Germans by the latter years of the war. In 1941, however, there was little to no local support for the Soviet partisans in the vast majority of regions the Germans took at such lightning speed, and justifiably so. Many of those regions had only recently been acquired by the Soviet Union, while collectivization and the purges had left the centralized government in Moscow relatively unpopular throughout much of the western USSR.

The distinction between Red Army soldiers and Communist Party partisans must therefore be stressed, particularly in these early years. One Communist Party official noted that “the main task of the partisan detachment then consisted of preserving strength and preparing it for decisive action, possibly only at the moment of the Germans’ retreat.” Orders from the Central Committee dictated that “Party organizations under the personal guidance of their first secretaries should provide comrades who are experienced fighting, loyal to our party, personally known to the Party leaders and proven in practice, for the establishment and leadership of the guerrilla movement.”

Partisan commanders were ordered to screen those attempting to join the resistance and admit only the “best parts of the local population…dedicated to our Rodina to the end.” In practice, this meant that all but the most devoted Communists were purposefully excluded from the partisan movement. Red Army soldiers – who often did not meet such criteria – maintained leadership of their own guerrilla bands, which often focused

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more on survival than sabotage. Disdain between Communist Party and Red Army units predominated. One Communist scoffed, “What’s a guy who came out of encirclement anyway? That means he didn’t die in battle...No, we don’t need that kind. The Party picked and confirmed us.” 14 The focus on commitment to the Communist cause often came at the expense of military expertise, which resulted in disproportionate casualties for Communist units. The first actual partisans of 1941 were fractured, mostly consigned to minor roles of subsistence banditry and survival.

In a further blow to regional support, the burden of supporting the existence of these inactive detachments often fell directly on the local population. Considering Communism’s purported interest in the needs of the proletariat, the level to which the workers and peasants were sacrificed for the good of the state is alarming. This was a war in which any attempt to live peacefully under Nazi rule was grounds for execution for collaboration, making the targeting of the population before the invader reminiscent of the inward looking purges of the 1930s. This was taken to extremes by the partisans, even by the standards set in those uncertain days. One German report from the 2nd Panzer Army estimated that in the Orel region of Russia, from 11 December 1941 to 23 January 1942, guerrillas killed 33 German soldiers, 38 Russian policemen, and over 200 Russian civil officials and civilians. 15 Eliminating collaborators was certainly the primary concern, but also gave justification for general action against civilians even suspected of potential collaboration. One partisan explained, “If we didn’t [steal], the Germans would.” 16 Another remembered taking food from a village and returning later only to find “everything was burning”, the village destroyed and the people removed. 17 If there was nothing left for

16 Kizant Robert Danilovich, Interview. “I Remember”.
17 Emelin George Alexandrovich, Interview. “I Remember”.
the village itself, there would be nothing left to aid the German war effort: such was the brutal logic of many partisan units. One desperate citizen wrote, “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.”18

From a desensitized perspective, this attitude served its purpose, to an extent; it discouraged collaboration and reminded the victims of the continued presence of Soviet power. However, indiscriminate killing made the German designation of the Soviet partisans as “bandits” seem valid. “For twenty five years the Bolsheviks ruled, promised a lot, but gave nothing”, claimed one report from Ukraine. “The population understands this business.”19 What the guerrillas needed, then, was to find a way to generate the popular support they needed to function effectively, to give civilians reason to believe that helping the partisans - even with the risks attached - was a more attractive option than passivity. The top-down approach to partisan command taken by Soviet authorities through exclusively Communist Party means made such support nearly impossible. Indeed, as we have seen, such support was often explicitly discouraged. These first partisans were often isolated both from the government and the local population, directed by territorial Party officials with little experience in conducting guerrilla operations.20 While the military situation at the front was worsening, the original 11,733 partisans fielded directly by the Soviets in 1941 had dwindled to an insignificant force of 1,965 by early 1942,

19 Making Sense of War, p. 130
20 John Alexander Armstrong, Soviet Partisans in World War II. Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1964, p. 90. It is worth noting that many accounts of the war against the partisans from the German perspective portray this early state of affairs (particularly in western Ukraine) as being representative of the Soviet partisan movement as a whole – that is, that the local populations unanimously hated the partisans and resented Soviet power when it was reintroduced. This perspective, though not entirely accurate, helps to understand the attitude held by the German Army during the war. For further analysis, see: War on the Eastern Front, Hitler’s War in the East, The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia.
while the overall number of 87,000 recognized partisans had fallen to 30,000 in the same time frame.\textsuperscript{21} Though estimates vary due to the difficulty of establishing exact numbers under such conditions, there is no doubt that the partisan movement was fading quickly by the spring of 1942.

Thus, the popular Soviet myth of a spontaneous and massive partisan uprising is undoubtedly exaggerated. Given the alienation that collectivization and deportation had fostered in many territories that had since fallen to the Nazis, Stalin’s hesitation in embracing a genuine popular movement to throw back the invader is understandable. A popularly supported movement might prove to be impossible for the centralized state to control over a great distance. Moreover, a partisan force of the people could potentially be as much a threat to Soviet power as it would to the Nazis once the occupied territory was reclaimed. The most pertinent memory of partisan warfare for the Soviet government was undoubtedly the Russian Civil War, and even Red partisans in the civil war had been known for their “lack of discipline, military unreliability, political unorthodoxy, extreme localism, and general contempt for Bolshevik hierarchy.”\textsuperscript{22} Labelled collectively as \textit{partizanshchina} by Soviet authorities, these were qualities abhorrent to the Stalinist regime.

The importance of a Soviet partisan movement was therefore the primary concern for Stalin in 1941 and early 1942, a goal that was reflective of the emphasized importance of the reinstitution of Soviet authority in areas under German occupation. The attempts to enforce Soviet power before fighting the German invader were evidence of the continued paranoia of the purges, a paranoia that led partisan units to find collaborators everywhere they looked. Even passivity was evidence of

\textsuperscript{21} Kenneth Slepyan. \textit{Stalin’s Guerrillas: Soviet Partisans in World War II} (Lawrence, Kan.: University of Kansas, 2006) p. 34, Boi’â’rskii, V. I. \textit{Partizany I Armii â’”. Istorii â’” Uteri â’”mykh Vozmozhnostei}. (Minsk: Kharvest, 2001) p. 80. The former number is assumed to be Communist Party partisans, while the latter likely represents all active partisans from the Red Army, local units, and Communist Party combined.

\textsuperscript{22} Kenneth Slepyan. “Why They Fought: Motivation, Legitimacy and the Soviet Partisan Movement”, p. 4.
collaboration, and was dealt with accordingly. Indeed, instances of actual collaboration served to vindicate the Stalinist perspective that enemies were everywhere, and had to be forcefully punished as a reminder to maintain constant vigilance against the internal enemy. The initial partisan experiment, as a result, can only be classified as a failure. These units were more political bodies than military, taking heavy casualties for a cause that was hardly guaranteed to survive the year. They were exclusive against the people actually bearing the burdens of occupation, while remaining almost entirely stationary and inactive against the occupation forces. Soviet leaders would need to find a way to integrate a genuine popular movement into their idealized projection of Soviet power before the partisan war could succeed. Fortunately for the Soviet Union, the victories of late 1941 and early 1942 would provide the catalyst necessary to re-energize the partisan movement.

The stand in front of Moscow in particular showed that the Wehrmacht could be beaten, a development that had hitherto been in serious doubt. The effect of this cannot be underestimated. Prior to the defense of Moscow, it was unclear if the Communist government would even manage to hold onto power through the end of 1941; holding back the Nazi tide made it clear to Red Army troops, civilians, and partisans that Communism was far from dead. Prior to that, the blitzkrieg had “created the impression of German invincibility and inevitable victory…thus making any resistance futile.”23 Few civilians would wish to engage in a “useless act of suicide” by resisting a Wehrmacht which had smashed the Red Army, taken Moscow, and decapitated Soviet leadership.24 Halting the Germans at the front therefore opened the door to the first realistic resistance. Hitler’s soldiers were “tired, his units depleted, his supplies intermittent, his equipment unfitted for a winter campaign” – and this was in late

1941, at the high water mark of the advance on Moscow!\textsuperscript{25} G.F. Pokrovskii, commander of the 1\textsuperscript{st} Voroshilov Partisan Detachment, noted: “[When] the population is certain that the Red Army exists, that the German rear burns, that we are the bosses there and not the Germans, we will use our sympathy with the population…unexpected action always gives positive results”.\textsuperscript{26} One of the keys to the success of the partisan war was indicating that Soviet power had a real and quantifiable presence in occupied territory. To fulfill this mission, the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement, headed by Panteleimon Kondratevich Ponomarenko, was established in May of 1942.

The Central Staff would allow Moscow direct control of the partisan movement on military terms, without the “earlier reliance on Party affiliation and past service to the regime” that we have already seen had crippled the partisans in 1941 and early 1942.\textsuperscript{27} Its task was also to bring the scattered partisan movement to heel, to bring direction and control to the Red Army units that had been living as marauders on the land, to ensure their continued existence as bastions of Soviet authority in occupied territory. Most importantly, this body would recognize the clear relationship between military success and popular support in guerrilla warfare. Nowhere was this clearer than in NKO (People’s Commissariat of Defense) Order 189, “On the Tasks of the Partisan Movement”. The partisan movement, on orders from Stalin himself, was to be turned into an “all-people’s movement…to draw into the partisan struggle increasingly the broad elements of the population.”\textsuperscript{28} This new attitude was reflected in the papers and propaganda circulating throughout Soviet territory. One editorial in 	extit{Krasnaia zvezda} published on 29 September 1942 declared that “all honorable Soviet men and

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\textsuperscript{25} Richard J. Evans, 	extit{The Third Reich at War} (New York: Penguin, 2009) 204.
\textsuperscript{26} Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI), f. 69, op. I, d. 28, l. 33.
\textsuperscript{27} Stalin’s Guerrillas, 42.
\textsuperscript{28} RGASPI, f. 69, op I, d. 3, l. 14.
women, desiring to be liberated from the German yoke…are the partisans’ reserves”, reflecting an abrupt shift toward embracing the broad-based guerrilla movement.29

This change in attitude, developed more out of necessity than out of trust for the people to fight for the Soviet state, became a valuable propaganda theme through the course of the war. The struggle taking place in occupied territory became, in the official version of events, a unified movement in which the Soviet people from every ethnicity and background naturally came together in defense of the motherland. The truth is, of course, somewhat more complex. Though many nationalities were represented in the partisan movement, there was undoubtedly a desire on part of the Soviet leadership to overemphasize the multiethnic nature of the guerrilla bands in an effort to fulfill the conditions set forth in NKO Order 189. In Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, a large number of partisans were “imported” from other areas of the Soviet Union, and leadership even in Belorussia and Russia overwhelmingly remained in the hands of Red Army soldiers taking their orders from Moscow.30 This naturally put the locally developed partisans at odds with the units upholding Soviet policy in occupied territory, who still operated under the philosophy that “a pure partisan war and its tactics must not tie fate to the population.”31 Ponomarenko’s partisans were in the curious position of requiring local support while considering those same local villages as expendable in the fight against the Germans. The movement, then, was not as unified or as welcoming toward contributions of the people as Soviet propaganda made it out to be. Even so, though the struggle may have been supplied and reinforced from the Soviet heartland, the partisans’ fortunes were inextricably linked to the people in occupied territory.

29 Cited in: Stalin’s Guerrillas, p. 50.
30 Ibid. p. 57.
31 Ibid. 159.
From numerous sources fighting the guerrilla war, there exists substantial evidence that the partisan movement, particularly in the period after NKO Order 189, featured a distinct lack of prejudice. Forced into a war of survival, most partisans rarely discriminated against others within their own ranks. This was both the natural result of the pressure put on the partisans by the German occupying forces, which served as a common enemy for the population to unite against, and a testament to the Soviet commanders, who sensibly realized that discrimination within the ranks would only damage the war effort. James von Geldern asserts that “only German brutality and contempt for Slavs made for common cause”, yet the power of the bond this commonality created should not be underestimated.

David Glantz argues in his work on the Red Army that “crude patriotism…pan-Slavism, traditional Russian nationalism, some sort of loyalty to the Soviet state, or sheer hatred of the German invaders” were all significant motivating factors in sparking motivation to fight, and the variety of different motives gives credibility to the assertion that the partisan struggle involved a very real diversity within its ranks.

In a given unit, one might even find families fighting together on the front lines; the presence of women and even children in the guerrilla war was a stark reminder that the rules of conventional warfare, often skirted by the Red Army proper, were disregarded to an even greater degree within the partisan movement.

Jews, in particular, had obvious reason to resist the German invaders, and thus occupied a pivotal role in the struggle. Embraced by some as fighters unwilling to be taken alive, viewed with disdain as outsiders by others, Jews represented a contentious minority within partisan ranks. One Jewish partisan

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34 This is not to say that there were no ethnic or nationalist divisions within the partisan units. Though united in their goals in 1941 and 1942, the addition of a variety of minorities in the latter years of the war would exacerbate tensions on ethnic divisions. Even so, one cannot discount the testimony of many individual partisans who recount very good relationships within their units. See accounts such as: Red Partisan, interviews with Robert Danilovich Kizant and David Timofeevich Shtarkman.
recalled in an interview that his partisan unit “lived as one family” with “all sorts of nationalities”, claims which we have no reason to disbelieve.\textsuperscript{35} Amir Weiner notes, however, that in the postwar Soviet Union, Jews came to be viewed as a natural anti-Soviet element, an “irredeemable” faction that needed to be “excised”.\textsuperscript{36} Even during the war such attitudes were present, particularly before NKO Order 189. In Belorussia, a group of Jewish women were even shot directly by a partisan band when fleeing from the Nazis, prompting little to no official response from Soviet authorities in the area.\textsuperscript{37} The declaration of the inclusion of all Soviet peoples in the struggle remedied this situation to an extent. Tuvia Bielski, one Jewish partisan, declared before a skeptical Slavic commander that “if you are a true Soviet leader, you should know that it is in the interest of our homeland to fight the German enemy, together. Our homeland does not differentiate between Jews and non-Jews, it only separates the loyal, disciplined citizens from harmful, destructive bands.”\textsuperscript{38} Anti-Semitism, however, remained a part of the partisan movement throughout its duration. It reached a crescendo as more unstable elements filtered into the partisan ranks in the latter years of the war, as those who had previously collaborated with or lived under Nazi rule were forced to readjust to the realities of Soviet authority.

The reason for Jewish participation in the partisan war should nonetheless be obvious. The Germans in their official policy equated simply being Jewish with complicity in partisan operations, frequently making armed resistance the only option for the survival of individual Jews in occupied territory.\textsuperscript{39} Some joined existing units, while others formed their own Jewish partisan groups. The

\textsuperscript{35} David Timofeevich Shtarkman, Interview. “I Remember”.
\textsuperscript{36} Making Sense of War, p. 50-52.
Central Staff, for its part, discouraged the division of partisan identity such as that inherent in the formation of Jewish partisan units in the forests of Belorussia and Russia. Bielski, a Belorussian Jew, formed a particularly potent unit that grew to about 1,200 by 1944\textsuperscript{40}. He and others like him often coordinated with Soviet partisans to attack the Germans and protect the local population, yet remained outside the limits of Soviet authority during the war. Only where the interests of the local partisan units and the Soviet-sponsored groups came together would they cooperate. “Don’t rush to fight and die,” Bielski exhorted his partisans. “So few of us are left, we have to save lives.”\textsuperscript{41} Tactics of preservation - practiced by many self-sufficient guerrilla bands - were in direct opposition to the stated goals of the Central Staff, which regarded civilian lives as expendable in the ultimate struggle to drive out the German invader and reinstitute Soviet authority. This would enflame tensions not only between Moscow and the partisans, but also between partisan commanders and the population.

One of the primary tasks of the partisan movement, then, became convincing the locals that the guerrilla bands were fighting in the people’s best interests, regardless of the losses they were taking. Indeed, the partisan war was partially a war of propaganda, an effort on both sides to sway the population to one side or the other. As the Germans continued to tout their victories at the front, the partisans acted as a connection to the Soviet Union for the people in occupied territory, spreading the “truth” through dissemination of Soviet propaganda. Nikolai Obrynba, one such partisan, describes in his memoirs how his unit would leave leaflets or posters at the scene of action after a firefight, to let the civilians know that they “were fighting for [their] Motherland, for the liberation of the people.”\textsuperscript{42} The importance of the civilians in the ongoing struggle is reflected in the language each side used when

\textsuperscript{40} Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation (JPEF), \url{http://www.jewishpartisans.org/}
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Red Partisan}, p. 140
referencing the other. The Germans were, as early as 1942, forbidden from using the term “partisan” when referring to the guerrillas; they were “bandits” and “forest murderers” who preyed on the locals, marauders and parasites who threatened the security of German soldier and Soviet civilian alike.\textsuperscript{43} To the partisans, the collaborators were “spies”, “kulaks”, and “enemies of the people”, Stalinist terms that were given a new urgency as the imagined enemies of the 1930s became very real enemies in the 1940s.\textsuperscript{44}

This kind of delineation legitimized the Soviet worldview to the civilian population, giving some credibility to Stalin’s government as the “enemies” of the Soviet state – whether ideologically motivated or not – were suddenly brought to center stage in their collaboration with the Germans. Much of the language in Soviet propaganda distributed to the local population is reminiscent of the phraseology utilized in the Russian Civil War, the battle lines of which mirrored those of the partisan war in many respects; the drive to cleanse the anti-Soviet elements from occupied territory, a drive that would continue even past 1945, is a particularly striking example. George Emelin, whose guerrilla unit operated near Kerch, specifically mentions that his family intended to “follow the example of 1919” in abandoning their homes and fighting against the Germans from the countryside.\textsuperscript{45} This is not accidental – the designation of collaborators as bourgeois foreign agents recalled basic Soviet myths about the origins of proletarian struggle and the fight against the Whites, a war similar to the current struggle in that there was no neutrality to be had by the unfortunate civilians on the territory in which it occurred.\textsuperscript{46} One Belorussian partisan “imported” to Ukraine recalled that they “had two enemies – the Germans and the

\textsuperscript{43} Red Partisan, p. 139.
\textsuperscript{44} RGASPI, f 69, op. 1, d. 28, 11. 57, 159; d. 29, 11. 62-63; f. 625, op. 1, d. 28, l. 87; IIAN ORF, f. 2 , raz. II, op. 4, d. 25, l.12.
\textsuperscript{45} George A. Emelin, Interview. “I Remember”.
policemen” and “where we were going, there is a third enemy – bourgeois Ukrainian nationalists.”

Even partisan groups that had formed for self-defense rather than joining with the Soviets were often considered a threat by the Soviet command, reminiscent of the “Greens” who took part in the Russian Civil War. Suspicion of being a collaborator or spy was ever present among most partisan groups, and factional differences were often less clear than propaganda made it seem. In the ranks of the partisans, one’s contribution to the struggle was the single most important factor in determining one’s worth; the establishment of trust for new recruits, unaffiliated with either the Red Army or the Party, was therefore an often difficult endeavor.

As a result, the primary motivation for civilian resistance – survival – was not enough to exonerate elements deemed to be anti-Soviet, whether that was collaborators or “untrustworthy” minorities. Once the German intentions for the East became clear, resistance became “not only a realistic alternative but also the only possible course of action” for many Soviet citizens, a very real survival alternative to captivity. Given the choice, the former victims of collectivization and deportation would most likely have elected to stay out of the conflict altogether. Confronted with the harsh brutality of German occupation policies, however, civilians were forced to pick sides. Once the prospects for Soviet victory became realistic and the burden of German occupation began to weigh on the population, resistance became an increasingly attractive option. The Germans, for their part, mistakenly identified the growing partisan movement as a product of the “Jewish-Bolshevik” fanatics forcing the people to fight, which led to harsh reprisals against anyone identified as a Communist and the villages who sheltered them. A document issued to occupation troops in late 1942 asserts that “the enemy is using in his bandit struggle fanatical, Communist-drilled soldiers who do not hesitate to commit any act of terror…if this battle is

47 Yukhnevich Victor Kupriyanovich, Interview. “I Remember”.
48 Stalin’s Guerrillas, p. 51.
not fought using the most brutal means…then we shall not master the plague”.\textsuperscript{49} Rather than eliminate the hated kolkhoz system, the Germans adopted it themselves, turning it into racially inspired “full blown serfdom”.\textsuperscript{50} Indeed, the indiscriminate nature of German oppression was a constant reminder of the Nazi belief that all Slavs were subhumans, easily expendable in the occupiers’ struggle against the partisans. The attitude that “anything that leads to success is proper”, as the aforementioned report asserted, ensured the use of increasingly brutal methods in an effort to establish order.\textsuperscript{51}

These mass reprisals left no doubt that life under German occupation was unendurable to many who found themselves caught in this war of ideology. Manfred Messerschmidt and Omar Bartov have compiled considerable evidence that the Wehrmacht was indoctrinated in Nazi ideals.\textsuperscript{52} This provides a persuasive argument that the harsh treatment of the conquered people in the East was implemented on every level of occupation, and thus contributed directly to the majority’s decision to resist Nazi rule. Categorizing the civilians under their control as “cruel, bestial, and animalistic” as Hitler did in his address of 3 October 1941, German troops could have in no way made compromises in their war of annihilation, which made reasonable treatment of the majority of Soviet civilians in occupied territory impossible. In the same month, Field Marshal von Reichenau issued an order to the troops under his command that explicitly forbade “the feeding of the natives and of prisoners of war who are not working for the Armed Forces”, classifying such activities as “misunderstood humanitarian act[s].”\textsuperscript{53} This

\textsuperscript{49} Cited in War on the Eastern Front, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{50} Karel Cornelis Berkhoff, "Hitler's Clean Slate : Everyday Life in the Reichskommisariat Ukraine, 1941-1944" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1998) 143.
\textsuperscript{51} Cited in War on the Eastern Front, p. 65.
pervasive attitude would ultimately ensure the success of the partisan war, through the demolition of infrastructure and agricultural production for the villagers of occupied territory. It gave many civilians no other option than taking to the forests to join the partisan struggle, whether they previously had been steeped on Communist ideology or not.

As we have seen, this is particularly accurate in areas like Ukraine and Belorussia, where an initially noncommittal populace was driven to resistance by the mishandling of occupation. Contrary to many Soviet-era accounts, this was not a people’s crusade for Communism – this was a logical and reasonable decision to resist based on the overwhelming conditions faced in everyday life. A Party secretary in Smolensk Oblast noted that “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…they say ‘No, Stalin is right.’”54 Some partisans, unwilling to fight for the Soviets, were more than willing to fight with them against the Germans – in this way, many were brought under the indirect control of Moscow, affirming Soviet authority even in areas where support for the regime had been lukewarm before the war. Field Marshal von Reichenau, in the aforementioned order to occupation troops, argued that “the indifference of numerous apparently anti-Soviet elements…must give way to a clear decision for active collaboration”, or the population could be turned against the occupiers. Some, then, recognized that encouraging positive collaboration rather than alienating the populace would result in better long term prospects for the German Army in the East. In reality, such warnings went overwhelmingly unheeded by the rear guards as the war dragged on, pushing ever more civilians into the ranks of the partisans.

54 Stalin’s Guerrillas, p. 39.
The fault for this, of course, is in basic Nazi ideology and the program of racial subservience and genocide in the East. Grossman, writing from Ukraine, recalled that “[Hitler’s] heavy-handed repression did more to turn the local population to the Soviet cause than decades of Stalin’s rule had done.” The same could be said for any area under occupation. Though the Soviets may have provided the means for resistance, the Germans themselves overwhelmingly provided the motive. The partisans, of course, did not hesitate to capitalize on hatred directed against Germans to recruit new soldiers to their cause. Obrynba, whose unit operated predominantly in Belorussia, noted that initial mobilization had never reached most of the areas under occupation, thus providing an excellent resource of new recruits. He emphasized throughout his memoirs that maintaining good relations among the people was of the utmost importance, mentioning that “having joined the Partisans, stealing from the people was unacceptable, as it would stain our reputation.” Other accounts declare similar sentiments of pride and noble intention, showing that many partisans truly believed that this was a people’s crusade against fascism. This should not, however, be interpreted as an unwillingness to engage in punitive action against civilians. Amir Weiner’s view of the war as the culmination of the Bolshevik Revolution indicates that as Soviet victory became more likely, the desire to purge anti-Soviet elements from the population was to become an increasingly important factor in the guerrilla war. The partisans, in general, would help civilians where the local population was deemed loyal to the Soviet Union; those who were viewed as collaborators or untrustworthy had no such luck.

As the tide of the war began to turn against the Germans, so too did the character of the partisan war. As we have already seen, the introduction of a mass participation movement had begun out of necessity in 1942. It reached its zenith in 1943 and 1944, leading to fundamental questions regarding

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55 *Writer at War*, “In Berdichev”.
56 *Red Partisan*, p. 135.
the self-identification of many partisan units. Central Staff records indicate that the number of partisans had skyrocketed to 102,562 by January 1943, and then to 181,392 a year later; clearly, success on the battlefield had a direct impact on the number of partisans active behind the lines\textsuperscript{57}. The rift within the partisan ranks between Red Army men and Communist Party-recruited guerrillas began to become overshadowed with the addition of such large numbers of local recruits, bringing with them their own motives and ideologies, rarely with any military discipline of their own. These new recruits were often regarded with contempt by Red Army and Communist partisans alike, viewed as opportunists and latecomers trying to prove their loyalty before the imminent return of Soviet power\textsuperscript{58}. This attitude was not unwarranted; many who had formerly been collaborators and policemen working for the Germans abruptly switched sides as battles like Stalingrad and Kursk ultimately made Soviet victory seem not only possible, but increasingly likely. The question for the partisans, then, was how to manage the massive new influx of recruits, both to incorporate them into the existing partisan structure and to establish their motives for joining. The leadership of the movement remained overwhelmingly in the hands of Red Army men and, to a somewhat lesser extent, their Communist political commissars; how well, then, could a self-defense unit comprised of civilians be expected to join a partisan band and submit to military authority? Having lived in occupied territory during the war, these civilians were regarded with deep suspicion by other partisans and Soviet authorities alike, a condition that would remain largely unchanged in the aftermath of the war.

\textsuperscript{57} Cited in: Kenneth Slepyan, \textit{Stalin's Guerrillas}, p. 188.
\textsuperscript{58} Christian Streit. “Partisans-Resistance-Prisoners of War,” \textit{Soviet Union / Union Soviétique} 18, 1-3, 1991. This attitude is confirmed by many interviews from “I Remember”, such as Kizant Danilovich’s, which are generally positive about the initial role of the partisan groups, and tend to emphasize the experiences of 1941-42 more than 1943-44.
The inclusion of newcomers into partisan ranks in 1943 and 1944 was directly encouraged by Ponomarenko and the Central Staff, but in reality, such newcomers were often unwelcome by the veterans from 1941 and 1942. Partisans recruited by the Party and hailing from the Red Army suddenly found themselves at the head of detachments being filled with “untrained, seemingly apathetic peasants, women, non-Slavic ethnonationalities, and former traitors” that appeared to be nothing more than opportunists looking for an excuse to be spared Soviet retribution. This rift between the authorities in Moscow and the partisan unit commanders would only become more apparent as the Central Staff continued to encourage partisan units to welcome back redefectors to the Soviet side, actions which created tension within the units and limited combat effectiveness. As the flood of recruits for the guerrilla war reached its zenith, the Slavic Red Army men who led the movement began to question the loyalty of these latecomers who seemed so different from their predecessors of 1941 and 1942.

In particular, the identification of women and non-Slavic ethnicities with collaboration is a striking indication of the negative attitudes many partisans harbored toward those minorities, attitudes which would help dictate social relations in the postwar Soviet Union. Women, as previously mentioned, had certainly played a role in the partisan struggle; given the opportunity to “prove their worth” both to their male comrades and their country, many fought valiantly for the partisans from 1941 onward and knew some semblance of acceptance within individual partisan units through combat valor. The Central Staff encouraged female participation within the movement from NKO Order 189 onward; yet, the reality of

social relations on the ground meant that women simply did not possess the same authority as men. Women in substantial leadership roles in the partisan movement were nearly unheard of, and the predominant attitude of male partisans toward their female counterparts began to reflect a more misogynistic mindset as the tide of the war began to turn; while males would be incorporated into the Red Army and commended for their service, women “were told to hand in [their] arms and go find [themselves] jobs.” 61 Women and other marginalized minorities participating in the partisan war provided exceptionally good propaganda for the professed egalitarian society of the Soviet Union, but when the social structure and general masculinity of the partisan movement was perceived to be threatened by association with such elements, the partisan commanders themselves balked.

This created a tenuous situation for the veterans of the movement. In representing the diversity of the Soviet Union in the guerrilla war, they could provide evidence that everyone in the Soviet Union supported the regime; however, incorporating those who had previously opposed that regime in the partisan movement showed the Soviet leadership that the partisan movement itself could not be trusted. After the war, the stigma of having lived on occupied territory could only be remedied by what Amir Weiner terms “indisputable evidence of combat valor”, a verification of “rank-and-file Communists” who would otherwise be held under suspicion for their passivity during the war. 62 The addition of “unstable elements” into the war effort could change the perception of the partisan movement as a whole, particularly when many of those latecomers were unable to fight, or were viewed as inferior. Kenneth Slepyan, in Stalin’s Guerrillas, makes a strong argument that the existence of “internal and external threats”, crucial to the Stalinist worldview, was confirmed in the partisan struggle more than in

61 Cited in: Svetlana Alexievich, War’s Unwomanly Face (Moscow: Progress, 1988) p. 45.
62 Making Sense of War, p. 84.
any other aspect of the war. Verification of commitment to the cause then became of paramount importance in the postwar Soviet Union. For some who had participated in this “all people’s movement”, including many minorities such as Jews and Ukrainians, such verification would prove to be increasingly difficult. The partisan struggle essentially became the ultimate test for loyalty to the Party and the Soviet state. From a movement that had been conceptualized as an all-encompassing struggle of the people emerged an ideal of Communist purity, a final culmination of the Revolution and a justification for the Soviet system in general.

Any attempt to summarize the partisan movement in the Great Patriotic War in a single statement is ultimately futile. The conflict was too complicated for that. In a sense, it echoed the Russian Civil War; in another, it called to mind the Stalinist purges of the 1930s. In a broader sense, it was simply a necessity. Those who fought often had little choice but to resort to resistance. This does not, however, detract from their accomplishments. Many, particularly the Red Army and Communist Party partisans, fought with a genuine patriotism that we have no reason to doubt. In doing so, they preserved a semblance of the Soviet system in occupied territory and established the legitimacy of Soviet authority throughout the area that would be liberated from the Germans, a task which would have important political ramifications in the postwar Soviet Union. These could even be seen by 1944, when the diversification of the partisan movement hit its zenith; in the divisions between veteran partisans and new recruits was a microcosm of the postwar divisions in formerly occupied territory, tensions that would give cause for a purification drive and a desire to cleanse the last anti-Soviet elements from the area. The partisan movement not only contributed directly to the defeat of the Germans and the restructuring

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63 Stalin’s Guerrillas, p. 281.
64 The idea of the war as a “final culmination of the Bolshevik Revolution” stems from the work of Amir Weiner, whose Making Sense of War highlights the links between the Revolution and the Second World War and the resulting implications on the postwar Soviet Union.
of occupied territory, it brought these issues to the forefront of public consciousness, and would leave a lasting effect on politics and society in the western reaches of the Soviet Union for decades after the war’s official conclusion.
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