

The Great Patriotic War and Soviet Society

Defeatism, 1941–42

OLEG BUDNITSKII

In October 1941, David Kaufman, a Moscow student and aspiring poet, wrote in his diary: “The Civil War was our fathers. The Five Year Plan, our older brothers. The Patriotic War of ’41, this is us.... The people of our generation, from diverse walks of life, now have but one path: everyone to the front. Here are heroes, cowards, and ordinary people. Nobody is excluded from the war. If I must write, I will write about how this sense of duty came to govern us. There is only one feeling that should be instilled in people from the cradle: duty.”¹

Kaufman, later published under the pseudonym David Samoilov, would become one of the most beloved poets of the Soviet intelligentsia. His generation was raised under Soviet power and did not know or recognize any other. He belonged to a cohort of educated, urban young people, many of whom rushed to recruitment offices on 22 June 1941, fearful of missing out on the war. On that very day, when so many young enthusiasts were rushing to sign up as volunteers, Olimpiada Poliakova, a resident of the town of Pushkin, outside Leningrad, wrote in her diary:

Could our liberation be at hand? Whatever the Germans may be, they can't be worse than our own. And what are the Germans to us? We'll live somehow without them. Everyone has the sense that, at last, the thing we have awaited for so long but did not even dare to hope for—although we did hope for it very much in the depths of our consciousness—has finally arrived. Without this hope it would not have been possible to live. And there is no doubt about the coming German victory. Lord forgive me! I am not an enemy of my people or my homeland. I'm not

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¹ David Samoilov, *Podennye zapisi* (Moscow: Vremia, 2002), 1:140.

a degenerate. But you have to look the truth straight in the eyes: all of us, all of Russia, fervently desires the victory of the enemy, whoever he may be. This accursed regime stole everything from us, even our feelings of patriotism.²

Clearly, Poliakova's claims about "all of Russia" wishing for the victory of the enemy are grossly exaggerated, as are Kaufman's touching words about the spirit of duty animating his entire generation. What *is* clear is that, more than 20 years after the revolution, Soviet society was still not homogenous: a significant part of it would have been happy to witness the disappearance of the Bolsheviks.

Historiography

The war was to be the most serious test of the Stalinist system's durability, becoming, in the words of Robert Thurston, "the acid test of Stalinism."³ The nature of public opinion about the Soviet regime and the outbreak of the war continues to be one of the most important, and consistently controversial, questions for the history of Soviet society during the war period. Meanwhile, the year 1941 constitutes an important chronological boundary for scholars of Stalinism. According to Stephen Lovell, among historians "the war is usually recognized as traumatic and important, but ultimately is granted the status of a cataclysmic interlude between two phases of Stalinism: the turbulent and bloody era of the 1930s and the deep freeze of the late 1940s.... Nonmilitary historians do not quite know what to do with the war."⁴

Historians whose work relates to the history of Soviet society during the war years have starkly different assessments of popular attitudes toward the state and the war. In the literature of the early 1950s, one already finds the idea that the defeat of the Red Army in 1941 and the vast number of prisoners taken at that time reflected the unwillingness of Soviet soldiers to fight for the regime.⁵ According to Martin Malia, Soviet soldiers in 1941 "felt no ardor" for the defense of the Stalinist system, and "even clearer signs

² L. Osipova, "Dnevnik kollaborantki," in *"Svershilos': Prishli nemtsy!": Ideinyi kollaboratsionizm v SSSR v period Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny*, ed. O. V. Budnitskii (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2012), 65. Lidiia Osipovna is a pseudonym for O. G. Poliakova.

³ Robert W. Thurston, *Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia, 1934–1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 199–226.

⁴ Stephen Lovell, *The Shadow of War: Russia and the USSR, 1941 to the Present* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 4.

⁵ George Fischer, *Soviet Opposition to Stalin: A Case Study in World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), 5–6.

of collapse appeared among the civilian population.”⁶ In accordance with authors who argue that Red Army soldiers in 1941 were forced to fight under threat of reprisals, Mark Edele and Michael Geyer have claimed that desertion and evasion of service were not restricted to the catastrophic events of 1941–42 but were in fact characteristic, albeit to a lesser degree, of the entire war period.⁷ Roger Reese has demonstrated that there were a variety of reasons why soldiers chose to fight (and Edele and Geyer ultimately concede that sheer coercion was not the only motivation): besides Soviet patriotism, many were motivated by a specifically Russian patriotism, or by the hope that victory in the war would precipitate a relaxation of the Stalinist regime.⁸ Jörg Baberowski agrees that “for the entire Soviet nation, both soldiers and civilians, the Great Patriotic War was experienced as a continuation of Stalinism by other means.” Soldiers, by and large coming from the peasantry, were just cannon fodder, “the objects of merciless terror.”⁹ Abject fear in the face of mechanisms of repression is the only motivation that Baberowski discusses. Stephen Lovell concludes that “the main—though not the only—reason the Soviet system was able to function so relatively well in wartime was its extensive use of coercion.”¹⁰

According to Robert Thurston, Stalinism withstood the test of the war: “There was no massive disloyalty among Soviet soldiers during the war.... Despite all the problems of 1941 and the profound flaws and violence committed in the name of Soviet socialism, people generally rallied to the regime when they needed to.”¹¹ The frontline generation was, according to Elena Seniavskaja, “mostly a Soviet product.” Amir Weiner, summarizing Seniavskaja’s position, claims that “the majority of the fighting men and women were born into a Soviet system where they acquired their worldview, language, and manner of conduct.” In attempting to answer the questions “what was Ivan fighting for?”

⁶ Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 283–84.

⁷ Catherine Merridale, *Ivan’s War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939–1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 106, 112–13; Mark Edele and Michael Geyer, “States of Exception: The Nazi-Soviet War as a System of Violence, 1939–1945,” in *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared*, ed. Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 384–87.

⁸ Edele and Geyer, “States of Exception,” 387; Roger Reese, “Motivation to Serve: The Secret Soldier in the Second World War,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 20, 2 (2007): 269–70; Reese, *Why Stalin’s Soldiers Fought: The Red Army’s Military Effectiveness in World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 15, 307.

⁹ Iorg Baberowski [Jörg Baberowski], *Krasnyi terror: Istoriia stalinizma* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2007), 215–16.

¹⁰ Lovell, *The Shadow of War*, 26.

¹¹ Thurston, *Life and Terror in Stalin’s Russia*, 225–26.

and who was “the average Ivan,” Weiner agrees with the Soviet sociologist and veteran of the war Vladimir Shubkin that the Soviet soldier was a combination of traditional Russian and new Soviet values.¹²

Anna Krylova considers the heroines of her book on female soldiers to be the products of the Stalinist educational and ideological project; accordingly, their Soviet patriotism and devotion to the authorities are taken as a given.¹³ Roger Markwick and Euridice Charon Cardona write that people belonging to the “core” of Soviet society were ready to sacrifice their lives for the cause of victory and claim that this supranational identification with the Soviet state cannot be explained by the “‘resistance’ genre of Anglo-American historiography, with its focus on resistance to Stalinism.” Markwick and Cardona put forward the hypothesis—confirmed, they believe, by their empirical research—that “the mass intellectual, discursive and emotional identification with the Stalinist state, which found its ultimate expression in the ‘Great Patriotic War,’ can only be understood in the context of the massive industrial, demographic, and educational shifts in the pre-war decade overseen by a state that monopolized political discourse.”¹⁴ In an earlier polemic with historians belonging to the “resistance genre,” Markwick writes, “coercion was not the key to the Soviet war effort.”¹⁵

It is quickly apparent that these researchers are writing primarily about urbanites and, not infrequently, about people with a higher education. Krylova’s investigations are predominantly focused on highly educated cohorts from the ranks of female soldiers.¹⁶ Markwick and Cardona cover a wider array of female combatants, but their book largely discusses elite groups—pilots, snipers, and those under the patronage of the Central Committee of the Komsomol. A fairly characteristic feature of more “patriotic” literature is the uncritical use of sources published during the Soviet era. Thurston, speaking about the improvement of life on collective farms during the second half of the 1930s, refers to a collection of memoirs published in Minsk in 1975.¹⁷ One hardly expects anything other than a positive evaluation of Soviet politics in the village from literature published in the USSR during the period of “stagnation.” Krylova also relies to a significant degree on

¹² Amir Weiner, “Saving Private Ivan: From What, Why, and How?” *Kritika* 1, 2 (2000): 315–16.

¹³ Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 20–27.

¹⁴ Roger D. Markwick and Euridice Charon Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline in the Second World War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1–3.

¹⁵ Roger D. Markwick, “Stalinism at War,” *Kritika* 3, 3 (2000): 520.

¹⁶ Krylova, *Soviet Women*, 26.

¹⁷ *V nachale bol'shogo puti: Memuarnyi sbornik* (Minsk: Uradzhai, 1975).

memoirs published during the Soviet era, despite the fact that these sources, by definition, could not contain anything contrary to the official canon of Soviet war history. Many of these memoirs were ghostwritten for the veterans by literary specialists. The authors responsible for these “literary records” were sometimes cited on the title page.¹⁸ Even when a ghostwriter was not responsible for a given book, it is important to remember that these kinds of texts were always subjected to painstaking editing to ensure that they harmonized with official ideology.

In post-Soviet Russian historiography the question of Soviet society’s attitude toward the war, and in particular the extent of its defeatism, is almost always raised in connection with the problem of collaboration. Mikhail Simiriaga links defeatism, and in particular the surrender of Red Army soldiers of peasant background, to the policies of the Soviet state in the 1920s–30s, especially de-kulakization.¹⁹ Andrei Sakharov and Valentina Zhiromskaia make a similar connection: for them, collaboration was not just about wartime circumstances but also about the events of the preceding two decades.²⁰ Igor’ Ermolov suggests that part of the civilian population of the USSR faced a dilemma with the outbreak of war: “to defend the established state order with its system of repression, which by then had affected a significant part of the population, or to go along with the Germans.... For all the criminal character of Nazi policy, it did not, especially in the first few months of the war, appear quite so abhorrent as it had been depicted by Soviet propaganda.”²¹ In an article on the daily life and outlook of Muscovites in 1941–42, Mikhail Gorinov notes fluctuations in mood according to the situation at the front and current living conditions, and these included the spread among some people of defeatist sentiments. In his view, it was “not uncommon” to encounter anti-Soviet statements in the early days of the war, but these became “muted” with time, while the harshness of the NKVD response to defeatism meant that “an internal front line never emerged.”²²

¹⁸ See, e.g., Krylova’s unqualified citation of Z. M. Smirnova-Medvedeva, *Opalennaia iunost’: Literaturnaia zapis’ N. I. Koroteeva* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1967).

¹⁹ M. I. Simiriaga, *Kollaboratsionizm: Priroda, tipologiia i proiavlaniia v gody Vtoroi mirovoi voyny* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2000), 87–89.

²⁰ A. N. Sakharov and V. B. Zhiromskaia, “Oblik naroda k nachalu Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny,” in *Narod i voina: Ocherki istorii Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny 1941–1945*, ed. Sakharov and A. S. Seniavskii (Moscow: Grif i Ko, 2010), 26–47.

²¹ I. G. Ermolov, *Tri goda bez Stalina: Okkupatsiia. Sovetskie grazhdane mezhdy natsistami i bol’shevikami, 1941–1944* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2010), 28.

²² M. M. Gorinov, “Budni osazhdennoi stolitsy: Zhizn’ i nastroiennia moskvichei,” *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 3 (1996): 3–28.

No matter how varied historians have been in their evaluation of the Soviet people's relation to the war or the reasons behind the Red Army's defeat in 1941, all of them agree that defeatism and collaboration with the enemy were particularly prevalent among residents of the Baltic republics, Belorussia, and Ukraine (especially the territories incorporated during 1939).²³ According to Lovell, "the problem of potentially disloyal elements in the Soviet population had a large ethnic dimension."²⁴

In this article, I consider the attitudes of ethnic Russians, who constituted the overwhelming majority of those residing in Russia, toward the war. The Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was one of the most monoethnic of the Soviet republics, surpassed only by Armenia. In 1939, Russians constituted 82.5 percent of residents in the republic. In regions occupied by the Germans or located adjacent to the front, Russians made up more than 90 percent of the population. In Smolensk oblast, Russians were 96.6 percent of the population, in Orel oblast—97.3 percent, Moscow oblast—93.7 percent, Iaroslavl' oblast—96.6 percent, Leningrad oblast—90.6 percent, and so on. Moscow and Leningrad, contrary to their popular depictions as cosmopolitan megalopolises, were predominantly populated by Russians, who constituted 87.0 percent of the residents in Leningrad and 87.4 percent of those in Moscow. The second largest ethnic population in both of these cities was Jews, undoubtedly one of the most assimilated, and definitely the most Soviet element of the capitals' populations; they accounted for 6.3 percent and 6.0 percent, respectively.²⁵

In what follows, I try to answer the following questions: How did Soviet society perceive itself on the eve of the war? How many of its members were really "Soviet"? How were different sections of the population treated at the beginning of the war? How did this war become "patriotic"? I am especially interested in the Russian peasantry, who became the backbone of the Red Army. As it would be impossible to provide comprehensive answers to all these questions within the confines of an article, I instead sketch a number of possible answers and, more specifically, identify problems in need of further research.

²³ Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 284; Thurston, *Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia*, 216–20; Weiner, "Saving Private Ivan," 320; Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 105–6; Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women*, 1. In Ukraine, the majority of peasants greeted the Germans as liberators. See Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941–1945* (London: Macmillan, 1957), 370–71; and Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2004), 20–21.

²⁴ Lovell, *The Shadow of War*, 6.

²⁵ Iu. A. Poliakov, ed., *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1939 goda: Osnovnye itogi* (Moscow: Nauka, 1992), 59–65.

Who Initially Could Identify with the Soviet Cause?

From the very beginning, the war was embraced as “ours,” as patriotic, by several segments of the population. This was true especially for the new intelligentsia raised in the Soviet Union, for whom service in the war was widely perceived as a duty. Who signed up as volunteers? Go to any former Soviet university that existed during the war, and you will undoubtedly find a memorial plaque with the names of those who died at the front. Many of them volunteered for the army or the militia during the first days of the war.

These were not only students: workers, staff, and researchers all volunteered. One should bear in mind that there was often a social component to volunteerism. Lev El’nitskii, an employee at the Moscow Museum of History, claims that it was virtually impossible to resist “voluntary” registration for the militia, remembering that “one youth who refused to volunteer was immediately ostracized.”²⁶ Igor’ D’iakonov, who worked at the Hermitage Department of Oriental Studies, was exempted from service because of his poor eyesight but still planned to serve as a translator. The local party secretary accused him of disloyalty, declaring, “This means that you don’t want to defend your homeland!” He ordered D’iakonov to volunteer for the home front militia that was being formed. D’iakonov “shrugged and signed up.”²⁷ Recruitment drives were, of course, not limited to the capitals. Another veteran, Aleksander Sheviakov, who in 1941 was studying at an agricultural school in the city of Millerovo in Rostov oblast, remembers that “on 23 June, the secretary of the city Komsomol came and demanded that we volunteer for the Red Army.”²⁸

However, not everyone was as rational as Igor’ D’iakonov. The engineer Mark Shumelishskii, who suffered from acute nearsightedness, was “shielded” by his professional expertise, which was needed for the defense industry. Nevertheless, he was eager to go to the front and repeatedly visited the recruitment office, insisting that he be drafted. Already by the autumn of 1941, such enthusiasts had become a rarity. On 11 October 1941, after another failed attempt to join the army, Shumelishskii wrote, “In general, a person who still desires to join the army, despite having legitimate grounds for exemption, is seen as an idiot, even at the recruitment office.”²⁹

²⁶ Lev El’nitskii, *Tri kruga vospominanii: Voina i plen* (Moscow: Agra, 2012), 10.

²⁷ I. M. D’iakonov, *Kniga vospominanii* (St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii dom, 1995), 503–4.

²⁸ See <http://iremember.ru/pekhotintsi/shelyakin-aleksandr-andreevich.html>, accessed 16 September 2014.

²⁹ M. G. Shumelishskii, *Dnevnik soldata* (Moscow: Kolos, 2000), 16.

Soviet Society on the Eve of War

In spite of the “cultural revolution” and industrialization, when the war began the USSR remained a poor and undereducated country, with the peasantry making up the majority of the population. On the eve of the conflict, the rural population was twice that of the urban: 114 million versus 56 million (these are rough estimates) according to the 1939 census.³⁰

According to official statistics, a fifth of the adult population remained illiterate, although the level of illiteracy among those between the ages of 9 and 49 was lower—around 11 percent. The one criterion of literacy shared by most participants in the census was the ability to sign their name in Russian or their native language. If we consider formal education, the picture is still not too rosy: only 6.4 out of every 1,000 people had any higher education, and only 77.8 had any secondary education. Included in the latter figure were many who had only partially completed their studies.³¹

Most citizens, as evidenced in the “repressed” census of 1937, were religious, despite two decades of antireligious activity and propaganda.³² These results are even more revealing given that many refused to answer the question because of rumors that “anyone who registered as a believer would be taken away.”³³

At the end of the 1930s, in reaction to the results of the 1937 census, the regime embarked on a massive liquidation of religious associations and a campaign of repression against the clergy. The number of churches and mosques in the country declined from around 20,000 in 1936 to less than 1,000 in 1941. In 1936, the USSR registered more than 24,000 members of the clergy; by the beginning of 1941, this number had dropped to 5,665, more than half of whom came from territories acquired by the USSR in 1939–40.³⁴

Soviet people, especially those from the peasantry, endured a very difficult decade prior to the war. Stalinist modernization called for the establishment of heavy industry and the collectivization of agriculture, during which millions of people died. The objective demographic results of these policies by the beginning of 1941 are apparent in the following example: at the end of

³⁰ Poliakov, *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1939 goda*, 21–22.

³¹ Ibid., 49, 245.

³² Iu. A. Poliakov, ed., *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1937 goda: Obshchie itogi. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2007), 118–23.

³³ Ibid., 17–18.

³⁴ S. Kurtua [Stéphane Courtois] et al., *Chernaia kniga kommunizma: Prestupleniia, terror, repressii* (Moscow, 1999), cited at www.goldentime.ru/nbk_10.htm; during Easter 1938, the city of Leningrad had 5 working churches, out of 33 still in operation just one year earlier (S. Davis, *Mnenie naroda v stalinskoi Rossii: Terror, propaganda i inakomyслиe, 1934–1941* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2011), 82.

the 1930s, half of those who died came from the active population between the ages of 16 and 49, of whom 20 percent were between the ages of 16 and 29. In 1940, the life expectancy for men in the USSR was 38.6, and for women it was 43.9. In the Russian republic, the picture is even more depressing: the life expectancy for men was 35.7, and for women 41.9.³⁵

The Leningrader Liubov' Shaporina wrote in her diary on 19 February 1939: "Death is everywhere and the suffering is endless. I have the impression that the entire country is tired to the point of exhaustion, even of death, and can't struggle any further. It is better to die than to live in such constant fear and eternal squalor, half-starved.... Lines, lines for everything. Deadened faces, people arguing in line; they enter the store and leave with nothing."³⁶

An unpleasant surprise imposed by the authorities on the population on the eve of the war was the introduction of fees in the upper levels of secondary schools and in universities. Arkadii Man'kov, a graduate student of history in Leningrad, describes the measure as follows: "The most disgusting and sneaky thing about this was that the way they sprang it on us. Young people took their exams, entertained certain hopes accordingly, then got through a whole month of their studies, and suddenly.... This demonstrates how little concern our leaders have for the people. They spit in our faces, smack us in the back of the head, kick us in the ass."³⁷

It is not surprising, as Sarah Davies notes in her research on popular opinion in Leningrad and Leningrad oblast in 1934–41, that the impending war was referred to "in numerous comments ... as a catalyst for change." People believed war would bring radical transformations, such as those Russia experienced in 1905 and 1917.³⁸

Recent scholarship on the 1930s has paid particular attention to how Soviet people learned to "speak Bolshevik," and how even "flaws" in the socialist plan provided important lessons for them as they attempted to "incorporate themselves" into the modern era and master its language.³⁹ It is precisely from this standpoint that Jochen Hellbeck analyzes diaries from the 1930s.

³⁵ Sakharov and Zhiromskaia, "Oblik naroda k nachalu Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny," 32–33.

³⁶ L. V. Shaporina, *Dnevnik* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2011), 1:231.

³⁷ A. G. Man'kov, *Dnevniki 30-kh godov* (St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii dom, 2001), 279. Entry dated 4 October 1940.

³⁸ Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda, and Dissent, 1934–1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 94–95.

³⁹ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

But much less attention has been paid to oppositional sentiments.⁴⁰ Noting the critical tenor of the above-cited diary by Man'kov, Hellbeck devotes his attention primarily to the author's use of a quasi-Marxist lexicon, rather than to what the author actually wrote.⁴¹ The content of the diary is exceptionally anti-Soviet, and Man'kov is fully conscious of being an enemy of the existing regime. On occasion, Hellbeck obviously misinterprets the text of the diary: for instance, he translates Man'kov's entry for 25 October 1938 about the arrest of six Leningrad University students: "Vprochem, chto u menia za dushoi? Poka, tol'ko dnevniki" as "However, what do I have to worry about? So far only the diaries."⁴² Yet, the question "chto u menia za dushoi?" means "what have I accomplished?" and contains an undeniable sense of regret that his years of struggle with the regime consisted only of secret notes in a diary.⁴³

Man'kov's attitude toward service in the army and the possibility of war fits the pattern. After receiving orders to mobilize for military training, Man'kov writes: "I don't want to fight. I don't even know what I would be fighting for."⁴⁴ On 26 October 1940, he copied extracts from the "Notes" of the historian Sergei Mikhailovich Solov'ev (published in 1877), including "we were certain that only disaster in the form of a miserable war could produce a salutary change of course and put a stop to further decay."⁴⁵

Man'kov did not keep his diary for educational or academic purposes: his observations make constant reference to the contemporary political context and testify to the defeatist attitude of this young historian.⁴⁶ At the very least, they contain the notion that defeat in the upcoming war could have beneficial consequences for the country, similar to those witnessed after the unsuccessful Crimean War. As for the imminence of war, few Soviet people had illusions on that score at the time Man'kov was writing.

Sources

How did Soviet society react to the outbreak of the war? How did these attitudes change as the war unfolded? Secret police reports of the Unified State Political Administration and the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (OGPU—

⁴⁰ A rare exception is Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia*.

⁴¹ Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 60.

⁴² Man'kov, *Dnevniki*, 197.

⁴³ Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 95; Man'kov, *Dnevniki*, 171.

⁴⁴ Man'kov, *Dnevniki*, 191. Entry dated 28 September 1938.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 283. Entry dated 26 October 1940. A critical attitude toward the regime did not always translate into active opposition to it; after serving in the army during the war, Man'kov went on to become a respectable Soviet historian.

⁴⁶ For further discussion of Man'kov's diary, see O. V. Budnitskii and G. S. Zelenina, "Ideinyi kollaboratsionizm v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny," in *Svershilos' . Prishli nemtsy!* 11–14.

NKVD) on the situation in the country and the popular mood have now been published for the 1920s–30s. Although this source has its limitations, it offers wide chronological and geographic scope and provides some insight into the general situation (albeit with distortions). Similar material from the period of the war has, until now, remained classified. Lovell rightly claims that “once upon a time, it was Western scholars foraging for documents on the 1920s and 1930s who were likely to be rebuffed when they arrived in Russia to do their research. Now, the war was the research topic most likely to elicit the vigilance of archival officials.”⁴⁷ I would add that this is the case not only for Western historians. On 23 July 2013, I was denied access to wartime materials in the Federal Security Service (FSB) Archive, receiving the following rebuff: “The Central Archive of the FSB does not have any archival materials available for public use.” It is possible that the restrictions are a function not only of political considerations but also of the desire of “historians in uniform” to monopolize access to this material for their own publications.

Thus the “archival revolution” has had only a modest influence on sources concerning the war. But the last 20 years in the former USSR have produced more than an “archival revolution.” There has also been what I refer to as a “revolution of memory”: the publication of dozens of diaries and hundreds of memoirs, many of which were written “for the drawer” without any hope of publication. Thousands of interviews have also been recorded. In my opinion, sources created by “private individuals” are often more useful for historians, more informative and genuine, than those produced by the Soviet government and its agents. This is especially true for the study of popular opinion during the war. Although the authors of diaries did not have the goal of investigating public sentiments, their observations are more spontaneous, and hence more reliable. It is striking how much the language of “negative” sentiments as reproduced in the few available NKVD reports from the war differs from overheard conversations as recorded in diaries: in the former case, we generally find monolithic official language, while in the latter, the peculiarities and “irregularities” of individual voices are preserved.

Historians are only beginning to familiarize themselves with this vast array of material, primarily making use of interviews.⁴⁸ In my view, the interview is an excellent source for the history of everyday life during the war, but not too effective for clarifying the history of popular opinion or relations within the army. Diaries are a much more authentic source. It is often stated

⁴⁷ Lovell, *The Shadow of War*, 11.

⁴⁸ Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (London: Penguin, 2007); Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought*; Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 9–10.

in the literature that it was forbidden to keep a diary in the army.⁴⁹ Yet there was actually no special order to that effect, and the treatment of those caught keeping a record of the war was usually determined on an individual basis. In some cases, the keeping of a diary was forbidden for reasons of secrecy; in other instances, diaries were kept quite openly over an extended period of time.⁵⁰

Diaries from the war, just like diaries from any other period, are not a mass source. Yet according to my observations, it was precisely during the war that many people, both civilians and soldiers, were motivated to keep diaries by the unfolding of such cataclysmic events. Among the diarists are people with absolutely pro-Soviet sentiments; there are also those who make little or no effort to mask their decidedly anti-Soviet attitudes. Analysis of these, and other, private sources allows us to improve significantly our understanding of Soviet popular attitudes during the war. I have also used sources from later in the Soviet period, from the early 1960s to the early 1980s, that were written “for the drawer.” Their authors wrote for themselves, for their children and grandchildren, “for posterity.” They did not have to adapt to the demands of Soviet censors and were not influenced by the mass of critical information about the war produced during *perestroika* and the post-Soviet period. While preparing this article, I familiarized myself with the transcripts of conversations conducted with soldiers, partisans, and residents of liberated territories by members of the Academic Commission on the History of the Great Patriotic War, contained in the archive of the Institute of Russian History. The respondents were, of course, thoroughly Soviet people, who were well aware that they were essentially giving their reports to representatives of the state. Yet these discussions largely took place during the war years (beginning in 1942), before the official canon of war history was established, and the accounts of many respondents are quite open and informative.

The Mood of 1941 in the Capitals

In analyzing the mood of 1941, we should not overlook the well-known phenomenon of Soviet “doublethink.” What people said and wrote was not always representative of their sincere opinions and in fact often served to mask those views. This was well understood by contemporaries. Mikhail Prishvin recorded the reactions of Muscovites to Stalin’s radio address on 3 July 1941: “Stalin’s speech caused a big surge of patriotism, but whether this was actual patriotism or a subtle counterfeit, I honestly cannot say. I want to, but I

⁴⁹ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 4.

⁵⁰ Oleg Budnitskii, “Jews at War: Diaries from the Front,” in *Soviet Jews in World War II: Fighting, Witnessing, Remembering*, ed. Gennady Estrakh and Harriet Murav (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 57–84.

cannot because of the loss of public sincerity during the Soviet period due to the total discord between personal and social consciousness.”⁵¹ After receiving the news of the fall of Kiev, Ol’ga Berggol’ts (unlike Prishvin, a convinced Communist) mused: “Was this the fault of the people? Maybe they were just keeping up appearances all along? More than anything, we have all learned to keep up appearances during recent years. Perhaps we fight so shamefully because, long before the war, people stopped believing and realized there was nothing for them to fight for.”⁵²

As early as 1949, on the basis of his conversations with postwar Soviet émigrés, George Fischer wrote that most people in 1941 had been convinced of the imminent defeat of the USSR because of the widespread discontent with the Soviet regime.⁵³ Many of those interviewed for the Harvard Project expressed similar views. This may reflect the particular psychology of émigrés, who preferred to stay in the West after the war.⁵⁴ Yet some of the available secret police accounts from the beginning of the war testify to the presence of similar sentiments, even in the most prosperous Soviet city—Moscow.⁵⁵

In the first days of the war, the People’s Commissariat for State Security (NKGB) and NKVD in Moscow and Moscow oblast recorded, alongside numerous patriotic utterances, “negative, and in several cases even defeatist, attitudes.” Significantly, all the accounts reported by agents attribute the possibility of defeat (or at least of serious difficulties) not to German might but to internal problems in the USSR—particularly the unwillingness of the people, especially those from the peasantry, to fight for the Soviet regime. The following remarks by a certain Doctor Grebenshchikov from the railroad hospital in Stalinskii raion are fairly typical: “Right now, half of the people in the USSR are bitterly opposed to the Soviet regime. Many people are locked up in prison, and the mood among the peasants is so bad that it would be

⁵¹ M. M. Prishvin, *Dnevnik, 1940–1941* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2012), 503. Entry dated 3 July 1941. Liubov’ Shaporina wrote her impressions of conversations about the speech. She describes people discussing how the leader could be heard sipping water to calm his trembling voice: “Clumsy peasant. Georgian coward!” (*Dnevnik*, 256, entry dated 16 September 1941). Of course, this kind of language would never have been heard in public, even among angry people waiting in line. It is impossible to establish how many people actually thought like Shaporina and her friends.

⁵² Ol’ga Berggol’ts, *Ol’ga: Zapretnyi dnevnik* (St. Petersburg: Azbuka, 2011), 64–65. Entry dated 22 September 1941.

⁵³ George Fischer, “The New Soviet Emigration,” *Russian Review* 8, 1 (1949): 15.

⁵⁴ Thurston, *Life and Terror in Stalin’s Russia*, 221.

⁵⁵ Typically, German soldiers were instructed, in their selection of “volunteers,” to choose Ukrainians first. If they had to use Russians, these should not be Muscovites. It was assumed that residents of the most privileged Soviet city were loyal to the regime (El’nitskii, *Tri kruga vospominanii*, 165).

very difficult to conduct a war. The people are against the government.” An employee named Makarova from the Krasin factory echoed this, saying: “It’s good that the war is finally starting. Life in the USSR has become unbearable. The forced labor and starvation bother everyone. Hopefully, it will all come to an end soon.”⁵⁶

Similar sentiments were shared by a high-ranking Soviet official after the defeats suffered by the Soviet army in 1941. In a conversation with his coworkers (at least one of whom, it seems, was an NKVD informant) at the beginning of 1942, Aleksei Kliuev, the deputy commissar of armaments, claimed that “already more than 1.5 million rifles have been thrown away by retreating soldiers, collective farm workers who remember our mistakes of the years 1929–37.... Our army is not currently combat-ready, because the majority of it is made up of peasants who prefer Hitler to the Soviet regime, which has bullied them since 1929.”⁵⁷

The peak of the defeatist mood (or perhaps more precisely, of the mood of protest) was reached in Moscow during October 1941. On 16 October, when it appeared that Moscow itself would be taken by the enemy, officials panicked and took flight against the backdrop of looting; for the next several days, people began to speak openly, sharing all (or almost all) their real opinions about the government. The writer Nikolai Verzhbitskii wrote in his diary on 18 October: “They are beginning to remember and catalogue all the insults, harassments, and injustices, the bureaucratic mockery by officials, the conceit and arrogance of party members, the draconian laws, the deprivations, the systematic deception of the masses, the sycophantic lies of the newspapers.... It is terrible to hear. They speak from the depths of their hearts.”⁵⁸ “Everyone is talking about defeat and revolution,” wrote Georgii Efron during the days of the Moscow panic, clearly amazed that “everything could unravel so quickly.” According to his observations, “the entire Moscow population” was afraid that efforts to defend the city would subject it to a brutal campaign of bombing and shelling.⁵⁹

On the gray and rainy morning of 17 October 1941, a group of volunteers for a women’s air-force regiment marched to the train station to set off for their training. Everyone’s uniform was too big; the young women had oversized greatcoats, helmets, backpacks, and gas masks. Rufina Gasheva, a pilot and later Hero of the Soviet Union, remembers that “the trams weren’t

⁵⁶ *Moskva voennaia*, 50, 52.

⁵⁷ *Vestnik Arkhiva Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii: Voina, 1941–1945* (2010): 118–19.

⁵⁸ *Moskva voennaia*, 478.

⁵⁹ Georgii Efron, *Dnevnik* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2007), 2:51, 60–61. Entries dated 16–19 October 1941.

running and the metro wasn't working. I remember hearing some woman shouting from a huge bread line: 'girls [*babenki*], defend our homeland!'"⁶⁰ The outburst was undoubtedly intended as mockery: the leadership, certain that the city would be taken, had fled Moscow the previous day. Now a group of absurdly outfitted "women warriors" wearing a variety of combat accessories, not even trained to march properly, appeared to be the city's "last hope." That this was exactly how Gasheva interpreted the remark is proved by her next statement: "and then my soul became heavy as lead."⁶¹ (In fact, however, these "girls" and others like them did a fine job of defending their homeland.) The city and the country were largely divided into two sections: those looking forward to an "easy occupation," and those who would sooner die than let this happen.⁶²

Material from the Military Tribunal in Moscow sheds light on the nature of conversations among Muscovites dissatisfied with the Soviet regime, as well as providing some sense of the social background and age distribution of those prosecuted under the "counterrevolutionary agitation" statute during the first half of 1942. In all, 1,268 people were brought to court under this law in the period in question. Employees of the tribunal analyzed a sample of 252 files relating to a total of 256 individuals. Seventy percent of those arrested were accused of "glorifying fascism and the German-fascist army and culture; engaging in slanderous accusations against the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Soviet government, and defaming the collectivization of agriculture in the USSR." Sixty-seven percent of those charged were aged 40 and older, 75 percent were men, and the same proportion were workers and employees (*sluzhashchie*).⁶³

The predominance of older people among the convicted seems to confirm that anti-Soviet sentiments were most widespread among "former" people. However, one should take into account the radical change in the demographic structure of the urban population: by the beginning of 1942, the prewar population of 4,200,000 had fallen to just a little over 2 million. This was in large part due to the huge numbers of young people who joined the army or were evacuated as members of various organizations and enterprises.⁶⁴ The younger population, raised under the Soviet regime, was probably more patriotic, but they were by no means unanimous: Georgii Efron, who in

⁶⁰ Nauchnyi arkhiv Instituta rossiiskoi istorii RAN (NA IRI RAN) f. 2, razdel 10, op. 7, d. 103, ll. 2–3. Transcript of a conversation dated 2 April 1947.

⁶¹ Ibid., 3.

⁶² Efron, *Dnevnik*, 51.

⁶³ Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF) f. R-9474, d. 181, ll. 96–97.

⁶⁴ M. M. Gorinov, "Budni osazhdennoi stolitsy: Zhizn' i nastroyeniia moskvichei (1941–1942)," *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 3 (1996): 3.

September 1941 arrived in the Litfond orphanage in Chistopol', observed that "anti-Soviet conversations were rife among young people."⁶⁵

On 31 August 1941, the Leningrad resident Liubov' Shaporina wrote about conversations she had heard throughout the city: "We are slaves and have a slave psychology. The entire population. We're like negroes in the time of Uncle Tom. The idea that Russia could be free never even enters our heads. Like negroes, we dream only of better masters, who won't be so cruel and who will feed us better. It can't get any worse—this is the secret chant of the entire proletariat or, rather, of all Soviet people. And they wait patiently for their new masters without fear or trembling. They say that Germans are, after all, better than Georgians and Yids."⁶⁶

Antisemitism at the Start of the War

Expressions of antisemitism were observed in various places throughout Russia during the first weeks of the war, since antisemitic and anti-Soviet attitudes were often connected. Lidiia Osipova (Olimpiada Poliakova) writes that new recruits from Pushkin could be heard calling "off we go to defend the Jews."⁶⁷ On the streets of Leningrad in August 1941, Igor' D'iakonov could hear "groups of drunks crying out in the streets 'beat the Jews,' as though the Soviet regime had not existed for the last quarter-century."⁶⁸ At Millerovo station toward the end of August 1941, Naum Korzhavin observed how a "colorful Cossack woman laid into the crowds of Jewish refugees.... 'What are our Cossack men thinking,' she said indignantly, 'they simply need to rip the heads off those Jews' shoulders.'"⁶⁹

Mary Leder spoke with a young Cossack woman on the streets of Rostov-on-Don at the end of August 1941. As they walked along the road discussing everyday difficulties, the woman, not realizing Mary was Jewish, remarked, "It will be over soon ... the Germans will be here before long. They'll take care of the Communists and the Jews."⁷⁰

Antisemitic sentiments were found not only among the "common people" but also among the intelligentsia in the capitals. An NKVD report addressed

⁶⁵ Efron, *Dnevnik*, 27. Entry dated 19 September 1941. Litfond (Literaturnyi fond) was a state-funded organization set up in 1934 for the purpose of providing material assistance to writers.

⁶⁶ Shaporina, *Dnevnik*, 249.

⁶⁷ Osipova, *Dnevnik kollaborantki*, 70. Entry dated 18 August 1941.

⁶⁸ D'iakonov, *Kniga vospominanii*, 514.

⁶⁹ Naum Korzhavin, *V soblazzakh krovavoi epokhi: Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2007), 1:301.

⁷⁰ Mary M. Leder, *My Life in Stalinist Russia: An American Woman Looks Back* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 194.

to Stalin and Molotov, dated 21 July 1941, quoted one representative of the intelligentsia as saying: "Let the Jews fear the Germans, let them fight the Germans. If the Germans enter Moscow, I will stand at the head of their detachment and will help root out and exterminate the Jews." In a similar statement dated 27 August 1941, the writer M.P. said: "We are all faced with the question, how to save ourselves from disaster? For the Bolsheviks and the Jews, there is little chance of salvation. The Germans won't destroy all categories of Russian people. I believe that, for me personally, this will be a change for the better. For 24 years of Soviet rule I have desperately fought to maintain my existence. Year after year I have been hounded by Jewish critics who are alien to my work and my philosophy."⁷¹ The name, hidden by the publishers behind the initials M.P., is almost certainly that of Mikhail Prishvin.

Prishvin summarized the mood of the urban intelligentsia in an entry dated 10 September 1941: "The defeatists and pro-Germans think that after the Germans overthrow the Bolsheviks they will establish a Russian government. The word in the city [*gorodskaiia versiiia*] is that the Germans will be broken, and that we must help them win in order to overthrow the Bolsheviks. It is difficult for these politicians to give a concrete answer to the question: 'what are we fighting for?' There is after all no material benefit, and so it turns out that we are fighting simply for a better future, which in this case means life without the Bolsheviks."⁷²

Obviously, the "entire proletariat" and "all of Russia" did not desire the victory of the enemy, as Shaporina and Poliakova claimed, but there was clearly a defeatist mood among parts of the urban population. Further research is required to determine just how widespread this mood was.

The Mood of 1941 in the Village

Gauging the mood in the countryside is much more complicated, since peasants did not tend to write memoirs. Nonetheless, the diaries and reminiscences of urbanites evacuated to the countryside provide some insight into the mood among the peasantry. The observations of people from diverse locations and circumstances frequently describe similar situations, allowing us to make some, albeit tentative, generalizations. Mikhail Prishvin fled the bombardment of Moscow in the middle of August 1941 and settled in the village of Usol'e, not far from Pereslavl'-Zalesskii in Iaroslavl' oblast. The peasants considered Prishvin almost one of their own: he was not a

⁷¹ V. S. Khristoforov, "Obshchestvennye nastroyeniia v SSSR: Iiun'-dekabr' 1941," in *Otechestvennaia voina, 1941 god: Issledovaniia, dokumenty, kommentarii*, ed. Khristoforov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Glavnogo arkhivnogo upravleniia goroda Moskvy, 2011), 457, 461.

⁷² Prishvin, *Dnevnik, 1940-1941*, 577.

party member, was a believer, and knew their ways and customs. And they were not particularly reticent in their statements.

Anti-Soviet sentiments, including the desire for an external intervention that would topple the godless regime, were clearly widespread among the peasantry, even during the prewar period. (A common rumor during collectivization involved the belief that children of collective farmers would be branded with the mark of Satan.) The most persistent rumor of the 1930s “concerned the coming war in which foreign armies would invade Russia and put an end to the collective farms.”⁷³

As the state implemented military conscription in October 1938, a rumor that the war had already begun spread throughout the villages of Smolensk oblast. According to the head of the local NKVD, “enemy elements are spreading rumors about the supposedly imminent defeat of the Soviet Union in the war and the overthrow of the Soviet regime. In connection with this there are numerous cases of threats by the relatives of individuals repressed by the NKVD against local representatives of Soviet authority.”⁷⁴ In connection with the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and the Red Army’s subsequent “liberation” of Poland in September 1939, informants for the NKVD recorded defeatist statements made in Ivanov, Kalinin, and Orel oblasts, as well as in Krasnodar krai. On the one hand, peasants were afraid of war (they were especially concerned about the possibility of famine), but on the other hand, they were hopeful that war would bring an end to Bolshevik rule and the disbanding of the collective farms. Several of the statements were extremely frank: “It’s good that the war has started. The Communists have drunk enough of our blood. Now, it seems, we will soon get the chance to drink theirs” (from Nerl’skii raion in Kalinin oblast); “as soon as the Germans arrive, they will establish order. Hitler will free our sons from prison” (from Karachevskii raion, Orel oblast).⁷⁵

After the introduction of a new agricultural tax, a certain collective farmer from Orel oblast wrote a letter to Commissar of Finance A. G. Zverev that included this statement: “And they [the authorities] still want to defend the motherland. With what, dogs? People won’t fight. What would they fight for? For starvation?”⁷⁶ Many people in the cities intended to “settle accounts”

⁷³ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6.

⁷⁴ V. P. Danilov, ed., *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni: Kollektivizatsiia i naskulachivanie, 1927–1939. Dokumenty i materialy*, 5 vols., 3, pt. 2: 1938–1939 (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006), 293.

⁷⁵ A. Berelovich [Alexis Berelowitch] et al., eds., *Sovetskaia derevnia glazami VChK–OGPU–NKVD, 1918–1939: Dokumenty i materialy*, 4: 1935–1939 (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2012), 786–95, 800–1.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 804.

with party officials once the war began, including several college teachers in Voronezh oblast outraged by the rude behavior of the district party secretary toward an elderly teacher.⁷⁷ In Krasnodar, a certain N. A. Kuskov claimed that “our leaders should have a healthy fear” of war, since “as soon as it breaks out, they will need to start handing out rifles, and this is a truly frightening prospect.”⁷⁸

While expressions of hope about the arrival of foreign troops are only sometimes found in sources from the prewar period, the Red Army’s obvious difficulties at the start of the war loosened tongues to the extent that peasant conversations about changes for the better now took place in the presence of outsiders from the cities. During the summer of 1941, Elena Setnitskaia, a history student at Moscow State University, was ordered to participate in agricultural work in Riazan’ oblast, where she was “struck by the opinion of the peasants, or at least some of them, that the possibility of German occupation wasn’t necessarily a bad thing. They said that the Germans would eradicate the collective farms. Before this, I had naively thought that the peasants were staunch supporters of Soviet reforms in the countryside.”⁷⁹

Vasilii Grossman, writing somewhere on the border between Russia and Ukraine in September 1941, claimed that “individual peasant householders [*edinolichniki*, or noncollectivized peasants] whitewash their huts, glare at us defiantly, and say ‘Easter has come.’” Of course, Easter would not come until springtime: the peasants were preparing for the arrival of the Germans as though it were a holiday. In the village of Kamenka, located in the same borderland between Russia and Ukraine, there were widespread rumors about how, in the occupied territories, “the village elders were handing out strips of land.” Grossman and his colleagues spent all night explaining to the women who owned the hut in which they were staying “who the Germans really are.” The women “listened, sighed, and exchanged glances but did not share their secret thoughts. Later, the old woman quietly said [in Ukrainian], ‘What has been we’ve already seen, what will be we’ve yet to see.’”⁸⁰

One more reason behind the general aversion to the Bolsheviks and the hope of German liberation was the Bolshevik antireligion campaigns. Prishvin wrote on 4 July 1941 that one peasant woman was spreading the rumor that Moscow wouldn’t be bombed because “so many believers lived

⁷⁷ V. D. Samarín, “Sovetskaia shkola v 1936–1942,” in “*Svershilos’ . Prishli nemtsy!*” 220.

⁷⁸ Berelovich et al., *Sovetskaia derevnia*, 791.

⁷⁹ “Na vsiu zhizn’ zapomnilas’ mne ta voennaia Moskva: Rasskaz studentki MGU,” *Istochnik*, no. 2 (2003): 78.

⁸⁰ Vasilii Grossman, *Gody voiny* (Moscow: Pravda, 1989), 276.

there” and concluded, “Oi! How the state has gone wrong if all the believers are now looking to foreigners to defend their faith.”⁸¹ An old woman in the village of Kamenka persistently asked Grossman, “Is it true that the Germans believe in God?”⁸²

Memoirists and diarists noted that the peasants maintained at best a neutral attitude toward the Soviet regime and the Red Army and were sometimes openly hostile, keeping their distance and treating representatives of Soviet power as alien. In August 1941, Lev El’nitskii was stationed in a company somewhere in Smolensk oblast. The peasant women raised a cry of protest when they discovered the soldiers had been digging up potatoes on the collective farmland, and even some private plots. The marauders were punished by their superiors, and when soldiers gently (*po tovarishcheski*) chided the women, the latter replied, “We have almost nothing ... go ask your superiors to feed you.” El’nitskii claimed, “Everyone acts like this. No one cares about the soldiers’ plight, and yet there is a soldier in every family.”⁸³

On 13 August 1941, Prishvin wrote after a conversation with cattle herders from Belorussia: “Defeatists ... they constantly refer to the Germans as ‘him’ and the Bolsheviks as ‘them,’ while referring to ‘us’ as their prisoners.”⁸⁴ In October 1941, while escaping from the Viazma “cauldron,” Captain Illarion Tolkonniuk was unpleasantly surprised to learn that the peasants “referred to the Red Army soldiers as ‘you’ and to the Germans as ‘them.’” In general, the rural inhabitants of Smolensk and the environs of Moscow seemed unpleasant and not at all like “hospitable Soviet people.”⁸⁵

Colleagues of the war correspondent Daniil Fibikh told him how, while escaping encirclement, they had passed through a village in Smolensk oblast where they encountered a hostile attitude toward the Red Army. Residents refused to admit starving, shivering soldiers into their huts, advising them instead to be taken captive, saying “they will feed you there.”⁸⁶

The militiaman Efim Voronov, together with his comrades, attempted to escape encirclement in Smolensk oblast during October 1941. At the beginning of 1945, he remembered that “we tried to avoid the villages. You

⁸¹ Prishvin, *Dnevnik, 1940–1941*, 505.

⁸² Grossman, *Gody voyny*, 276.

⁸³ El’nitskii, *Tri kruga vospominanii*, 47.

⁸⁴ Prishvin, *Dnevnik, 1940–1941*, 544.

⁸⁵ Quoted from Andrei Smirnov, “Nastuplenie radi nastupleniia: O zapiskakh Illariona Tolkonniuka,” *Rodina*, no. 5 (2008): 31.

⁸⁶ Daniil Fibikh, *Dvuzhil’naia Rossiia: Dnevnik i vospominaniia* (Moscow: Pervoe sentiabria, 2010), 90.

could meet with worse than Germans in the villages. We knew this from personal experience.”⁸⁷

After being taken captive and serving as a translator for a German construction unit, Lev El’nitskii was shocked by the indifference with which the peasants treated prisoners of war (POWs). Even though he was one of them, a Russian, he had somehow become a stranger, an alien. In the winter of 1941–42, residents of a village not far from a prison camp in Orel oblast were ordered to convert a school into housing for freezing POWs. The next morning, no one had arrived. Only by opening fire along the streets and threatening to shoot the village elder could they convince the local inhabitants to start working. The German sergeant raged: “The prisoners of war are freezing, and the local inhabitants have no desire to help improve the camp. This is unheard of.” Work on the school eventually began, although the “peasants were angry about it for two days.” The soldiers had to intervene again just to get them to work.⁸⁸

Stories of peasant hostility should not be taken as universal: the sources contain just as many accounts of their kindness. Admittedly, many such acts were motivated by the thought of “our own” husbands, sons, and brothers off serving somewhere.⁸⁹

The peasants were not shy about trading food and tobacco with the soldiers in exchange for cloth from their greatcoats or their boots. Prisoners exchanged their boots for “*valenki* or *chuni* that were falling apart,” with food to make up the difference.⁹⁰ El’nitskii’s attempt to shame a peasant—“How can you, in good conscience, take the last pieces of clothing from a starving man?”—met with the following argument: “And where are we going to get things if not from you? And what did we see earlier? We didn’t have any shoes or boots. During the winter we went around in *chuni*, and in the summer they chased us around barefoot.”⁹¹ These interactions reveal a striking dynamic: the prisoners of war were in some ways richer than the peasantry. The war provided the impoverished village with an opportunity to acquire the factory-made shoes that had previously been an exclusive attribute of city life.

Antonina Semenova, a doctor from Smolensk, tells how those burying the dead from the prison camps would remove clothing from the corpses for sale: “Women come to the prison camps with pieces of bread, with which

⁸⁷ NA IRI RAN f. 2, d. 7, l. 20. Entry dated February 1945.

⁸⁸ El’nitskii, *Tri kruga vospominanii*, 152–53.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Gabriel Temkin, *My Just War* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1998), 71.

⁹⁰ *Valenki* are felt boots, and *chuni* or *lapti* peasant footwear made from hemp rope.

⁹¹ El’nitskii, *Tri kruga vospominanii*, 169. A colleague of Daniil Fibikh tells of how “some old man” from a village in Smolensk oblast demanded the watch of a starving political officer in exchange for a piece of bread (*Dvuzhil’naia Rossiia*, 90, entry dated 9 January 1942).

they buy clothing from the dead, or from the prisoners themselves. They wash the clothes and bring them to the village, where they sell them for larger quantities of bread. In this way, they live. Everyone in the village is dressed in jackets and overcoats.”⁹²

The impoverishment of the village, as well as the customs and traditions of rural people, affected urbanites who, were it not for the war, would never have experienced such close contact with the peasantry. The impression made on inhabitants of the recently incorporated territory of Latvia, many of whom were evacuated to the Volga region of Russia, was particularly strong. Four female students from Riga were ordered to work on the True Path (*Vernyi put*) collective farm in Gor’kii oblast. The fact that these evacuees were given meat at lunchtime caused a genuine sensation in the village. Admittedly, the lunch consisted of just meat broth and plain tea. A crowd of village women, who gathered to watch the new arrivals, got indignant when the Latvians asked when they would receive the second course and especially sugar for their tea. One of the peasant women observed that her seven-year-old grandson did not even know “that such a thing as sugar existed.”⁹³

Prishvin’s diary is an authentic chronicle of peasant sentiments. It contains some indications of the attitude toward reports of German cruelty: “*He* is supposedly not at all cruel, and the ‘atrocities’ are made up (and there are many legends about *his* fairness),” Prishvin recorded from a peasant conversation in August 1941. “*They* (the Bolsheviks), if they win, will claim this as a justification for everything that has been done, if not—‘no one could invent a crueller punishment.’ And as for us—do *we* even exist?”⁹⁴

The last phrase presents the ultimate subject of Prishvin’s reflections: who, exactly, counts as “us”? The author himself tries to work out whether his life will be better under the Germans or the Bolsheviks. A month after the start of the war, he criticizes the defeatists who are counting on the Germans “to establish a government more suitable to the spirit of the Russian people than that of the Bolsheviks and Jews.” Formulating his position, Prishvin says, “I personally think that under victorious Bolsheviks I would be closer to the Orthodox God than to the refurbished idol of the Germans.”⁹⁵

As the Germans moved deeper into Soviet territory, Prishvin’s village interlocutors became less hesitant in their statements: “And what is there to

⁹² NA IRI RAN f. 2, d. 28, l. 3. Conversation dated 13 December 1943.

⁹³ Esther Fain, *Po dorogam, ne nami vybrannym* (London: Overseas Publications, 1990), 12–14.

⁹⁴ Prishvin, *Dnevnik, 1940–1941*, 549. Entry dated 23 August 1941. The next day, he wrote, “I suspect that these articles about German atrocities in *Pravda* are having the opposite effect on local sentiments from the one intended” (ibid., 549, entry dated 24 August 1941).

⁹⁵ Ibid., 522. Entry dated 21 July 1941.

fight for?' said N. He continued, with a sigh: 'A family has a cow and has to pay a sheep as tax for it. A man joins the army, and the state doesn't forget about the sheep: he goes to the recruitment point, and the sheep has to come along with him. What is there to fight for? Ach, that's difficult.'"⁹⁶

Notes about the defeatist attitudes of peasants checker the pages of the diary. From time to time, Prishvin himself writes about the Soviet regime in extremely unflattering terms: "The period from 1917 to 1941 was like a short-circuit or a bottleneck [*probka*]; everything's burned out, and nothing is left. What does the Stalin Constitution mean now? Silly me, I tried to understand the Bolsheviks as an intermediate [middle] school of government for the primitive, lazy, and dissolute Russian people." Later, Prishvin crossed out the extremely dangerous phrase: "I was expecting the Bolsheviks to give us what only the Germans can."⁹⁷

As the Germans moved closer to Moscow, Prishvin began pondering what he would do when they arrived. On 21 October 1941, he composed a "protective phrase" (*zashchitnaia fraza*) with which to address the occupiers: "Ich bin ein Schriftsteller, aber kein Feind [I am a writer, not at all an enemy]." Prishvin remembers that "from the very beginning ... I have been against the Bolsheviks" and concludes that the "Bolsheviks should not have taken power in 1917." At some point, Prishvin apparently worried that phrases such as this, including his "protective" one, were too seditious, and he blacked them out of his diary.⁹⁸ However, this would hardly have helped him if the authorities had taken a serious interest in him: the diary was full of "incendiary material."⁹⁹

Prishvin's diary could be cited much more extensively, as it contains unique information. One might even say that it contains the voice of the people in 1941, a voice that is rarely reproduced in the sources with such precise intonation. Already in September 1941, Prishvin wrote about events with great clarity and insight: "In this war, society is divided between defenders and defeatists. But whereas in earlier times defeatists were members of the intelligentsia, now they are largely from the village."¹⁰⁰

As a whole, the mood of the Russian village differed little from that in Ukraine and Belorussia. I should also mention one more fact: various diary entries by Red Army soldiers testify that a significant part of the peasantry lived at an essentially premodern level. Mark Shumelishskii wrote in 1942 about peasant indifference to the war and lack of fighting spirit:

⁹⁶ Ibid., 556. Entry dated 30 August 1941.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 559. Entry dated 1 September 1941.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 641. Entry dated 21 October 1941.

⁹⁹ See, for instance, *ibid.*, 559, 563, 594, 632, and many others.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 563. Entry dated 3 September 1941.

The peasants have the ideology of individualistic, small property owners. I have my piece of land. I can feed myself and my family, and the rest can go to hell! War? I have no desire to risk my neck for someone else. Germans? They're far away. They've never come here and I have no reason to fear them. They (the Soviets) forced me into the army, tore me away from my home, and trained me to go where death is stronger than life—a place I will never get out of alive. It would be so much better to be finished with life, to end this torment.¹⁰¹

Shumelishskii wrote this entry after a conversation he had with one of his comrades-in-arms. When Shumelishskii countered that this kind of attitude would allow Hitler to reach Kaiskii raion in Kirov oblast (where his comrade's family was located), he received the following reply: "No, our village is far away. There are only forests there. What would Hitler take? He won't go there."¹⁰²

Boris Komsii wrote from Trubchevsk in Briansk oblast in October 1943: "It's a strange state of affairs: the Germans ceaselessly babble about Jewish Bolsheviks, and the local women refer to the Germans [*nemtsy*] as mute Jews [*nemye zhidy*]."¹⁰³ The comparison seems absurd at first, but this is not the case. Evidence from time immemorial testifies to the archaic thinking and language of the rural inhabitants of Central Russia. The Russian word for "German" is *nemets*—which means a person who speaks unclearly, unintelligibly, like a mute person. Hatred of the Germans combined with traditional medieval anti-Judaism to spawn a remarkable linguistic hybrid.

The Change of Mood: How the War Became Patriotic

When and why was there a turning point in popular attitudes, especially among the peasantry, who produced the majority of Red Army officers and soldiers? When and why did the war become patriotic, not just in name but in popular sentiment? How did the regime succeed when such a significant portion of the population was hostile to it? In my view, the most significant role was played by the following factors.

First, there is the organizational and disciplinary role played by the state and the army. During the war, the army became, among other things, a critical instrument for the Sovietization of the peasantry and other segments of society. Indeed, over the course of the war, the army and the navy enlisted some 29.5 million people. The traditional method for "disciplining" society and the army was repression. Judging from the available sources, repression

¹⁰¹ Shumelishskii, *Dnevnik soldata*, 71–72.

¹⁰² Ibid., 72.

¹⁰³ B. G. Komsii, "Dnevnik 1943–1945," published by O. V. Budnitskii in *Arkhiv evreiskoi istorii* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006), 6:35. Entry dated 11 October 1943.

periodically reached the levels of 1937. The reaction of Stalin and company to the outbreak of the war was predictable: yet another “purge” of the country.

In Moscow, on the first day of the war (no later than seven in the morning!) a list was prepared containing the names of 1,077 individuals to be placed under immediate arrest. At five o'clock on the evening of 22 June 1941, “according to information obtained by government agents ... the active removal of counterrevolutionary elements” was already underway. On the very same day, 1,000 prisoners were transferred from the NKVD prison in Moscow oblast to make room for the new arrivals.¹⁰⁴

A wave of preemptive repression swept the entire country, carrying away “suspicious elements” in regions located thousands of miles from the theater of war. A report made by the court in Molotov oblast during the second half of 1941 claimed: “During peacetime, there was much more tolerance toward the freedom of people for whom we have only partial evidence of criminal activity. During wartime, the freedom of these elements cannot be tolerated. They have been arrested and tried.” Whereas during the first half of the year the Molotov regional court processed an average of 83.1 cases a month, by the second half of the year it was processing 239.6. Around 27.9 percent of those arrested were sentenced to death in this period, as opposed to 7.4 percent during the first half of the year.¹⁰⁵ From June to December 1941, the Kirov regional court ordered the execution of 346 out of 716 people, or about 48.3 percent of those held for crimes against the state.¹⁰⁶ During the last quarter of 1941, the courts of the RSFSR sentenced to death 41.5 percent of those charged with crimes against the state.¹⁰⁷ According to my calculations, the number of people convicted of counterrevolutionary crimes in the RSFSR during the second half of 1941 was 1.5 times higher than it was during the first half of the year. The percentage of those sentenced to death was 11.5 times higher.¹⁰⁸

NKVD reports from the second half of 1941 reveal new categories of criminals: “arrested and convicted were cowards and alarmists, deserters and soldiers with self-inflicted wounds, defeatists and disseminators of provocative rumors.” The largest number of those arrested over the course of more than six months in 1941 were those accused of defeatism and spreading rumors—some 47,987 people.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ *Moskva voennaia*, 37, 43–44.

¹⁰⁵ GARF f. R-9474, op. 1a, d. 184, ll. 69–70, 74.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, d. 185, l. 153.

¹⁰⁷ GARF f. A-353, op. 16, d. 41, l. 9.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, d. 38, ll. 121–22.

¹⁰⁹ V. Khristoforov, *Organy gosbezopasnosti SSSR v 1941–1945* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Glavnogo arkhivnogo upravleniia goroda Moskvy, 2011), 385.

The repressive measures used in the army periodically exceeded even Stalin's standards. Vladimir Stavskii, one of Stalin's appointees in the field of Soviet literature, wrote to his patron on 15 August 1941 about his observations over ten days with the 24th Army near El'nia: "Recently there has been a shift in the areas of promotion and coercion. Instead of a skillful combination of the two, evidence from the army's command and political departments reveals that between 480 and 600 people have been shot for desertion, alarmism, and other offenses. Meanwhile, only 80 have been presented with medals.... Right now, efforts are underway to eliminate these excesses."¹¹⁰

From 22 June to 10 October 1941, counterintelligence and defensive units of the NKVD detained 647,364 stragglers from among their own ranks or those found fleeing the battlefield. The majority of them were returned to the front, but 10,201 were shot, 3,321 of them publicly.¹¹¹ From 22 June 1941 to 1 August 1942, special units of the NKVD arrested 20,798 soldiers for "attempts to betray the Homeland and treasonous intentions." Of these, 16,287 were shot.¹¹² The peak of this repressive activity seems to have been reached during the summer and autumn of 1942, after Stalin issued his Order no. 227 on 28 July 1942. In August–September 1942, defensive units shot 1,690 soldiers.¹¹³ On 11 October 1942, Lavrentii Beria sent Stalin an update about the progress of the campaign against desertion: "Over the course of the war, the organs and defensive detachments of the NKVD have detained 1,187,739 people on suspicion of desertion or evasion of duty. Of these, 827,739 have been transferred to military units and regional military committees and 211,108 have been arrested. Of those arrested, 63,012 have been sentenced to death, 28,285 have been deprived of their freedom, and 101,191 have been returned to the front in lieu of punishment."¹¹⁴

Grifsekretnosti sniat, published in 1993 (and in English as *Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses in the Twentieth Century*), released statistics on Red Army losses during World War II for the first time. The book was reprinted several times under different names and with several updates and additions. Only the information concerning repressions remained unchanged: 994,300 were

¹¹⁰ Tsentral'nyi arkhiv Ministerstva oborony (TsAMO) f. 32, op. 11306, d. 36. Quoted from a copy of the D. A. Volkogonov papers located in the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

¹¹¹ Khristoforov, *Organy gosbezopasnosti SSSR*, 156.

¹¹² Report from L. P. Beria to I. V. Stalin, V. M. Molotov, and A. S. Shcherbakov dated 20 August 1942. Cited in Khristoforov, *Organy bezopasnosti SSSR*, 174.

¹¹³ A. N. Iakovlev et al., eds., *Liubianka: Stalin i NKVD–NKGB–GUKR "Smersh," 1939–mart 1946* (Moscow: Materik, 2006), 317–18.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Khristoforov, *Organy gosbezopasnosti SSSR*, 175.

subjected to military punishment during the war, of whom 135,000 were shot. In addition, 212,400 deserters remained unaccounted for.¹¹⁵

Mark Edele estimates that, over the course of the war, 157,593 people were sentenced to death by military tribunals, and 40,139 by special councils of the NKVD. Taken together, these comprise only 5 percent of the death sentences issued in 1928–53. In Edele's opinion, "this toll within the wartime state of exception appears perversely small."¹¹⁶ Yet by any other measure this number was enormous, being roughly equal to half of the fatalities suffered by American forces during the war. The death sentences issued for crimes against the state by courts of general jurisdiction should also be added to the total. Besides this, it is important to recognize that violence pervaded the entire system from top to bottom, and the practice of shooting men without a trial was widespread, both in the army and in partisan groups. Although the actual number of "arbitrary" shootings is impossible to determine, there is no doubt that the quantity was significant. Almost every memoir and diary from the time contains accounts of such reprisals.

Vasilii Tsymbal, who fought with a partisan detachment in the Kuban', wrote in his diary about his commander, named Piatov, who "loves to arrest and shoot people." This love of shooting was decidedly not platonic. Ten days later, Tsymbal wrote in his diary that "Piatov and his friends were drunk and arguing about something, and they ended up shooting someone."¹¹⁷ Lieutenant Oleg Reutov, complaining about how hard it was to get the infantry to attack, claims that "even hitting them on the back with a shovel didn't help. Five were shot."¹¹⁸

Regimental chief of staff Captain Nikolai Belov went to the front lines to "motivate" a battalion to attack and met with a depressing scene: "Captain Novikov, the commander, and Chief of Staff Grudin were running along the lines, revolvers in hand. When I asked them to report on the situation and what exactly they were doing, they explained that they were leading the troops into battle. Both of them were drunk and I ordered them to relinquish their weapons. A heap of corpses covered the trenches and the parapet. Among them was Captain Sovkov, shot by Novikov. I was informed that Novikov had

¹¹⁵ G. F. Krivosheev and A. V. Kirilin, eds., *Velikaia Otechestvennaia bez grifa sekretnosti: Kniga poter'* (Moscow: Veche, 2009), 43. The English edition is G. F. Krivosheev, *Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses in the Twentieth Century* (London: Greenhill Books, 1997).

¹¹⁶ Mark Edele, *Stalinist Society, 1928–1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 40, 44.

¹¹⁷ Vasilii Tsymbal, *Dnevnik, zapisi ot 28 avgusta i 8 sentiabria 1942* (personal archive of E. V. Tsymbal).

¹¹⁸ T. O. Reutova, *Gvardeets, uchenyi, diplomat: Frontovye dnevniki akademika Reutova* (Moscow: Zvonitsa, 2011), 83. Entry dated 18 February 1942.

shot many soldiers.”¹¹⁹ Accounts of summary shootings (of deserters, cowards, defectors, or simply those who fell afoul of a disgruntled commander) are found in almost every diary.¹²⁰ Arbitrary shooting remained a problem for the Red Army until the end of the war.¹²¹

Retreat-blocking detachments were an effective means of maintaining combat discipline. General Vasilii Chuikov, commander of the 62nd Army near Stalingrad, told Vasilii Grossman: “Everyone knows that those who retreat will be shot on sight. This is scarier to them than the Germans.” Nevertheless, fear alone cannot explain what happened to the Red Army as it suddenly “dug in” at Stalingrad and changed the course of the war. Grossman spoke with Chuikov about the “miracle of resistance” and about the fact that he could not understand “how those who fled before became so steadfast.” Chuikov replied, “I honestly don’t understand it myself.”¹²²

The second factor at work was ideological. The regime successfully formulated the concept of a “Patriotic War” (*Otechestvennaia voina*), relegating rhetoric about the ideals of socialism and the benefits of collectivized agriculture to second place. Molotov compared the war with Germany to the Patriotic War of 1812 as early as 22 June 1941. On the following day, Emel’ian Iaroslavskii wrote an article in *Pravda* in which he referred to the current conflict as the “Great Patriotic War.”¹²³ The Bolsheviks were not original in this respect. The term was borrowed directly from a speech made by Prime Minister Ivan Goremykin to the State Duma on 26 July 1914, at the start of World War I. Molotov’s famous phrase “Our cause is just—the enemy will be destroyed, victory will be ours” is a paraphrase of Pavel Miliukov’s statement: “Our cause is a just cause,” from his speech at the same session of the Duma.¹²⁴ The ideological retreat eventually extended to efforts at reconciliation with the church.

¹¹⁹ “Frontovoi dnevnik N. F. Belova: 1941–1944,” in *Russkoe proshloe: Istoriko-dokumental’nyi al’manakh* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta, 1996), 6:340. Entry dated 13 February 1943.

¹²⁰ N. N. Inozemtsev, *Frontovoi dnevnik*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Nauka, 2005), 39; Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, 113–14.

¹²¹ See, e.g., the report from N. A. Bulganin to G. M. Malenkov dated 27 May 1944 (RGASPI f. 83, op. 1, d. 29, ll. 101–7) and the draft of Stalin’s order “On the Arbitrary Shooting of Soldiers” (February 1945), a copy of which is located in the collection of Dmitry Volkogonov in the Library of Congress (Box 15; original in TsAMO f. 132, op. 2642, d. 59).

¹²² Grossman, *Gody voyny*, 355.

¹²³ Emel’ian Iaroslavskii, “Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina sovetского naroda,” *Pravda*, 23 June 1941, 2.

¹²⁴ For more on this, see O. V. Budnitskii, “Istoriia voyny s Napoleonom v sovetskoi propagande 1941–1945,” *Rossiiskaia istoriia*, no. 6 (2012): 157–69.

The third factor is clearly the most important. The Nazis had no intention of freeing Russia or dissolving the collective farms, and reports of their atrocities in the Soviet press, even if sometimes exaggerated, on the whole unwittingly understated the level of their violence. The real turning point in public opinion occurred when the Nazis revealed their true colors. It quickly became clear that the very existence of Russia—both the physical existence of its inhabitants and its collective sense of self-respect—was at stake. At the end of December 1941, it became clear, in the words of Prishvin, that “with the help of the frost, we had thoroughly thrashed the Germans outside Moscow [and] that, in all probability, the ‘atrocities’ of the Germans were quite real.... In short, the faith of huge numbers of citizens that the Germans would create a Russian government and that life would quickly become better were wrong.”¹²⁵

The inhabitants of Tula oblast, shortly after it was liberated from German occupation, told stories of the outrages committed by German soldiers. Their coarse behavior especially angered the peasants: “German conduct is rude, cruel, simple banditry. They enter residences without shame or reservation. They just walk in, take off their shirts, and begin hunting for lice. We are simple people with a rural, third-grade education, yet we never allow such things. At the table, where they sit and eat sandwiches, there they hunt for lice. This is how the soldiers behave, and the German officers are even worse. One officer walks along whacking chickens. His face looks civilized, but he behaves like a hooligan.”¹²⁶ Lisin, the director of a local school, said: “The behavior of the Germans is coarse. I’ve never read of even savages behaving this way. They strip naked and swat insects. They are dirty. I thought the Germans were cultured.... They defecate without leaving the huts, even sitting in front of the window. Whether there are men or women around, it makes no difference. One goes about with his trousers undone and says, ‘fasten my pants, mum.’”¹²⁷

According to the collective farm chairman Stepan Baranov, after witnessing such behavior, “two people from the village soviet quickly stopped talking about how good the Germans are.” This phrase was blacked out in the transcript. Apparently, workers at the Institute of History found it impossible to retain any information about officials of the Soviet regime expecting anything good from the occupiers. One German asked two women to direct him to the road. They couldn’t understand him, so he beat them: “These women had previously supported the Germans. After this event, they stopped speaking out on behalf

¹²⁵ Prishvin, *Dnevnik, 1940–1941*, 737. Entry dated 23 December 1941.

¹²⁶ NA IRI RAN f. 2, razdel VI, op. 3, d. 1, l. 5. Transcript of a conversation with collective farmers from Tula oblast dated 23 December 1941.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, ll. 21–22.

of the Germans and began recounting what had happened to them.”¹²⁸ Peasants from the collective farm at Iasnaia Poliana told of how the Germans “pestered one of our girls. They raped A., M., and P. [in the transcript they are named—O.B.]” They concluded that “everything written about them in the newspapers, it’s all true. They just go into a hut where a girl is and take her, saying she’s ours for two hours. Then they leave.”¹²⁹

Grossman recorded peasants’ stories about the Germans that were full of contempt and hatred: “Our German guests shit on the sheets, are not even willing to go out to the breezeway to relieve themselves.”¹³⁰ If some whitewashed their huts and awaited the arrival of the Germans during the summer of 1941, in a newly liberated Ukrainian village the “women cleanse their huts, not as they would before a holiday, but as they would when a disease had ravaged the village.” In the words of one peasant woman, “After the Germans left the hut, the cats wouldn’t go in for three months. This isn’t only among us—in all the villages everyone says the same. They sense an alien people in the German smell.”¹³¹

In 1941, the poet Nikolai Glazkov (author of the term *samizdat*) captured the feeling of many people unsympathetic to the Soviet regime:

O God! Save the Soviets,
Defend the country from higher races,
Because all your commandments
Are broken by Hitler more than by us.¹³²

The words of a peasant woman at her kitchen table, overheard by Grossman in the Stalingrad region, serve as a fitting epitaph for the hopes of some Russian peasants that the Germans would bring liberation: “That Hitler is the real Antichrist. And we used to think that the Communists were antichrists.”¹³³

One more circumstance had an impact on the development of public attitudes: the enchantment of success. Prishvin observed that the mood in one village fluctuated according to the relative success of German and Soviet troops (it was no accident that he called the place *Boloto*, “swamp”). The turning point in Boloto came, curiously enough, after the Moscow panic of 16 October 1941, when the capital was almost captured by the enemy.

¹²⁸ Ibid., l. 25.

¹²⁹ Ibid., op. 4, d. 3, l. 3.

¹³⁰ Grossman, *Gody voyny*, 302.

¹³¹ Ibid., 309–10.

¹³² Nikolai Glazkov, *Molitva* (<http://militera.lib.ru/poetry/russian/glazkov/05.html>, accessed 16 September 2014).

¹³³ Grossman, *Gody voyny*, 344.

Almost, but not quite. Whether because of the sluggishness of the Germans or the perseverance of the defenders, in Boloto the meaning was clear: the Germans were not all-powerful. Attitudes toward the Red Army (which was not completely identified with the regime) became more favorable with every day that passed, while the Germans were unable to advance further or win a decisive victory. According to Prishvin, “the cast of mind of the human herd changes just like the weather.”¹³⁴ Attitudes in Boloto would continue to change until Stalingrad brought a resolution.¹³⁵

Boloto was a microcosm of the mood of the Russian peasantry. At the start of the war, in my view, this mood was little different from that of the Ukrainian or Belorussian peasantry (with the exception of the population of the territories incorporated into the USSR in 1939–40). Urban attitudes were probably also more similar than different across the Slavic republics of the USSR. Many people hoped that a Soviet defeat in the war would bring improvements to their lot. The hopes were not borne out, not because Soviet power turned out to be better than expected, but because the enemy turned out to be even worse.

Translated by Jason Morton

International Center for the History and Sociology of World War II
and Its Consequences
National Research University—Higher School of Economics
12 Petrovka St.
Moscow 107996, Russia
obudnitskiy@hse.ru

¹³⁴ Prishvin, *Dnevnik, 1940–1941*, 650. Entry dated 27 October 1941.

¹³⁵ “The sound of a few bombs exploding is all that is required to return our Boloto to the side of the Germans” (ibid., 748, entry dated 31 December 1941).