

# The Spring Victory: Stalin's Glossed Over Crime by Mark Solonin

*Translated from the Russian by David Loutit*

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### Translator's Note:

Mark Solonin is a Russian aviation engineer and historian. He was born in Kuybyshev (now Samara) on 29 May 1958. His early career was as an aviation design engineer in one of the closed city of Kuybyshev's many design bureaus. (Kuybyshev was a 'closed' city in the former USSR because of the large proportion of military industry located there, which meant that it was closed to all without permits, most particularly foreigners).

Life in the USSR was dichotomous. Citizens had to be able to see the Soviet reality around them and yet somehow simultaneously believe that they lived in the best and most promising country on earth. Their newspapers would report successful harvests and industrial advances while shops were bare and technology patently backward.

For the purposes of obfuscation, the Soviet Union produced for its citizens great masses information in books and newspapers, some of which was true, some distortions and half lies, and some outright fantasy.

The majority of Soviet citizens could achieve the necessary schizophrenia and live their lives amidst this.

However, the sheer amount of lies, distortions and fantasy made it impossible to achieve consistency and those of a more intellectual bent who chose to do so could dissect, analyse, and tease out at least some truth from the inchoate mass.

Marc Solonin was one of these and it was from carrying out such analyses that he first became a dissident writer in 1983-85, then politically active during the years of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and later a full-time historian doing his research, delving into archives in Moscow, Podolsk, and Freiburg.

He is the author of seven history books which have been published in Russia, Ukraine, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechia, Romania, Bulgaria and Germany and has written articles for the freer Russian press. He also runs a popular and highly respected YouTube channel where he gives lectures on history.

In 2016, when the wheels of history were approaching a full revolution, he found himself obliged to go into exile from Russia now that once again truth-telling had become 'problematic' there.

The following long article, which I have translated, was written in 2009. It is illustrative as a polemic cry against historical distortions.

David Loutit, April 2021

# The Spring Victory: Stalin's Glossed Over Crime

## by Mark Solonin

*Patriotism can be estimated from the measure of shame  
that a man feels about the crimes committed  
in the name of his people*

Adam Michnik

Polish historian and editor-in-chief  
of the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

To say that in the USSR this subject was a strictly and totally forbidden one is a gross understatement. It would even be an utter lie to say that ridiculous excuses were later invented about it. No excuses were ever made and no-one even tried to find any. The party and the people, fathers and sons, top people and hoi-polloi were all united in their total denial that there was anything even to discuss, let alone condemn.

So there were no questions, even though there was an answer—irrefutable, monolithic and lasting. Constructed of granite and marble, the Soviet warrior-liberator holding a rescued German lass in the crook of his arm stands in Berlin's Treptower Park and has fresh flowers obediently brought to be laid at his feet each spring.

In the early years of glasnost, there appeared a rare little scattering of memoirs telling of the fact that the little German girl might have been in that Soviet soldier's arms for a somewhat different reason and with somewhat different consequences for her. This, however, was not something anyone wanted to hear. Truth to tell, it could not penetrate—because a truth such as this one could have no place in the mind of a normal Soviet citizen.

Help came, strangely enough, from the West. Foreigners were going to help us once again. A whole 'historiographic tradition' had been developed out there in which the subject of the abuses against Germany's civilian population (bestial mass murders, torture, robbery, and the destruction of property) was cutely covered under the heading of 'sexual abuse', thus allowing everyone to heave a relieved sigh. No, no-one was arguing that rape was not a crime. Yes, it was—in common law and even among common thieves. But it's an odd sort of crime because the accused can always say with an insolent grin (or frightened evasive eyes, depending on the circumstances): "Oh, come on... What do you mean rape... She came on to me..."

Everything became simpler once the term had been found. All that was left to do was to reduce this dreadful historical and moral problem to a question of 'sexual abuse' and then to cast doubts on how widespread such abuses had been and even question whether whatever it was was even abuse.

Here is one of the many such examples of aggressive counter-propaganda which appeared, be it noted, in one of the Soviet Union's oldest and highest circulating newspapers. The occasion for this 'discussion' was the publication in Russia of Anthony Beevor's *Berlin The Downfall 1945*. On 21 July 2005, an article by journalist S. Turchenko appeared in *Trud* newspaper to take on and deal with this uninvited foreign consultant. And he was going to be 'dealt with' in the full Russian meaning of the phrase!

Turchenko was going to hit hard from the very start: the article was headlined *Violating the Facts* and the sub-heading was infused with a less than subtle hint about exactly whom Beevor was

echoing and whose tune he and others of his ilk were playing: “Why are a British historian and some mass media repeating Goebbels’ fairytales?” The journalist’s creative imagination next conjures up an infernal picture: “Goebbels is gleefully rubbing his hands together in his grave...”

The first person to be given space in the article is General M.A. Gareyev, (President of the Academy of Military Sciences, Academician of the Academy of Natural Sciences, Professor, PhD (History), PhD (Military Sciences), retired Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Soviet Army and so on and so forth). This highly qualified scientist and researcher has no lingering doubts nor any questions:

Beevor and the fellow-members of his choir are plagiarists, plain and simple. The real author of the myth of sexual abuse by our soldiers is Goebbels. Beevor, however, has outdone him... Another in a long line of libels against the Soviet soldier-liberator... I personally took part in the liberation of Eastern Prussia and can safely say that I never heard of even one instance of sexual violence. I remember standing before my paraded troops as the sentence of a court martial was read. This was following an incident when a number of troops had broken into the yard of a German farmer and caught several chickens and geese and had stewed them up. When the skirmish was over, the owners came up from the cellar where they had hidden and raised a hue and cry. A MP patrol came by and the soldiers were arrested. The commander of the 184<sup>th</sup> division, Major-General Basan Gorodovikov, ordered that they be court-martialled as an example. The soldiers were each sentenced to five years’ prison camp. One can easily understand that the sentence would have been immeasurably more severe if any one of them had dared to interfere with the farmer’s wife.

The next general featured in the article, Hero of the Soviet Union and Hero of Socialist Labour I. Tretyak was not quite so categorical and was even ready to admit that not just geese and ducks were victims of violence:

Many things could of course happen when such a massive number of troops entered Germany in 1945. Some of the men had not seen a woman for literally years. And some succumbed. Nowadays, however, it is recognised by many that sexual relations between our men and German women were not always forced. There was mutual attraction. It is strange, therefore, to read that some Englishman has, 60 years after these events, become concerned about sexual encounters which German women themselves are not shouting about...

History PhD and President of the Association of Historians Professor O. Rzheshhevsky also finds himself unable to restrain his indignation at this renewed attempt “to revive the myth of Asiatic hordes driven into the minds of the Germans by Nazi propaganda, a myth later taken up by a *small group of neo-Fascist historians whose views were long ago rejected in Germany* [my emphasis]. As one might readily expect, the professor and President of the Association of Historians is particularly shocked by the lack of grounds for these accusations:

One should have serious grounds and properly documented facts before making such serious allegations against the members of an army that took the brunt of the battle against the fascist invaders. Nothing of the kind is to be found in Beevor’s book. His reports of mass abuse are all based on witness accounts along the lines of “Berliners remember...” and “a doctor counted...”. This is not acceptable in a book that purports to be a serious work of historical science.

On the contrary, what happened, in Professor Rzheshhevsky’s opinion, is that

the avalanche of revenge that could have descended upon Germany never took place. The soldiers of the Soviet and Allied armies in general behaved humanely towards the

Germans... The high command took extraordinary steps to prevent brutalities against the civilian population of Germany.”

Having got this straight, Rzheshvsky, doing as a professional historian should, adduces his properly documented fact—and an interesting one it is too, even if it is sadly somewhat confusingly expressed:

In the first months of 1945, for abuses perpetrated against the local population were convicted by courts martial 4,148 officers and a large number of rank and file.”

“A large number of rank and file”. How many is that? No information given. We must therefore make assumptions. An army in active service contains at least 10 soldiers for each officer. If we take on trust the thesis that outrages occurred because “the men had not seen a woman for literally years”, then one might rightly expect that instances of ‘abuse’ by the rank and file would be higher than by officers. In fact, Red Army officers did see women, especially in the later years of the war. Indeed, Comrade Stalin saw to that: four hundred and fifty thousand women were called up in the spring of 1942 alone, as part of the ‘mass voluntary mobilisation’ (as it was termed in the State Defence Committee’s decree). Soviet historians are keen to point out that no less than 70% of these were sent into the active army. Besides the women mobilised under this decree, there were also volunteers; they numbered 234,000 in 1945. It is worth noting in passing that in 1943-1945 there were approximately 5 million men serving in rear divisions and in office posts of the Armed Forces of the USSR; despatching hundreds of thousands of women to the front, to the very front line, cannot be explained by any catastrophic lack of men...

Let us return, however, to the fact adduced by Professor Rzheshvsky. One may reasonably assume that 10 times more grunts than officers were condemned for ‘outrages perpetrated against the local population’. This would bring the number of condemned (*not* the number committing abuses, please note!) to 40-50 thousand. In the spring of 1945, that number represents the total force of one army group.

This, however, is not the end of it. Continuing to show more diligence than sense, our friendly journalist S. Turchenko hurries to expand Professor Rzheshvsky’s quotation by quoting from another source, namely a Report of the Chief of the Political Department of the 8<sup>th</sup> Guards Army, Major-General M. Skosyrev, dated 25 April 1945:

In recent days there has been a sharp reduction in the number of cases of looting, rapes of women, and other immoral activities by members of the forces. We are now registering 2-3 cases of such in each locality, when these used to be far more frequent...

So what have these respected and authoritative sources told us? The word ‘murder’ has not even received a mention. General Gareyev is aware of some stolen chickens but he is totally unaware of any rapes. General Tretyak admits to the occurrence of some ‘sexual encounters’ but sees no need to consider them in any detail. Historian Rzheshvsky knows of no documents which could confirm the occurrence of any “mass abuses” but does admit that many thousands of Red Army soldiers and officers were punished for abuses that Gareyev says never happened in any way. A Guards Major-General proudly reports that the number of rapes and other immoral acts invented by Goebbels’ propaganda have “reduced considerably”, with only 2-3 cases being recorded “in every locality”, a mere nothing since “these used to be far more frequent”.

Let us now turn to the documents and facts collected by the “small group of neo-Fascist historians whose views were long ago rejected in Germany”.

I should start by admitting that Professor Rzheshchinsky was fairly correct in his phrasing: in the immediate post-war years (and more strangely still, in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union) historians in Germany who did not agree that the very fact of fierce military battles between brown and red fascism justified either or both these two criminal dictatorships were indeed sidelined as lepers and avoided by all who hoped for a political career and government grants.

Nonetheless, by means of stubborn work over many years, some researchers were able to collect and organise a large volume of facts and documents. First and foremost among these come the eleven volumes of Theodor Schieder's *Documents on the Expulsion of the Germans from Eastern & Central Europe*, work on which began in 1949 and took four years. Survivors told of the crimes of which they or their neighbours had been victim and the work records the testimonies of teachers, doctors, and civil servants. These data made it possible for researchers to estimate at 12 million the number of Germans displaced from their homes, with 2 million of these being listed as lost without trace, or in other words, given how matters were in the mid 1950s, dead.

Calculations using demographic balance as a departure point enable one to estimate that 2,484,000 civilians (not counting those killed in fighting) died in the 'eastern regions' that became part of the USSR along with Poland and Czechoslovakia. This method is of course not an accurate one and any numbers derived can be subject to criticism. It should be remembered, however, that the currently canonised number of Soviet losses (27 million souls) was calculated by very nearly this method. We say 'very nearly' because German historians used the data from their 1948 census when the war had been over for three years while the Soviets took their data from the 1959 census (fourteen years after the war's end) and also the falsified figures from Stalin's 1939 census.

The FRG's Missing Persons service run by the Church came to a considerably lower number, reporting in 1964 that 473,000 died during the expulsion of Germans from East Prussia, Pomerania, Silesia, and the Sudetenland. One should note, however, that this was a count of known dead, not of missing persons. The number 473,000 is of course five times less than 2.484 million. From a legal point of view, however, the point is fairly moot: the deaths of 473,000 civilians in a matter of a few months is more than enough in order to raise the question of a war crime or crime against humanity being committed. It is also important to note that the 473,000 civilian deaths mentioned in this report do not include the victims of the bombing of Dresden and other towns in East Germany (the future GDR), nor did it include the civilians who died during or after the storming of Berlin or the tens of thousands of ethnic Germans who 'disappeared' during their expulsion from Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Romania.

One of the most prominent members of that 'small group of historians' was (he died in 2002) Dr. Johann Hoffmann, who worked for 35 years (1960-1995) in the German Armed Forces Military History Research Office, rising in that time from junior researcher to eventually becoming its head. His book *Stalin's Vernichtungskrieg 1941-1945 (Stalin's War of Extermination)* was published in 1995 and went through 4 reprinting before the century was out. The reaction of German 'left wing circles' to Hoffmann's research was so incandescent that on 28 February 1996, the members of a number of fractions of the Bundestag sent "six questions and 14 supplementary requests for information" to the German government—even though questions of historical research do not come under the competence of the government. Commenting on this disgraceful attempt to turn the parliament of a democratic country into something along the lines of an inquisitorial tribunal, Hoffmann said in the foreword to the fourth edition of his book:

If a researcher sometimes feels he is addressing his arguments to a stone wall, this is due to reasons residing deep in the psychology of post-war Germans and for which there can be no rational explanation... Many Germans are so immersed in themselves that they fail to notice

that what they want of the Russians is that they, these Russians, should continue to live quietly with Stalin's propaganda and lies precisely so that the Germans can have an alibi in the form of Hitler. Germans want to present themselves to the world in a good light and can do this by contrasting themselves with the Russians, demonstrating how far they as Germans have distanced themselves from Hitler..."

Below I shall be quoting extensively from the chapters of Joachim Hoffman's book *Stalins Vernichtungskrieg 1941-1945*, Herbig Verlag, [3rd edition] 1999 ISBN 3-7766-2079-X, (Russian translation И.Гофман, "Сталинская война на уничтожение", М., АСТ-Астрель, 2006 г.) that look at the events of the winter and spring of 1945. Most of the episodes and quotations are referenced to the corresponding holdings of the Military History Research Office (German: Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, MGFA) archive in Freiburg. I have, however, omitted these due to the fact that the average Russian reader is unlikely to find his way to them. I will also in most cases give the names of Soviet servicemen as single initials.

And so here we go:

The hate propaganda served to Red Army men was properly reflected in captured front line letters, from a few of which we will quote here. They were written by soldiers of the motorised infantry (field post office no. 20738) in January-February 1945.

Writes S. to his parents in Smolensk: "We are going deeper into East Prussia every day and we take revenge on the Germans for all the horrible things they did to us... We're allowed to do anything we like with the German swine."

In a letter dated 30 January 1945, L. writes: "The Germans are running, they're afraid of our revenge. But they don't all get away. Now German mothers rue the day they gave birth to their sons. Now German women will learn the horrors of war. Now they can feel what they had intended for other people."

"The civilians don't run anymore," writes K. on 30 January 1945 to his family in Vladimir. "The things that are happening here are simply awful."

P. writes to his parents in Alma-Ata on 1 February 1945: "It's out and out war now. We're smashing the bastards right in their lairs in East Prussia... Now it's our lads who can watch their homes burn and families flee, dragging their little brats along with them... They probably hope to save their lives that way, but no mercy for them."

"There's plenty of German women," write E. on 3 February 1945. "No need for sweet talk. Just hold a Nagana to their heads and shout 'Lie down!' You do your thing and off you go."

On the same day, Captain K. writes: "We're driving all the Prussians out, making feathers fly. The lads have all had their goes with the German women. And there's plenty of souvenirs to collect..."

Actually, that same officer, who appears to be something of a dreamer and almost philosophical, a man of human ideals, tired of war and sorry for the victims and the destruction, nonetheless shows himself affected by the hate propaganda. On reaching the town of Starkenberg, he writes in his diary on 27 January 1945:

We really hate Germany and the Germans. In one house, for example, our lads came across a German woman lying killed with her two children. On the streets, too, one often sees killed civilians... Of course, it's unbelievably cruel to kill children... But the Germans deserve these horrors..."

Incited by Soviet military propaganda and their Red Army commanders, the soldiers of the 16<sup>th</sup> Guards Rifle Division of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Guards Tank Corps of the 11<sup>th</sup> Guards Army in late October 1944 set about exterminating the peasant population of a salient to the south of Gumbinnen. This area was subsequently recaptured by the Germans and they were able to carry out an investigation. No fewer than 72 men, women and children were killed in Nemmersdorf alone. The women and even little girls were raped before being murdered. Several women were nailed to barn doors. A short distance away, the Soviet killers murdered a large number of German and French POWs who were still being held in the area.

The bodies of hideously murdered inhabitants were to be found in all the other villages. For instance, the remains of several people burnt alive in a barn were found in Banfelde, on the Teichhoff Estate in Alt Wusterwitz and the same elsewhere.

Oberleutnant Amberger writes in a report:

The bodies of civilians lay by the roadsides and in farmyards... In particular, I saw the bodies of many women who had been raped and then shot in the back of the head. The bodies of their killed children often lay by their sides.

Elements of the 93<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Corps of the Baltic Front 43<sup>rd</sup> Army entered the village of Schillmeichen near Heydekrug in the Memel (now Klaipeda) district on 26 October 1944. Questioned at a military court hearing, gunner Erich Cherkus described what he saw:

I saw my father lying face down on the ground with a bullet hole in the back of his head... In a room, I saw the bodies of a man and a woman who had been tied together, their hands behind their backs, with a single rope... In another farmhouse, we found 5 children whose tongues had been nailed to a large table. I searched madly but was unable to find my mother... On a roadside we saw, tied up together, five girls, stripped practically naked and their backs ripped to shreds. It looked like they had been dragged some distance along the ground. On that road, we saw a number of carts which had been totally crushed.

To present the horrible details of what was done or provide a complete picture of what happened is simply not possible. The examples given above provide a general idea of the behaviour of the Red Army in the eastern provinces after the advance resumed in January 1945. A Federal archive report on the expulsions and the crimes committed during them published on 28 May 1974 provides accurate data from what were called "summary sheets" on the brutalities in two selected districts, namely the East Prussian border district of Johannsburg (now Pisz in Poland) and in Oppeln (now Opole, Poland) in the Silesian Regierungsbezirk (government region).

The official investigation details what took place in Johannsburg which was seized by the 50<sup>th</sup> Army of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Byelorussian Front. The mass murder on 24 January 1945 of 120 (or by another count 97) civilians along with a number of German and French POWs from a column of refugees on the Nickelberg-Herzogsdorf road south of Arys (now Orzysz, Poland) stands out besides countless other murders. Thirty-two refugees were shot on the Stollendorf-Arys road. A Soviet officer ordered the shooting of about 50 refugees, mostly children and youngsters taken from their parents and relatives travelling in carts on the road between Arys and Drigelsdorf (now Drygały, Poland). Thirty people were burnt alive in a barn just outside Groß Rosen (now Rogoznica, Poland). One witness described how there were "bodies lining the road" on the way to Arys. A "mass shooting" took place in Arys, presumably at a collection point. An NKVD torture cellar where many met agonising deaths was also located there.

Soldiers of the 32<sup>nd</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> Guards Rifle Corps of the 5<sup>th</sup> Guards Army of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian Front slaughtered no fewer than 1,264 civilians... In the Silesian region of Oppeln, Soviet soldiers on 23

January 1945 in Gottersdorf shot about 270 villagers, including small children and 20-40 members of the Marian Brotherhood. One hundred and ten villagers, including the residents of an orphanage were shot in Bad Karlsruhe (now Pokój, Poland). Between sixty and seventy villagers, including the residents of an old people's home and a priest who tried to protect women from being raped, were shot in the village of Kuppa.

Bear in mind that Johannisberg and Oppeln were just two of a multitude of districts in the eastern part of the German Reich occupied by the Red Army.

Several lists of the violations of international law and atrocities committed by the Red Army in the occupied German territories were drawn up from field commanders' reports to a department of the Land Forces HQ that dealt with the "foreign armies from the East". Whilst these do not provide a full picture, they have the advantage of documenting Soviet atrocities in a relatively reliable way from freshly collected evidence.

Thus, on 20 January 1945, Army Group A reported that all the inhabitants of the just recaptured villages of Reichthal and Glausche by Namslau (now Namysłów, Poland) were shot by Soviet soldiers of the 9<sup>th</sup> Mechanised Corps of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Guard Tank Army.

Army Group Centre reported on 22 January 1945 that tanks of the 2nd Guards Tank Corps had

overrun and shot up with tank shells and machine gun fire a 4-kilometre-long column of refugees consisting of mainly women and children before finally finishing survivors off with rifle fire

on a road near Grunhein in Welau district [now Znamensk].

A similar event took place not far from there, by the village of Gertlauken, when 50 people from a column of refugees were killed by Soviet soldiers, some of them by shots to the back of the head.

In late January at an unnamed location in Western Prussia, a long column of refugees with carts was overtaken by an advancing Soviet tank unit. A few women survived to tell of soldiers shoving

the carts into the ditch and throwing themselves on the women while any children who rushed to help were shot. A Soviet colonel who was there regulated the queue of rapists while another officer shot any children or old men who hysterically tried to stop the abuse.

Tank crewmen of the 5<sup>th</sup> Guards Tank Army poured fuel over horses and carts and set fire to them:

Some of the civilians, most of whom were women and children, jumped from their carts to save themselves. Some of them were already living torches. The Bolsheviks then opened fire. There were only a few survivors."

The same thing was repeated near Plonen when in late January more tanks of the 5<sup>th</sup> Guards Tank Army fell upon a column of refugees and shot it up.

The bodies of women, old men, and children scattered over piles of clothes and upturned carts stretched out all the way to the horizon along the road.

Red Army men uninterruptedly and with extreme brutality raped all the women between the ages of 13 and 60 of a village near Elbing (now Elbląg, Poland). Some German soldiers on a reconnaissance came across a woman who had been disembowelled with a bayonet and another young woman with her face smashed to pieces lying on a bench. Wrecked and robbed refugee carts

lining both sides of the road with the bodies of their owners alongside in the ditch were also found around the nearby village of Meisleiten.

There were reports from all over the eastern provinces, where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Guards Tank Army was advancing, of (easily recognisable as such) refugee columns with carts being crushed under the caterpillar tracks of tanks and raked with fire.

Similar columns were stopped, attacked, and decimated on 18 and 19 January in the district of Wahldrode: "Women and children who stopped or fell were shot or crushed." Another report simply says "most of the women and children were killed". Still near Wahldrode, Soviet tanks used their cannon and machine guns against a German transport of wounded – "of the 1000 wounded only 80 survived.

Reports of Soviet tanks being used to attack refugee columns came from Schauerkirch and Gombin where "around 800 women and children were killed".

In a forester's cottage near Soldin (now Myslibórz), Soviet soldiers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Guards Tank Army killed the forester's family and all the refugees who had sheltered with them. They also burned alive a group of German soldiers who had taken refuge in a barn. Many years later, in 1995, a mass grave containing the remains of 120 civilians was found in the area.

Similarly, only a representative sample of the atrocities committed in East Prussia can be listed here. For instance, Red Army men of 3<sup>rd</sup> Guards Cavalry Corps near the small settlement of Tollnikken shot and killed a family of seven, including small children, because the parents had tried to stop the rape of their two daughters.

More detailed investigations, such as the ones at Gumbinnen, Golden, and Elbing and some other places could only be made on the infrequent occasions when German forces were able to retake a previously lost position.

One such location, previously taken on 28-30 January 1945 by units of the 10<sup>th</sup> Tank Corps of the 5<sup>th</sup> Tank Army, was Preußisch Holland (now Paszek, Poland) and surroundings. The 2 February 1945 report from Army Group North says that villagers were clubbed to death or shot in the villages of Götthendorf, Döbern, and Bordenen. The report states:

In Götthendorf, near Preußisch Holland, we found in one room seven murdered civilians, including two elderly women, two men, and a boy of about fourteen. In one corner of the room there lay crumpled a nine-year old boy with a shattered skull, with beside him a 15-year-old girl, naked from the waist down. She had knife wounds to her hands and facial cuts. Her breasts had been cut off with a bayonet. An 80-year-old man lay shot dead at the door to the room.

Investigation and medical officers of the German 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division were able to question survivors when German forces managed to liberate the Pomeranian town of Preußisch Friedland (now Debrzno, Poland) and its neighbouring hamlets. Their report to command dated 14 February 1945 states:

Most of the men in Preußisch Friedland and the village of Ziskau were shot after being put to extreme torture. Houses and homes were looted, damaged, and burnt. The Bolsheviks shot at and machine-gunned women and children who attempted to flee.

Two kilometres further on, they came across a farmstead with the bodies of many children and older men; the women had been raped and shot. Many other atrocities were recorded as having

taken place in Preußisch Friedland. Sixteen villagers were killed and no fewer than 50 women were raped in Linde on 29 January 1945. One of these was an 18-year-old girl found lying in a pool of her own blood. In three rooms of one large house, they found the bodies of five dead women and of three young girls—all the victims had had empty wine bottles rammed into them.

Civilians in Ziskau were also shot “after having been brutally tortured” along with a number of soldiers and a sailor in hiding. The women there were raped, many of them repeatedly; one of these was

an 86-year-old lady and another an 18-year-old from Bromberg [now Bydgoszcz, Poland] who had died in terrible pain. An officer’s wife was nailed to the floor and then raped to death.

This official material is, of course, not exhaustive and can in any event only be briefly excerpted here. Reports such as these are available with regards to Silesia, Brandenburg, Pomerania and East Prussia and all contain details of the same sort of crimes—murders, rapes, robberies, looting, and arson—so we can safely conclude that they present a true picture of what happened there.

...Close to the frontier of the Reich frontier, West of the town of Wielun, Soviet soldiers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian Front poured petrol on the carts of the refugees, burning them along with their passengers. Countless bodies of German men, women and children lined the roads, some of them mutilated, with their throats cut, tongues ripped out, stomachs bayoneted. Still to the West of Wielun, 25 Todt Organisation workers were shot by the tank crews of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Guards Tank Army. The whole male population of Heinersdorf was shot, the women raped. In Kunzendorf 25-30 men of the Volkssturm were shot in the back of the head.

After Beatenhof near Ohlau (now Oława, Poland) was retaken, every male inhabitant was found shot in the back of the head. The perpetrators in this case were soldiers of the 5<sup>th</sup> Guards Army. Eight families were murdered by soldiers of the 89<sup>th</sup> Guards Tank Corps in Grünberg (now Zielona Góra, Poland). A terrible crime was enacted in the Tannenfeld Estate near Grottkau (now Grodków, Poland). There, Red Army men of the 229<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division raped two girls and then killed them in a bestial manner. They next proceeded to gouge out the eyes and cut off the tongue of a man before doing the same to a 43-year-old Polish woman and torturing her to death.

In Alt-Grottkau, soldiers of the same division killed 14 prisoners, decapitated them, gouged out their eyes and then crushed them under tank tracks. In Schwartzengrund, again near Grottkau, others of that division raped women, including some nuns. Following that, they shot a peasant by the name of Kalert and disembowelled his wife, having first chopped off her hands, before shooting another peasant by the name of Krzysztof along with his son and a young girl.

At another estate, Eisdorf near Merzdorf, Soviet soldiers of the 5<sup>th</sup> Guards Army gouged out the eyes of an elderly married couple and then cut off their noses and fingers. The bodies of 11 brutally murdered Luftwaffe airmen were also found nearby.

The bodies of 21 German POWs killed by Red Army men of the 4<sup>th</sup> Tank Army were found in Güterstadt near Glogau (now Głogów, Poland).

Maria Heinke found her husband, dying but still just alive, in a Soviet guard post in the village of Heslicht near Striegau (now Strzegom, Poland). A medical examination found that his eyes had been gouged out, his tongue cut off, his arms broken in several places, and his skull smashed.

Soldiers of the 7<sup>th</sup> Guards Tank Corps raped women, killed 6-7 young girls, and shot 12 farmers in the village of Ossig, near Stiegau. They carried out similar atrocities in Hirtwisswaldau near Jauer (now Jawor, Poland).

The bodies of numerous civilians shot by Soviet soldiers of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army were found in Liegnitz (now Legnica, Poland).

After the town of Kostenblut near Neumarkt (now Sroda Slaska, Poland) was seized by units of 7<sup>th</sup> Guards tank corps, soldiers raped women (including a heavily pregnant mother of eight) and young girls. When a brother of the pregnant woman tried to protect her, he was shot. The soldiers also shot all the foreign POWs they found and also 6 men and 3 women.

The bodies of a man and woman were found not far from Skape lying beside the road to Bentschen (now Zbaszyn, Poland). The woman's stomach had been cut open and her unborn child ripped from her womb, with the hole being filled with mud and hay. Three Volkssturm soldiers had been hanged nearby.

In Kae, near Züllichau (now Sulechów), soldiers of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Army killed all the travellers in a cart, including women and children, by shooting them in the back of the head.

Red Army men looted and then set fire to the town of Neu-Bentschen (now Zbaszyn, Poland).

Red Army men of the 69<sup>th</sup> Army slaughtered by gunfire a column of civilians, including women and children, on the road to Frankfurt from Schwiebus (now Swiebodzin, Poland) in such numbers that "the bodies were left in piles".

In Reppen (now Rzepin, Poland) all the men in a passing column of carts were shot by soldiers of the 19<sup>th</sup> Army and the women raped.

On 9 February 1945, a strike group of the Vlasov Army commanded by Russian Liberation Army Colonel Sakharov with German support retook the villages of Neulewin and Kerstenbruch on a bend of the Oder. A German report on 15 March 1945 recorded that the population there had been "subjected to the most horrible abuses":

In Neulewin, the mayor and a Wehrmacht serviceman were found shot. The bodies of three women, two with their legs bound, were found in a barn where they had been raped and killed. A German woman lay shot at the door to her home. An elderly couple had been throttled. Nineteen villagers were found killed in Neubarnim. The landlady of the hotel was mutilated and killed, her legs bound with wire. Here, as in other villages, women and girls (and in Kerstenbruch even a 71-year old amputee lady) were raped. Here in these villages by the Oder, as everywhere else, these acts of criminal violence by Soviet forces were accompanied by looting and deliberate destruction...

There were relatively fewer such reports from Pomerania for February 1945 since fighting to break through here only began towards the end of the month. In Jedersdorf, soldiers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Guards Tank Army shot 10 women evacuees and a 15-year-old youngster, finishing off any that were still alive with bayonets or pistols...

In Groß Silber (now Sulibórz, Poland) Red Army men of the 7<sup>th</sup> Guards Cavalry Corps raped a young woman with a broomstick, cut off her left breast, and smashed her skull... This dreadful act was reported by the commander of a German engineering tank battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Tank Division.

In late February 1945, Soviet officers of the 1<sup>st</sup> (or 160<sup>th</sup>) Rifles Division at a location north of Konitz (now Chojnice, Poland) drove a group of children aged ten to twelve into a minefield to check it. German soldiers heard the pathetic cries of the children “who lay with blood flowing from their torn bodies” after being wounded by exploding mines.

Fierce fighting took place for East Prussia in February 1945 and atrocities were committed there continuously despite orders to the contrary:

In Landsberg in East Prussia (now Górowo Hławeckie, Poland) Soviet soldiers of the 331<sup>st</sup> Rifles Division drove the horrified populace, women and children included, into their cellars and then set fire to the houses, shooting any who dared try to escape in their panic. Many were burnt alive.

In a village on the road from Landsberg to Heilsberg (now Lidzbark Warminski, Poland), soldier of the same division held a group of women and girls, some in chains, for 6 days and nights in a locked cellar and gang raped them under the supervision of their officers. Irked by the desperate cries of the women, a pair of Soviet officers cut out the tongues of two of the women with a “curving-bladed knife.” German tank crewmen managed to rescue some of these women but 20 of them died from the abuse.

In Hanshage, not far from Preußisch Eylau (now Bagrationovsk, Kaliningrad, Russia) Red Army men of the 331<sup>st</sup> Rifles Division shot two mothers who were trying to stop the rape of their daughters and the father of another girl who had been dragged from the kitchen of their house to be raped by a Soviet officer. They then went on to kill a schoolteacher couple and their three children, a refugee girl, the landlord of a pub and a farmer, whose 21-year-old daughter they raped.

In Petershagen, another village not far from Preußisch Eylau, soldiers of the same division killed two men and a youth named Richard von Hoffman and viciously raped women and girls there.

At the start of February 1945, Soviet troops unexpectedly surged into Samland in former Königsberg (now Kaliningrad, Russia), seizing a large number of villages. A few days later, the Germans managed to break their hold and push back these advance parties. This brave mass advance on 19-20 February 1945 restored land and sea communications with Königsberg. Officers of Army Group Samland and Army Group North jointly with police investigated what had been done to the population—this information, at least for some of the villages, has survived the war.

For example, in the village of Georgenvald soldiers of the 39<sup>th</sup> Army killed four civilians and threw their bodies into the flames of their burning properties. In Kragau, soldiers of the 91<sup>st</sup> Guards Rifle Division raped and strangled two young women. In Medenau, soldiers of the 358<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division murdered no fewer than 11 civilians. The bodies of two murdered women, a child, and a baby were left in front of one of the houses. Elsewhere, two elderly men and a boy of fourteen were killed, as were two women and a girl after first being raped. The completely naked body of a 30-year-old woman with knife slashes to her breasts and her skull split, was left riddled with bullets.

In Groß Ladtkeim, soldiers of the 91<sup>st</sup> Guards Rifle Division shot two German POWs and four civilians, including the mayor and his wife. No trace was found of their 18-year-old daughter. However, the body of another young girl who had been raped and then had her breasts cut off and her eyes gouged out was found.

In Krattlau, soldiers of the 275<sup>th</sup> Guards Rifle Regiment of the 91<sup>st</sup> Guards Rifle Division killed six men and two German soldiers. All the women and girls, some as young as thirteen, were gang-raped uninterruptedly, being “subjected to sexual abuse by 6-8 soldiers for five or as many as eight times a day.”

In Annental, the Germans who had freed the town found the bodies of two women who had been raped (one on a dungheap) and then strangled.

It proved possible to carry out a detailed investigation in Germau, which had been taken by the 91<sup>st</sup> Guards Rifle Division of the 275<sup>th</sup> Guards Rifle Regiment. The murdered bodies of 21 men, women and children were found. Eleven more committed suicide after dreadful abuse. Fifteen wounded German soldiers were killed by having their skulls smashed, or in the case of one of them, by having a mouth organ driven down his throat. The dead bodies of two girls were found on the road from Germau to Palmnicken (now Yantarny, Kaliningrad, Russia)—they had both been shot in the head at point blank and one of them had her eyes gouged out.

The bodies of several hundred German soldiers, some of them mutilated beyond recognition, were found on the approaches to Metgethen, a resort suburb of Königsberg. There were bodies of men, women and children in practically every house and garden. The women had all clearly been raped. Many had their breasts cut off. Two 20-year-old girls had been torn in half by machine-gun fire. In the station there had stood at least one train full of refugees from Königsberg. The railway carriages were filled with the bodies “of viciously murdered refugees of all ages and sexes”. Metgethen’s tennis court was filled with German POWs and civilians who had been killed en masse with the help of explosives. Body parts lay scattered as far as 200 metres away from the large crater. On 27 February 1945, Captain Hermann Sommer of the staff of the fortress of Königsberg found a gravel quarry at a crossroads just outside Metgethen and in it the bodies of 12 completely naked women and children lying in a “messy heap”. They had been repeatedly slashed and stabbed with knives and bayonets.

Besides the individual bodies scattered all around the holiday village—of which there were hundreds—investigators also located several large earthen mounds under which it was discovered hundreds more (up to 3000 according to Captain Sommer and Professor Doctor Ipsen) had been buried. The investigation of the commission appointed by Infantry General Otto Lasch, fortress commander of Königsberg, was hindered by the fact that the Soviet soldiers had poured fuel on the bodies and tried to burn them. However, it was nonetheless possible to establish that the majority of the dead had not been shot but had more often been cruelly slaughtered with blunt objects and bayonet stabs.

West of Metgethen, the road all the way to Povajen was, according to Captain Sommer, lined with the bodies of civilians who had been killed either by shots to the head or “stripped completely naked and raped before being killed with bayonets or by battering with rifle butts”. Four naked women were crushed under the tracks of a Soviet tank at the crossroads just outside Povajen. Captain Sommer, jointly with Professor Ipsen, who was also a major, recorded a deliberately symbolic horror: a young woman was crucified in the church of Groß Heidekrug with two German soldiers hanged on either side of her.

All these atrocities were carried out just outside Königsberg, the provincial capital. The bestial atrocities committed by inflamed Soviet soldiers later, after the town was overrun on 7-9 April 1945 hardly bear description and even the diarists Dr. Deichelmann and Count von Lendorf found themselves inadequate to the task.

Here we shall break off from our kaleidoscope of horrors collected by J. Hoffmann from documents in the German archives and focus down onto a single event in just one town so as to see EXACTLY HOW such things went. In fact, we shall be looking not even at a town, really, but at a Silesian townlet—Striegau (now Strzegom, Poland)—of just 17 thousand inhabitants.

Unlike Nemmersdorf and the massacre there about which much has been written, Striegau is not particularly famous. The town is just one of the many German towns and villages in Saxony which by order of Stalin found itself in Poland after the Second World War. Before the war, the town was home to 17-20 thousand people but in February 1945 that had risen to an estimated 30 thousand due to the influx of refugees.

Strigau was occupied by Soviet soldiers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian Front on 13 February 1945. Four weeks later it fell back into German hands as a result of one of the Wehrmacht's last efforts to counter-attack.

When the Germans retook Striegau, they found there thirty (30!) living inhabitants and about two hundred bodies that had not been cleared away. It is estimated that 13-15 thousand fled the town before it was occupied by Soviet troops while the rest were driven from their homes after their entry, some to be sent for forced labour in the USSR. [In all, 267 thousand people, not counting POWs, were sent from Germany and the countries of Eastern Europe to the USSR for forced labour.]

German criminal investigators and members of the burial teams described what they saw in the now deserted town. Two German historians—the 'neo-fascists' Martin Bojanowski and Eric Bosdorf, as Comrade Rzheshovski called them—quote witnesses to the events in their 1951 book *Striegau. Schicksal einer schlesischen Stadt (Striegau: the fate of a Silesian town)*, which the German Federal Government's Committee used as a source of documentary evidence.

The description of the dead of Striegau was divided in two sections—mass finds and single finds—with accurate street names and house numbers and went like this:

- Item – body of a youth of approximately 14, crushed by a heavy vehicle and with a shot to the head
- Item – partially naked body of a woman on a sofa, two shots in the mouth
- Item – body of a 72-year-old woman, eyes gouged out
- Item – body of a woman shot and crushed under a trunk
- Item – body of an elderly woman, stripped from the waist down, shot and left dead in the pieces of broken and glass and china of her looted shop
- Item – three men, two women and a child of about two, shot
- Item – body of a woman aged 30-35, stripped from the waist down, nearby an older woman with her arms wrapped around a tree. Both shot.
- Item – bodies of three elderly women, stripped from the waist down and with signs of rape, shot; in the attic, body of an elderly man, hanging by his feet"
- Item – body of a man hanging from a door handle, in the attic two naked women with evidence of sadistic rape, shot; on sofa, body of boy of about twelve, shot; on bed, naked body of sadistically raped 18-year-old girl, shot
- Item – in cellar, bodies of married couple, eyes gouged out and shot

Rather amazingly, we have the details of a collective suicide in the attic of the house at N°5 Tziganstraße from one of the actual participants. This woman, who was 47 at the time, wrote a letter to the son of one of the other women and it was somehow preserved. Omitting for the reader's sake details of the endless gang-rapes they endured (Army General Tretyak's 'sexual encounters'), we can quote from the close of the letter:

Things became calmer around ten in the morning and we all went to the flat of Frau K, a young doctor; her 11-year-old daughter Treutel had also been raped. We boiled up something to eat. However, the next thing was that we heard some approaching steps and everything started all over again. We shouted and pleaded that they should let us be, but they knew no mercy. We spoke and agreed that we would hang ourselves. But some more of them came. When they left at last, we made our way as quickly as we could to the attic.

Frau R. hanged herself first. Young Frau K. first hanged her daughter Treutel and then did the same for herself. Your mother then did the same for your sister. That left just two of us, your mother and me. I asked her to make a noose for me but I was too jittery to do it myself. We hugged and then kicked over the waste bin we were standing on. But my rope was too long and my feet could reach the ground. I looked around me right and left and everyone was dead, hanging in a row. There was nothing left for me to do but get the noose off and...

Are the things quoted above true? Can one believe the documents, reports and witness statements adduced by only one side—the German? Where are the expert conclusions of independent and unprejudiced witnesses? Alas, there are none. Documents of Soviet military tribunals? Reports of Soviet military police? There is nothing of the sort either. Why should we believe what just one, clearly not disinterested, party has to say?

That is a good question, and one might say a hard one. It is a question that is also in line with modern thinking, with the principles and standards of modern states. States where the law rules supreme need lots of lawyers. Defence attorneys live by the saying “I do not care if my client is guilty or innocent of his charges but I will prove that there is no law covering that charge”.

Judging from the fact that a great many lawyers are wealthy, this is not a bad principle to follow. Yet killers and rapists far from always find themselves walking free out of court with an insolent grin on their faces. Fortunately, the paid defence lawyer is not the only participant in a trial and there are also juries and judges with their equal legal right to make their decisions *ex aequo et bono* (according to what is equitable and good) and with regard not just to the letter of the law but to their “inner persuasions” (which phrase, by the way, is readily found in the Russian Code of Criminal Procedure). It should be clear to anyone, in all conscience and fairness, that the monstrous crimes committed during the Second World War cannot always be dealt with by formal bureaucratic procedures. It might even be said that they can practically never be dealt with in that way. Did a ‘Commission of independent experts from neutral Switzerland’ establish the fact of the bestial killings of the residents of the Byelorussian village of Khatyn? Where are the documents? Where are the independent witnesses? Actually, some documents *did* survive. In the archives. These can therefore quite properly be called archival documents, two words that can have a magical effect on some readers. A report written by the commander of the 118<sup>th</sup> Police Battalion (raised in Kiev from Red Army prisoners) about the punitive operation carried out in Khatyn on 22 March 1943, describes the events as follows:

The village was surrounded and attacked from all sides. The enemy resisted stubbornly, firing from every dwelling, so that we were obliged to use heavy weaponry—anti-tank guns and heavy mortars. In the operation 34 bandits were killed and many villagers. Some of them perished in burning houses...

So here we have an archival document ‘proving’ that there was a battle, enemies, bandits, and the collateral, no doubt unintended, deaths of villagers in burning buildings. If we—rightly—consider formulations such as these to be a profanity of the truth, just as we would about attempts to cast doubt on the reality of the many other war crimes committed by Hitler’s troops and their accomplices on Soviet soil, then why should we apply a different standard when it comes to crimes where the victims were German women and children?

On 31 August 1941, the newspaper *Pravda* published an article by A.N. Tolstoy headed *The Face of Hitler’s Army*. Sixty-six years later, a book by A. Dyukov, references this article and quotes this:

At the entrance to a village near Byelostok, the bodies of five women were impaled on five sharpened stakes. They were naked, disembowelled, their breasts cut off. They had been

decapitated and their heads lay in a pool of blood together with the bodies of their murdered children.

So here we have a wartime article in *Pravda*, the author of which was so 'principled' that two years previously he had written in the same newspaper a description in practically identical terms of the brutalities of the Polish army reeling away from the attacks of the Wehrmacht (itself then an ally of the Soviet Union). Now if such an article can be considered a 'document', then why cannot thousands of other testimonies, given under oath by named and identified persons and published by a Federal Government Commission of democratic Germany, be given the same consideration?

Yes, each individual description of a war crime may, if fully checked, turn out to contain inaccuracies, exaggerations, or even an invention—not that such checks will, in the overwhelming majority of cases, be even remotely possible to carry out in any legally satisfactory way. At the same time, the totality of events as recorded in the 'archive' of popular memory, cannot but be true.

Incidentally, we should not think that no attempts were made to check (or rather debunk at any price) reports of the bestial reprisals against the German populace. They were—and with great pomp and circumstance to boot! For example, in 2008 Yauza-EKSMO publishers issued a collection of articles under the title *Nothing to Repent* (a strange call for a country where three-quarters of the population claim, according to recent social surveys, to be Russian Orthodox believers). In the introduction to this book A. Dyukov, whom I have already mentioned, writes—or rather, screams:

They are trying to take the Great Victory away from us. We are being told that Victory brought slavery, that Soviet soldiers raped Germany, that there is nothing left for Russia to do but pay up and repent, repent and pay up, making us an object of international politics instead of its subject.

Strangely, Mr Dyukov fails to notice that democratic Germany has been paying and repenting and is nonetheless one of the most influential subjects of world politics. He continues:

The time is up. If we do not want our grandfathers and great-grandfathers to be labelled as murderers, drunkards, and looters, if we do not want our children to be taught to spit on the graves of their ancestors...

This opening blast to the collection is followed by an article with the title *Nemmersdorf: the truth and the propaganda* by I. Petrov. And what is the truth according to him? Petrov begins his article with an open acknowledgement: "Let me say first that the information available today leaves no doubt about civilians having been killed at Nemmersdorf." He then goes on to admit another strange and most regrettable fact: "If there do indeed exist in archives anywhere reports by special investigators, historians have so far not had access to them." We should note that "so far" actually means 'even after 64 years have elapsed'. So what is this long article about? This awkward attempt to expose things consists of a search for small inaccuracies, discrepancies and inconsistencies in the available German documents and witness statements:

Lieutenant Zirn saw 7 murdered civilians, Corporal Scheible saw 11; only Major Braumüller speaks of 15... In not one of these reports is there any mention of the shot to the right eye, which according to the Hinrich's reports, was the cause of death of one of the girls... No-one saw the man nailed to a door; the conclusion is reached on the basis of wounds to his hands and the words of a severely wounded witness who was then taken away and later never identified...

Of course there are going to be inconsistencies of this kind. In fact there should be many, given the circumstances and how those involved in those tragedies acted. This writer's main 'achievement' is

to reach the assertion that “only 26 civilians” were murdered in Nemmersdorf and the figure of 70 given by historians in the West is the result of adding to that number those killed in farms and estates around Nemmersdorf. We should not repent of the murder of civilians because... Because we should—he claims—, even now in 2008, bear in mind what Dr. Goebbels had to say about such things:

Goebbels’ propaganda needed a scarecrow for the population of the Reich’s eastern provinces and Soviet soldiers killing old men, women and children were just what was needed. The propagandists themselves painted in most of the dreadful colours and bloody details...”

The reluctance to call facts by their names can sometimes get quite farcical. For example, on 12 January 2009, the Russian website infox.ru posted a report that a mass grave had been found during construction work in the Prussian town of Marienburg (now Malbork, Poland). Over 1800 bodies, including those of women and children, had been buried, naked, and without shoes, belts, glasses, or gold teeth. The source article in the British newspaper *The Guardian* was published under the headline *Remains of 1,800 German civilians found in wartime mass grave* with the subtitle *Workers unearth bodies of men, women and children believed to have been killed as Red Army captured town at the end of the second world war*. It is scarcely to be believed that no proper translator was to be found in the great city of Moscow capable of understanding this. Yet the headline as translated on this Russian website read: “Mass grave of German soldiers found in Poland” while the sub-heading even more curiously said: “Experts believe these could be Polish citizens killed with Soviet weapons.”

Times change, however. In 2008, for instance, another article reported matters without any reservations or equivocations, stating the following monstrous facts outright:

Fourteen million Germans were turned out of their homes, of whom only 12 million made it back to Germany alive... The expulsion of the Germans from Eastern Europe was accompanied by large-scale violence... Remaining Germans were herded into concentration camps. Adults were used for forced labour. In the winter of 1945-46, the death rate in the camps reached 50%. For example, in the Potulice camp (previously the German concentration camp know as Lebrechtsdorf) over half of those incarcerated there between 1947 and 1949 died of hunger, illness and maltreatment by the guards... One of the most horrific instances took place in the night of 18-19 June in the town of Prerau (now Prerov) when 256 Germans, including 120 women and 74 children, were shot. The oldest to die in this way was 80 and the youngest eight months...

This article, entitled *Expelled and Killed*, was, fairly astoundingly, published, not in some laughable leaflet printed by ‘liberal hyenas milling at the gates of Western embassies’ but by the entirely respectable, expensive and serious periodical *The Expert* (Issue 30, 28 July 2008), whose editors position it as “one of the most influential weekly analytic journals in Russia with a reputation as the undoubted leader in business magazines”. The managing director of the *Expert* media group, Mr Fadeyev is also a director of the United-Russia-affiliated Institute of Social Development and chairman of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation.

Most astonishing of all about the publication of this article is that there was no outcry. Not a peep! Neither Comrade General Gareyev, who never heard so much as a whisper about there having been any rapes, nor Comrade Rzheshesky, who never fails to demand to be shown “properly documented materials before setting out accusations of such seriousness”. Furthermore, Comrade Dyukov failed to make an appearance with his worries about Russian having to “pay up and repent...”

The answer to this conundrum is very simple and comes in 3 letters – SDI, Strategic Defence Initiative.

After our former Warsaw Pact allies left and not only joined NATO but allowed US missile defence systems to be installed in their countries, some Russian historians and journalists suddenly recovered their memories. All of a sudden, old and well-known facts came back to them and they set off in a hurry to provide Poland and Czechia with some words to the wise about some episodes in their post-war history.

The article in *The Expert* was written in the Soviet and Russian style known as ‘balanced and politically restrained’. The main emphasis was given to the expulsion of the German population from Czechia and the parts of eastern Germany transferred to Poland with only a tiny excursion devoted to events in Hungary and Romania (no American missile defences had been built there and none seemed planned). Not a word was said about Yugoslavia (“brotherly Serbia standing firm against NATO penetration”) where in 1944-45 sixty-nine thousand out of 200 thousand Germans who had not managed to flee the country were killed. It goes without saying that *The Expert* most certainly did not have anything to say about anything happening in the towns and villages in the territories of East Prussia and Pomerania transferred to the Soviet Union; did not have anything to say about Comrade Stalin bearing a certain responsibility for what happened Soviet-occupied Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia; did not have anything to say about how the puppet Polish Provisional Government would not have dared without Moscow’s permission to move three chairs from one corner of the room to another in their building let alone three million Germans...

Having reached the end of my sorry list of facts regarding the mass expulsion and mass murder of German populations, I will now admit to the reader that I indulged in not one, but three deceptions: when reproducing quotes from J. Hoffman’s book, I deliberately inserted three passages from the memoirs of L. Ryabichev (a senior lieutenant who came to the front in December 1942, fought all the way to Prague, and was awarded the Order of the Red Star and other medals). His memoirs were published in the journal *Znamya*, issue 2, 2005 and his accounts mirror J. Hoffman’s practically word for word. Plagiarism (or unconscious repetition) cannot be suspected: Hoffman died three years before Ryabichev’s memoirs were published but his book *Stalin’s War of Extermination* was only published in Russian translation in 2006.

The following excerpt from a report presented on 29 March 1945 by N. Mikhailov, a secretary of the Central Committee of the Komsomol to the Secretary of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) G. Malenkov, could be inserted seamlessly into Hoffman’s book:

On the night of 23-24 February, a group of about 35 officers and cadets, all drunk, entered the farmstead of Grutenneng, surrounded the farmhouse and set up machine guns which they fired, wounding a Red Army man who was guarding the location. They then began an organised gang rape of the girls and women and the house...”

However, to have inserted this particular quote in my text would have been an impermissible subterfuge because Mikhailov’s report was not about atrocities committed against the German civilian population but about “bestial and vile treatment of liberated Soviet girls and women.” Machine pistols in hand, this “group of 35 officers and cadets” had stormed a temporary shelter set up for Ostarbeiters liberated from Nazi servitude.

I am afraid that I know what a fair proportion of my readers are now awaiting with bated breath. I am sorry to say to them that they will be disappointed as that is not on the cards. There are no, absolutely no, justifications for the premeditated and bestial murders of women and children. And it is sad that in these days of oil at \$147 per barrel ‘raising Russia from its knees’, the consciences of

many of my fellow-citizens have been so poisoned that they are incapable of understanding what an insult it is to the memories of our soldiers who fell in the Great Patriotic War to indulge in rationalisations along the lines of “Hitler’s forces also killed women and children.”

This is not up for discussion and I will waste no time on empty moralising. Decent people will understand me and I will never be able to convert the feral. For those who are not hopelessly lost, let me just quote a few lines from Ilya Ehrenburg’s 14 March 1945 article in the newspaper *Red Star*. He explains with accessible clarity the difference between animal viciousness and the noble hatred of the liberating soldier may have for his enemy.

I received a letter yesterday from a man who is no longer with us. There’s even a bloodstain on the notepaper. This officer, Boris Antonovich Kurilko, died on German soil, defending the freedom and honour of our Motherland. His letter was sent to me by his comrades and I would like Comrade Kurilko’s words to touch my readers in the same way that they touched me. This is what this Red Army officer wrote on the eve of his death:

“The flames of hatred kept us going in our hardest days. Now we are in Germany. Our hatred will carry us all the way to Berlin. The Germans think that we are going to act on their soil as they acted on ours. We will be harsh but fair and never, never, will our people demean themselves...”

My heart fills with pride as I hold this sheet of paper: it is stained with the blood of a hero and the words on it, noble and beautiful, are written in blood. We will beat fascism not just on the battlefield, we will beat it in a moral duel between good and evil... Our hatred is a noble feeling. It demands justice and not revenge, reprisals, or brutality... The Soviet warrior has entered Germany not for seizures, loot, and concubines but for justice... The defender of Stalingrad, the soldier from Yelnya, Rzhev or Sevastopol, is above the Germans, ‘above’ not in bloodline (let’s leave offensive Arianism and its rancid ideas out of this), but above by his conscience, principles and heart. He despises the Germans, despises their tinsel, their possessions, their flags, their newspapers, their women, their arrogance of yesterday and their obsequiousness of today. He has come not as an avenger; he has come as a judge...

Another subject that many think should not be left out of the spotlight is the Anglo-American bombing of Germany. The mass bombing strategy, and in particular the night area bombing of towns, dealt death to hundreds of thousands of unarmed German men, women and children. Millions were left without homes or property and magnificent historical and architectural treasures were pounded to dust. I will not, however, be discussing these bombings in this article. This is not just because the strategic bombing of Germany was carried out by the allies with at the very least the full consent and approval of the Soviet party. (As for the ill-famed bombing of Dresden, *that* was done in direct response to Stalin’s demands, when at Yalta he accused his counterparts of a deliberate unwillingness to destroy eastern Germany’s transport network.)

The strategic bombing of German towns was a matter of war. Allied aviation destroyed factories making weapons for Hitler, damaged railway stations from which Hitler’s troops travelled, and killed and terrorised German workers (some of them possibly not entirely willing) producing things for Hitler. The Germans were advised of what they had to do in order for the bombings to stop: they, being the aggressors, had to declare their complete and unconditional surrender. The Western allies kept their word in this matter: not a single bomb fell on any German town after the surrender was signed. Furthermore, the allies did not, as far as I am aware, bomb or blow up a single German town after they had taken it, even though they had supplies enough to do so and might have felt that this was ‘payback for Coventry’. To the East, brutal revenge on the civilian population in the areas controlled by the Red Army began immediately after armed resistance had been suppressed and the location seized.

Let me say it again: there can never be a justification for crimes against humanity and there can be no statute of limitations on them. My aim in writing this article is not to show up as a late moraliser but to study the real causes that produced these tragic and shameful effects in Germany. This is a search for reasons, not justifications. And the task, as I am coming to see, is not an easy one.

A desire to take revenge for the monstrous deeds of the invaders on Soviet soil was, of course, one part of the explanation. However, not all wishes can always be made to come true and commanders do not accede to or approve every wish of the soldiers under them. Furthermore, every person is not just externally controlled but also has self-control. I may be an incorrigible idealist, but I find it hard to believe that a normal Russian called up into the army from his village near Smolensk, a man who was baptised in childhood and brought up in a working family, could be capable of nailing German children's tongues to a table or crucifying girls on the altar of a church. A number of the ethnicities populating the multinational Soviet Union would recollect their traditions of blood feud, but I have never heard of a tradition that incorporated the gang rape of the wives and daughters of the 'blood enemy'. It seems to me that anyone who allows that soldiers of the Red Army were thereby implementing their feelings of hatred for the enemy is actually out-Goebbelsing Goebbels and his concept of the "Asiatic Bolshevik hordes".

All pathos aside, we should note the indubitable, verifiable and at the same time, in view of the foregoing, strange fact that German prisoners in the Soviet rear were not shot, tortured, nailed to barn doors, or run over with bulldozers. The attitude of the civilian population in the rear to German prisoners was surprising tolerant. To say this is not 'Red propaganda' but to report a reality known to millions of contemporaries.

Being a prisoner in the Soviet Union was not, of course, to be in a holiday camp. The prisoners were used for forced heavy labour. They had to live in a cold climate that was new to them and in much the same conditions of hunger and deprivation that the Soviet population did. When one considers that many of the German soldiers were wounded, frostbitten, and ill when taken prisoner, the harsh conditions in which they were kept led to a very high death rate: even the most modest official estimates have it that over 450 thousand German soldiers and officers died in Soviet captivity.

Whilst recognising this far from happy truth, we should also not ignore that fact that cases of premeditated and/or sadistic murders of German prisoners were exceedingly rare, even in the prison camps nearest to the front line. If any such took place in the POW camps in the rear, they would have been rarer still and totally out of the ordinary. German prisoners working on building sites and in mines received a ration of 600 grammes of bread (the standard ration of a Soviet worker and more than that of "non-working dependents"). German soldiers who returned home have recounted how compassionate Russian women sometimes gifted food to their disarmed and helpless enemies. Hundreds of thousands of German prisoners were given life-saving professional medical treatment in Soviet military hospitals.

Acknowledging that normal human logic disappears in a war, it is still difficult to conceive how in the Soviet rear the attitude towards the disarmed German soldiers (many with hands stained with the blood of Soviet citizens) was humane while in Germany a "spontaneous eruption" of wild hatred for German women and children sprung forth for some inexplicable reason in the ranks of the army in the last months of the war.

One might start by wondering, at least as a working hypothesis, if this thirst for revenge that overcame the soldiers of the Red Army when they crossed the frontier into Germany was not the sole and perhaps not the most important of a number of reasons for the dreadful deeds done on German soil.

Other very weighty factors are easy to discern. The first of these, by virtue of its obvious existence even if it is not the most important, was the catastrophic collapse of military discipline in the Red Army. Military discipline does not just suddenly collapse out of nowhere and in this case it came about because the commanders were themselves openly looting on a mass scale.

Attempts to discuss the subject of violence done to the civilian population of Germany are hurriedly interrupted by shouts that “Soviet commanders issued order after order against...” And that is entirely true: there were ‘orders after orders’ on the matter and we shall look into this shortly.

In order, however, to have a real picture of what was happening there, I think it far more important to quote, not these multiple orders in which looters were threatened with dreadful punishment up to and including the firing squad, but this now widely-known report drawn up after the search of the dacha of Marshal Zhukov, the former Commander in Chief of the Soviet Occupation Forces and the man known as ‘the Victory Marshal’:

Two rooms of the dacha were used as storerooms where a vast quantity of goods of various kind and valuables was kept. For example, woollen cloth, silk, brocade, velvet, panne velvet, and other cloth, to a total length of 4000 metres; 323 fur pelts (sable, monkey, fox, seal, karakul); prime kid leather, 35 skins; large and valuable carpets and tapestries taken from Potsdam and other castles and mansions in Germany, 44 pieces; [...] valuable classical paintings, large, in gilt frames, totalling 55 pieces, of which some were hung in various rooms of the dacha and other held in the storerooms; expensive tableware (decorated porcelain and crystal), and tea sets, 7 large trunks; silver cutlery and tea sets, 2 boxes; richly decorated and veneered accordions, 8 pieces; bespoke hunting guns from Holland & Holland and other makers, to a total of 20 pieces...

All the furnishings, from furniture, carpets, crockery, decorations, including the curtains on the windows were of foreign origin, mainly German. Not a single object in the dacha was found to be Soviet-made except for the carpet runners leading to the front door. The bookshelves held not a single Soviet-printed book but were filled with a large number of beautifully bound books with gold-embossed titles, all in German. On entering the house, it was difficult to imagine one was in Moscow and not in Germany...

This protocol was signed Abakumov, USSR Minister of State Security, on 10 January 1948. On 20 January 1948, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) “having heard the report of the commission, composed of Comrades Zhdanov, Bulganin, Kuznetsov, and Shkiryatov”, passed a special ruling “On Com. G.K.Zhukov” in which it noted, in particular that

Zhukov’s subordinates, in order to find favour with him, collected paintings and other valuables in palaces and mansions, broke open the safe of a jewellery shop in the town of Łódz [in ‘liberated’ Poland, not Germany] and removed the contents, and so on. As a result, Zhukov appropriated up to seventy pieces of valuable gold jewellery (necklaces and rings with precious stones, watches, diamond earrings, bracelets, broaches etc), up to 740 pieces of silver cutlery and silver tableware, along with another 30 kilograms of various silver articles...” (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, Fund 17, Inventory 3, File 2198, Sheets 28-29).

The most important thing for us to note is the reference to Zhukov’s subordinates. The Marshal in command of the front was of course not going personally to dig through the ruins of palaces and mansions; he had colonels from his suite to do that for him. Next, these colonels were not going personally to blow up safes in jewellery shops and not going to collect furs, be they monkey fur or karakul. The actual work was given to majors and captains who took along—for the maintenance of order and security—a platoon of submachine gunners, themselves commanded by a lieutenant, who

in turn had a driver for his Willis jeep, an acting sergeant who was nobody's fool. Sadly for acting sergeants, though, any diamond earrings had to be handed in to their commanders but a few driblets and drabs could nonetheless get lost at the bottom of their pockets... This particular chain of logic is very clearly expressed in the Russian saying "fish rot from the head down".

And that is very true: the rot starts at the top. If their senior commanders were behaving that way, then junior sergeants were going to simply ignore all and every order coming down to them. Official orders were not going to change much when Army Regulations had been unofficially replaced by the unwritten rules of another game.

It was at this point that the Red Army began to change rapidly. It even changed in external appearance:

The river of soldiers flowing from East to West looked as colourful as a painting. Mud-spattered tanks with colourful carpets slung over them spewed smoke as they advanced, their grimy crews sitting on top of them in their khaki jackets, now black with the oil that had soaked into them. One would pull a bottle out from under this jacket and take a slug, head thrown back, before passing it on to his neighbour, screeching a song as loud as possible over the roar of the engine and the clanking of the caterpillar tracks.

The gunner's mate, whose task it is to sit on the ammunition cases at the back of the tank and have his bones shaken, has placed silk-covered soft cushions taken from a sofa all over them. He is feeling fine, blasting a tune on a German harmonica or pulling the bellows of an accordion decorated with wood veneer and silver inlay.

Mixed into the stream of tanks, guns, trucks, and trailers, the eye is not infrequently caught by a nobleman's grand old antique carriage, with glistening paintwork and shiny brass lamps or a long landau with lacquered panels. They now carried officers and soldiers, in their greatcoats and shoulder straps, guns slung over their shoulders, yet wearing top hats and twirling umbrellas...

The sight was truly colourful, J. Hoffman continues:

The Red Army was becoming more feral by the day... Soviet soldiers stopped wearing their uniform caps and put on Napoleonic tricornered hats, carried walking canes, umbrellas, rubber raincoats and in this way took on ever more visibly the appearance of robbers and marauders.

Can one believe this "German neo-fascist historian"? One can and one should, because a little further on Hoffman quotes from Soviet military orders preserved in German archives—for example, Order N°006 of the Military Council of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Byelorussian Front of 22 January 1945 which states:

...besides robberies, looting, and arson, we are encountering mass drunkenness... Vehicles are so overloaded with all sorts of household goods, seized food, and civilian clothes that they becoming a hindrance to the troops, reducing their mobility and the effectiveness of the tank units."

Carriages, top hats, and umbrellas also get a mention in the Order of Marshal I.S. Konev, CiC of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian Front and also notes that a review had found tanks so loaded with looted goods that there was no room left in them for their crews.

Ubiquitous looting became so habitual and commonplace that even an official report of the Red Army Chief Directorate of War Trophies listed as "war trophies" 60 thousand pianos, 460 thousand radios, 190 thousand carpets, 940 thousand items of furniture, and 260 thousand wall and

grandfather clocks. As for wrist and pocket watches, the Red Army developed a craze for them and there is no counting the number of these that were taken.

Military discipline is, in one way, rather like pregnancy—it is either there or it is not. There is no halfway state. So if for an army it has become ‘permissible’ to break down doors with rifle butts, rush into houses, tear earrings from the ears of terrified women, turn everything in the house upside down in a search for those damn watches and for drink, then a very thin line separates those actions in ‘revenge for the abuse of the land of the Soviets’ from the next steps on that course. Orders? Yes, orders were issued. And yes, sometimes, by some strange luck of the draw, a severe punishment could be handed out. One such occasion is colourfully described in M.M. Koryakov’s autobiographical memoir already quoted from above. The battle to maintain discipline went like this:

The soldier was standing to attention in front of the colonel, a black ladies’ hat adorned with flowers and fruit pushed back on his head. The carriage which the soldier was dragging from some Silesian landowner’s mansion held the yellow carcass of a pig and had freshly-killed chickens hanging from its lamps.

“You wanted a chicken dinner? Pork chops? Our Soviet food isn’t good enough for you?” shouted the colonel and slapped his face with his hand in a kid glove. “Haven’t you been read Comrade Stalin’s order of 19 January?”

“Yes, I have, Comrade colonel,” replies the soldier and goes pale.

“And what about the order of the front commander? Have you been read that?”

“Yes, I have, Comrade colonel.”

“So what the f—ing hell do you think you’re doing!” yells the colonel, looking round with drunken, bulging eyes for something to do to the soldier. His glance falls on one of the chickens hanging by a string from a lamp of the carriage. Grabbing it by the neck, he pulls it free and swings it with full force across the soldier’s face.

The colonel was drunk. In his jeep, a large, rope-wound flask stands on the carpet-covered seat. Walking unsteadily, holding his legs wide, he returns to his jeep and, as he climbs back in, shouts back to the soldier:

“I’ll teach you to respect Comrade Stalin’s order! I’ll teach you!”

Truth to tell, this colonel was actually very lucky—he was drunk and the soldier was sober. In “subjugated Germany” it was better to stay well away from drunken Soviet soldiers. Here is Koryakov, a captain who saw action from Moscow to Silesia, again:

I went through the most frightening night of my life on Wilhemstrasse in Bunzlau [now Bolesławiec, Poland]. Not under bombing, like I experienced, say, in Volyn, when the town of Sarny was flattened in a single night, nor on the front line under fire from German heavy mortars, have I ever experienced such fear as I did that night in this quiet German neighbourhood... We lay down to sleep at ten in the evening. The locks on the door had been busted, so we pushed a table and some coal buckets up against it. No more than half an hour later, the door shook and our barricade was pushed aside... Tank crew men... Six of them. Not just rank and file but officers too. Pistols in hand, out of their holsters. They dashed up the stairs without paying the slightest bit of attention to me. From above us, through the ceiling, came the cries of women and the sound of children crying. Worried, I started to get my kit on. The old couple and the girl with whom I was sharing the room begged me not to go up, saying I would be killed. That had happened to an officer from the town commander’s office the night before, when he tried to stop some violence. We spent

the night listening in horror to the unfortunate women's cries and the whimpering of the children as heavy soldier's boots stomped, stomped about above our heads..."

M. Koryakov's recollections are fully matched by documents in the German military archives. For instance, on 10 February 1945, a certain Captain B., commander of the Soviet 510<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment of the 154<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, went over to the enemy. This was rather strange behaviour, particularly for the last weeks of the war, and the explanation he gave for it was that he had shot two of his subordinates whom he had caught engaged in the gang rape of a German girl and that "he could no longer bear to see how Red Army soldiers were treating the civilian population." When being questioned, a second lieutenant of the 287<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division told how a number of officers from his unit had been shot by enraged Red Army men when they had tried to stop the abuse of civilians. On the other hand, Captain E., who was in command of a battalion of the 4<sup>th</sup> Guards Tank Corps, on 2 February 1945 shot one of his men who was trying to defend a woman Captain E. was in the process of raping. In the village of Germau, which had been occupied by units of the 91<sup>st</sup> Guards Rifle Division, the Soviet military commandant, with a view to saving the German women there from abuse, gathered them in a church which he placed under armed guard, instructing the guards to fire on Red Army soldiers if the need arose...

One of the reasons for the increase in the bestiality of the Red Army was the radical change in its composition and the 'quality' of the incoming new recruits. Russia may be a large country but she could not endlessly feed her long war with millions of young men. There were no fewer than 5 million soldiers in the Armed Forces of the USSR at the start of the war. Ten million more were mobilised by the 22 June 1941 edict of the Præsidium of the Armed Forces of the USSR. Another 4 million were raised by the State Committee for Defence's decree of 11 August 1941. In the autumn of 1941, men born in 1890—i.e. 50-year-olds—became subject to call-up. Another 2 million enlisted in the army in the so-called 'volunteer mobilisation'.

The waves of mobilisation in 1941 swallowed every last one of the reserves who had undergone proper military training in the years leading up to the war. The hungry monster, however, demanded more and more blood. Another 700 thousand were mobilised between 1 January and 1 March 1942. Many millions of men were of course left in the rear, but 20<sup>th</sup> century armies do not fight and win using sticks and stones. The home front needed at least five workers and farmers producing food and manufacturing tanks, cannon, and aircraft to back up each and every soldier and provide the fighting men with the ammunition, fuel, and spares these mountains of military equipment required.

By the second half of 1944, when the advancing Red Army reached the frontiers of Germany and her allies, practically none of the Young Communist volunteers who had besieged the army recruitment offices in June 1941 wanting to join the war, were left. The saying "he fought the war from the river Bug to the Volga and from the Volga to the Elbe" may be a nice newspaper cliché but anyone to whom that can really be applied must have been born in a caul. The reality of survival was five months for infantry, 11 months in the tank regiments. Those are the merciless statistics. That was how long it took for one soldier to become lost in action (dead or missing) or out of action by reason of wounds, illness, or frostbite. These, furthermore, are the numbers for 1943-45 and do not take into account the catastrophic losses of the first year of the war!

Nonetheless, by late 1944, the acting army alone numbered 6.7 million servicemen (i.e. not counting men in the rear, trainees, transport and medical units, and Armed Forces office staff). So where did they come from?

Boys of under the age of enlistment had reached it as the war went on. These boys had grown up, thin and hungry, to all intents and purposes on their own (father at the front, mother from dawn to

dusk in the factory), in their hard neighbourhoods, criminalised by war. Throughout the war, there was also a 'special reserve' that could be called up from the Gulag, although only criminals were taken since those sentenced under the political Article 58 were not deemed to be sufficiently reliable. These dregs were, however, all used up earlier. In the last year of the war recruits in the main came from the territories of the western USSR liberated from German occupation. And the numbers were good: 1.5 million men born 1905-1918 who had not come under the first mobilisation (having avoided recruitment or not been enlisted because the recruitment office had disappeared before it had time to send out call-up papers); 3.6 million men born 1890-1904 who were left behind or had remained in the occupied territories at the time of the 2nd mobilisation wave in August 1941. We do not know the number of youths who reached call-up age by 1944. Finally, there were also 1-1.5 million men left behind in those territories by the encirclements who had deserted, or who had fallen behind from the units. These numbers were all in theory to be found there and should have been arriving at the enlistment offices re-established after the return of the Red Army.

In reality, it was all rather more complicated. Surviving three years of occupation was no easy matter for a man of draft age. He would raise too many questions for the German authorities. If he was a former Red Army serviceman, why was he not in a POW camp? If he was a spy for the partisans, why was he not under arrest? Was he a draft evader or had he been left behind the lines by the NKVD to organise sabotage? Such people had to prove their loyalty to the new order.

And this they did, each in their own way. Half a million Soviet citizens worked on the railways—those very railways that Soviet partisans regularly blew up. Hundreds of thousands went to serve in German-organised police battalions, Cossack troops, local self-defence units, and all sorts of other armed 'national' outfits. Thus, over 10 thousand men fought for B. Kaminsky's infamous Russian People's Liberation Army (later reformed as the 29<sup>th</sup> SS Division) against the partisans in the Bryansk district.

While the numbers who fought, weapons in hand, for the Nazis, were relatively small, a far greater number of Soviet people found themselves able to ingratiate themselves in lesser ways: one would quietly denounce a neighbour, another would help the Germans find a Jewish family hiding in a cellar. Others betrayed and denounced no-one but on the contrary risked life and limb to rob empty dwellings and sometimes got into fierce fights with other looters.

Life (if it can be called that) under the German occupation quickly taught one to forget one's patriotic songs such as Katyusha and other wonderful Soviet tunes. The new rules were simple: dog eats dog, you today and me tomorrow. Good Soviets got their dialectics from elsewhere than Hegel: in mid-1943, the police and other units cooperating with the Germans began defecting *en masse* to the partisans. And *en masse* means *en masse*: the 7000-strong 1<sup>st</sup> Russian People's Brigade of the SS under the command of Gil-Rodionov suddenly became the 1<sup>st</sup> Anti-Fascist Partisan Brigade. Indeed, by summer 1944, fully one quarter of the partisans in Byelorussia were made up of former 'politsai' and Wehrmacht 'volunteers'.

It would be too a great a simplification of the true picture to say that the remaining three quarters spent all their time derailing German trains. Without going into a precise count, suffice it to say that a number of 'partisan units' spent the whole war in what was termed 'self-provisioning', which is to say robbing the local population. Some particularly enterprising ones even arranged for the regular collection of grain from the local villages, distilled industrial quantities of moonshine from it, and controlled the market for it by force of arms...

All these motley people would, after being cursorily checked by the security services, be handed over to the enlistment offices. Former 'politsais', former deserters, former partisans, and plain-and-simple bandits would have their heads shorn, a Red Army uniform thrown on them, and be sent off

to the front. I cannot say incontestably that some of the Soviet soldiers who committed the outrages in Nemmersdorf or Strigau (and in a hundred other towns and villages in Germany) were butchers in switched uniforms who had previously served in the 118<sup>th</sup> Police battalion that set fire to Khatyn and its inhabitants. But it hardly matters if it was that battalion or some other.

Maybe 5% of the total number of servicemen of 1944 were former butchers, rats, and marauders. Maybe it was 55%. Historians will need to verify this, but it is of no great import for the purposes of this article. Whatever was the case, the fact remains that tens (or perhaps hundreds) of thousands of moral degenerates, without any sense of decency and with a habit of sadistic violence, were injected into the Red Army. Given the right conditions, that would be enough to account for the bloody outrages described here. It is not the percentage that matters—social psychology has shown long ago that crowd behaviour is generally conditioned by a minority of 5-10%—but the ‘conditions’. In some situations, these scum will try to keep quiet as a whisper but in others they will actively force their criminal outlook on the majority.

This is where we at last come to the main issue: to the question of who set the tasks and who set the rules; to the fact that no serious discussion of the history of the war can be had without the mention of one main person—Comrade Stalin. Supreme Commander Generalissimus Stalin bears personal responsibility for the war crimes committed in Germany, first and foremost due to the obvious and unquestionable rule that the commander is responsible for the actions of his subordinates. I trust that all those who like to say “Stalin won the war” will immediately signify their agreement with this. Because, if he did win the war all by himself, then it is he who should be tried for these war crimes for which there is no statute of limitations...

Even without that, however, there are serious reasons to believe that Stalin and his adjutants criminally premeditated the crimes and brutal atrocities committed against the civilian population of Germany. What at first sight may appear to be the explosion of a blind blizzard of revenge may actually have been a cynically pre-planned and mercenary operation.

Wasting no further words, let us look at the stenogram of the talks of the Big Three in Potsdam.

#### Meeting five, Saturday 21 July 1945:

STALIN

The American and British governments have proposed several times that Polish administration not be permitted in the western districts until the question of Poland's western frontier is finally settled. We were unable to implement these proposals because the German population was making its way westward along with the German forces...

TRUMAN

Determining future frontiers is a matter for the peace conference.

STALIN

The serious problem with restoring a German administration in these parts is that they [the Germans] have all fled.

TRUMAN

I assume that we will be able to reach agreement on Poland's future frontiers but what concerns me now is the question of these territories while they are under occupation.

STALIN

On paper these territories pertain to the German state, but they are now in fact Polish ones since there is no longer a German population in them.

TRUMAN

Nine million Germans. That is a lot of people.

STALIN

They have all fled.

CHURCHILL

One comment about what Generalissimus Stalin has said about all the Germans leaving these territories. We have other information that two to two-and-a-half million remain there. This situation must be looked at.

STALIN

As a result of the war, practically none of those eight million Germans remain... When we entered the area being considered for potential addition to Polish territory, there were no Germans left in it. That is how things went...

CHURCHILL

The immediate resettlement of eight million people is not something that I can support. Resettlement on such a scale will be too great a strain on my country... If the German population is not provided with a sufficient quantity of food, conditions in our zone of occupation will be like those in a concentration camp but on an even grander scale.

STALIN

But you can buy grain from Poland.

CHURCHILL

We do not think that those areas are Polish territory.

STALIN

It is Poles who are living there and it is they who have sown the fields. We cannot ask the Poles who have sown their crops to hand their harvest over to the Germans.

TRUMAN

I am getting the impression that the transfer of a large part of Germany to the Poles is being presented as a fait accompli... I do not think the Poles have the right to take possession of this part of Germany, thus removing it from the German economy...

On the next day, 22 June 1945, the deceived allies attempted a diplomatic counterattack. But Stalin stood firm:

CHURCHILL

Firstly, we agreed that the frontier would be drawn only after a peace settlement. Secondly, there will be no great advantage to Poland from taking over such a large piece of German territory. Thirdly, this will disorganise Germany's economic structure and put a serious overload on the occupations forces. Fourthly, accepting the resettlement of such large numbers of people will place a very great moral responsibility on us. I must say that I think it is wrong to expel eight and half to nine million people. Fifthly, we do not actually have any clear numbers. Our information is that there are between eight and nine million people there. The Soviet delegations insists that they have already left. This matter needs to be clarified...

STALIN

There are not eight, or six, or even three million people there. There was mass mobilisation in the area and many died. Very few Germans were left and they all fled before the Red Army...

So what what the high contracting parties arguing about?

One thing of which one could never suspect Comrade Stalin was love for Poland or for Poles. The opposite was the case and Comrade Stalin nursed a special, barely concealed hatred for 'bourgeois

Poland', as it was without exception called in the Soviet press. The Central Committee's secret edicts and newspaper propaganda never failed to find 'Polish agents' as the prime source of all sorts of wickedness. A special fate was reserved for Polish communists in the purges of 1937-38: Stalin did not just send the leadership of the Polish Communist Party to the firing squad but actually had the whole Party of 'wreckers' disbanded, something that was seriously unusual even for the Comintern of the late 1930s.

The infamous 'Polish operation' which was begun in the summer of 1937 (under Order N°00485 signed by Yezhov, People's Commissar of the NKVD) led to the arrest of 143,810 people of whom 111,091 were condemned to the firing squad. One hundred and eleven thousand. One sixth of the total number of Poles living in the USSR. The figure is a record for the times of the Great Terror.

Over the night of 23-24 August 1939, to the clink of champagne glasses, Comrade Stalin concluded an agreement with Ribbentrop to liquidate Poland and its territory. By 31 October 1939, his mouthpiece and henchman V. Molotov was calling this Slav country with its ancient history "the ugly duckling state born of the Versailles Treaty."

People's Commissar of Defence Voroshilov did not conceal his delight in his speech at the Revolution Day celebrations on 7 November 1939: "The Polish State has collapsed at the first serious military encounter, flying to pieces like an old and rotten farm cart." From then on, it was categorically forbidden to employ the word 'Poland'—even secret documents of the high command of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army (to give it its full name) invariably referred to 'former Poland' or in a truly Hitlerian way to the 'general-governorship'.

Everything changed after the summer of 1941 when it was the Red Army that "collapsed at the first serious military encounter, flying to pieces like an old and rotten farm cart" and Comrade Stalin, much to his surprise, found himself in the ranks of the 'anti-Hitler coalition of democratic countries'.

The rules of behaviour of this club required certain minimum decencies to be respected and Stalin found himself obliged, at least in words, to relinquish the prize which he had so neatly obtained from his union with Hitler. On 30 July 1941, the USSR signed an Agreement with Sikorski's Polish Government in London with the following opening paragraph: "The Government of the USSR recognises that the Soviet-German treaties of 1939 regarding Polish territorial changes are now null and void".

The long and winding story of how Stalin step by step overcame the consequences of the 'momentary weakness' that led him to recognise the 'bourgeois émigré government' as legal and his territorial gains in Poland as illegal goes beyond what can be covered in this article. We need here simply to go straight to the result: in early 1945, Stalin simply did not want to hear of any Polish Government in Exile in London; Poland's partisan army, the Armia Krajowa, had been in effect defeated by the joint efforts of the Wehrmacht, the SS, the Red Army, and NKVD troops; the advancing Soviet forces had brought along with them a 'Polish' puppet government, the Polish Committee of National Liberation.

A pseudo Polish army, the Wojsko Polskie, was even created. This included in its ranks not just Soviet 'volunteer' officers but even rank and file, with tank crew in particular being wholly Soviet. The state security organs of 'People's Poland' were stuffed from top to bottom with Soviet 'advisers' and were to all intents and purposes a local division of the NKVD. That Marshal of the Soviet Union Rokossovsky was later appointed Minister of Defence of puppet Poland was in this context entirely symbolic and demonstrative.

Given this totally clear situation, Stalin had every reason to consider the western frontier of 'his' Poland as the USSR forces' ultimate expansion line. For that reason alone he strove to draw this line as far to the west, as close to Berlin and Dresden, as possible. There was much that was still to be decided about the fate of post-war Germany but Stalin considered the Polish question (the matter of his expansion into Europe) to be already settled.

Stalin saw nothing to discuss at all when it came to the fate of East Prussia. At Potsdam he curtly announced to 'his allies' that he would taking over the northern (Baltic) part of East Prussia with the towns of Königsberg and Tilsit (now Kaliningrad and Sovetsk).

The total area of the territories to be annexed in East Prussia, Pomerania, and Silesia amounted to 114 thousand square kilometres (an area equivalent to Belgium, Holland, and Denmark combined) or a quarter of the territory of Germany in its 1937 borders. In announcing his claim to these territories (either directly as in the case of East Prussia, or indirectly by including them in the territories of the puppet Polish state), Stalin was also taking on a major problem—their German populations which numbered millions.

Stalin's despised 'allies' might appeal to some incomprehensible 'rights' of these German, to the 'Leninist principle of the right of nations to self-determination', or in a worse case change their benevolent attitude towards the demands of the extortionist from the Kremlin. There was only one radical solution to this problem. And it was one that Stalin understood full well: "Absent the people, absent the problem."

By now, Comrade Stalin was well experienced in such matters. It would not be the first or even the second time that he had removed 'wrong people' to 'right places'. It was, however, going to be rather more tricky this time with the Germans. For a start, there were too many of them. This was a dialectical change of quantity into quality. It is one matter in peacetime to deport 400 thousand Poles from western Byelorussia and the Ukraine over a period of eighteen months, but quite another to deport from one place to another 8-9 million Germans, especially in wartime when every truck, every litre of fuel, every railway wagon and locomotive is urgently needed. Furthermore, whither was Stalin going to deport the Germans of Silesia, Pomerania and Prussia?

There were just two possibilities: either backwards, to the east into the depths of Soviet Russia, or forwards, to the west into the Soviet occupation zone in Germany. In both cases the Soviet Union would have to feed 8 million charges, consisting in the main, after six years of war, of women, children, invalids and the elderly.

My hypothesis, for which I can find no direct documentation, is that Stalin's decision was simply to expel them. To expel them quickly—certainly so fast that the western 'allies' would not realise what was happening and be able to react—while also ensuring that the expulsion should very definitely pay for itself. Stalin therefore decided to create in the territories to be annexed a state of such terror and horror that the Germans would of their own volition, by their own efforts and with their own vehicles, carts, bicycles, and fishing boats sail, drive, walk, run, or crawl to the west. Let them scuttle westwards, without pause or respite, until they made it to the British or American occupation zones.

This decision derived from three 'wise' reasons: the deportation would not cost the Soviet Union a single rouble in expenses; creating the necessary conditions would additionally provide Stalin's *nomenklatura* bigwigs with practically unlimited opportunities to fill their pockets and dachas with looted goods; the despised 'allies' would be landed, according to far from accurate calculations, with an extra 7 million hungry, sick, homeless and penniless refugees.

Two other issues deserving serious study are the geographical spread and the timeline of the terror sanctioned from the top against the civilian population of Germany. There is reason to believe, although I should again emphasise that this is a matter on which I have no firm evidence, that there was a sharp decline in barbarism once the Red Army found itself on the territory of the future GDR. It is certainly that case that J. Hoffman's book, which we have already seen as a source, reports all the episodes of mass killings as taking place in Prussia, Pomerania, and Silesia, that is to say on the lands intended for annexation. In Berlin, with the eyes of allied western officers and war correspondents on them, the thirst for revenge was limited to looting on a massive scale and rape.

We should also note the fact that on 14 April 1945, two days before the start of the Berlin operation (the Red Army's advance from the banks of the Oder towards Berlin), *Pravda* newspaper published its now famous article *Comrade Ehrenburg Oversimplifies*. This article, under the byline of G. Aleksandrov, Head of the Directorate for Propaganda and Agitation of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, was in language and style very reminiscent of Stalin's own (questions that are then answered, a favourite mannerism of his). It is therefore entirely likely that Stalin either dictated the main points of the article to Aleksandrov if he did not actually write the whole thing himself.

If the authorship of the directive—there is no way in which an article published in the central print organ of the Central Committee of the Party could be considered anything but such in Stalin's USSR—may be a matter of dispute, the same cannot be said of the Directive N°11072 of HQ Supreme High Command dated 20 April 1945 in which Stalin's signature is plain to see.

This directive was addressed to the “military commanders and members of the Military Councils of the 1<sup>st</sup> Byelorussian and 1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian Fronts”. It is important to note to whom it was not addressed, that is to the commanders of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Byelorussian fronts which were fighting in East Prussia and Pomerania.

It beggars belief to think that two of the fronts were simply forgotten.

Directive N°11072 in its main section says:

HQ Supreme High Command orders:

1. Demand a *change in attitude* [my emphasis] towards the Germans, both prisoners of war and civilians. Harsh treatment of the Germans engenders fear in them and increases their resistance and reluctance to surrender. The civilian population organises itself into groups to protect against revenge. This is not to our advantage. A more humane attitude towards the Germans will make it easier for us to wage war on their territory and will without doubt reduce the stubbornness of their defence.
2. In Germany, create German administrations to the west of the line formed by the Oder, Fürstenberg, and west to the Neisse and install German mayors in the towns there. If they behave reasonably towards the Red Army, do not touch rank-and-file members of the national socialist party and only detain their leaders, if they have not already fled.
3. Better attitudes towards the Germans must not be allowed to lead to decreased vigilance or fraternisation with Germans.

HQ Supreme High Command

J. Stalin

Antonov

It is interesting to note that this Directive was only declassified and published without its preamble (that is to say its description of the situation it was addressing) in the collection *Russian Archives, Great Patriotic War*, vol. 15, Terra Publishers, Moscow 1995. The line described in point 2 corresponded exactly to the frontier of the Soviet zone of occupation, that is to say the future

GDR. We can assume that Stalin did not want a 'socialist Germany' devoid of a population and therefore gave orders that the attitude towards them change, i.e to stop driving them out.

I must say once again that I have seen no papers actually signed by Stalin about any of this. There probably never were any. Stalin of course never penned and signed an order to kill German women and children—because there was no need for one. Twenty years after Stalin's coming to power and seven years after the Great Terror, Stalin's entourage consisted solely of people who, like dogs, knew what their Master wanted without any words being needed. Any who failed to understand stood to be quickly replaced by others with greater intuition.

Strangely, the absence of any clear, written orders actually explains much of what we do know for sure about the tragic events in German lands, above all how different, as both documents and popular memory record, things could be in one place or another: in one town, the population could be subjected to unspeakable horrors while in another relative order would prevail.

Let us delve once more into J. Hoffman's book:

...Soviet officers would sometimes manage to hold their own against criminals in uniform, perhaps because their superiors, too, were similarly thoughtful. Thus, even the behaviour of the 91<sup>st</sup> Guards Rifle Division could differ on occasion. At the same time as the divisional headquarters and the 275<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment were committing their atrocities in and around Germau, other places such as Wilkau, which had been occupied by other troops from the division, did not report any murders or rapes... At the same as, for example, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 14<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment of the 72<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Division were committing terrible crimes, Red Army men of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 187<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment of the same Division were being warned against taking liberties with the population... Major-General Gelen, whose department received all corresponding reports, noted the "correct behaviour" of Soviet officers and soldiers in certain instances...

In the absence of a clear written order—with verbal ones, I imagine instead, much depended on the attitude of each commander. The further from the Kremlin and the closer to the front, the greater would be the number of middle-ranking commanders who had not grasped—or maybe did not wish to grasp—the 'will of the king'. Far from all of them lost their humanity. It should also be remembered that front-line commanders were rather harder to frighten than Moscow bureaucrats. Finally, any regimental or battalion commander fully realised that he would be held responsible for the fulfilment of his military tasks and that it would be somewhat harder to carry them out with tanks filled to bursting with looted goods and drunken soldiers wearing "Napoleonic tricornered hats and women's raincoats". For this reason, many Red Army commanders at all levels tried hard to stop their troops from going feral.

On the other hand, there was no need for terror to be sown absolutely everywhere in order for Stalin's wish to expel Germans from the territories which were to be annexed to happen. It was enough that there should be just the right level of brutal avenging in some places in order for the population to flee in panic, abandoning their homes and property. In other words, there did not need to be that many atrocities so long as a sufficiently horrific level of cruelty was achieved in some places—quality instead of quantity as it were.

This is where we come to my Hypothesis N°2. This one is even harder to document given the totally sealed nature to this day of the archives of the NKVD/NKGB, but is nonetheless entirely plausible. Hypothesis N°2 is that there were special terror units, NKVD Einsatzgruppen so to speak, and that the reports of children's tongues nailed to tables, women crucified on altars, and other unspeakable atrocities were the results of their work. I should immediately emphasise that Hypothesis N°2 does not exclude but simply complements the assumption I have made above

about there having been a deliberate, sanctioned from 'on high', demoralisation of the Red Army. (This correlates perfectly with what was done during the 1929-31 dekulakisation campaign when completely non-hypothetical and totally real and active OGPU units participated in and reinforced the atrocities then being committed by the hordes of village lumpens.)

This hypothesis might appear quite unbelievable—but only to someone brought up on old Soviet (or now the latest Russian) school history books. Within the context of the actual history of the USSR, there is nothing in the slightest bit untoward about this idea. Lies, provocations and terror were handmaidens from day one of the Bolshevik dictatorship, as these three examples illustrate: the attempted assassination of Lenin, of which the half-blind (and immediately shot) F. Kaplan was accused; Lenin's directive that "good use should be made of the opportunity" presented by the fact that the bodies of those starved to death in the famine of 1921-22 were piling up along roadsides to blame and hang as many "counter-revolutionary priests" as possible; and finally the GPU's Operation Trust in which it set up a fake anti-Soviet organisation to entrap opponents...

On the other hand, the existence of 'NKVD Einsatzgruppen' which pretended to be Ukrainian Insurgent Army partisans and terrorised the population of western Ukraine ceased to be a hypothesis a long time ago: the documentation on them was preserved and has been found and published. This documentation confirms both the scale of their deployment—by June 1945 there were 156 such deployment groups with a total force of 1,783 men—and their methods. In fact their methods were so outlandish that they were actually too much even for the MVD military prosecutor for the Ukraine, Colonel Kosharsky. On 15 February 1949, he wrote to Nikita Khrushchev, then First Secretary of Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukraine, to report "incidents of gross breaches of Soviet legality in the actions of the so-called MGB deployment groups". He went on to say that

...crude incitements and unintelligent work by a number of the deployment groups, which go so far as to commit arbitrary and violent acts against the local population, not only do not help the struggle but, on the contrary, actually hinder it... Without sufficient evidence, the so-called MGB deployment groups act blindly and as a result people innocent of any attachment to the nationalist Ukrainian bandit underground become victims of their abuses...

Prosecutor Kosharsky next adduces a long list of 'breaches and abuses':

...in March 1948 a special deployment unit under the command of MGB Agent codename *Wings* went twice to the house of G.S.Palmarchuk, aged 62, claiming to be UPA bandits, and cruelly tortured him and his two daughters; ...on the night of 23 July 1948, a special deployment unit kidnapped 17-year-old N.Ya.Repnitskaya from her house and took her into the woods, where they tortured and raped her. The members of the team beat her, hung her head down by feet, forced a piece of wood into her vagina, and then gang-raped her...

His concluding statement reads:

Such facts about the activities of the MGB special deployments units were regrettably not a rarity.

Let us return, however, from the forests of Carpathia to Germany's ruined towns and villages in spring 1945. We might note, in passing, that the task facing the 'security organs' was a much easier one. While the special deployment units pretending to be Bandera's nationalists had to be specially selected and trained for the task so as to speak in the right dialect and have knowledge of local habits and customs, everything was much easier in Germany. All that was required was 'to put the frighteners on the Fritzes'. All *that* required was to select from an army of millions a few thousand men with copybooks stained by collaboration with the Hitlerite occupiers, threaten them with

exposure and the firing squad, and then propose to them that they should 'expunge their guilt through blood'. The blood did not even have to be theirs and they are already well practised in the art of vile abuse of women and children. It is a dreadful thing to have to say, but it cannot be denied that German sensibilities were of a quite different order to ours—theirs had not been hardened in the 'Bolshevik forge'. Germans in the 20<sup>th</sup> century had not passed through years of civil war with its endless pogroms and shootings nor had they experienced dekulakization and the golodomor famines. For Germans, the year 1937 stood out in their memories as one of a flourishing economy, not one of Black Marias in the night coming to disappear one's neighbours, friends and acquaintances. The average German was therefore not mentally prepared for the arrival of true mass terror. Stalin's calculation was entirely correct: after a first encounter with cut-throats in Red Army uniforms, the civilian population of Germany's eastern territories would up and run in panic.

However, there was one little aspect of Comrade Stalin's brilliantly complex plan that did not quite work out.

Stalin's intention was that the merciless expulsion of Germans from the eastern territories that he wished for should make the lives of Germans in the western-occupied territories so miserable that it would discredit the western powers and eventually make the people turn to Bolshevism... Children would see the misery around them and look to a future in which they could escape from it—a pre-revolutionary situation. But the revolution did not come. The East's political calculations had taken practically every factor into account—except for one: the people. Millions of Germans fled from the Red Army. Millions witnessed what happened when the Soviet soldiers arrived. Millions experienced for themselves the meaning of communist rule and suffered under it. Humiliated and insulted, they were lost for communism, no matter how it masked itself or what promises it made...

The above words, written by the German historian and journalist Gunther Bedecker, could serve as the conclusion to this article of mine were it not that I, as a Russian historian, cannot allow myself to fail to speak of the most numerous victims of this forgotten crime of Stalin's—the soldiers of the Red Army.

In late 1944, Germany's industries, transport system, and armed forces were in their last agonies. Hitler's thousand-year Reich had lost all its allies, lost all external sources of raw materials (in particular Romanian oil, Swedish iron ore, Finnish and Ukrainian nickel). British and American aviation had total air superiority over the whole of Germany and was methodically erasing town after town and factory after factory, dropping several kilotons of bombs in the course of each raid. Already there was no safe rear to which the German army could withdraw. Germany's war production collapsed after May 1944 when the raids targeted mainly the transport system and the chemical plants producing synthetic fuel and explosives. Factories, hidden underground and widely dispersed, were still producing tanks and aircraft but they were actually scrap metal before they even came off the conveyor belt as there was no fuel with which to drive them.

However, the loss of fuel supplies, territory, transport lines, experienced tank crew and pilots was as nothing compared to the most important one—the fact that there was no point or aim anymore. What could continuing military action bring Germany apart from the loss of still more lives?

In September 1944, the Red Army reach the banks of the Vistula and the Western allies were fast advancing on the Rhein. There was no longer any doubt as to the conclusion of the war. Prior to the Tehran conference, the Hitler leadership might still have hoped that a 'political resolution' might come about, that a split in the enemy camp might open the possibility of concluding a separate peace with one of the allies. Indeed, in July 1944, there was still a hope that the Anglo-American landings in Normandy might be contained and defeated. The explosion of a bomb on 20 July 1944 in Hitler's Wolf's Lair showed the world that the Wehrmacht's top commanders, and not just the

plotters, had lost their last illusions. When questioned on 17 July 1945, Generaloberst Alfred Jodl, Chief of the Operations Staff of the Wehrmacht High Command, stated the following:

Sometime around February 1944, I reported to the Führer that if the British and Americans landed in France and we were unable to throw them back into the sea, we would lose the war. I did this in writing... Hitler accepted that my view was correct but gave orders that the memorandum should not be sent to the commanders of the air force, army, and fleet...

The last two, desperate attempts by the Wehrmacht as 1944 turned into 1945 to go onto the counter-attack—in the Ardennes against the Western Allies and around Lake Balaton in Hungary against the Red Army—ended in crushing defeats and the loss of the country's last combat-ready tank and air force divisions. The collapse of Germany's war machine was evident. But then, on the eastern front, there was a sudden and dramatic change. The German forces literally found a second breath and this was rapidly reflected on the Red Army's rate of advance and on its losses.

Let us take a look at an entirely official and respectable source—the 1993 collection of statistics entitled *Grif Sekretnosti Snyat* (*The Numbers - Declassified* might be a suitable English title) published in 1993 under the editorship of Colonel-General G.F.Krivosheyev. Pages 157-159 list the average daily Red Army casualties, killed or put out of action, for various periods of the war and campaigns. The figures are terrible, with each day of the war costing the lives of thousands of Soviet soldiers. Setting perfectly understandable emotion aside, let us consider the dynamics exposed by these numbers:

1. Campaign of summer and autumn 1943 (July to December—the Kursk Salient, the liberation of the eastern Ukraine, Kiev and Smolensk): irrecoverable losses of 7,600 men per day;
2. Campaign of winter and spring 1944 (January to May—liberation of western Ukraine, Crimea, Leningrad and Novgorod districts): irrecoverable losses of 5,300 men per day;
3. Campaign of summer-autumn 1944 (June-December—the Red Army's major advances into Byelorussia, the Lvov-Sandomierz operation, the second Jassy-Kishinev operation, and the Baltic and Belgrade operations): irrecoverable losses of 4,500 men per day.

The trend is evident: 7.6 - 5.3 - 4.5. The Red Army's commanders and men are becoming better skilled, superiority in numbers and firepower is growing while the opposite is the case for the Wehrmacht, where supplies and morale are shrinking. This results in an increasing scale of advances by Soviet forces on all fronts while at the same times their losses become smaller.

We come to 1945. The Red Army's numerical superiority in tanks and aviation reaches double digits while the German command is having to throw untrained Volkssturm boys into battle. But manpower losses in the Red Army do not fall and on the contrary rise considerably. They are back up to 6,200 men per day. The Red Army is finishing off a Wehrmacht in its death throws but losing 30 percent more men than in 1944 as it does so.

We now need to turn our attention to material losses. These are given on pages 355-356 of the same work.

In 1943, the Red Army lost on average 64 tanks and self-propelled artillery pieces per day and 65 per day in 1944. In other words, the level of daily losses remained practically constant over two years of war.

We come to 1945. Between 1 January and 10 May 1945, losses amount to 13,700 tanks and self-propelled artillery pieces. That amounts to 105 (one hundred and five) per day. The losses have nearly doubled. What has happened to the Soviet armour? Has it become worse than in 1943-44? On the contrary—this year, 1945, is when the new and much more powerful T34/85 tank has come

to re-equip the forces; when the forces are being armed in large quantities with the newest Joseph Stalin series of heavy tanks and with the new monster 122mm and 152mm heavy self-propelled guns (not to be confused with the short-barrelled 152mm pre-war KV-2 howitzer) whose cannon can penetrate the front armour of any German tank up to and including the Tiger II... And the numbers tell a tale, too: as at 1 January 1944, the Red Army had 1,600 heavy tanks and 800 heavy self-propelled guns but by 9 May 1945, these numbers had risen 5,300 and 2,700 respectively.

Meanwhile, the Germans on the other side had not seen any new anti-tank weapon appear. Claims that the Panzerfaust was a technological revolution in weaponry are greatly exaggerated. We only have to look at the numbers collected contemporaneously by Colonel P. Igumenov and published in his 1947 research paper on the vulnerability of Soviet tanks to see this is the case. Here is the distribution of tank losses at war's end:

Tank Losses to Panzerfausts

- 1<sup>st</sup> Byelorussian Front, January-March 1945 - 5.5%
- 1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian Front, January-March 1945 - 8.9%
- 4<sup>th</sup> Ukrainian Front, January-May 1945 - 9%
- 1<sup>st</sup> Byelorussian Front, April-May 1945 - 10.5%

The main way of destroying a tank was and remains shell-firing guns and these accounted for 90% of tanks destroyed. Even in the Berlin operation, with its fierce street fighting in a large city, the tank losses of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Guards Tank Army were attributed to Panzerfausts in 23% of cases and to cannon in 77% of cases. Nor did the Wehrmacht have anything new in the way of artillery in 1945—it was still fighting with its same old 75mm and 88mm pieces. Any changes at all were for the worse: the production of armour-piercing shells was forced to stop due to the shortage of tungsten while the shortage of fuel led to many fewer tanks and self-propelled guns being able to take the field. As a result, the main method of fighting Soviet tanks was the towed field gun which left their crews with nothing but their shirts and greatcoats to protect them from bullets and shrapnel.

Yet Soviet tank losses doubled during that period!

Some of the most paradoxical, in my view, events took place in the air and not on land. Germany's aviation became practically non-existent after the failure of the counter-advance in the Ardennes. There was only sufficient fuel and pilots for a couple of hundred aircraft and these were devoted to anti-aircraft defence. In spring 1945, it was only on very rare occasions that a German fighter would appear over the eastern front. Regardless of this, average daily Soviet losses of aircraft 'downed in action' hardly went down—from 7.95 aircraft per day in 1944 to 7.49 per day in 1945. (Here and below the numbers are taken from the volume, classified Top Secret at the time, *Soviet Aviation by Numbers in the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945*, produced in 1962 by the USSR Air Forces HQ.

If one examines the figures even more closely, one can see that losses in the air of bombers and ground-attack craft actually rose—from 3.3 per day in 1944 to 4.3 in 1945. Losses of bombers and ground-attack craft from anti-aircraft fire rose 70% from 5.8 per day in 1944 to 10 per day in 1945 .

So what was happening on the eastern front in the spring of 1945? How is one to explain these losses of the Red Army? Soviet historiography traditionally tried not to notice these numbers and not to ask the unavoidable questions. One might just occasionally come across references to "SS fanatics prepared to defend Hitler to the last", to the "genetically ingrained discipline of the German soldier who would not stop firing until ordered to do so". There is no denying that there is an element of truth to these attributions. They should not divert our attention, however, from the even more important 'wonder-weapon' Stalin gifted to the German soldier. This is not a typographical mistake: Goebbels might have ranted about forthcoming wonder-weapons which

would change the course of the war, but he was lying. Comrade Stalin, on the other hand, actually delivered: he gave the Wehrmacht something truly special—purpose.

After Nemmersdorf (and a hundred other 'dorfs'), the German soldier on the eastern front did not have to have it explained to him what he was fighting for. What he needed to do was perfectly clear: the task was right there, out in the open, visible to the naked eye. Furthermore, it was one that could be accomplished.

There, right before him, went the endless columns of refugees making for the west, a river of humanity flowing to the Baltic ports and gathering on the piers. He could see the ships taking on board thousands of refugees and setting forth one after the other to sail to the shores of western Germany and Denmark. Each day and even each hour that the Red Army's advance was delayed increased the number of German women, children and the elderly who would be saved from rape and death. The German Army found it did have a purpose and a reason to continue fighting.

In late January 1945, the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian Front forced the Oder near Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland). The encirclement of the town was completed on 15 February. The garrison, if one includes the Volksturm, consisted of not more than 50 thousand men. They held the town throughout February. Then for the whole of March. Then April. Thirteen Soviet divisions were brought up to Breslau. Far off to the west, Berlin was falling, bloody tyrant Hitler had committed suicide, but in Festung Beslau's charred ruins, they still held out. The city only capitulated on 6 May 1945. Garrison commander General Niehoff survived the war and spent 10 years in Soviet prison camps. In his memoirs, he asserts that the lengthy defence of the city enabled one and half million German refugees from Silesia to escape to the west.

On 5 March 1945, men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Byelorussian Front began the storming of the small seaside town of Kolberg (now Kołobrzeg, Poland) in Pomerania. The town sheltered 85 thousand civilians as many refugees had fled there. The garrison numbered three thousand men. This handful of soldiers held back the 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Tank Army and three division of the Wojsko Polskie until the morning of the 18 March. The town was left in total ruins. The garrison lost 2,300 killed. The German Navy evacuated 70 thousand refugees from Kolberg.

On 13 January 1945, the forces of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Byelorussian Fronts comprising 117 rifle divisions, 7 tank corps, 9 separate tank brigades, and 1,590,000 men began their advance into East Prussia. As the month came to an end, the German forces in Königsberg found themselves hemmed in from the west and north-east and pushed up against the sea. Further advances by the Soviets were hindered by the fierce fighting of the Wehrmacht, despite having 6-7 times fewer men. On 19-20 February, the Germans mounted a counter-attack, broke out of encirclement to the west and restored East Prussia's land corridor to as yet unoccupied parts of eastern Germany.

The Germans kept this 'corridor of life' open for the whole of March until a new advance by the Soviet Army in early April. Königsberg was only taken on 12 April 1945 after very bitter combat. However, even after that, the Germans managed for two weeks to hold onto their last position in East Prussia, the port of Pillau (now Baltiisk) from which ships with refugees and wounded continued to sail until 27 April.

After the loss of Pillau, the only 'haven of hope' left was the Hel Peninsula, north of Danzig in Pomerania. The Red Army's East-Pomeranian Operation began on 10 February 1945. The defence of Danzig (Gdansk) went on until 30 March. But the Germans held the thin, shell-riddled strip of sand that is the Hel Peninsula until 8 May! During that time, 400 thousand people were evacuated by sea from it.

In all, two million people were evacuated to the west by German navy and civilian ships from East Prussia and Pomerania, the largest amphibious operation in history.

In the popular mind, the Spring Victory is simply the advance on Berlin. The average man in the street would say that was the main, if not only, thing that took place then. Alas, this is far from true.

The Berlin operation—not just the storm but everything from the advance from the Oder to the Spree to the encirclement of the Wehrmacht in Berlin—lasted from 16 April to 8 May 1945 and cost the lives of 78 thousand Soviet men and officers. The East Prussian operation took the lives of 126 thousand Red Army men while the closely connected East Pomerian operation took another 53 thousand. The total number killed or taken out of action in 1945 on all four fronts (3<sup>rd</sup> Byelorussian, 2<sup>nd</sup> Byelorussian, 1<sup>st</sup> Byelorussian and 1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian) involved in the ‘liberation of Germany’ was 411 thousand men. Red Army, Airforce, and Navy losses from 1 January to 10 May 1945 totalled 801 thousand men. Eight hundred and one thousand dead. The Berlin operation cost less than a tenth (!) of this dreadful figure.

Grand Admiral Dönitz, who was appointed by Hitler to be his successor as head of state with the title President of Germany, was not an ‘SS fanatic’. In fact, he was never even a member of the NSDAP. Hitler himself was no longer alive when Dönitz took responsibility for what was left of Germany. Even then, however, the war was continuing on the Eastern Front. Speaking on German radio at 2200 hours on 1 May 1945, Dönitz said:

My first task is to save Germany from being annihilated by the Bolsheviks. That is the only reason that armed resistance will continue. While the British and the Americans continue to prevent us from doing this, we shall have to continue defensive warfare against them as well...

And still the bloodshed did not stop. German forces continued to fight in the east. Cannons roared in Potsdam, Breslau, and Danzig. Surrounded back in November 1944, Wehrmacht troops in the coastal strip of Kurland (or Courland, now Kurzeme, Latvia) held out until 10 May 1945, at a cost of 62 thousand men to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Baltic Fronts.

Then there is the strange story of the Prague uprising, when the patience of its townspeople, who had put up with German occupation for six years, finally broke and American forces were just 80 kilometres away. The Red Army rushed ahead to help the uprising and lost a further 11 thousand men.

Only this harsh position taken by US General Eisenhower, CiC of the Allied Force in Western Europe

I have asked for Jodl to be advised that if they do not immediately desist from excuses and delaying tactics, I will close the whole allied front and *stop letting any German refugees through our lines* [emphasis added]

obliged Dönitz to cease military activities on all fronts.

The relevant chapter in Kirisheyev’s collection of statistics is called *The Cost of the Liberation Mission*. Now that we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is it not perhaps time to question the adequacy of such headings?

The Anglo-American allies liberated Italy, Greece, France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, nearly the whole of Austria, and over half of Germany (actually over half of the country by its 1937 frontiers or four-fifths of the country in its present ones). In 1938, the population of the lands liberated by

the Allies was 170 million. The allied losses in so doing were one order of magnitude less than the Red Army's (American losses in 1945 amounted to 55 thousand; the Anglo-Canadian forces lost another 15 thousand).

Yes, of course, three quarters of Germany's forces were on the Eastern Front. Yes, of course, on the Western Front German soldiers surrendered in droves. But that is not the point. The question of course is WHY did German soldiers surrender by the tens of thousands in the West yet fight to the last bullet and last drop of blood in the East? Does this astounding difference have something to do with 'the class solidarity of the world bourgeoisie and its mortal hatred for the workers' and peasants' state'? Or were there weightier and more mundane reasons? Is the 'cost of a liberation mission' eight hundred thousand dead? Or are they the price paid for Stalin's convoluted geopolitical games?

Statistics, the numbers so necessary and unavoidable in any research into the history of a war, sadly turn the suffering of millions in tidy little columns of digits. However, that would not be a nice way to conclude this article and I will therefore bring it to an end with the simple story told by Alen Poltz, a Hungarian woman, about what she went through. Who is Alen Poltz? A kind woman. In fact a very kind one: she found employment post-war in a very appropriate job—as a doctor and psychotherapist in a hospice. Before reading her story, *A Woman and the War*, in the literary periodical *Neva* (N<sup>o</sup>2, 2004), I would have said that only angels could be filled with such humility and kindness. Sadly, however, this lady was an entirely normal and earthly lass of nineteen when the war found her in a small Hungarian town that for a few months happened to lie near the front line.

Alen Poltz recounts what she saw and lived through in an amazingly gentle way, with sympathy for all concerned. Coming from a journalist today, I would certainly have found it revoltingly 'politically correct', but in her telling it all sounds natural and human. Of course, she does not forget to remind the reader that "Hungarian soldiers did not behave much better in Russian villages", but never mind. This is her tale:

I learned that we were suspected of being spies because immediately after our church bell had rung in its tower, a bomb had hit the Russian headquarters, killing a lot of people. It was impossible to explain that the clock in the tower was mechanically driven and rang the bell regularly, and that this was a simple coincidence. It was actually quite difficult to explain all sorts of things to the Russians. They lived in an another world and their experiences were quite different. Their logic was also quite different. They just didn't know about clock towers...

What an ability find explanations and justifications for anything. She even finds a justification for this:

In the morning I learned about how a person's back can be broken. It happens like this: the woman is placed on her back and her legs pulled up over the kneeling man's shoulders so that he can penetrate her in this way. If the forward and down pressure is too great, the woman's spine is broken. It is not on purpose; simply in the heat of a rape, people do not restrain themselves. The spine curls and bends as the pressure and rocking continues and they don't notice when it breaks...

She finishes her account of the next rape—her own—with words of high praise for the Soviets, commenting

Meanwhile, the Russian officer lit a match and touched my eyes with a finger to see if they were open. This done, he set about his business. It was a little painful. Because I kept very still and didn't shout, he lit another match to check if I was still alive. He shook his head. I can't have given him much pleasure. As I was starting to get up from the mattress in order

to leave, he sent down his orderly who made use of me too. I did not stop then to wonder why he sent down an orderly, but now I think that Russian officers are more democratic than ours...

Yet later, when she has a real opportunity to get retribution, she does not seek revenge.

The soldiers were lined up in front of me and I was to point out who had raped me. I don't remember this very well. It was a frosty winter morning and I walked in front of the ranks. The soldiers were standing stiffly to attention. I was accompanied by two officers on my left and slightly behind me as I walked along the ranks. I saw fear in the eyes of one of the soldiers. He was a young lad with blue eyes. I guessed from his eyes that he was the one. He looked so very frightened, so terribly fearful that I felt straight away that I could not do this. There was no point to having this lad killed. And why, when so many others would be going unpunished? Why him alone, just one from so many?

As should happen in the lives of good people, the story does have a happy ending. Alen Poltz survived the war, did not lose her mind, and made her way back to Budapest where she found her mother still alive as well. Her parent's house was damaged by bombing only on one side and they still had a flat. Some pre-war comforts still remained and there was even food aplenty. A fairytale ending, should we not say?

Of course, Mama cried and was happy and hugged me. And I looked at her and was happy too. I was happy that they were alive, but I was not overjoyed. I was not overjoyed because by now I did not trust anything, or believe in anything very much. I was already carrying a disease within me—gonorrhoea—as a result of which I was never able to have children, and I still didn't know if I had syphilis or not. I felt like I was ever so infectious and I did not want to infect anyone. We sat around the dining room table. We were having tongue in tomato sauce. I looked at it in amazement and ate quietly, even soundlessly. They began discussing the Russian rapes. "Did it happen where you were?" my mother asked. "Yes," I said, "it happened with us too." "But they didn't touch you?" asked my mother. "They took pity on no-one," I replied and went on eating. Mama looked at me and asked in amazement: "But why did you let them?" "Because they beat you," I said and took another bite of my food. I could see nothing important or interesting in this question. "Were there many?" one of the guests at the table asked carelessly. "More than I could count," I said, and again went on eating. Afterwards, my mother called me to one side and said: "Don't joke like that, darling, they might believe you!" "That wasn't a lie, Mother!" Mama burst into tears and then hugged me in her arms. "Darling," she begged. "Tell me that wasn't true."

Does any more need to be said? Of course, Alen Poltz took pity on her poor mother and told her what she wanted to hear.

For my part, however, I cannot and do want to give comfort in the same way to our 21<sup>st</sup> century oil-guzzling Russian patriots. Everything I have written here is the truth. The terrible, revolting truth. And *Messieurs les patriotes* are going to have to decide who they are. Are they decent men or are they slaves? Slaves know no responsibility. Those who give up their freedom and their honour liberate themselves from their responsibilities. This then makes it possible for them to go on enjoying the mellifluous words of Count Alexander von Benckendorff, the founding head of the Gendarmes and the Secret Police in Imperial Russia:

Russia's past is amazing, her present day is more than wonderful, and as for her future, that will be in all ways better than the bravest imagination can envisage. It is with this in mind that Russian history must be viewed and written.

Free people will never agree to this early Big Brother's idea of Russian history, nor with the right of policemen to dictate Russia's past or form her future. Free people should not be afraid of their history. Free people need to pull themselves together and face facts. They need, along with all their compatriots, to accept their share of the responsibility.