"For what and for whom were we fighting?": Red Army Soldiers, Combat Motivation and Survival Strategies on the Eastern Front in the Second World War.

Robert Dale
Newcastle University
robert.dale@ncl.ac.uk

In recent years, films, television dramas, and documentaries about the war on the Eastern Front between 1941 and 1945, what Russians continue to call the Great Patriotic War, have become entertainment staples in contemporary Russia, reoccupying a cultural space they last ocuupied in the Brezhnev-era. Turn on the television, and it is hard to avoid reruns of late Soviet war films and new multi-part wartime dramas. The Ministry of Defence's own channel, *Zvezda* (Star) can be relied upon for a wartime fix, if other stations disappoint.[1] Russian blockbusters such as *Citadel* (dir. Nikita Mikhailov, 2011), *Stalingrad* (dir. Fedor Bondarchuk, 2013), and *The Battle for Sevastopol* (dir. Sergei Mokritskii, 2015) have triumphantly brought the war back to the big screen. *Stalingrad*, the first Russian film produced completely in IMAX 3D, broke Russian box office records, grossing an estimated $51,000,000, and was met with positive, if not universal, approval.[2] As the living memory of the Great Patriotic fades, many Russians' appreciation of this most murderous and destructive conflict derives from what they see on their screens, and to a lesser extent read in print. The glossy production values and computerised special effects of recent films, and the personal stories fleshed out by television dramas, enliven the viewing experience. Many films and dramas have opened up less heroic aspects of the war effort, off-limits in the late Soviet era, for public discussion. While a post-Soviet generation of cinema goers, or indeed an older generation watching at home, might feel that these cultural products bring them closer to the action, and enhance their understanding of the wartime experiences of their forbears, for historians these are highly problematic sources of inspiration.

[1] Stephen M. Norris, "Guiding Stars: The Comet-Like Rise of the War Film in Putin's Russia: Recent World War II Films and Historical Memories," *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 1, no. 2 (2007): 163–89.

[2] Anastasia Kostetskaya, "Stalingrad re-imagined as mythical chronotype: Fedor Bondarchuk's Stalingrad in IMAX 3-D," *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 10, no. 1 (2016): 47–61.

This essay seeks to strip away the multiple layers of myth and official distortion woven around the Red Army's wartime experience, which accrued during and after the Cold War, through the politicisation of war memory, and the influence of cultural products like war films. It asks for what, and for whom, Soviet soldiers fought for nearly four long years. What motivated rank and file soldiers to fight, and keep fighting, amidst the carnage and privation of the Eastern Front? Although these are simple questions, determining how soldiers experienced extreme violence and coped with the physical and psychological pressures of war presents serious methodological difficulties. Accessing Soviet soldiers' inner worlds, at moments of great individual and collective stress, is complicated. Although the hyper-realism of modern film can be seductive, historians find it far harder to peer into soldiers' souls than filmmakers and screenwriters. As Mark Edele dryly notes, "Motivation is an inherently tricky phenomenon to investigate, even more so if the subjects of such investigations are, in their vast majority dead."[3] Nevertheless, many historians have embraced the challenge of explaining why soldiers fought, and continued to fight, amidst the death and destruction of modern industrialised warfare. Historians of the First World War have long grappled with these problems.[4] Studies of the importance of frontline cultures, emotions, and communication in the Red Army, in comparison with the state of scholarship of the western front during the First World War, are in their infancy. John Horne's work, which has sought to apply social and cultural history approaches to a field once considered the domain of military history, has been a special source of inspiration for this chapter. His work has challenged established myths about wars, often by interrogating the beliefs and cultural assumptions which underpin myths. The focus in John's work on the techniques of cultural mobilisation employed by belligerent states, and the collective mentalities and powerful emotions of individuals both on or behind the frontlines, offers important insights for studying

[3] Mark Edele, *Stalin's Defectors: How Red Army Soldiers became Hitler's Collaborators, 1941–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 11.

[4] For recent examples see: Alexander Watson*, Enduring the Great War. Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), and Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

combat motivation, and a way forward in examining combat motivation in Stalinist society.[5]

The Complexities of Combat Motivation in Stalinist Society

Scholars of Soviet history have long questioned why Soviet soldiers fought for a political system which persecuted large sections of society, and whose policies wrought widespread economic and social damage. Before the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, the difficulties of understanding why the Red Army fought were compounded by highly restricted access to source materials. Military archives were closed to all but a select few; while official histories and published memoirs told reassuring narratives that preserved a patriotic cult of the war.[6] Although pinpointing why Soviet soldiers fought is difficult, these questions get to the heart of historiographical debates about the nature of Stalinism, and the extent to which the state and its ideology commanded popular support.[7] Military historians, constrained by the available evidence, were amongst the first scholars to consider soldiers' combat motivations. Conventional military historians, however, tended to produce operational histories, which focused on military performance, at army, regimental, or battalion level. The motivations of rank and file soldiers were subsumed into wider examinations of the Red Army's recovery, and its transformation into an effective fighting force after the disasters of 1941.[8] Only with the

[5] John N. Horne, *Labour at War: France and Britain 1914–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); John Horne (ed.), *State Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

[6] On the Soviet war cult see, Nina Tumarkin, *The Living & The Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

[7] Catherine Merridale, "Culture, Ideology and Combat in the Red Army, 1939–45," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 2 (2006): 305–24.

[8] John Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad: Stalin's War with Germany, Vol. 1* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975); John Erickson, *The Road to Berlin: Stalin's War with Germany, Vol. 2* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983); David M. Glantz and Jonathan House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1995); Chris Bellamy, *Absolute War: Soviet Russia in the Second World War: A Modern History* (London: Macmillan, 2007); Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East: The Nazi-Soviet War*

gradual application of social and cultural approaches to military history was greater emphasis placed on explaining why soldiers, kept fighting in the face of catastrophe, failures in leadership, training, and supply, and massive casualties. In the mid-1990s Elena Seniavskaia's research opened the everyday experience of the frontlines to anthropological scrutiny, and probed at the psychology of frontline soldiers (*frontoviki*).[9] More recently Catherine Merridale and Roger Reese have re-examined the frontline experience, asking directly why Soviet soldiers fought, and questioning how the regime mobilised combatants. Both stress the importance of ideology, patriotism, propaganda, and the culture of the Red Army in sustaining soldiers in the heat of battle.[10] The level of coercion employed on the frontlines, something frequently exaggerated, and the role of ideology in motivating soldiers, has proved particularly controversial. "The cement," according to Hellbeck, "that the Red Army command used to bind together diverse soldiers and motivate them to fight was ideology."[11] Soviet ideology, he argues, was integrative, rather than purely repressive. Although ideas about socialism, the party-state, and the political leadership were important in a militantly ideological state, a new generation of scholars are deepening our understanding of combat motivation by revealing, in ever greater detail, the emotions, cultures, and behaviours that sustained soldiers before, during and after combat.

This essay seeks to re-examine the Red Army's combat performance in light of recent research, new approaches, and new evidence. It resists the temptation to present total mobilisation as something that the Soviet state forced on its citizens, preferring to examine the subtle interplay of state and social forces. It argues the importance of culture in shaping how individuals, armies, and societies were mobilised to fight. The role of

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1941–1945. 2nd Edition (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Alexander Hill, *The Red Army and the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[9] E. S. Seniavskaia, *Frontovoe pokolenie, 1941–1945: istoriko-psikhologicheskie issledovanie* (Moscow: IRI-RAN, 1995); E. S. Seniavskaia, *Psikhologiia voiny v XX veke: istoricheskii opyt Rossii* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1999).

[10] Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: The Red Army 1939–45* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005); Roger R. Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought: The Red Army's Military Effectiveness in World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011).

[11] Jochen Hellbeck, *Stalingrad: The City That Defeated the Third Reich*, trans. Christopher Tauchen and Dominin Bonfilio (New York: Public Affairs, 2015), 22.

singing songs, telling jokes, receiving letters and parcels, and sharing food, cigarettes, and news from home were just as important as Stalinist ideology and the exertions of party agitators in sustaining soldiers in extreme circumstances. What motivated a social organism as complex as the Red Army, which included men and women from across the age, class, ethnic, and professional spectrum, is far from clear. Different groups and individuals responded to the strains of combat differently. Furthermore, those pressures shifted enormously between 1941 and 1945, as a war of desperate defence, gave way to liberation, and eventually conquest. This chapter, reflecting this diversity, draws upon a wide range of source material, including: the wartime press, published documents, soldiers' wartime letters, post-war memoirs, and cultural products, such as songs, novels, and poetry, designed to keep soldiers fighting.

How anybody maintained their motivation to fight amidst the extreme violence, death and destruction of the Eastern Front almost defies imagination. The intensity of fighting, the lethality of combat, and the horrors of the battlefield are difficult to describe let alone comprehend. Calculating Soviet military casualties is itself a daunting task, and the statistics have been hotly contested, but approximately 8.5 million Soviet soldiers lost their lives.[12] The Red Army's casualties dwarfed those of its British and American allies. Mawdsley calculates that, "Soviet losses in every three-month period of the war (except April-June 1943) were greater than the number suffered by the Americans for the whole war."[13] In addition, the Red Army sustained approximately 14.7 million cases of injury, and 7.6 million cases of sickness.[14] At least 2.5 million soldiers were permanently disabled by their service.[15] Extreme violence characterised the entire conflict; as

[12] G. F. Kirvosheev, ed., *Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses in the Twentieth Century* (London: Greenhill Books, 1997), 83–5; Sergei Kropachev and Evgenii Krinko, *Poteri naseleniia SSSR v 1937–1945 gg.: Masshtaby i formy. Otechestvennaia istoriografiia* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2012), 232–49. For a recent re-examination see, Lev Lupokhovsky and Boris Kavalerchik, *The Price of Victory: The Red Army's Casualties in the Great Patriotic War*, trans. Harold Orenstein (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2017).

[13] Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*, 389.

[14] Kirvosheev, ed., *Soviet Casualties,* 87–8.

[15] Beate Fieseler, "The Bitter Legacy of the 'Great Patriotic War"': Red Army Disabled Soldiers under Late Stalinism," in *Late Stalinist Russia: Society between Reconstruction and Reinvention*, ed. Juliane Fürst, 46–61 (46–57) (London: Routledge, 2006); Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War. A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society, 1941–1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 81–101.

recognisable in Stalingrad's street-fighting, Kursk's tank battle, or the scorched-earth policies of partisan warfare. Big-budget cinematic representations of battle attempt to bring violence to life, but how soldiers really reacted in such extreme circumstances remains frustratingly unclear. Soldiers' diaries, letters, and memoirs are often silent about combat, and surviving veterans are reluctant to explore painful memories in oral history interviews. Many maintain that nobody could truly understand combat unless they had experienced it themselves.

Violence, Fear and Survival

Although extreme violence adds to the problem of analysing combat motivation, it has also been presented as part of the explanation. Violence, and the fear that it engendered, have often been cited as mobilising factors. "This was a war fought with utter unrestraint from the start," as Mark Edele and Michael Geyer write, "…this was not a 'conventional' war, but a war in which the imperative was to win by whatever means necessary or to perish entirely."[16] The escalation of the conflict into a life and death struggle between two implacably opposed ideological enemies, gave Soviet soldiers little alternative but to fight. As the veteran Nikolai Nikulin wrote in his memoirs:

> You had to be prepared to die not only now, but constantly. Today you might be lucky, death passed you by. But tomorrow it would be necessary to attack again. Again it would be necessary to die, and not heroically, but without a mention, without an orchestra and speeches, but in the mud and stench.[17]

Faced by the extraordinary physical and psychological pressures of war, and a brutal invading enemy, fighting could be reduced to a survival instinct. Fear of German retribution, what awaited soldiers in enemy captivity, and the Wehrmacht's murderous policies towards Jews and commissars added to the impulse to resist. Soviet propaganda created and celebrated fearless heroes, like the 28 Panifilov Men and Alexander Matrosov, who demonstrated superhuman determination and remarkable self-sacrifice. The

[16] Mark Edele and Michael Geyer, "States of Exception: The Nazi-Soviet War as a System of Violence, 1939–1945," in *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared*, ed. Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick, 345–95 (348) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[17] Nikolai Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine* (Moscow: ACT, 2014), 47.

exploits of these heroes, however, were often fabricated or distorted; Red Army soldiers were anything but immune to fear.[18]

Olga Omelchenko spoke for many when she told the oral historian Svetlana Alexievich, that she would not, "believe anyone who says that war isn't terrifying."[19] Fear was a natural reaction amidst battle's sensory onslaught, especially for inexperienced soldiers. Accounts of soldiers' first taste of battle often focus on the sights, smells, and sounds of battle: the chatter of machine gunfire, the thunderous roar of shells, ringing in the ears, the rank smell of soil, blood, and burning, and the horrific visions witnessed. As Steven Jug observes, "Many soldiers' introduction to battle overwhelmed their perception."[20] Battle, as the artillery officer Isaak Kobylansky described, could induce an intense "bodily" fear:

> It appeared instantly when you heard the ever-increasing hissing of murderous metal, and when shells or bombs exploded close at hand. The explosions deafened you and cast you about like a piece of grain. This kind of fear deprives you of your will.[21]

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[18] V. Koroteev, 'Gvardeitsy Panfilova v boiakh za Moskvy," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 27 November 1941, 3; 'Zaveshchanie 28 pavshikh geroev," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 28 November 1941, 1; Alexander Statiev, "'La Garde meurt mais ne se rend pas!: Once Again on the 28 Panfilov Heroes," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 13, no. 2 (2012), 769–98; Rosalinde Sartorti, "On the Making of Heroes, Heroines, and Saints," in *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, ed. Richard Stites, 176–93 (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995); Karel C. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda During World War II* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 59–67.

[19] Svetlana Alexievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Penguin, 2017), 133.

[20] Steven G. Jug, "Sensing Danger: The Red Army during the Second World War," in *Russian History Through the Senses: From 1700 to the Present*, ed. Matthew P. Romaniello and Tricia Starks, 219–40 (224) (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

[21] Isaak Kobylanskiy, "Memories of War: Part 2: On the railroads, the battle on the outskirts of Vishnyovy hamlet, 'mysterious are the ways of the Lord', fear, and about blocking detachments," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 16, no. 4 (2003): 47–56. (152).

Fear could paralyse, and although taboo in this hyper-masculine environment, it caused combat breakdown and psychiatric casualties.[22] In his memoirs Gabriel Temkin admitted to being, "profoundly scared" by combat. As a Jewish soldier, his fear of capture was as strong as his fear of death.[23] It would, however, be inaccurate to suggest that Soviet soldiers were permanently in fear. As Temkin himself writes, "It is just not possible to participate in a terrible four-year war and always be scared, especially if one is, as I was, a generally healthy young man between the ages of twenty and twenty-four."[24] Yet, even the young and healthy broke down under fire.

Coercion and Stalinist Discipline

Violence was ever-present on the frontlines, although its scale and intensity fluctuated, but it was never monopolised by the enemy. The Red Army has enjoyed a fearsome reputation, especially in the West, for employing violence against its own. The use of blocking detachments and penal units to enforce strict military discipline and prevent desertion has become legendary. These coercive techniques, however, were a continuation and radicalisation of pre-war practice, rather than a new departure. Stalinist society was already accustomed to the regime's violent policies and actions. Forged in the crucible of total war, revolution, civil-war, and famine, what Peter Holquist terms Russia's "continuum of crisis", the Soviet party-state routinely subjected its population to unrestricted violence.[25] It was hardly surprising that a political system, which doubted the loyalty of its army throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and purged its officer corps on the eve of war, employed violence to ensure compliance on the battlefield.[26] Since the archival revolution prompted by Perestroika and the Soviet Union's collapse, the famous

[22] Benjamin Zajichek, "Scientific Psychiatry in Stalin's Soviet Union: The Politics of Modern Medicine and the Struggle to Define 'Pavlovian' Psychiatry, 1939–1953," (Ph.D Dissertation: University of Chicago, 2009), 152–3.

[23] Gabriel Temkin, *My Just War: The Memoir of a Jewish Red Army Soldier in World War II* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1998), 176.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[26] Peter Whitewood, *The Red Army and the Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Soviet Military* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015).

orders demanding "Not one Step Back" have been much discussed. Penal battalions and blocking detachments have been explored on-screen and in published memoirs. Images of blocking detachments forcing soldiers forward at gunpoint, and mass executions of soldiers whose loyalty wavered by the NKVD have become abiding images of the war,[27] but they are essentially myths. As Reese argues, "Careful scrutiny of the draconian discipline of the Red Army reveals that much mythmaking has transpired and calls into question the efficacy of coercion to motivate."[28]

The security services were prepared to brutalise Soviet soldiers from the war's start. By 10 October 1941, the NKVD alone had sentenced and executed 10,201 deserters, of whom 3,321 had been shot in front of their units.[29] It is likely that panicked officers, desperate to re-impose discipline shot many more. The total number of soldiers executed between June 1941 and May 1945 are hard to establish, but it is estimated that approximately 158,000 death sentences were passed.[30] The level of violence and coercion employed against the Red Army rests largely upon two orders personally sanctioned by Stalin. Order No. 270, issued on 16 August 1941, which was read to troops rather than published, obliged commanders and commissars to shoot deserting officers on the spot. The family members of deserters were to be arrested. Battalion or regimental commanders considered to be frightened of commanding were to be reduced to the ranks, and if necessary shot on the spot. Rank and file soldiers were obliged to, "fight selflessly for as long as possible", irrespective of encirclement and demand the same from their officers. The families of captured servicemen were to be denied state assistance and benefits.[31] Pressure on officers often translated into increased coercion of their men, and

[27] Merridale, "Culture, Ideology and Combat," 317.

[28] Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought*, 161.

[29] "Report of S. R. Mil'shtein to L. P. Beria on the number of arrested and executed personnel who were separated from their units and fled from the front. October 1941. RGANI, f. 89, op. 18, d. 8, ll. 1–3," in *Stalin and the Lubianka: A Documentary History of the Political Police and Security Organs in the Soviet Union, 1922–1953*, ed. David R. Shearer and Vladimir Khaustov, 258 (New Haven, and London: Yale University Press, 2015).

[30] Richard Overy, *Russia's War: A History of the Soviet War Effort: 1941–1945* (New York: Penguin, 1998), 160; Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 136.

[31] "Prikaz stavki verkhovnogo glavnokomandovaniia ob otvetstvennosti voennosluzhashchikh za sdachy v plen i ostavlenie vragy oruzhiia, No. 270, 16 Avgusta 1941 g.," in *Russkii Arkhiv: Velikaia otechestvennaia:*

an increase in executions.[32] Less well-known, perhaps, is that the wave of violence unleashed by Order No. 270, was subsequently checked on 4 October 1941 by Order No. 391. This as Reese argues, "criticized commanders for too often resorting to abuse, physical assault, and 'repression' (summary execution) to cover their own panic and confusion on the battlefield."[33] As the popular wartime journalist Vasily Grossman put it in his diary, "[The cry of] 'Forward, forward!' is either the result of stupidity, or of fear of one's seniors. That is why so much blood is being shed."[34] Once officers resorted to threats of violence, they were in danger of losing authority, weakening unit cohesion, and at risk of a bullet in the back.[35] To quote Grossman again, "The phrasing of an order – "If you don't go forward now, mother fucker, I'll shoot you" – comes from a lack of will. This does not persuade anybody, this is weakness."[36]

The disciplinary culture of the Red Army shifted again on 28 July 1942 with Stalin's infamous order No. 227, sometimes known as the "not a step back" order. It was read out to all Red Army units, making an immediate impact, not just for its harsh recommendations, but because it also acknowledged the extent of Soviet military failure. Order No. 227 tasked commanders with eliminating, "all notions of retreat," and threatened them with court-martial for allowing troops to abandon their positions. The order called for the formation of penal battalions (*shtrafbaty*) for officers of approximately 800 men, and penal companies (*shtrafroty*) of between 150 and 200 soldiers and junior officers, "guilty of breaking discipline through cowardice or instability". These were to be stationed on the most difficult sectors of the front, "so that they might atone for their crimes against the Motherland with their own blood."[37] Penal

Prikazy Narodnogo Komissara Oborony SSSR, 22 iiunia 1941 g. – 1942 g. T. 13 (2-2), ed. V. A. Zolotarev, 58–60 (Moscow: Terra, 1997).

[32] Overy, *Russia's War*, 80–1; Hellbeck, *Stalingrad*, 32–3; Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 98; Hill, *The Red Army*, 223.

[33] Reese, *Why Stalin's Solders Fought*, 162.

[34] Vasily Grossman, *A Writer at War: Vasily Grossman with the Red Army 1941–1945* (London: Pimlico, 2006), 237.

[35] Edele, *Stalin's Defectors*, 101; Merridale, "Culture, Ideology and Combat," 318.

[36] Grossman, *A Writer at War*, 219.

[37] "Prikaz o merakh po ukrepleniiu distsipliny i poriadka v krasnoi armii i zapreshchenii samovol'nogo otkhoga s boevykh pozitsii, No. 227, 28 iiulia 1942 g," in *Russkii Arkhiv: Velikaia otechestvennaia: Prikazy Narodnogo Komissara Oborony SSSR, 22 iiunia 1941 g. – 1942 g. T. 13 (2-2)*, ed. V. A. Zolotarev, 276–9.

battalions were not an immediate death sentence, but those sent to serve within them faced hazardous deployments, and suffered very high casualty rates. Provided they survived their allocated period of service, usually three months, soldiers were rehabilitated and returned to regular units. By the end of the war, "the Red Army had 65 *shtrafbaty* and 1,048 *shtrafroty* in which 427,910 men had served."[38] In addition, Order No. 227 called for the creation of blocking detachments of up 200 men, to be deployed behind unstable divisions, which, "in the event of panic or disorderly retreat of part of the division," were to, "shoot scaremongers and cowards on the spot…".[39] Blocking detachments were, of course, not new; they had been established in principle since June 1941, and implemented since September 1941, and also mirrored similar formations in the German army. Indeed, some soldiers, such as Vladimir Gelfand, welcomed the attempt to re-impose discipline in their units.[40] According to the infantryman Mansur Abdulin, "The order provided a strong psychological incentive for the men. As did the knowledge that there were special holding detachments in the rear, authorized to shoot anyone who actually did drop back…"[41] Other post-Soviet memoirs, echo the sentiment that the order to take "not a step back", was necessary.[42] Blocking detachments, however, were never intended to execute stragglers indiscriminately, but rather intimidate soldiers into maintaining their positions. In practice, the implementation of the order varied. The responsibility for dealing with indiscipline and retreating soldiers often fell on inexperienced officers concerned to avoid accusations of leniency. The ambiguity and imprecision which surrounded the application of lethal discipline within the Red Army was typical of Stalinist inducements to employ state-sanctioned violence, something which helps explain the extent and escalation of violence.

Scholars largely agree that although fear, of both the enemy and the NKVD, was widespread, it was never sufficient to motivate soldiers on its own. As Richard Overy writes, "Not every soldier stood with a gun to his back; not every instance of self-sacrifice

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[38] Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought*, 165–6.

[39] "Prikaz o merakh po ukrepleniiu distsipliny i poriadka v krasnoi armii," 278.

[40] Vladimir Gel'fand, *Dnevnik 1941–1946*. 2-e izdanie (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2016), 102.

[41] Mansur Abdulin, *Red Road from Stalingrad: Recollections of a Soviet Infantrymen*, trans. Denis Fedosov (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2004), 31.

[42] Nikolai Amosov, *Moia voina: Polevoi gospital'* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2016), 76.

and courageous defiance was a product of coercion or fear."[43] Perhaps the most convincing evidence of the failure of coercive measures to improve combat performance, was the extraordinary number of Soviet soldiers who, despite the risks, stopped fighting. Alexander Dallin calculated, in figures published in 1957 but still commonly cited, that 5,754,000 Soviet soldiers were taken prisoner between 1941 and 1945, of whom 3,355,000 or 58 per cent were taken in 1941.[44] Many of these soldiers, especially those caught in the encirclement battles of 1941, were victims of a hopeless military situation, and may have continued fighting in less desperate circumstances. Surrender was frequently a survival strategy; a way of escaping death or life-changing violence.[45] Yet, soldiers continued to be taken prisoner, to defect across the lines, and to desert long after blocking detachments and penal units became well-established. "Overall, in 1942 and 1943," according to figures cited by Reese, "the NKVD caught nearly 1.25 million men who were away from their units without documents, and it rounded up and sent back their units another 200,000 stragglers."[46] Even after the tide of the war turned decisively in the Red Army's favour soldiers deserted and defected in surprising numbers. The percentage of defectors, POWs who made conscious decisions to go over to the enemy, increased in 1944 and 1945, despite the Red Army's improving fortunes, and the prospect that defectors might be recaptured by victorious Soviet soldiers.[47] Enemy violence and that practiced by their own state, was never sufficient to make Soviet soldiers fight. "Desertions on this scale," as Merridale writes, "were evidence that tyranny alone could not make heroes out of frightened men."[48]

Training and Growing Skill

Soviet soldiers were not simply victims of violence, at the mercy of the enemy and the coercive force of the NKVD. Over time training improved, producing capable soldiers.

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[43] Overy, *Russia's War*, 161; Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought*, 175.

[44] Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia 1941–1945. A Study in Occupation Policies* (New York: Octagon Books, 1980), 427; Edele, *Stalin's Defectors*, 22-23; Aron Shneer, *Plen: Sovetskie voennoplennye v Germanii, 1941–1945* (Moscow: Mosty Kul'tury, 2005); 93-99.

[45] Edele, *Stalin's Defectors*, 100–3

[46] Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought*, 174.

[47] Edele, *Stalin's Defectors*, 33.

[48] Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 232.

Nikolay Markov was drafted in January 1943 and spent several months training with a Reserve Rifle Brigade in Gorky, before being experiencing frontline duty for the first time at the Battle of Kursk in July 1943. "By 1943 we knew how to fight… It wasn't like 1941 and 1942, when we plugged holes in the line with infantry! Indeed, the infantry was now seasoned, and the commanders by now had learned to fight."[49] Pride in professional military skills, and the mastery of the technology of modern warfare, became increasingly important to soldiers as the war progressed. Official training at military schools and in reserve battalions were supplemented by the circulation of frontline knowledge and skills. As Vitaly Ulianov, a seventeen-year-old soldier from Kiev who found himself at the front in 1942 explained, "The first battle is the hardest, because you still don't know anything. … If you remained alive after your first battle – good fellow! After the second battle – a frontline solider! And after the third battle, you were a veteran! Now you knew everywhere, where to crouch, where to fall prone, where to run, what to eat, and what to discard."[50] Another soldier recalled how a battle-hardened sergeant major taught him how to recognise the direction of gun fire, by making him dig a hole, crouch in it, and listen for where he was spraying the lip of the whole with submachine-gun fire.[51] As the Red Army's operational effectiveness, soldiers' confidence and experience grew, individuals and units became skilled agents in the use of violence.

Powerful Emotions: Hatred and Revenge

Violence stirred strong emotions in the Red Army, but fear was just one of them. Historians of twentieth-century warfare have suggested that some men fought and continued to fight, because they derived pleasure and satisfaction from combat, and opportunities to practice lethal violence.[52] Scholars of the Soviet war effort have tended to avoid suggesting that the Red Army enjoyed enacting violence. Yet, historians have accepted that the desire to extract revenge on the enemy drove soldiers to fight and keep

[49] Nikolay Dmitrievich Markov, "There were No Long-term Survivors," in *Panzer Killers: Anti-tank Warfare on the Eastern Front*, ed. Artem Drabkin, trans. Stuart Britton, 49–63 (53) (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2013).

[50] Vitalty Andreevich Ulianov, "The First Battle is the Hardest," in *Panzer Killers*, 15–49 (16–17).

[51] Boris Vasil'evich Nazarov, "A fight to the Finish," in *Panzer Killers*, 86–102 (92).

[52] Niall Fergusson, *The Pity of War* (London: Allen Lane, 1998), 339–66, especially 357–66; Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (London: Granta, 1999), 13–43; Richard Bessel, *Violence: A Modern Obsession* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 137–8.

fighting. As Mark Edele and Michael Geyer write, "Rage was a powerful incentive to kill – both on the field of battle and between engagements."[53] Looking back decades later Ilya Kobylyanskiy explained his hatred of the Germans; "As I fought on, I tried to take revenge on them for all of their monstrous offenses." As he witnessed and heard stories of atrocities his hatred only increased:

> One could not but hate the invaders for the "scorched earth" that I saw in the region between the Volga and Don rivers, … I hated them for burning the central part of the city of Stalino and for destroying and depopulating Sevastopol, as well as for the hundreds of thousands of youth they commandeered for slave labor in Germany…
>
> After seeing and hearing all of this, how could I not feel a fierce hatred towards the Germans?[54]

This visceral hatred of the enemy was fed by the propaganda apparatus. Soviet hate propaganda de-humanised the enemy, circulated knowledge about Nazi atrocities, and exhorted Soviet soldiers to seek revenge and kill the enemy. The wartime press began to inculcate hatred, and demand revenge soon after the German invasion, becoming more intense over time.[55] On 6 June 1942 *Pravda* published an editorial, which presented a "Soviet Patriot", as, "a person who everywhere, even in the most distant hinterland, sees the hated enemy before him, senses his terrible breath – and kills him."[56] Hatred became a civic duty, a mark of a genuine patriot.[57] To quote Stalin: "It was impossible to beat an enemy without having learned to hate him with all the might of the soul."[58] The most infamous exhortations to revenge were written by the journalist and publicist Ilia

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[53] Edele and Geyer, "States of Exception," 390.

[54] Isaak Kobylyanskiy, *From Stalingrad to Pillau: A Red Army Officer Remembers the Great Patriotic War*, ed. Stuart Britton (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 239.

[55] E. S. Seniavskaia, *Protivniki Rossii v voinakh XX veka: Evoliutsiia "obraza vraga" v soznanii armii i obshchestva* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006), 80–97; Argyrios K. Pisiotis, "Images of Hate in the Art of War," in *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, 141–56.

[56] "Sovetskii patriot", *Pravda*, 6 July 1942, 1.

[57] Here I paraphrase Serhy Yekelchyk, "The City Duty to Hate: Stalinist Citizenship as Political Practice and Civic Emotion (Kiev, 1943–53)," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7, no. 3 (2006): 529–56; Serhy Yekelchuk, *Stalin's Citizens: Everyday Politics in the Wake of Total War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 9–33.

[58] Stalin's words appear in a slogan at the top of Mikhail Sholokhov, "Nauka nenavisti," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 23 June 1943, 3.

Ehrenburg.[59] He noted, in his post-war memoirs, that; "During the first months of the war our soldiers did not feel any real hatred for the German army", something that he worked assiduously to combat.[60] Ehrenburg launched a ferocious appeal to eradicate the enemy in the pages of *Krasnaia zvezda*, the Red Army newspaper, in July 1942:

> We remember everything. We understood: the Germans are not humans. From now the word "German" for us is the most terrible curse. From now the word German unloads a firearm. We won't discuss. We won't be outraged. We will kill. If on a given day you haven't killed a single German, your day has been wasted. … If you can't kill the German with a bullet, kill a German with a bayonet. … If you have killed one German, kill another one – there is nothing more entertaining than German corpses. … Kill the German! The native soil crises out for this. Don't miss the chance. Don't let it slip. Kill![61]

This was a refrain that Ehrenburg, and others particularly Konstantin Simonov, continually repeated.[62] Writing on 13 August 1942 Ehrenburg reminded *Krasnaia zvezda*'s readers of the imperative to kill:

> Now there are no books, no life, no stars – only one thought: kill the Germans. Slaughter them all. Bury them. … We will no longer say 'good morning' or 'good night'. In the morning we will say, 'kill the German,' and at night, 'kill the German.'[63]

As the war progressed through phases of defence, reclamation of territory, and then conquest the imperative to hate intensified. Soldiers had to be re-energised to take the fight beyond Soviet borders. Nikolai Nikulin, for example, recalled that agitation had to be stepped up as soldiers approached the German border. Once again political officers shouted the slogans of 'A death for a death!!! Blood for Blood!!! Don't Forget!!! Don't Forgive!!! We will avenge!!!' …"[64]

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[59] Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*, 182–93.

[60] Ilya Ehrenburg, *The War 1941–45. Vol V Men, Years – Life*, trans. Tatiana Shebunina and Yvonne Kapp (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1964), 26–7.

[61] Il'ia Erenburg, "Ubei," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 24 July 1942, 4.

[62] On Simonov and his poem "Kill Him" see, Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (London: Penguin, 2008), 414–5.

[63] Il'ia Erenburg, "Pomni," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 13 August 1942, 3.

[64] Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, 207.

The well-spring of such violence, however, was never senseless brutality, but love for the Soviet motherland, concern from one's family, and grief for one's fallen comrades.[65] If hate propaganda gained traction, it did so because it channelled soldiers' personal experiences of atrocity. The desire to protect endangered loved-ones, and avenge members of new frontline families, became important sources of wartime motivation. Rather than fighting for violence's sake, individuals were usually protecting their homes, families, and the wider Soviet collective.[66] Nevertheless, vengeful passions were hard to restrain once stirred, especially once the Red Army was fighting beyond Soviet borders. Violent collectives of soldiers, partisans, security forces, and disbanded military units enacted extreme violence against civilians within and beyond Soviet space, and long after the war was won. Much of this violence was generated from below and was intended to punish and humiliate enemies or collaborators.[67] Although we might discern groups of men revelling in aggressive masculine behaviour, the overwhelming number of demobilised veterans did not experience long-term brutalisation, but succeeded in compartmentalising their wartime experiences.[68]

The Mobilising Force of Ideas

If the Red Army was not simply coerced by violence, or compelled by hate propaganda, an alternative argument, prominent in the historiography, is that soldiers were inspired by ideas. As Gabriel Temkin put it, "It was the great collective fear of annihilation, turned into hate, the desire for revenge, and finally into the 'cause', which

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[65] "Liubov' k rodine i nenavist, k vragu," *Pravda*, 18 May 1943, 1; "Nenavist k vragu," *Pravda*, 11 July 1942, 1.

[66] Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, "'Our City, Our Hearths, Our Families', Local Loyalties and Private Life in Soviet World War II Propaganda," *Slavic Review* 59, no. 4 (2000): 825–47 (838).

[67] Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in German: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, MA: Belpnapp Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 33–140; Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War: A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society, 1941–1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 26–28; Filip Slaveski, *The Soviet Occupation of Germany: Hunger, Mass Violence, and the Struggle for Peace, 1945–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 28–43; Mark Edele and Filip Slaveski, "Violence from Below: Explaining Crimes against Civilian across Soviet Space, 1943–1947," *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 6 (2016): 1020–1035.

[68] Robert Dale, *Demobilized Veterans in Late Stalinist Leningrad: Soldiers to Civilians* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 131–56.

inspired the Red Army during this war."[69] For Temkin that was "cause" patriotism.[70] Historians, however, disagree about what ideas were capable of mobilising and motivating millions of soldiers. Two contenders have come to dominate the debate: first, the power of Soviet socialism, in the guise of Stalinist ideology, and second, patriotism for the Soviet motherland. Although, historians have frequently presented these two ideas as binary opposites, with the literature lining up official ideology against popular patriotism, my contention is that these ideas operated in a similar intellectual space, and both had a limited capacity to inspire on the battlefield.

Official Stalinist Ideology

As Michael David-Fox has argued the history of Soviet society cannot be written without due consideration of the role of ideology.[71] The power of ideas in a militantly ideological state should not be dismissed. This holds true for both the military and civilian spheres. Long before the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Stalinist system proved itself adapt at mobilising large segments of society behind its political projects.[72] The youngest generation of the Red Army, the so-called frontline generation, upon whom the burden of wartime casualties fell particularly heavily, were born or grew up under socialism, and were socialised in its values. As the frontline soldier Viacheslav Kondriatev explained, "There was much in the system that we did not accept, but we could not imagine any other kind."[73] Historians of Stalinist subjectivities, in particular, have argued that Soviet citizens were shaped by the regime's ideology, to the extent that they found it difficult to escape official language and discourse.[74] The ideas and values inculcated

[69] Temkin, *My Just War*, 176.

[70] Ibid., 34.

[71] Michael David Fox, *Crossing Borders: Modernity, Ideology, and Culture in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 75.

[72] David Priestland, *Stalinism and the Politics of Mobilization: Ideas, Power, and Terror in Inter-war Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[73] Quoted in Elena Zubkova, *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945–1957*, ed. and trans. Hugh Ragsdale (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 26.

[74] Hellbeck, *Stalingrad*, 20.

during the 1930s, did not evaporate once soldiers reached the frontlines, but continued to impinge on mentalities and behaviour.

Although Soviet soldiers were a product of official ideology, it is unclear that the Red Army fought solely of out of belief in socialism, or Stalinist conviction. Veterans' memories of the importance of ideology at the frontlines, and its role in combat motivation, vary enormously. Many frontline veterans, regardless of their politics, expressed doubt that soldiers went on the attack shouting "For Stalin! For the Motherland" as they were frequently portrayed in post-war novels and films. Soldiers remembered swearing, but not charging into battle with Stalin's name on their lips. As Nikolai Nikulin recalled, "Hoarse crises and deeply obscene swearing could be heard on the frontlines, while bullets and shrapnel had not shut up screaming voices", but not cries of Stalin. "Commissars tried to drum it (For Stalin!) into our heads, but commissars weren't in the attack."[75] The slogan itself had been appearing in the press, and repeated at meetings, from almost the very start of the war.[76] Yet, whether soldiers cried Stalin's name in the heat of battle or not, was a poor indicator of their politics. As Grigorii Chukrai explained in his memoirs, "What we cried going into the attacks was not so important, many of us really were Stalinists."[77] Amongst the survivors, were soldiers who claimed to be loyal Stalinists, as well as those more sceptical about the mobilising force of socialism. Some soldiers like Vladimir Gelfand, for example, idolized Stalin and followed his wartime speeches with rapture.[78] The testimony of veterans who identified as true-believing Stalinist, however, should be balanced against those who experienced the war, in Mikhail Gefter's oft quoted phrase as a form of "spontaneous de-stalinisation".[79] The military disasters of 1941, and the conduct of the war in general, shook many individual's faith in the system. The literary historian Lazar Lazarev, himself a veteran, expressed this better than almost anyone:

> Before the war we had not questioned anything, we believed all the propaganda about Stalin, and believed in the Party as the embodiment of

[75] Nikulin, *Vospominaniia o voine*, 48.

[76] "Za Rodiny, za Stalina!", *Krasnaia zvezda*, 24 June 1941, 2.

[77] Grigorii Chukhrai, *Moia voina* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2001), 281.

[78] Gel'fand, *Dnevnik 1941–1946*, 219.

[79] Mikhail Gefter, *Iz tekh i etikh let* (Moscow: Progress, 1991), 418–23.

> justice. But what we saw in the first years of the war forced us to reflect on what we had been told. It made us question our beliefs.[80]

Soldiers' accounts are not necessarily accurate reflections of their wartime beliefs. Many veterans internalised the official myths about the war, finding comfort in them. Memoirs and memories, were frequently shaped by the political atmosphere in which they were written or recorded. However, the range of political views expressed by veterans was not simply the product of post-war manipulation and misremembering. In the immediate wake of war a remarkably wide range of political opinions was available to veterans. As Mark Edele has argued veterans expressed a remarkable spectrum of political ideas and opinions, ranging from, "an embrace of an idealized version of Western liberal democracy and capitalism to "Stalinism" – with all possible shades of grey between."[81] This position has been supported by his recent examination of the political motivation of Prisoners of War. Those who were fighting actively for, or indeed against, Stalinism were a small minority. Most Soviet soldiers, like the rest of Soviet society, were primarily concerned with their own survival, rather than ideology.[82]

Nevertheless, many scholars have pointed to the power of the ideology to inspire victory. Pre-war party and Komsomol members were well represented within the Red Army's ranks, with many communists volunteering to fight in the summer of 1941. Indeed, party membership increased dramatically during the war; high casualty rates necessitating a recruitment drive. Decrees passed in August and December 1941 lowered entry criteria, sweeping aside formalities for soldiers who had proved themselves in battle.[83] Nearly 80 per cent of new party recruits were from the armed forces.[84] By the summer of 1945 approximately three million party members, and 2.4 million Komsomol

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[80] Quoted in Figes, *The Whisperers*, 433. See also Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, 64–6.

[81] Mark Edele, "More than Just Stalinists: The Political Sentiments of Victors 1945–1953," in *Late Stalinist Russia*, 167–91 (174).

[82] Edele, *Stalin's Defectors*, 9–10, 119, 176–8.

[83] Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevnuik, *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945–1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 182.

[84] Cynthia S. Kaplan, "The Impact of World War II on the Party," in The Impact of World War II on the Soviet Union, ed. Susan J. Linz, 157–87 (160) (Totawa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985).

members were in uniform.[85] Many citizens for whom party membership was an unlikely prospect before the war, now found themselves inducted into the ranks of the governing party. This circumstance affected both the social composition of the party, and how socialism was practiced within party cells. Party membership conferred on the frontlines, did not equate with an orthodox understanding or acceptance of Stalinism. The brand of communism which soldiers practiced on the frontlines was their own political philosophy, not just a carbon copy of the ideas expressed by their political officers. As Merridale writes, "Front-line ideology was strong and deeply rooted, but it was also so distinct from that of the civilian elite that it might have been evolving in another universe."[86] This disparity between frontline and civilian understandings of ideology became clearer after the war as millions of communists, with a rudimentary knowledge of Bolshevik ideology and the conventions of civilian party life, were demobilized.[87] "This might have been a war of ideologies," to quote Edele, "but not everybody caught up in it was ideologically motivated."[88]

Although the bulk of the Red Army were not ideological warriors, but rather a non-committal citizens struggling to survive, there is little doubt that the propaganda and political apparatus helped mobilise soldiers. The Main Political Administration of the Red Army (GlavPUR), represented on the frontlines by political officers, known as commissars, was responsible for inspiring heroic deeds, and providing political education, not just fostering hatred. GlavPUR, in Reese's words, aimed to make recruits, "better socialists, better servants of the party, and better soldiers."[89] During their training and on the frontlines soldiers were subjected to a barrage of propaganda, which was difficult to avoid.[90] Rather than recalling political lectures laced with references to Stalin's speeches, some veterans remembered their political officers with fondness. Nikolai Markov, echoing a famous Stalinist mantra, paid respect to commissars as "engineers of human souls":

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[85] Hellbeck, *Stalingrad*, 34–5; Edele, *Stalin's Defectors*, 168.

[86] Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 199.

[87] Dale, *Demobilized Veterans*, 165–9.

[88] Edele, *Stalin's Defectors*, 10, 119.

[89] Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought*, 196.

[90] Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 94–6.

> It is hard for a man in war; someone has to chat with him. These fellows (political workers) were civilized, mannerly. They did their duty to nurture the human soul. /… It all depended on the man, but generally speaking, they were ordinary guys. They cultivated a proper attitude among the men toward each other.[91]

Many political officers took these pastoral responsibilities seriously. As Hellbeck writes, "Commissars saw themselves as responsible for not only the mental health of the soldiers, but also their physical well-being".[92] At times of enormous psychological pressure commissars could be an important source of support. The ideological reach of the political administration and its officers, however, was more circumscribed than often appreciated. Commissars might provide solace in moments of crisis, but this did not necessarily mean that they successful inculcated ideological messages. If the propaganda state was in crisis before the war, as David Brandenberger has argued, then it faced even greater pressures in wartime.[93] Practical problems complicated the work of communicating official messages. National shortages of newsprint and strained distribution networks meant that propaganda materials, including copies of *Krasnaia zvezda*, were often in short supply on the frontlines. Radio broadcasts could compensate for problems in newspaper distribution on the home front, but maintaining a signal in frontline conditions was difficult.[94] Qualified and experienced agitators were rare commodities; those that were available found it difficult to persuade cynical battle-hardened soldiers of the official line. In the early months of the war, "Soldiers at the front openly scoffed at the inaccurate report of supposed Soviet success and German weakness and took a jaundiced view of whatever GlavPUR had to say."[95] Questions about the effectiveness of political work continued to be raised throughout the war. In the wake of the battle of Stalingrad even Lieutenant General Vasily Chuikov, the best known of the Red Army's commanders on the Volga, questioned the value of propaganda and agitation: "The political work was

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[91] Markov, "There were No Long-term Survivors," 61–2.

[92] Hellbeck, *Stalingrad*, 44.

[93] David Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination, and Terror under Stalin, 1927–1941* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

[94] Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought*, 193–5; Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*, 7–34. On wartime radio see Stephen Lovell, *Russia in the Microphone Age: A History of Soviet Radio, 1919–1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 107–33.

[95] Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought*, 193.

conducted haphazardly, but it was appropriate to the circumstances. During such dangerous times a soldier doesn't need lectures or clever slogans. He needs to know that his high command is with him, that his commander is with him."[96]

Patriotism

If the capacity of Soviet ideology and Stalinist propaganda to inspire soldiers has been questioned, the mobilising force of patriotism has become a mainstay of explanations of why the Red Army fought and kept fighting. National pride, and protecting the Motherland from an abhorrent invader, undoubtedly served as a rallying points around which the war effort could take shape. The surge in patriotism provoked by the outbreak of the war is universally accepted. Between 1941 and 1945, according to one of the few scholars to interrogate the meaning of patriotism, the war fused the ethnic (*russkii*) and the imperial (*rossiiskii)* dimensions of Russian national identity, creating a new Russian national consciousness.[97] There are, however, problems in presenting patriotism as an alternative to official ideology. Soviet notions of patriotism were themselves mediated through the ideological apparatus, and were never entirely separate from Stalinist ideology. The language and symbols of Russian national identity were revived by the party-state long before June 1941, and had been at the core of Stalinist discourse for some time. In the mid-1930s propaganda was already fostering love for the motherland, and presenting patriotism as integral to the construction of socialism.[98]

Appeals to patriotism continued, and indeed strengthened, following the Nazi invasion.

In his radio address to the nation on 22 June 1941, announcing the German attack, Molotov invoked the memory of Napoleon's attack in 1812, declaring that the "The Red

[96] Hellbeck, *Stalingrad*, 274.

[97] Geoffrey Hosking, "The Second World War and Russian National Consciousness," *Past and Present* 175, no. 1 (2002), 162–87 (163).

[98] Nikolas Timosheff, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline in Communism in Russia* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1946); David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Russian National Identity, 1931–1956* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis*, 98–119.

Army and our people will again wage a victorious patriotic war for the motherland, for honour and freedom."[99] Such sentiments rapidly gained traction in the press and public discourse. By 28 June the editorial in *Krasnaia zvezda* was once again calling for a, "sacred patriotic war against the invading fascist vandals."[100] Patriotic slogans such as these rapidly established themselves in the national press.[101] Visual propaganda, in particular, played upon patriotic calls to arms, and appeals to defend the motherland (*rodina*), frequently represented in posters in female form, from invading forces.[102] Mass song, popular both within and beyond the Red Army, sought to mobilise patriotic emotions through rousing tunes, lyrics which evoked the landscape, and collective acts of singing.[103] According to Merridale, "music like this worked better than the prim rote-learning of the *politruks* (political instructors)," but many songs were not without their ideological component. Political education within the Red Army also strove to encourage patriotic sentiment. Commissars, as Afanasy Svirin explained after Stalingrad, taught soldiers,

> our Russian military traditions. We often quoted our great military leaders, who said that to protect your wives and children you must defend the fatherland, you must give everything to defend the fatherland. We told them about the heroic deeds of Ivan Susasin [a widely celebrated seventeenth century Russian national hero] and gave many other examples from the history of the Russian people.[104]

Wartime patriotism, then, was shaped and influenced by the propaganda apparatus, and never ideologically neutral. Nevertheless, a popular grass-roots dimension to patriotism survived. Local patriotism, the impulse to protect home and family, as we have already seen, was as much part of wartime Soviet patriotism, as grand visions of the Soviet

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[99] 'Vystuplenie po radio Zamestitelia Predsedatelia Sovetas Narodnykh Komissarov Soiuza SSR i Narodnogo Komissara Inostrannykh Del tov. V. M. MOLOTOVA 22 Iunia 1941 goda," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 24 June 1941, 1.

[100] "Sviashchennaia otechestvennaia voina sovetskogo naroda," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 28 June 1941, 1.

[101] Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture From Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 159–60.

[102] For example: Irakli Toidze, *The Motherland is calling!* (1941), Viktor Ivanov, *For the Motherland, for honour, for freedom!* (1941).

[103] Robert A. Rothstein, "Homeland, Home Town, and Battlefield: The Popular Song," in *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, 77–94; Suzanne Ament, "Reflecting Individual and Collective Identities: Songs of World War II," in *Gender and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Russian Culture*, ed. Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux, 113–30 (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006).

[104] Hellbeck, *Stalingrad*, 149.

motherland. [105] Propaganda played on these emotions, in part because, they were genuine. Just as soldiers practiced their own form of socialism, frontline patriotism had its own specificities. To quote Merridale, "The patriotism of the front was not the dour stuff of later ceremonial. It was maudlin, desperate, a way of clinging to the pre-war world that had been lost, a way of honouring the friends who died."[106]

If we begin to consider the remarkable social and ethnic diversity of the Red Army, the limitations of socialism and patriotism as mobilising forces begin to become clearer. The urban working classes, for example, were more likely to have internalised propaganda messages and ideological positions than the peasant soldiers who made up the bulk of the Red Army. Female soldiers, of whom there were nearly a million in the armed forces, as predominately young, education, urban, Komsomol members were statistically more likely to be committed communists than their male counterparts.[107] The gamut of ideas, emotions, and impulses capable of motivating men, held a broadly similar appeal to women. Yet, women also had their own motivations to serve, which included notions of gender equality, and determination to demonstrate what they were capable of.[108] Although women were not expected to volunteer to serve, as Roger Reese argues, "many felt compelled to do so to demonstrate that, as citizens, they were the equal of men."[109] Sadly, many women experienced abuse, discrimination, and viscous taunts about their sexual conduct during and after their service, that undermined lingering beliefs in Stalinist society's commitment to gender equality.[110]

Similarly, the appeal to patriotic sentiment gained different levels of traction beyond ethnic Russians. Soldiers from the non-Russian nationalities often had additional reasons to serve. Jewish soldiers had special reason for fearing and hating the enemy, but

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[105] Kirschenbaum, "'Our City, Our Hearths, Our Families'".

[106] Merridale, "Culture, Ideology, and Combat," 315.

[107] Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Roger D. Markwick and Euridice Charon Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline in the Second World War* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[108] Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat,* 137–43.

[109] Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought*, 269.

[110] Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 206–9; Reese, *Why Stalin's Solders Fought*, 291–303; Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 239–41; Reese, *Why Stalin's Solders Fought*, 291–303.

they also had to contend with anti-Semitic slurs and harassment from within their own ranks.[111] Soldiers from the Soviet Union's western borderlands, particularly western Ukraine, western Belorussia, and the Baltics, territories only recently acquired, had every reason to resent a particularly Russo-centric form of patriotism. They often served reluctantly, and many deserted or defected to the enemy.[112] In the early phase of the wars, appeals to defend the Soviet motherland resonated even less with men from the Central Asian republics. Persuading Central Asians to fight for the Soviet state, whilst knowledge and understanding of its ideology was so weak, proved very difficult. Kazakh and Kyrgyz conscripts were initially reluctant recruits and were forcibly drafted into the Red Army. Rebellions against conscription in the Caucasus were not unheard of.[113] Things were little better once soldiers reached their units. Non-Russians were generally seen as a problem by commanders, their resilience in battle and political loyalty was questioned. Poor training and difficulties following commands in Russian, the official language of command in the Red Army, meant that Central Asian soldiers suffered high casualties.[114] Over time the Red Army's Political Department, and Soviet propaganda more widely, refined its messages to Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek soldiers, and began to integrate non-Russians more successfully into a Soviet identity.[115] Nevertheless, non-Russian soldiers continued to suffer derision and even abuse. They were often assigned some of the most difficult and dangerous tasks in their sectors. As Brendon Schechter, observes, "Indifference and

[111] Oleg Budnitskii, "Jews at War: Diaries from the Front," in *Soviet Jews in World War II: Fighting, Witnessing, Remembering*, ed. Harriet Murav and Gennady Estraikh, 57–84 (Boston, MA.: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 76–7; Edele, *Stalin's Defectors*, 107–8.

[112] Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought*, 146–7, 250–2.

[113] Moritz Florin, "Becoming Soviet through War: The Kyrgyz and the Great Fatherland War," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 17, no. 3 (2016): 495–516 (495–500); Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought*, 141–6.

[114] Brandon Schechter, "'The People's Instructions': Indigenizing the Great Patriotic War Among 'Non-Russians'," *Ab Imperio* 3 (2012): 109–33 (109–16).

[115] Schechter, "'The People's Instructions'; Roberto J. Carmack, "History and hero-making: patriotic narratives and the Sovietization of Kazakh front-line propaganda, 1941–1945," *Central Asian Survey* 33, 1 (2014): 95–112; Boram Shin, "Red Army Propaganda for Uzbek Soldiers and Localised Soviet Internationalism in World War II," *Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 42, no. 1 (2015): 39–63; "Florin, "Becoming Soviet Through War".

hostility toward 'non-Russians' by many of their commanders could be shockingly callous."[116]

Frontline Communities and Social Support

In general, Soviet soldiers were more likely to be fighting for a sense of local community, than they were an overarching Soviet identity. That sense of community also included the "fictive kinship" established amidst the shared suffering and hardship of the frontlines. The Red Army fought not only for families and loved ones, but also members of the "frontline brotherhood", the small tightly-knit groups of friends, which were so important in sustaining frontline morale. Military historians have long acknowledged the critical role of these "primary groups" in combat effectiveness.[117] Hellbeck questions the contribution that frontline bonds played in the Red Army, arguing that, "the terrible casualty rate on the Soviet side consumed whole units in a matter of days," which, "made it impossible for soldiers to develop personal cohesion."[118] Others have noted the challenges low life expectancy and rapid turnover created for the formation of primary groups in both the Red Army and other forces.[119] Without doubt the membership of these primary groups were constantly shifting, as soldiers were killed, captured, or injured. As Nikolai Markov explained in his memoirs, "By September 1943 there weren't any of the men left in my platoon with whom I'd started. The platoon was constantly being rebuilt and men were always rotating in and out of it."[120] Despite the odds against it, there were soldiers who did survive, and could become the pivots around which primary groups formed. Soldiers accounts often have much to say about wartime friendships, or the relationship between officers and men. As Reese explains, "veterans almost always mention the names of five or fewer wartime comrades who made a difference in their lives." These friends, perhaps alongside a trusted officer or a compassionate political

[116] Schechter, "'The People's Instructions'," 112.

[117] For example, E. A. Shills and Morris Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintergration in the Wehrmacht in World War II," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 12 (1948): 280–315.

[118] Hellbeck, *Stalingrad*, 22.

[119] Merridale, "Culture, Ideology, and Combat," 322; Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 173–4; Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941–45, German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare*, 2nd ed. (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), 36–7.

[120] Markov, "There were No Long-term Survivors," 53.

instructor, were critical in keeping fear in check.[121]. Furthermore, in the heightened sensory environment of the frontlines it did not take long for strong emotional bonds to form. As one soldier wrote to the fiancée of a deceased comrade after the war:

> Life at the front brings people together very quickly. It's enough to spend one or two days with someone, and you know all his characteristics and all his feelings in a way you would never know them in peacetime, even after a whole year. There is nothing stronger than front-line friendship, and nothing can break it, not even death.[122]

Frontline life threw soldiers into remarkable proximity, so close that they grew accustomed to the smell of each other's sweat and unwashed bodies.[123] They slept side by side, ate from the same pot, and shared almost everything, even their letters. Dead comrades remained with their friends long after they were buried; their deaths providing another reason for revenge. Years later veterans still remembered their comrades, attempted to trace the graves and relatives of dead friends, and corresponded with fellow survivors.

Comradeship helped make the pressures of battle more bearable, but so did the cultures and practices that emerged within the Red Army. Even amidst the death and destruction the routines of frontline life sustain soldiers. As Ilya Ehrenburg later explained:

> The men lived in such close proximity, not only to the Germans, but to death itself that they had stopped noticing it; a way of life had been established. They wondered when they would be issued with their tot of vodka, and why Varya, who had moved into the batallion commander's dugout, had received a medal. By the poor light of the smoky oil-wick the soldiers quarrelled, wrote letters home, hunted lice (known as 'snipers'), and speculated on what things would be like when the war was over.[124]

"War is never only about killing and dying," as Oleg Budnitskii reminds us. "Card-playing, drinking, singing, jealousy, love, and theft were all part of the war."[125] For scholars of the First World War, where studies of frontline conditions are more advanced, this will hardly

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[121] Reese, *Why Did Stalin's Soldiers Fight*, 218.

[122] Seniavskaia, *Frontovoe pokolenie,* 85–6.

[123] Jug, "Sensing Danger," 222–3.

[124] Ehrenburg, *The War 1941–45*, 81.

[125] Budnitskii, "Jews at War," 58.

be a revelation. Yet, only relatively recently have historians of the Red Army begun to strip away the myths woven around the Soviet war experience. Over a decade ago, Catherine Merridale's ground-breaking social history of the Red Army demonstrated the role improved rations, a sturdy pair of boots, a rousing song or smutty joke, receiving a letter or parcel from home, swig of vodka or a drag on a cigarette played in enabling soldiers to survive the frontlines.[126] A new generation of scholars are now taking on the challenge of revealing in ever greater detail the complexities of wartime military culture. New research is revealing the Red Army's military culture, the social bonds created by communal eating, the relationship between genders and ethnic groups, as well as more nuanced emotional and sensory histories.[127] Nevertheless, much work remains to explore the inner turmoil unleashed by extreme violence, what Aleix Peri terms "the war within", something which we understand better in civilian contexts.[128] We still know, for example, little about the jokes and rumours that circulated on the frontlines, or the language and slang that soldiers spoke amongst themselves, as opposed to the phrases uttered at political meetings, or the words scrawled to relatives in letters. All of these might reveal more about how ideas and information circulated within the ranks, and help us better understand how soldiers adapted and internalised propaganda messages. Better access to the archives of the Ministry of Defence and the Military Medical Academy might inform more subtle understandings of combat breakdown, and the war's effects on minds and bodies.

Conclusion

[126] Merridale, *Ivan's War*.

[127] Brandon Schechter, *"Khoziaistvo* and *Khoziaeva*: The Properties and Proprietors of the Red Army, 1941–45," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 18, no. 3 (2016): 487–510; Brandon Schechter, "The State's Pot and the Soldier's Spoon: Rations (Paëk) in the Red Army," in *Hunger and War: Food Provisioning in the Soviet Union During World War II*, ed. Wendy Z. Goldman and Donald Filtzer, 98–157 (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015); Steven G. Jug, "Red Army Romance: Preserving masculine hegemony in mixed gender combat units, 1943–1944*," Journal of War and Culture Studies* 5, no. 3 (2012): 321–34; Jug, "Sensing Danger."

[128] Alexis Peri, *The War Within: Diaries from the Siege of Leningrad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

No single factor adequately explains why the core of the Red Army fought and continued to fight in the face of such exceptional violence and suffering. Fear, coercion, ideology, propaganda, patriotism, and primary groups all played their part in motivating soldiers. Not all Soviet soldiers fought for the same reasons, and those reasons changed over the time. The wars of defence, liberation and re-conquest necessitated different attitudes from soldiers and commanders. In other words, Soviet soldiers were human beings with complicated inner worlds and their own diverse motivations to serve, not passive subjects of Soviet power. Nevertheless, the extreme violence, the scale of death and destruction on the Eastern Front, and the highly ideological nature of the conflict, has made the Soviet experience an important test case for why soldiers endured the horror and of modern industrialised warfare. The prominence, however, of ideology and patriotism in historians' explanations of what and for whom Soviet soldiers were fighting for, perhaps reveal more about the interests and historiographical preoccupations of professional historians, than the interests of "ordinary soldiers". Most soldiers were desperately trying to survive, rather than thinking deeply about socialism or the motherl and. Although Soviet soldiers faced great violence at the hands of the enemy, and were subject to the coercive force of Stalinist violence, the Red Army fought for many of the same reasons as soldiers everywhere. They were fighting for each other, for their families and communities, rather than the party or Stalin. Like other armies, primary groups and wartime emotions, were more effective at mobilising soldiers than propaganda alone. Soviet soldiers, then, were anything but faceless unthinking brutes or superhuman heroes of Cold War mythology. They had much in common with combatants of the First and Second World wars from across Europe. Rather than being a special case Russia and the Soviet Union was part of a wider World at War.