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Battle for the People: Ideological Conflict between Soviet Partisans, the German Military, and Ukrainian Nationalists in Nazi-Occupied Ukraine

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Abstract

Soviet historiography discusses the People's War during the Second World War, the idea that all of the Soviet people rallied to the cause and fought off the Nazi invaders, but this is far from the truth. Within the western borderlands of the Soviet Union multiple conflicting groups fought for control of and support from the people. This was especially true in Ukraine where the German Army, Soviet Partisans and Ukrainian nationalists all fought 'for the people' and for their own ideologies. This paper is an attempt to discuss the ideological conflict between the Nazis, the Soviets, and the Ukrainian nationalists, and how the failure or success of these policies led to the legitimizing of policies of mass murder of the local Ukrainian, Jewish, and Polish populations, and how the tension from the partisan struggle continues to this day.

Battle for the People: Ideological Conflict between Soviet Partisans, the German Military, and Ukrainian Nationalists in Nazi-Occupied Ukraine

David Heim

History 418: Nazism

Professor Bowman

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Table of Contents

List of Maps and Figures

Fig. 1: Forest Areas of Ukraine and adjacent territories in 1941 – pg. 6

Fig. 2: Photo of S.A. Kovpak – pg. 19

Fig. 3: Total Deaths Inflicted by Guerillas during Their Attacks and Soviet Counterinsurgency Operations, 1944-1946 – pg. 33

<u>Introduction</u>

Partisan warfare was not a phenomenon unique to Soviet lands during World War II, but it was in this region that partisans played the largest role in the conflict. Partisans both changed the nature of warfare on the eastern front and were transformed by this same conflict. Who constituted a partisan depended largely on who was asked. Soviets considered partisans as those who were under their central control. The Nazi categorization of partisans was much broader, constituting anyone who was a Jew, harbored partisans, was a partisan, or in general obstructed Nazi policy.[1] As the war progressed and ideology became more crucial to supporting Nazi war efforts, the category of partisan became increasingly convoluted, leading to mass murders of Soviet citizens across the front. Neither the Nazis nor the Soviets supported "independent" partisans or nationalist groups. Independent groups were often integrated into the larger groups, but nationalist groups fought for their own independence leading to permanent conflict with the Soviets and a much more complicated policy towards the Nazis.

Beginning as early as the days following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, small pockets of independent resistance formed against German occupation, but it was not until early spring 1942 that organized resistance behind the front lines began to be coordinated by the Soviet central command. Pro-Soviet partisans were far from the only troops fighting behind the front line though. Independent partisan groups continued to operate; they were often comprised of Jewish individuals who were attacked and repressed by both Soviet and Nazi forces. Nationalist groups, such as the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the Russian National Liberation Army (RONA), also combatted pro-Soviet and pro-Nazi groups, though

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[1] Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 89.

their resistance was much greater against pro-Soviet forces, in line with their fight for

independence from the Soviet Union.[2]

In the early stages of the war, from Operation Barbarossa to the Battle of Kursk in July

1943, Soviet partisans struggled in Ukraine because of their inability to connect with local

populations, who often harbored anti-Soviet sentiments. Soviet partisans were also unable to

receive supplies from the Soviet government, which itself struggled to turn around the Nazi

offensive. Even after July 1943 and the beginning of the Soviet drive towards Berlin, the Soviet

partisans continued to struggle to achieve both their ideological and military objectives. The

increasing anti-partisan efforts of the retreating Nazi forces along with the growing strength of

Ukrainian independence groups, who fought Soviet troops for years after the end of World War

II in 1945, hindered pro-Soviet partisan efforts. As the war dragged on, ideology increasingly

became a foundation for mass murders of the Ukrainian population. All three groups—

Nationalists, Nazis, and Soviets—attempted to convince the population that they were fighting

for the good of the people, but all three groups murdered the same people they were supposedly

protecting. As all three groups battled for the "people", it was the people who suffered the most.

Mass executions, torching of villages, scorched-earth policies, labor requisitions, rape, and

looting of the local population became common events in western Ukraine during World War II.

Anti-Soviet sentiments and the failure of Soviet partisans to connect with the people due

to the failure of centralized Soviet policy, Nazi anti-partisan activity and its increasingly

aggressive nature throughout the war, and the success of nationalist Ukrainian partisan groups

who continued to combat Soviet forces into 1949 are all factors to be understood in the context

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[2] Wiktor Poliszczuk, *Bitter Truth: The Criminality of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA): the Testimony of a Ukrainian* (Toronto: Author, 1999), 167-175.

of the ideological battle waged in Ukraine during World War II. This ideological battle between Soviet, Nazi, and Ukrainian nationalist ideologies, and the distortion of the conflicting ideologies allowed for the mass murder and repression of the Ukrainian population by Soviet partisans, the Nazi occupiers, and the Ukrainian nationalists.

Ultimately, this paper will attempt to understand how ideological conflict between the Nazis, the Soviets, and Ukrainian nationalists "legitimized" mass murder and other repressive means against the local population, how regional and ethnic tensions within Ukraine were exacerbated by the Nazi invasion in 1941, and how to some extent these tensions continue to this day within Ukraine in the struggle over the legacy of the partisan struggle during World War II.

Map 2. Forest areas of Ukraine and adjacent territories in 1941. *Source: Historischer Atlas der Ukraine. Ein deutsches Dokument aus dem Jahr 1941. – Wiesbaden, 1993. Die Karte Nr 12.* [3]
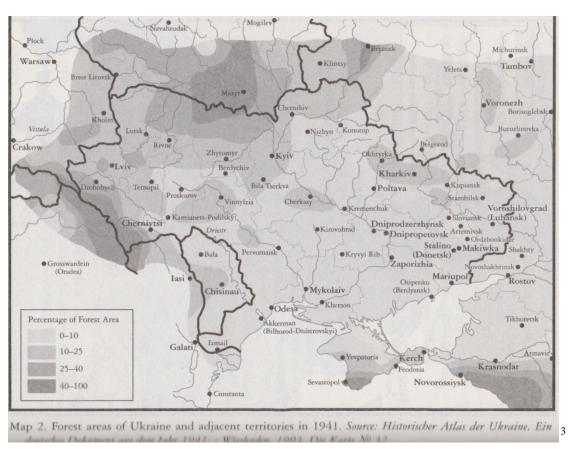
Fig. 1: Forested areas of Ukraine in 1941

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[3] Alexander Gogun, *Stalin's Commandos: Ukrainian Partisan Forces on the Eastern Front* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), xii.

Historiography

The historiography of partisan movements on the Eastern Front has been dictated in large part by nationalistic narratives of the Soviet Union pre-1991 and of both Russia and Ukraine in the post-Soviet period. The Cold War period offered a more or less homogenous view of partisans as groups of Russians organized and centralized under the Soviet government and fighting for the liberation of the working classes in occupied territory. Works such as the *Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941-1945: A General Outline*, written within the USSR, supported this Soviet narrative of class struggle with claims such as, "the fight for liberation against the invader merged increasingly with the people's struggle against the exploiting classes."[4] Much of the work from the period was dominated by Soviet historians, whereas western historians wrote little more than handbooks on the military tactics of Soviet partisan and German forces for the U.S. military.[5] On top of the Soviet historians' domination of the historiographical discussion, other partisan groups who operated outside of Soviet control were covered up or removed from records and histories. In his memoir *A Voice from the Forest: Memoirs of a Jewish Partisan*, Nahum Kohn recalled the absence of his Jewish partisan groups from the official records. Although his actions during his time under Soviet control were recorded, "the Soviet authorities refused to include his eighteen-man Jewish group in the record."[6]

Even in the post-Soviet period many historians, especially within the newly independent Ukraine, pushed nationalistic narratives of the partisan conflict. The revival of Stepan Bandera,

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[4] P.N. Pospelov, ed., *Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941-1945: A General Outline* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 222.

[5] Edgar M. Howell, *The Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941-1944* (Washington DC: Department of the Army, 1956).

[6] Nahum Kohn, *A Voice from the Forest: Memoirs of a Jewish Partisan* (Holocaust Library: New York, 1980), 10-11.

leader of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, as a national hero of Ukraine is one of the major examples of transforming the actions of partisans to fit a specific nationalist narrative. Bandera, long considered a Nazi collaborator and traitor to the Soviet cause, has since been restored, in the minds of many, as a hero of the Ukraine.[7] The whitewashing of crimes in favor of national heroes remains a problematic aspect of the historiography on partisan activity. The "need" to justify the historic narrative of specific states, increasingly important in post-Soviet Eastern Europe, has allowed for the revival and support of an individual who, "regarded Russia as the principle enemy of Ukraine…showed little tolerance for…Poles and Jews…and [was willing] to abandon all principles to attain the goal of an independent Ukraine."[8]

Although nationalist narratives have remained a large part of the historiography, the post-Soviet period has also seen a proliferation of memoirs by Jewish partisans and works attempting to counter the basic Cold War era assumptions created by the pro-Soviet narrative. Works such as those by Nahum Kohn, Harold Zissman, and the popularity of the Bielski brothers' story in popular culture are all a small portion of the numerous works and memoirs written by partisans who had been left out of the official Soviet records and narrative.[9] Along with the increased number of memoirs written, an attempt has been made to remove the narrative from the grip of the conflict between nationalist considerations. One of the most successful attempts was by Timothy Snyder. His work *Bloodlands: Europe between Stalin and Hitler*, focused on Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, and the Baltic states, and the horrors witnessed by the populations of these lands

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[7] David R. Marples, "Stepan Bandera: The Resurrection of a Ukrainian National Hero," *Europe-Asia Studies* 58 (2006): 555-566.

[8] David R. Marples, "Stepan Bandera: The Resurrection of a Ukrainian National Hero," 565.

[9] Kohn, *A Voice from the Forest*. Harold Zissman, *The Warriors: My Life as a Jewish Soviet Partisan* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005). Peter Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers: The True Story of Three Men who Defied the Nazis, Saved 1,200 Jews, and Built a Village in the Forest* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003).

at the hands of both Nazi and Soviet authorities. In one chapter discussing partisan groups in Belarus, as throughout the entire book, Snyder breaks this image of Soviet partisans as protectors of the people. In fact, Snyder completely overturns this myth in many regards. Throughout the chapter Snyder writes that Soviet partisan units in Belarus often turned away or killed Jews who attempted to join units, showed little regard for the rights and lives of women, by the end of the war were populated by many of the same individuals who had acted as local auxiliary forces for the Nazis, and were the killers of tens of thousands of fellow Belarussians.[10] Snyder, along with other historians in the post-Soviet period, has worked to complicate the narrative made popular by Soviet historians and Ukrainian historians in the name of their national histories.

The present work will not go so far as Snyder in its criticism of partisan fighters, but it will be an attempt to better understand the interactions between the different movements in western Ukraine, and how it led to the mass murder of the local population. In the past, historians have discussed the Soviet partisan movement, memoirs and other works have discussed the independent groups and nationalist Ukrainian groups, and more recent works such as those by Snyder have dissected interactions between the Nazis and the partisan forces. Minimal work though has been completed in understanding the interactions between pro-Soviet partisans, pro-Ukrainian partisans, and the German military and the underlying historical, military, and ideological factors that created the diverse landscape of support and conflict in Ukraine. This paper will be the start of a discussion on these interactions, their causes, and their overall impact on the Eastern Front and Ukrainian national identity in the post-1945 and post-Soviet periods.

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[10] Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 225-252.

Ukraine in the Russian Civil War and Ukrainian Famine

Relations between Ukraine/Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Soviet Union central leadership from 1917 onwards were often not cordial and the creation of nationalist Ukrainian armies during World War II was not the first time Ukrainians had fought against Russian aggression in the twentieth century. The strong anti-Soviet sentiments encountered in Ukrainian territory at the start of World War II can be attributed to multiple events earlier in the twentieth-century, most prominently the Russian Civil War and the Ukrainian famine.

Although involving many diverse interests, the Russian Civil War, which began in 1917, was a conflict between the Bolshevik-led Red Army and the White Armies of those still loyal to the Russian Empire or the democratic interests of the provisional government. For a majority of the Russian Civil War, Ukraine was independent of the emerging Soviet Union. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, ratified in March 1918 and signed between Germany and the Bolsheviks, formally ended Russian involvement in World War I. The treaty forced the Bolsheviks to cede most of the European land controlled by Russia which later became the independent states of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine.[11] Many in Ukraine wanted to keep their newly independent state separate from Russia. Ukraine was largely a peasant population. An 1897 census record reveals that close to ninety percent of the Ukrainian population was in the peasant class.[12] With a population overwhelmingly Ukrainian and peasant, Russians were viewed as oppressive outsiders, who "were heavily represented among the principal landowners."[13] Support for Ukrainian nationalist parties in elections, ukrainianization of education, religion, and governance and rise of organizations promoting Ukrainian autonomy portrayed a country that

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[11] S.L.A. Marshall, *World War I* (New York: Mariner Books, 2001), 327-334.
[12] Steven L. Guthier, "The Popular Base of Ukrainian Nationalism in 1917," *Slavic Review* 38 (1979): 31.
[13] Ibid., 32.

wanted to remain free from Soviet, and more importantly Russian, control. Unfortunately, national autonomy did not materialize in this period. The small elite classes, mainly Russian bureaucrats, landowners, and industrialists (a group that also contained many Jews), focused in the major cities such as Kiev, supported reintegration with Russia and by 1921 the Bolsheviks had regained control of the Ukrainian heartland.[14] The same peasants who supported Ukrainian independence during the Russian Civil War would become victims of Soviet policy little more than a decade later. Only a few years after the Russian Civil War ended in 1922, Lenin passed away and by the end of the 1920s Joseph Stalin was in firm control of the Soviet state.[15]

Stalin enacted a policy not only directed at ending calls for autonomy but also attempting to destroy any notions of Ukrainian nationalism. Stalin's policy of central control meant the collectivization of agriculture. Grain requisitions required by the state were unable to be met by the Ukrainian countryside, which struggled with poor weather, pests, lack of livestock and tractor equipment, deportation of the best farmers, and refusal by peasants to work.[16] Although it was clear that many factors caused the inability of peasants to meet the grain quotas, Stalin declared it political sabotage by local authorities, Ukrainian nationalists, and, the kulaks (rich peasant classes), who intentionally were withholding grain from the state authority.[17] There were many responses the Soviet state could have taken to shield the population from starvation, but it deliberately ignored all attempts to protect the Ukrainian peasants. Snyder considers seven different policy actions that reveal the Ukrainian famine to be a result of intentional and lethal policies intended to kill the Ukrainian peasantry. These seven policies included: seizure of grain surpluses in prosperous areas to meet the overall quota; peasants who were unable to meet the

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[14] Guthier, "The Popular Base of Ukrainian Nationalism in 1917," 32.
[15] Gregory L. Freeze, *Russia: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 307-318.
[16] Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 33.
[17] Ibid., 24-46.

quota had to pay higher taxes on meat; grain quotas were raised for farms unable to meet the original demand; mass arrests of Ukrainian communist leaders; continued setting of quotas during the famine; sealing off the Ukrainian borders and issuing internal passports; and the seizure of seed grain needed to plant future yields.[18] These policies led to the intentional starvation of the Ukrainian peasantry and the death of an estimated three million people. These blatant policies of starvation along with the arrest of the Ukrainian elite resulted in what Snyder considers the death of Ukrainian autonomy and the removal of Ukrainian identity.[19] In this regard, it is possible to argue with Snyder and suggest that it was not the death of Ukrainian nationalism and identity, but rather the rise of anti-Soviet attitudes throughout the populace. Instead of destroying autonomous thought, Stalin's policies caused greater support for autonomous action from a population that viewed its own government as outsiders. The recent history of Ukrainian autonomy during the Russian Civil War, along with Stalinist policies of mass murder in the 1930s, created a populace that despised the Soviet government and allowed for the rise of nationalist groups and independent partisan groups during the war that were just as likely to fight the Soviets as they were the Nazis.

Along with a recent history of oppression that created an anti-Soviet atmosphere, Ukraine also had a history of anti-Semitism. Nationalist groups such as the OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) referred to the "Polish-Jewish-Russian capitalists and landowners."[20] This was very similar to the Nazi creation of the Judeo-Bolshevik threat. Ukrainian territory had also witnessed major pogroms during the Russian Civil War. During occupation of western territories by white armies, it has been estimated that between 100,000 and 200,000 Jews were

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[18] Ibid., 42-46.
[19] Ibid., 54-55.
[20] Marco Carynnyk, "Foes of our Rebirth: Ukrainian Nationalist Discussions about Jews, 1929-1947," *Nationalities Papers* 39 (2011): 317.

murdered in western Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine throughout the Russian Civil War, often for

the suggestion that they "had welcomed the Bolsheviks with joy."[21] Mass murder was committed

by both Red and White troops, who perceived themselves as threatened by ethnic and ideological

enemies and commanders on both sides were unwilling to stop their troops. General Denikin,

commander of the White Army in Ukraine, was revolted by the pogroms but "did not want to

appear pro-Jewish." Lenin's response to the murder of Jews was little more than a mild

reprimand.[22] Attacks on Jews had been common in recent Ukrainian history, and there were

many Ukrainians, both nationalist and otherwise, who were suspicious of ethnic outsiders,

including Jews, Poles, and Russians, who would have considered the murder of Jews for political

ends a common and perhaps acceptable means of conducting political policy during wartime.[23]

Soviet Partisans as an Extension of Soviet Policy

Anti-Soviet attitudes throughout Ukraine made it difficult for a partisan effort centralized

from Moscow to be effective. The overall Soviet partisan movement was not unified under

central command in Moscow until early 1942. From the beginning of the Second World War,

however, Moscow airdropped specialists into occupied territory. Often personnel who worked

for the party, state, or NKVD and had fled from the territory under Nazi occupation were

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[21] Robert Gellately, *Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler: The Age of Social Catastrophe* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 69.
[22] Ibid.
[23] For an overview of Russian history see Gregory L. Freeze, *Russia: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). For an overview of Ukrainian history see Anna Reid, *Borderland: A Journey through the History of Ukraine* (New York: Basic Books, 2000). For an overview of World War II in Eastern Europe see Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

reinserted into these territories to form partisan groups.[24] Nahum Kohn, a Jewish partisan embedded in the overall Soviet partisan command structure, wrote on the origin of his partisan army as being, "a group of twenty men parachuted from Moscow…another group was soon parachuted there, and it was followed by a third group and a fourth."[25] These inserted groups would become the core leadership of most Moscow-controlled partisan organizations. Almost like Special Forces, these small task forces were inserted to create the ideological and military conditions necessary for the start of guerilla-style conflict.[26] In a country where anti-Soviet sentiments were strong and most ethnicities other than Ukrainian considered enemies, the local populace would have resented the formation of leadership cores made up of ethnic Russians controlled by Moscow, which did little to help support these partisan efforts in the early years.

Along with distrust from the local populace, the Red Army was unprepared for the initial Nazi offensive. The encirclement of over one million Soviet troops in the early weeks of the war, such as pockets formed around Kiev and Bryansk, and the subsequent break down of these pockets caused a massive number of Red Army soldiers to flee into forested areas in the region. Many of these soldiers fled for fear of Nazi captivity or hope for a Soviet victory. They formed or joined pro-Soviet partisan groups in hopes of continuing their service to the Motherland.[27] The overall number of former Red Army soldiers within the partisan movement has been an issue of contention among historians and in official Soviet records. While some historians have suggested that throughout the war former Red Army soldiers made up around forty percent of the partisan strength, with numbers as high as sixty percent in 1941, Soviet and Russian sources

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[24] Alexander Hill, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941-1945: A Documentary Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 196.

[25] Kohn, *A Voice from the Forest*, 104.

[26] Gogun, *Stalin's Commandos: Ukrainian Partisan Forces on the Eastern Front*, 11-16.

[27] Leonid Grenkevich, *The Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941-1944* (Portland: Frank Cass, 1999), 125-126.

have suggested the number to be closer to eleven percent, most likely attempting to protect the

myth that the partisan struggle was truly a spontaneous people's struggle against fascist

occupation.[28] This creates a major problem for understanding the true nature of the partisan

conflict in Ukraine. Were the people involved in the 'People's War' or is it a myth of Soviet

historiography? While Soviet authorities and historians have created this myth of the people's

involvement in liberation from Nazi occupation, and it might hold true in ethnic Russian

territory, it would seem that in many of the borderland regions the local populations had little

interest in supporting Soviet partisan efforts.

These early partisan units proved to be extremely ineffective in combatting the first

German offensives in the latter half of 1941 and early 1942. The destruction battalions formed by

the NKVD (units formed for the purpose of sabotage in occupied areas) were often quickly

thrown together and the few home guard battalions formed from the population had little to no

supplies and had zero expertise in combat. Many attacks conducted by partisan groups were

often scattered and of little strategic importance, with raids confined mainly to small areas near

forests instead of on major supply centers captured by the Nazis.[29] Many of the units, even the

NKVD formed destruction battalions, were ill-equipped. Most of the Moscow-formed battalions

and all of the home guard units lacked basic weaponry necessary for guerrilla-style warfare.

They had little to no automatic weaponry and anti-tank weapons; they instead had to rely on

Molotov cocktails to attack heavily-armored vehicles.[30] This made many of the early missions

suicide for undertrained and underequipped units. Panteleimon Ponomarenko, head of the

Central Staff of the Partisan Movement (TsSHPD) formed in 1942 to oversee partisan warfare,

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[28] Ibid., 126-128.
[29] Howell, *The Soviet Partisan Movement*, 49-50.
[30] Kenneth Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas: Soviet Partisans in World War II* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 32.

even admitted to Stalin in February 1943 that up until that point overall partisan actions across the occupation zones had "still not reached such an extent as to have operational impact on the German front line."[31] Lack of equipment, little to no training, and failure of organization were only some of the partisan organizations' problems.

The largest problem for pro-Soviet partisan action in the first two years of the war was the lack of popular support. Failure to gain the people's aid was caused not only by anti-Soviet sentiments, but overall initial enthusiasm for Nazi occupation, or in their minds, liberation. As discussed earlier, many Ukrainians viewed the Nazis as liberators due to the very recent traumatic experiences of collectivization and mass deportation in tandem with the famine of 1932 and 1933. Many hoped that the Nazis would overturn the policies that had recently been forced upon the Ukrainian population. Motivated by hatred of the Soviets, many Ukrainians initially welcomed the Nazi troops with open arms. Ironically, positive Soviet propaganda in the early-1940s in connection with the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact helped create an idea that the Nazi government was an ally and subsequently was to be trusted.[32] A memory of peaceful German occupation at the end of World War I and the early behavior of the Nazi troops also played an important role in the population's behavior. Accounts across occupied territory of German troops arriving and providing the villagers with goods such as eggs and meat created a sense of goodwill towards the occupiers.[33] In his memoir, Kohn often recounted the Ukrainian nationalists (banderovtsy, named for their leader Stepan Bandera) and wrote that, "the Germans kept them as 'favorites'," and that they would also form groups in the woods that would "make

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[31] Hill, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union*, 211.
[32] Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas*, 32.
[33] Ibid.

the area clean of Jews."[34] Many seemed, at least early on, to support the Nazis and their ideas

concerning the removal of Communists and Jews from occupied territory. Many others refused

to pick sides and hoped to wait and see which army would achieve victory. This type of inaction

was just as harmful to pro-Soviet groups as open support for the Nazis. Without supply lines set

up from the Soviet government, the partisan groups in the first years of the war had to rely on the

support of the people, and many refused to do so. Although the people were never truly accepted

by the central government into the 'people's war,' many wanted no part with it to begin with,

and this was devastating for the early partisan units.[35]

Many were also reluctant to join Soviet partisan groups because of the actions of the

Soviet forces during their initial retreat from the borderlands. Days before retreating from towns

the NKVD "endorsed the summary execution of those sentenced for 'counterrevolutionary

crimes and grave embezzlement."[36] Thousands of people jailed for petty ideological crimes were

brutally executed. The NKVD records claim that they evacuated 141,527 prisoners to eastern

prisons, and only executed 11,319, but it is very likely that the number of executed was higher

than reported.[37] Along with their scorched-earth policies, the Soviet partisans were despised by

many in Ukraine due to the brutal policies enacted to defeat the advancing Nazis, which

disregarded the lives of the local population.

The Jews fared little better than the Ukrainians. As the war continued and it became clear

that the Jews had no fate other than death in the ghettos, many fled to the forest to join partisan

groups. Jewish youth were more likely than their elders to flee, but upon entering the forest their

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[34] Kohn, *A Voice from the Forest*, 93.
[35] Grenkevich, *The Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941-1944*, 109-111.
[36] Alexander Statiev, *The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 55.
[37] Ibid.

odds of survival were little better than remaining in the ghettos. They faced high levels of anti-Semitism from the Ukrainian partisans and the local populace and were likely to be turned over to the Nazis.[38]

On July 18, 1941 Stalin sent instructions on how partisan warfare was to be conducted. Stalin wrote that groups should be made of the "most reliable party, Soviet and Komsomol leadership elements," and "from amongst participants in the Civil War and from those comrades that have already proved themselves in the destruction battalions."[39] The NKVD was one of the most active government administrations in the partisan war. By July 5, 1941, a week or two after combat had commenced, the NKVD had formed the Department of Special Tasks to control intelligence and sabotage operations conducted in Nazi-occupied territory.[40] In August of the same year, the NKVD was given permission by Stalin to create destruction battalions, the same groups which would later comprise the core of many partisan organizations. In January of 1942 the NKVD formed the Fourth Administration which would come to rival the central government's own organs for control of the partisan struggle. [41] It was not until May 1942 that the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement had been formed in Moscow and new instructions were sent out by September on how partisan warfare was to be conducted. The central control Moscow attempted to exert over the partisan struggle by early 1942 meant the addition of political commissars and state personnel to each partisan group.[42] The addition of individuals like commissars and state officials to Soviet partisan groups meant that the partisan's objectives

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[38] Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1939-1945* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), 322-323.

[39] Hill, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union,* 195.

[40] Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas*, 108.

[41] Ibid., 108-109.

[42] Ben Shepherd and Juliette Pattinson, ed., *War in a Twilight World: Partisan and Anti-Partisan Warfare in Eastern Europe, 1939-1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 44.

also included political and ideological objectives. Within a little over a year, the Soviets had already created central control of the partisan movement; it had originated as a movement largely controlled and operated by Moscow-inserted operatives and former Red Army soldiers. The people seemed to factor very little into a movement that was meant to be a spontaneous response to Nazi occupation, and often civilians became the victims as commissars executed or arrested civilians.

Official documents and propaganda made it very clear that the partisans were nothing other than an extension of Soviet policy making. In the official instructions sent out to partisan commanders on September 5th, 1942 it became clear that almost the entire role of the partisan groups was supposed to be in support of Red Army activity. The document concluded with the phrase, "through the combined activities of the Red Army and partisan movement the enemy will be destroyed," a less than subtle way to show who was actually in control of the 'people's movement.'[43] In his memoir of his time as a partisan commander, S.A. Kovpak, leader of the largest partisan force in Ukraine, wrote that, "the Red Army, on the fronts and we in the enemy's rear were one indissoluble whole. We and the Red Army were of one blood, one mother – the Motherland, one father – Comrade Stalin."[44] The final strategy to be undertaken by the partisans was to conduct political and ideological work among the local populations, a strategy which clearly attempted to place the partisans under Soviet control in more ways than one.

In August 1942, Kovpak was asked to attend a conference held in Moscow discussing the future strategy of the partisan struggle. At the conference, Kovpak recalled that the partisan leaders were asked where they were receiving their supplies from, and they replied that they were being seized from the enemy. Upon hearing this, Stalin himself said, "now we shall help

[43] Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas*, 200.
[44] S.A. Kovpak, *Our Partisan Course* (New York: Hutchinson, 1947), 47.

2. S. A. Kovpak, commander of a partisan formation

Fig. 2: S.A. Kovpak

you with our equipment."[45] Although it was rather early for Stalin to be making claims, as the Red Army remained on the defensive until early 1943, the sentiment was clear; the partisans were to be a part of the overall Soviet war machine. Supplies, instructions, and commanders were all going to be received by the partisans from Moscow. At the height of Soviet partisan strength it is estimated that the partisan forces across occupied territory numbered 125,000 fighters, with around 30,000 situated in Ukraine.[46]

This conference, attended by Kovpak[47], was held in Moscow between Stalin, fifteen heads of partisan organizations, and Ponomarenko (head of the TsSHPD). At the conference Ponomarenko stressed two policies: mass participation in the struggle and central leadership from Moscow.[48] Partisan organizations, which up until now had not witnessed large mass support, were to not only allow for larger mass involvement in partisan conflict, but also to protect civilians. Though it seemed that the partisans were finally going to become the people's protectors and the people's armies, Soviet policy and propaganda often contradicted each other.[49]

In the first two years of the war, the official propaganda and policy of the Soviet state did little to support the concept of the partisans as the defender of the people. Many stories depicting partisans in 1941 and 1942 portrayed them as willing to sacrifice anything to defeat the enemy and these same media sources often ignored the deaths and suffering of civilians as long as the

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[45] Kovpak, *Our Partisan Course*, 77.
[46] Grenkevich, *The Soviet Partisan Movement*, 208.
[47] Ibid., 208-209. Footnote for Figure 2: S.A. Kovpak.
[48] Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas*, 45.
[49] Statiev, *The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands*, 54-55.

overall success of the Motherland was being achieved.[50] One of the largest examples of the

Soviet command's disregard for civilian lives was the scorched-earth policy enacted by partisans

during the first Nazi offensive. Only one week after the commencement of Operation

Barbarossa, Soviet high command ordered all troops, cadres, and partisans behind the front line

to "destroy crops, livestock, machinery, communications lines, public buildings, and even private

houses and barns that might be useful to the occupiers."[51] With little to no regard for the well-

being of the people, the partisans were asked to destroy everything that ensured the livelihood of

their own civilians in order to remove anything the Nazis could use. The scorched-earth policy

seemed to be a success though as Soviet records suggest that in 1942 and 1943 partisans

destroyed around ten percent of all grain reserves in occupied territory and twenty percent of all

meat.[52] Scorched-earth policies made strategic success against the Nazis a detriment to the

survival of the local population.

It seems difficult to suggest that a movement waging a 'people's war' would do such a

thing as attempt to destroy all food stocks necessary for the survival of the people. These

partisans were less a force for good than an extension of a regime that had destroyed grain and

livestock like back in 1932 and 1933. Against this backdrop, at the conference between partisans

and Stalin in August 1942, Stalin still suggested that, "the most important thing, comrades, is to

keep stronger links with the people."[53] But then again, propaganda and reality often had nothing

in common, and the overall condition of the people mattered little as long as the partisans, the

Red Army, and the Motherland defeated the Nazis.

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[50] Shepherd and Pattinson, *War in a Twilight World*, 40.
[51] Ibid., 41.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Kovpak, *Our Partisan Course*, 79.

German Occupation and Anti-Partisan Activity

Although initial occupation by German troops seemed to support a policy of cooperation with the local Ukrainians this policy quickly changed. First encounters with Ukrainians had been cordial; ideology however, quickly began to control occupation policies and anti-partisan efforts within Soviet territory. The occupation policies within Ukraine can best be understood through an ideological lens.

The occupation of Ukraine was closely tied to the Nazi idea of *Lebensraum.* Within this concept were three key points. First was the belief held by the Nazis that the Slavic people were an inferior race. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler wrote that the organization of a Russian state was "only a wonderful example of the state-forming efficacity of the German element in an inferior race."[54] The Nazis had not been the first to attempt to claim Ukrainian territory for German settlers. In 1918, during the German occupation of Ukraine at the end of World War I, German statesmen Immanuel Winkler and Friedrich von Lindequest attempted to form a German colony in the Crimean peninsula.[55]

Second was the belief held by the Nazis that Ukraine was the perfect place for agricultural colonization. Hitler viewed the peasants as central to the purity and strength of the nation. It was his belief that big cities promoted degeneration and effeminacy and that the German peasant class helped the nation retain its fertility and conservatism.[56] Germany's poor soil meant that to expand the peasant class it was crucial to conquer more fertile territory. The "breadbasket of Europe," Ukraine, was the perfect region for German colonization.

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[54] Ihor Kamenetsky , *Hitler's Occupation of Ukraine, 1941-1944: A Study of Totalitarian Imperialism* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1956), 2.
[55] Ibid., 3.
[56] Ibid., 4.

Third was the belief held by the Nazis that expansion of the nation could only occur through physical conquest. Without the ability to create overseas colonies, expansion would have to occur within Europe, and it made sense to Hitler that the fertile land to the east of Germany occupied by an inferior race would be the perfect land to expand the German nation. In Hitler's words, they would have to "obtain by the German sword sod for the German plow and daily bread for the nation."[57] Ukraine and the rest of Eastern Europe were to become a region for the German people and exploited by the German people. There was no room for Slavs of any kind.

Although these ideological foundations were in place, the Nazis had chances early on in the occupation to gain mass Ukrainian support. The Germans had two chances to gain popular support for their policies, but failed. The first failure was the refusal of the German leadership to abolish the hated-collective farms (*kolkohzy*). Universally hated within Ukraine, the collective farms established by Stalin during the first five-year plan (1928-1932), their abolishment would have seen widespread support among the local population. At the key moment though, the Germans refused to remove them. The Restitution Law, put into effect on February 16, 1942, kept the collective farms intact but allowed each farmer to control a strip of tax-free land for his own purposes.[58] Keeping the collective farms intact allowed for greater central control from the occupation government, although resentment among the local population began to grow. The second failure was the refusal of the Germans to allow for religious freedom. Religion had been to some extent tolerated but greatly suppressed in atheistic Soviet Union. The support for religious freedom in occupied territory would have been appreciated by a rural population that remained very religious. Religious freedom, however, was denied in occupied territory though because Hitler believed that it would allow for a strengthening of nationalist groups and a more

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[57] Ibid., 5.
[58] Howell, *The Soviet Partisan Movement*, 100-101.

concerted national liberation movement against the Nazis.[59] The revival of religious freedom and the abolition of the collective farms would have gained the Nazi occupation strong popular support, but they failed to realize or refused to acknowledge the potential of such policies.

Although these initial failures were most damaging at an early stage to German legitimacy, a whole host of other failures created steadily declining support for German occupation. First, all but the most rudimentary education was denied to the Ukrainians. This was a major propaganda failure as the Soviets were able to say that "the Germans need land and slaves; slaves must be kept dumb."[60] It was believed by the German hierarchy that knowledge of reading and writing would have allowed the Ukrainians to understand their own nationalist history and subsequently refute the German occupation as illegitimate. Along with refusing any level of education, the Nazis "plundered, destroyed, or transported libraries, museums, and scientific institutions to Germany."[61] Second, food shortages occurred across occupied territory as early as 1942. In major cities like Stalino, modern day Donetsk, 70,000 out of 248,000 citizens were unable to acquire ration cards; in rural areas peasants were forced to barter away most of their furniture in order to acquire small amounts of food from the black market.[62] Often during these requisitions, German troops would be "taking the inhabitants' last remaining food reserves and livestock."[63] Food shortages and high levels of forced requisitions from the German occupation government would have been reminiscent of the famines brought upon Ukraine in the early 1930s by the Soviet government.

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[59] Ibid., 103.
[60] Ibid., 104.
[61] Kamenetsky, *Hitler's Occupation of Ukraine*, 45.
[62] Howell, *The Soviet Partisan Movement*, 105.
[63] Bartov, *Hitler's* Army, 77.

Last, and probably one of the most damaging policies was that of forced labor. Due to the large number of men needed to fight as replacements on the front line Hitler ordered six million workers to be integrated into the German economy, and 1.6 million of these were supposed to be acquired from Ukraine.[64] Local administrations were quickly forced to fill labor quotas. Failure to fill quotas led to "public beatings and the burning of whole villages [and] families were held in ransom for conscripted workers who escaped to the forests."[65]

As the local populations became aware of their inferior status in the eyes of the Nazis the failure to garner popular support caused resistance to Nazi occupation to grow. As resistance grew and Ukrainians joined nationalist groups or partisan groups, the Nazi occupiers relied on escalating policies of mass murder and suppression. In occupied territory the Germans made public the use of violence against citizens, and made no moral attempt to justify the violence other than through their own distorted ideological values.[66] The creation of broad and vague categories of enemies under the title 'partisans' or 'bandits' allowed for mass murder of civilian populations without disciplinary measures from German leadership.

The ability of German troops to commit atrocities against the local population without retribution from its own leadership led to the increasing use of collective punishment for the actions of partisans. In July 1943, troops were ordered to shoot any member of a partisan unit or any civilian found to be assisting partisan units.[67] Along with these types of policies, troops would shoot the leaders of villages for any partisan activity in the area, citizens who 'tolerated' partisans would be shot, houses of those suspected of harboring partisans would be burned down, and the retaliation for partisan attacks on German troops would be the torching of an entire

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[64] Howell, *The Soviet Partisan Movement*, 107.
[65] Ibid., 108.
[66] Kamenetsky, *Hitler's Occupation of Ukraine*, 58.
[67] Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, 90.

village.[68] German troops also conducted large scale encirclements. Operation *Zigeunerbaron*, conducted in May 1943, was the encirclement of a partisan pocket on the Belorussian-Ukrainian border. The objective was to drive the entire population out of a given area, arresting all soldiers and men between the ages of fifteen and sixty-five and forcing the relocation of all women and children along with the torching of all villages in the area and the confiscation of all other property. Estimates suggest that the Germans drove out close to sixteen thousand inhabitants and killed around sixteen hundred partisans during operation *Zigeunerbaron*.[69] One of many large-scale encirclement operations conducted near the end of the Nazi occupation, it is an illustration of German orders which "officially sanctioned a campaign of organized murder, but also opened the way for a massive wave of indiscriminate shooting by soldiers who refused to distinguish between the various categories of enemies dictated from above."[70] The German failure to gain popular support and the implications behind the policy of *Lebensraum* turned a population once in favor of German occupation into an openly hostile populace. While it is true that some citizens did join the Soviet partisans, many more Ukrainians joined the ranks of nationalist groups in order to fight both the Nazis and the Soviets.

The Rise of Ukrainian Nationalist Groups

Ukrainian nationalism, embodied by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and a break-away military organization, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) became a rallying cry for many Ukrainians discontented with the Soviet and Nazi regimes. Founded in 1929 in Polish territory, former Ukrainian territory annexed to Poland following World War I, the OUN

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[68] Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, 90-91.
[69] Ibid., 92.
[70] Ibid., 82.

came to represent the closest Ukrainians came to forming a national army under Soviet rule, and its consistent message of independence by any means made it an important political and military force in the second half of World War II.[71] The idea of independence at any cost created many problems for the OUN-UPA though.[72] Mass murders of Poles and Jews along with collaboration with the Germans were side effects of a policy that considered the Soviet Union the main enemy blocking Ukrainian independence. In the eyes of the OUN-UPA leadership anyone was expendable as long as the dream of Ukrainian independence was achieved.

At the outbreak of hostilities between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, the leadership of the OUN considered the Nazi regime to be a natural ally in its crusade for Ukrainian independence. Already having attracted a large radical right-wing following within western Ukraine, the OUN became known for working with Nazi forces and conducting activities, such as subversion, espionage, sabotage, terrorism, and murder.[73] Though the Nazis were not the first to contact the OUN, and Hitler never promised to form an independent Ukraine, the OUN still contacted and worked with the Nazi regime. The OUN even had official representatives in Berlin and had helped to disarm and capture Polish officers on the Polish-Ukrainian border during the Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939.[74] Even before the outbreak of World War II, the Ukrainian nationalists had chosen to side with the Nazis against the Soviet Union.

Between the German invasion of Poland in September 1939 and the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 the OUN was split by internal differences. The organization was split

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[71] David R. Marples, *Heroes and Villains: Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine* (New York: Central European University Press, 2007), 79.

[72] OUN-UPA was a designation used by Soviets, who disregarded all internal politics of the Ukrainian nationalist movement. Since many records remain unclear, the use of OUN-UPA will designate discussion of general nationalist ideas or actions not confined to one group.

[73] B.F. Sabrin, *Alliance for Murder: The Nazi-Ukrainian Nationalist Partnership in Genocide* (New York: Sarpedon Publishers, 1991), 4; Marples, *Heroes and Villains*, 79.

[74] Wiktor Poliszczuk, *Bitter Truth*, 135-136.

between an old guard faction, which wanted to remain a largely political organization and aid the

Nazis (OUN-M under Andrii Melnyk), and a more youthful and militant faction that wanted to

create a Ukrainian-led military force (OUN-B under Stepan Bandera).[75] On June 30, 1941, a

mere eight days after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, OUN-B declared Ukrainian

statehood during a conference in the city of Lvov.[76]

It was this faction of the OUN, under the leadership of Bandera, that later became the

UPA in late 1942 or early 1943. It was this same organization that became known for its use of

mass murder against non-Ukrainian ethnicities; tactics that they had adopted from their

collaboration with the occupiers early in the war. Before the formation of the UPA, OUN

members were strongly advised to join local police forces that aided the Nazis in their activities

in order to gain both equipment and practical experience.[77] These police and auxiliary forces

were central components to the Nazis ability to enact the Final Solution in western Ukraine. In

the region of Volhynia (modern day Northwestern Ukraine), these police units aided in the

murder of 150,000 Jews, and the murder of ninety-eight percent of the Jews within all of western

Ukraine.[78] Most nationalists were anti-Semitic, considering the Jews to be the strongest

supporters of the Bolshevik regime. Even as the OUN-M continued to support the Nazi occupiers

throughout the war, the OUN-B began transitioning into a more independent organization.

The OUN-B began its transformation into an overtly military organization as early as the

second half of 1942, but clearly by the first months of 1943.[79] The creation of armed nationalist

units began in response to Soviet partisan raids under the leadership of S.A. Kovpak in the late

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[75] Sabrin, *Alliance for Murder*, 4; Polisczcuk, *Bitter Truth*, 143.
[76] Sabrin, *Alliance for Murder*, 5.
[77] Statiev, *The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands*, 67.
[78] Ibid., 69.
[79] From this point forward the OUN-M will be referenced as the OUN, and the OUN-B will be referenced as the UPA.

summer months of 1942.[80] These raids continued and even intensified into the first months of

1943. Throughout the period of these raids the UPA[81] began to form defense units in Volhynia

and Galicia, the region they had previously helped the Nazis to cleanse of Jews, to protect

citizens from Polish and Soviet partisans who all operated in this borderland region.[82] Although

small pockets of resistance had been formed, it was not until the middle of 1943 that the UPA

had full control of partisan operations within the regions of Volhynia and Galicia, which became

their base of operations. At the height of UPA power, it is estimated that the armed force was

around 200,000 members strong.[83]

In order to gain control of the contentious borderland region, the UPA had to clear the

region of rival nationalist groups. As the idea of independence at all costs suggests, the UPA

under the leadership of Bandera used force to clear out other nationalist forces under the control

of the OUN-M and under the control of Borovets (leader of a competing Ukrainian nationalist

group in the region).[84] The UPA resorted to lowly tactics in order to gain full control of the

region, often signing agreements with OUN-M and Borovets forces before disarming them and

murdering their leaders.[85] The UPA's formation of military units in late 1942 in response to

Soviet partisan attacks, along with their focus on gaining superiority over other nationalist

forces, illustrates the UPA's belief that the Soviets were a larger threat to independence than the

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[80] David R. Marples, "Anti-Soviet Partisans and Ukrainian Memory," *East European Politics and Societies* 24 (2010): 29; Kovpak, *Our Partisan Course*, 77-78. These raids had been suggested by Stalin himself at the conference held in August 1942 between partisan leaders, Stalin, and Ponomarenko.

[81] The name UPA was taken from another nationalist organization formed by Taras Borovets in 1941, which was slowly taken over by the OUN-B (the later and larger UPA movement) by 1943.

[82] Marples, "Anti-Soviet Partisans and Ukrainian Memory," 30.

[83] Grenkevich, *The Soviet Partisan Movement*, 134.

[84] Marples, "Anti-Soviet Partisans and Ukrainian Memory," 30.

[85] Ibid., 31.

Nazis. Through some deluded sense of national identity Bandera and the other leaders of the

UPA believed that the path to independent nationhood was through the defeat of the Soviet

Union and the removal of non-Ukrainian ethnicities. Although the UPA sporadically fought off

German requisition forces, it "never had a coherent anti-German strategy [but] the nationalists

fought the Red partisans without compromise."[86]

Upon gaining control of Volhynia, the UPA forces proceeded to cleanse the region of all

citizens of Polish origin. The ability of the nationalists to commit mass murder similar to Nazi

atrocities came from experiences in 1941 and 1942 when "the Germans organized a brutally

intimate genocide of the Volhynian Jews, which trained many of the perpetrators of the 1943

cleansings of Poles."[87] By 1943 the commander-in-chief of the UPA, Dmytro Kliachkivs'kyi and

his successor Roman Shukhevych both supported the liquidation of the Volhynian Polish

population. Kiachkivs'kyi himself said that the UPA should "carry out a large-scale liquidation

action against Polish elements," and that upon the withdrawal of German forces they should

"liquidate the entire [Polish] male population between 16 and 60 years."[88]

The use of mass violence against minority groups in order to form a homogenous state,

either racially or class-based, by both the Nazis and the Soviets created an example upon which

the UPA could begin to create its own ethnically homogenous nation-state. It was with this in

mind that the UPA forces began to purge Volhynia of Poles. In 1943, the UPA killed about fifty

thousand Volyhnian Poles and forced tens of thousands more Poles to flee the region.[89]

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[86] Statiev, *The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands*, 83.
[87] Timothy Snyder, "The Causes of Ukrainian-Polish Ethnic Cleansing 1943," *Past & Present* 179 (2003): 199.
[88] Statiev, *The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands*, 86.
[89] Snyder, "The Causes of Ukrainian-Polish Ethnic Cleansing 1943," 202.

Not only is the scale of murder shocking, but also the method of murder. Soviet partisans, themselves no supporters of the Polish, often reported on the barbaric methods used by the UPA. Reports discuss the use of axes and pitchforks along with burning Poles alive within their own homes.[90] A Soviet partisan headquarter situated in Rovno reported that the nationalist forces "do not shoot Poles but stab them with knives and axe them regardless of their age or sex," and many others were burned alive in their homes.[91] A Polish priest by the name of Waclaw Szeletnicki described the "hideous sight of human forms chopped with axes and gored with knives, some bodies with legs chopped off and hands cut off."[92]

There are also instances of Polish resistance to UPA mass murder. The Polish Home Army (AK), the largest Polish resistance group, attempted to destroy entire Ukrainian villages along the border with Poland. They were able to destroy the village of Werzchowina along with its entire population, but often they were repelled by UPA forces.[93] Although the AK never attempted to commit a large-scale massacre of the Ukrainian population, their retaliation most likely escalated the UPA's efforts to murder every Pole residing within Volhynia and Galicia. In a dark yet ironic twist the two brothers of Stepan Bandera (himself imprisoned in Sachsenhausen at the time) who had been sent to Auschwitz were beaten to death by Polish kapos.[94] Even in the concentration camps of the Nazis it was impossible to remove ethnic and personal animosities that led to the mass murder of millions across Soviet territory.

The UPA's crimes were not reserved for the Polish populations only. The UPA continued the liquidation of the Jews in their territory. In April 1941 at the second congress of the OUN,

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[90] Statiev, *The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands*, 86.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid., 87.
[94] Snyder, "The Causes of Ukrainian-Polish Ethnic Cleansing 1943," 207.

the nationalists came to the agreement that "in the USSR the Jews are the most faithful supporters of the ruling Bolshevik regime," and that "the OUN combats the Jews."[95]The Jews and the Bolsheviks were almost always referred to as one in the same. UPA literature called it the "Jewish-Bolshevik threat," and it declared that the "struggle against Jewry is in the interest and in the traditions of the Ukrainian nation."[96] Their brutality against Jews was similar to the brutal acts committed against Poles. Instead of shooting them, UPA forces "quartered the Jews with axes, smashed their heads with iron bars, or burned them alive. They also routinely killed entire families in households that hid Jews."[97] Other atrocities were common, and Kohn recalled in his memoir that banderovtsy (UPA soldiers) would often rape the most attractive Jewish girls before killing them and they would also hunt down the Jewish women and children who fled from nationalists into the surrounding forests.[98] While many of the early atrocities committed against Jews were done under German supervision, the killing of Jews by Ukrainian forces continued unabated throughout the war.[99]

Ukrainian resistance against Soviet forces continued after the withdrawal of Nazi troops. The Ukrainian resistance remained confined to western Ukraine because most Eastern Ukrainians considered themselves sympathetic with the Soviet cause. In these western borderlands though, Ukrainian propaganda was extremely effective. Large printing operations churned out tens of thousands of leaflets and pamphlets. The OUN-UPA called mass meetings to explain nationalist objectives to the peasantry, paraded troops through villages while singing Ukrainian folk songs, organized political shows and public trials of criminals, and participated in

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[95] Sabrin, *Alliance for Murder*, 4.
[96] Statiev, *The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands*, 85.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Kohn, *A Voice from the Forest*, 45, 78-79.
[99] Snyder, "The Causes of Ukrainian-Polish Ethnic Cleansing 1943," 228-229.

religious festivals with the local population.[100] These tactics were effective and many peasants joined the nationalist cause. The nationalists were unable to compete militarily with the Red Army though and by the end of 1945 the nationalists had lost all momentum.

As the outcome began to look bleak for the UPA, it turned to coercion and fear. Unable to fight effectively against the Red Army, the nationalist forces were ordered to kill all "enemies" (Poles, Czechs, Jews, Red Army officers, policemen, and Soviet-sympathizing Ukrainians), kill all those who evaded UPA service, kill all Soviet soldiers, and use corporeal punishment against those who sabotaged UPA activities and food supplies.[101] This very unclear category, similar to the Nazis vague use of the term bandit or partisan, caused the use of violence against large numbers of Ukrainians. From 1944-1946, it is believed that nationalists in western Ukraine killed around sixteen thousand civilians and soldiers.[102] In the end the UPA's policy of independence at all cost led to the murder of many civilians who had been UPA supporters, many wanting to return to normal life after years of conflict and uncertainty instead of continuing the nationalistic struggle. Although the UPA continued sporadic military action throughout the 1940s, it offered little hope of national independence for Ukraine and by 1949 had lost all local support and was no longer able to resist Soviet control.

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[100] Statiev, *The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands*, 107.
[101] Ibid., 124.
[102] Ibid., 125.

TABLE 4.10	*Total Deaths Inflicted by Guerillas during Their Attacks and Soviet Counterinsurgency Operations, 1945–1946*														
	1944					1945					1946				
	W.Uk	Lit	Lat	Est	W. Bel	W.Uk	Lit	Lat	Est	W. Bel	W.Uk	Lit	Lat	Est	W. Bel
Police	221	53	No data	0	44	400	138	43	21	67	253	99	21	11	20
NKVD and Red Army soldiers	2,037	92		5	140	948	351	114	40	73	443	181	51	35	11
Militia	40	No data		2	9	368	510	200	39	15	398	243	92	35	10
Soviet activists	904	268		3	58	823	615	152	75	177	347	444	67	48	75
Civilians	2,953	262		57	76	4,249	1,630	262	141	296	1,688	2,037	177	125	135
Total	6,155	675		67	327	6,788	3,244	771	316	628	3,129	3,004	408	254	251

Notes: These data do not include those missing, some of whom were killed by the guerrillas. Data on losses of the Latvian militia for 1945 exclude January. The data on casualties in Lithuania submitted by the police in 1945 (3,244) differ from the final summary it produced in 1953 (4,144). Poliakov to Kruglov (24 January 1947), GARF, f.9478, op.1, d.709, ll. 22, 31; Leont'ev to Kruglov (2 April 1945), GARF, f.9478, op.1, d.279, ll.7–15; GARF, f.9478, op.1, d.319.

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Fig. 3: Total Deaths Inflicted by Guerillas during Their Attacks and Soviet Counterinsurgency Operations, 1944-1946

Problems of Reinstituting Stepan Bandera and the UPA as Ukrainian National Heroes

Although the OUN-UPA remained classified as villains under the Soviet regime, they, and their leader Stepan Bandera, have been revived as national heroes in the post-1990 period. In a decade of uncertainty in Ukraine (the Orange Revolution in 2004, tension with Russia, the overthrow of President Yanukovych in the 2014 revolution, the Russian annexation of Crimea, and the uprising of separatist movements in Donetsk and Luhansk), history, and the revival of a nationalistic history, has coincided with the whitewashing of nationalist crimes during World War II.

Recent literature in Ukraine has focused on the UPA's struggle as one of "heroes fighting oppression, of selfless warriors prepared to give up their lives for the cause of an independent Ukraine."[104] These new histories clash with former ideas of the Great Patriotic War. These earlier narratives, focused on Russia, claimed that liberation came from the arrival of Soviet forces, but in these new narratives the arrival of Soviet forces is just another form of oppression.

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[103] Statiev, *The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands*, 125. Lists casualty lists for all borderland regions, but W.Uk (western Ukraine) is the important column for this work.
[104] Marples, "Anti-Soviet Partisans and Ukrainian Memory," 35.

The revival of a narrative supportive of the UPA's actions also divides a country already under stress. While many in the western half of Ukraine look upon the UPA favorably, many in the eastern half still consider the idea of the Great Patriotic War to be the correct way to understand the history of World War II.[105] In the west, many are willing to overlook the years of collaboration with the Nazi regime and mass murder of Poles, Jews, and Ukrainian populations in the name of Ukrainian independence.

The revival of the OUN-UPA as national heroes has also increased tensions between Ukraine and its neighbors. While Yanukovych and his successor Poroshenko have been willing to embrace the actions of the OUN-UPA, Polish and Russian politicians have criticized this stance. In 2010, then-president Viktor Yushchenko posthumously awarded Stepan Bandera the award of 'Hero of Ukraine.' It was later revoked but not before an outcry from other states of the European community. Members of the Polish Sejm were quick to point out the UPA's collaboration with the Nazis and called their actions "ethnic cleansing with 'elements of genocide'."[106] Russian leaders have also used the actions of Ukrainian nationalists to denounce current events within Ukraine. Russian politicians and media have both blamed the events of Euromaidan and the 2014 revolution on, "the OUN and UPA's ideological successors among the far right organizations," and that a, "fascist coup," had taken place in Ukraine.[107] Although tensions have been rising and archival work has clearly linked Ukrainian nationalists in World War II to terrorism, collaboration with the Nazis, and mass murder of non-Ukrainian populations, high-level Ukrainian politicians have continued to support the revival of the OUN-UPA as national heroes and have even continued to deny claims made by Polish and Russian

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[105] Ibid., 26-27.
[106] Ivan Katchanovski, "Terrorists or National Heroes? Politics and Perceptions of the OUN and the UPA in Ukraine," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 48 (2015): 218.
[107] Ibid.

politicians. Tensions have been rising and have even manifested in physical confrontation. Victory Day parades in Kiev have been the sites of clashes between veterans of the Red Army and the UPA.[108]

The rehabilitation of the OUN-UPA's image as national heroes in the eyes of many western Ukrainians has increased tensions between Ukrainians and among Ukraine and its neighbors which has only exacerbated already high levels of social tension in the region. Along with this, the whitewashing of nationalist crimes in favor of a positive and nationalistic Ukrainian history has erased the history and memory of the tens of thousands murdered in the name of Ukrainian independence.

Conclusion

Partisan warfare in Soviet territory was traditionally called the 'people's war' in Soviet historiography for the large number of Soviet citizens involved in fighting the Nazis in occupied territory, but it should be called the people's war for a different reason. The conflict within the occupied territory was a conflict over the hearts and minds of the Ukrainian people. The conflict, especially in Ukraine, was fought among a multitude of different groups: the Soviets, the Nazis, the Ukrainian nationalists, the Polish partisans, and Jewish partisans. While all of these groups fought for the support of the people it was the citizens who suffered the most. Mass murder, forced labor, food requisitions, forced mobilization, looting, rape, and the torching of entire villages were all common events from 1941 until the end of Nazi occupation in 1944, and even to a limited degree until 1949.[109] All sides committed atrocities. While all sides fought for their own ideological ends, the Ukrainian people, especially the Jewish and Polish citizens, suffered.

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[108] Marples, "Anti-Soviet Partisans and Ukrainian Memory," 27.
[109] Statiev, *The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands*, 97-139.

Radical ideologies and the distortion of these ideologies allowed for the legitimization of mass murder policies against the Ukrainian population.

Ukraine was often a source of contention in the twentieth-century. The Germans prized it as the breadbasket of Europe at the end of World War I and during World War II. The Russians wanted to occupy Ukraine for the same reason after the revolution in 1917. Under Soviet rule, the Ukrainian people were systematically starved to death. Tensions that arose during Soviet control were exacerbated by the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, and the Ukrainian people often took up arms against their former rulers. These tensions also built onto decades of repression, and these tensions exist to this day. While the Ukrainian government, the Russian government, and others have used the memory of World War II and the actions and atrocities of all those involved to support conflicting nationalist narratives, the Ukrainian people have witnessed multiple revolutions, ongoing violence, and the breakup of their country.

As the Ukrainian nation has begun to create its history independent of Russia in the post-1990 period it has also begun to redefine its history. This history is a complicated one though, and the inability to come to terms with the history of mass murder and repression during World War II has blocked the Ukrainian people from overcoming tensions that have been present in the region since the introduction of Soviet rule in the 1920s. Until this history can be described outside of nationalistic narratives and ideologies it is unlikely that the atrocities committed within Ukrainian borders during World War II will ever be truly and genuinely overcome.

Glossary

AK (Polish Home Army): The largest resistance movement in occupied Poland, the AK often clashed with UPA troops on the border of Ukraine and Poland. It supported the Polish government-in-exile and is most known for its actions in the 1944 Warsaw Uprising.

Bandera, Stepan: Leader of the OUN-B faction that became the UPA, Bandera was arrested by the Nazis and sent to Sachsenhausen in 1942. He was later released in 1944 and came back to command the UPA. During his absence the UPA was commanded by Dmytro Kiachkivs'kyi and Roman Shukhevych. Bandera survived the war and died in 1959.

Borovets, Taras: Commander of the first Ukrainian nationalist group titled the UPA, Borovets supported a liberal democratic form of governance and often clashed with armed OUN-B (UPA) units under Bandera. His movement slowly weakened due to its refusal to fight large-scale conflict against fellow Ukrainian groups, and the murder of many leaders by armed Bandera supporters. Borovets survived the war and died in 1981.

Kovpak, S.A.: General of the largest Soviet partisan unit in Ukraine, numbering between 2,000 and 3,000 fighters. His unit's advances into the western reaches of Ukraine in late 1942 and early 1943 caused the formation of Ukrainian nationalist militias which later formed the UPA. He survived the war and died in 1967.

Melnyk, Andrii: Leader of the OUN-M faction, his faction was made up of the old guard of the OUN. Remaining a political group while Bandera and the UPA turned to military affairs, many of the OUN-M leaders will killed by armed Bandera supporters. Melnyk survived the war and died in 1964.

NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs): Formed in December 1917 as the Cheka, the NKVD was the policers of political crimes in the Soviet Union under the leadership of Lavrentiy Beria. Their destruction battalions became the nucleus of many Soviet partisan units. In the aftermath of World War II the NKVD was renamed the KGB and remained an important organization in Soviet politics and affairs until the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

Operation Zigeunerbaron: Conducted in May 1943. It was one of many German encirclement operations attempting to flush partisan units out of forested areas. Often these operations included the mass killing of civilian populations in the encircled area.

OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists): Formed in 1929, the OUN became the most important organization in the quest for Ukrainian independence. Originally aiding the Nazis upon invasion in 1941, due to internal struggles the organization split into two competing camps, the OUN-M under Andrii Melnyk and the OUN-B under Stepan Bandera (which became the UPA). The organization exists to this day in the forms of the OUN and the KUN (Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists).

TsSHPD (Central Staff of the Partisan Movement): Formed in May 1942 under the leadership of Panteleimon Ponomarenko, the TsSHPD became the central office in Moscow for creation of policy and strategy surrounding the Soviet partisan movement.

UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army): Formed in late 1942-Early 1943, the UPA became the strongest military organization in favor of Ukrainian autonomy. Under Bandera, and subsequent leaders, the UPA fought Soviet partisans and committed mass killings of local Polish populations in the western borderlands of Ukraine.

Volhynia and Galicia: The two most western regions of Ukraine, these regions contained the most supporters of Ukrainian independence and became the base of operations for the UPA. In 1943 the UPA attempted to cleanse Volhynia of Poles, killing around fifty thousand Poles in the process.

Yanukovych, Viktor: President of Ukraine from 2010 to 2014, he was preceded by Viktor Yushchenko (president from 2005 to 2010), and succeeded by Petro Poroshenko (president from 2014 to the present). Yanukovych was ousted from office during the events of Euromaidan in 2014 in which protesters demanded closer ties with the EU instead of Russia.

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