

DIGGING FOR VICTORY: MOBILIZATION OF CIVILIAN LABOR FOR THE BATTLE
OF KURSK, 1943

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
Department of History.

Chapel Hill
2016

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ABSTRACT

Daniel Fitzgerald Giblin: Digging for Victory: Mobilization of Civilian Labor for the Battle of Kursk, 1943
(under the direction of Donald J. Raleigh)

This dissertation examines the mobilizations carried out in spring and early summer 1943, by the Red Army and civilian authorities in preparation for the Battle of Kursk, the largest tank battle in history and the turning point in the war against Hitler. This work centers on four main themes. First, it explores the initial demands the Red Army and returning Soviet civilian officials placed on a population that had just been liberated from German occupation. Even though the people had been terrorized and exhausted by eighteen months of Wehrmacht rule, the Red Army demanded that the people provide labor for its rear services while Moscow required that the collective farmers of the oblast launch a sowing campaign designed to bring in a harvest of prewar proportions. Second, it describes the elaborate propaganda campaign that Kursk's civilian leaders organized as a means to induce the people to support the Red Army with foodstuffs and labor, while still ensuring a successful sowing operation. In this the authorities attempted to construct a relationship that characterized the people as aggrieved victims of Nazi atrocities and the Red Army as their avenging angels of death. As such the people had to devote their labor to the Soviet military, thus enabling their instrument of vengeance the means to destroy the German invader. Third, this dissertation analyzes the Red Army leadership's decision to make a deliberate defensive stand in Kursk Oblast given the string of reckless offensives in the preceding half year of fighting. Here, one sees that the Soviet military leadership had learned that the Red Army's two major successes in the Soviet-German War, at the battles of Moscow and Stalingrad, hinged on firm defensive stand that exhausted the German

army followed immediately by a strong counteroffensive. Finally, this dissertation explains how the Red Army mobilized the people to prepare Kursk's tank-friendly, open territory into a vast trap for the Wehrmacht's vaunted armored forces that had, using its Blitzkrieg tactics, been wildly successful the preceding four summers of the war.

By investigating the mobilization for the Battle of Kursk at the grassroots level, this dissertation uncovers a matrix of interactions between the Red Army, the returning Bolshevik Party leaders, and the civilian population in a time of extreme crisis. It shows that the Soviet Union, as a mobilization society, possessed an ability unique to all belligerents to commandeer the countryside's vast labor reserves to serve immediate military necessity. A close examination of the mobilization processes at work, however, uncovers a rivalry between two state institutions trying to maximize their access to an unfree labor pool, while members of that work force protected their own interests through various forms of peasant resistance. As the Soviet state gave military commanders legal fiat to incorporate nearby civilians in their rear services and impress them into labor crews numbering in the tens of thousands, local political leaders relied on prewar networks of personal connections for mutual protection in order to execute the onerous tasks mandated by the state. While these three entities seemed to work at cross purposes, they still managed to create the first defensive structure that withstood the onslaught of the Nazi fighting force.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The successful completion of this dissertation and my journey through grad school were made possible by the help and support of many people. First and foremost, I owe a tremendous debt to my advisor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Donald J. Raleigh, whose dedication and guidance has made me a better writer and scholar. His erudition and endless patience through dozens of drafts of grant proposals and dissertation chapters secured for me the wherewithal to carry out my project and gave me the impetus to make continual improvements in its content and style. Don's support and his exacting standards afforded me not only a strong basis upon which I could complete this dissertation, but also have provided me an excellent model for my own scholarship as I begin my career in history.

The professors at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University who agreed to serve on my dissertation committee also deserve my thanks for the contributions they made to the betterment of my project. Louise McReynolds' straightforward manner and emphasis on not losing sight of the big picture helped keep me on a tighter path. Christopher Browning, Wayne Lee, and Anna Krylova took the time to read through my dissertation and supplied invaluable feedback in the final revisions of the project. I also received excellent advice from a community of scholars at UNC and elsewhere. This group includes Chad Bryant, Richard Kohn, Jeff Jones, Wendy Goldman, Eren Tasar, and Alex Roland. Their thoughtful guidance and intellectual input contributed in a variety of ways to strengthen my dissertation and make me a better historian. All mistakes made, of course, are my own.

I am thankful to the institutions that provided me the generous funding and support that allowed me to carry out my research and write the dissertation. A dissertation fellowship The

US Army Center for Military History furnished me valuable time to draft chapters 3, 4, and 5. A Title VIII Fellowship from the American Councils for International Education allowed me to work for ten months in Kursk, Russia. Many people made my time in Kursk more productive and pleasant. The directors at the State Archive of Kursk Oblast, Margarita Mikhailovna Litvinova and Nadezhda Andreevna Elagina were extremely helpful in getting me started and always finding a place for me to work when the reading room was under construction. Elena Grigorevna Artep'eva, Valentina Konstantinovna Vinogradova, and Olg'a Viktorovna Timofeenko helped me secure access to ever useful materials. I also received a great deal of assistance from Tamara Vasil'evna Mikhailova, Natal'ia Viacheslavovna Karachevtseva, Tat'iana Ivanovna Es'kova, and Antonina Nikolaevna Mal'tseva. The staff of the Party Archive in Kursk furnished me with materials vital to the project. I am grateful to Natal'ia Nikolaevna, El'ia, Natal'ia Anatol'evna, and the archive director Vladimir Ivanovich Khondar' for their help. Chapter 3 could not have been written without the gracious assistance of the staff of the *Kraevedcheskii Zal* (The Regional History Reading Room) in the N. N. Aseeva Library of Kursk Oblast. I am grateful to Elena Nikolaevna, Masha, and Marina Ivanovna Kaplina. Most of all, I owe a great deal of thanks to Elena Mikhailovna Kapustina, not only for her boundless help, but also her patience, curiosity, and warm friendship. My time in Kursk benefited from guidance and friendship from Konstantin Vladimirovich Iatsenko, Georgii Dzhunglovich Pilishvili, Vera Alekseevna Sergeeva, Irina Gavrilovna Sazonova, Tat'iana Afanas'eva, and Irina L'vovna Zhirnova and her staff in the Office for International Students at Kursk State University. My first two years of graduate school were funded through Foreign Language Areas Studies Fellowships administered through Duke University.

I could not have asked for a better intellectual home for graduate school than UNC Chapel Hill. I not only benefitted from the training of a host of amazing scholars, but I also had the support and comradery of an excellent group fellow graduate students and colleagues. Emily Baran, Adrienne Jacobs, and Mike Paulauskas have been stalwart friends and given me invaluable feedback on my writing. Emily and Mike also taught me the benefit of taking a break with trips to the NC state fair and a little gamesmanship (get them levels). I have benefitted from the friendship and editing skills of Aaron Hale-Dorrell, Gary Guadagnolo, Edward Geist, Mary-Elizabeth Walters, Ned Richardson-Little, Julia Sittmann, and Laura Brade. The cohort of Russianists and Germanists at UNC, including Andrew Ringlee, Peter Gengler, Trevor Erlacher, Styopa Riegg, Dakota Irvin, Scott Krause, and Brittany Lehman maintained an environment of lively debate on contested points in history and current events. The process of writing was made a little less daunting by my writing group cohorts of Alex Ruble, Rachel Lewandowski, Angelica Castillo, Ann Halbert-Brooks, Yukio Mishima, and Maikel Farinas Borrego. I also want to thank Beth Renne, Lindsey Martin, and Jack Coombes for their warm friendship. The UNC History Department staff was always there when I needed to file some document or application at the last minute. Thank you to Joyce, Genevieve, Diana, Renee, and Adam. But a lion's share of gratitude goes to the two people who made the administrative work painless: Joy Mann Jones and Violet Anderson. Violet gets an extra shout out for being such a dear friend.

Anya Yudina helped me decipher the scrawl and bad grammar of Kursk's peasants in dozens of documents. More importantly, Anya and her husband, Brandon Rice, shared with me their kitchen table and limitless stimulating conversation in Moscow and Chapel Hill. Alex Jacobs, along with Adrienne Jacobs, reinforced my spirits with twice weekly meals of tasty and healthy food, surrounded by wonderful debate and kvetching, and topped off with a little

Mariokart. Anya, Brandon, Adrienne, and Alex were instrumental in helping me celebrate the little victories and talking me through the darker days.

I would also like to thank those who helped me before I came to UNC. I received excellent instruction and guidance at European University in St. Petersburg from Boris Kolonitskii, Mikhail Dolbilov, Nikita Lomagin, and Vladimir Lapin. In Boston, Alex Friedman, Ben Loring, Maria Glymour, Diana Burgin, and Alfia Rakova helped me over the initial hurdles of getting into a doctoral program. I also benefitted from the friendship of so many people, including David Strozzi, Miranda McGill, Oliver Dial, and Susan Rosevear. I must say thank you to the small army of Russian language teachers I have had over the years, most of all the wonderful faculty at the SWSEEL program at Indiana University as well as Edna Andrews and Elena Maksimova at Duke University.

Finally, I want to thank the people who have always been there for me. My spirit has for many years been strengthened by the company of Geddy, Alex, Neil, Robert, Frank, David, and Miles, among so many others. Also, I have to thank my family who showed support for my uncommon decision to pursue graduate training later in life. My gratitude goes to my siblings Mary, Joe and Neil. And finally, I give a big thank you to my mother, Judy Giblin, whose support was fundamental to the successful completion of this chapter in my life.

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INTRODUCTION

World War II often conjures up images of the use of many great technological innovations that had been developed in the interwar period, such as tanks and mechanized warfare, strategic bombing, and the first exclusive use of naval air power. Historians and their readers alike can get lost in the glory of victory as represented in the iconic images of US Marines hoisting the American flag on Mt. Suribachi on Iwo Jima or the Red Army soldier planting the Soviet flag on the German Reichstag in Berlin. Conversely, contemporary readers and writers still debate what the horrors of the death camps, the firebombing of Dresden, the mass rape in Nanking, or the use of the atomic weapons tell us about modern society and the human condition. This second global war of mass conscript armies deploying the tools of mass industrialization drew upward of seventy countries into the fight. Combat raged on four continents and three oceans. In presenting the totality of the war, writers have exhausted superlatives that quantify the numbers of soldiers mobilized, the volume of the production of materiel, the numbers of soldiers and civilians killed, and losses in terms of GDP for the nations involved including the destruction of infrastructure. These mind numbing figures can cause students of the war to lose sight of the sacrifice and trauma made by the people who participated in the conflict, whether civilian or soldier.

As entire nations, or groups of nations, celebrate the memory captured in one photograph or condemn a particular event, we must remember that this global conflagration comprised countless small fires. Just as former Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Tip O'Neil, observed that "all politics is local," one could argue that all war is local as well. The greater mobility offered by newer machines of war, such as the airplane and the tank, dramatically

increased the territory on which military forces carried out extreme violence. Lethality touched a greater number of civilians than in previous wars. In the majority of cases civilians experienced indiscriminate violence such as in strategic bombardment and were classified as collateral damage. This war also saw an unprecedented number of civilian victims whom soldiers viewed as legitimate targets. While we may consign these civilians to categories of victim or bystander, in fact they participated to varying degrees in the war, too, demonstrating agency in how they participated in their corner of the war.

The Soviet Union responded to the German invasion in 1941 with a mobilization of unprecedented scope, initially calling on all young men to join the ranks of the Red Army and insisting that women take their places in the factories and on the collective farms. Such an initial appeal was not different from England or the United States. Soon after the first staggering defeats, however, the Soviet state modified its demands to encompass more of the people directly into the war effort.¹ It allowed women to join the ranks of the Red Army, both to serve in the rear services area and in combat roles. But as the Germans made swift advances to the east, Soviet authorities attempted to convert major metropolitan areas, such as Leningrad, Odessa, Kiev, and Moscow into bastions of resistance. These strongholds required the preparation of strong defensive perimeters from which the Red Army could fight the Germans. As such, local military units impressed civilian authorities to form work crews to carry out defense construction.

Such was the case in Kursk Oblast in the spring and summer of 1943, a region roughly 290 miles south of Moscow, which had fallen to the Wehrmacht in October and November 1941.

¹ Anna Krylova provides a detailed account of the Soviet state's tepid and inconsistent response to the tens of thousands of young women who appeared at Red Army recruiting stations in the summer of 1941. See Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Having liberated the oblast from eighteen months of Nazi occupation, the Red Army advance there stalled at the time of the spring rains in a westward-facing salient with a German army group on either side. In a surprising decision, the Red Army assumed a deliberate defensive posture and let the Germans launch a major offensive that summer, using methods of below-ground field fortification but modifying them for a highly mobile mechanized environment. The victories at Moscow and Stalingrad, along with Soviet military doctrine developed in the 1920s and 30s that emphasized simultaneous battle along the entire depth of the enemy's frontline forces, further informed the commanders' conceptualization of how the defenses at Kursk should be arranged. In order to execute such a plan, the Red Army needed the labor of hundreds of thousands of Kursk's (and the surrounding oblasts') inhabitants. The returning civilian leaders who followed quickly on the heels of the liberators served as an intermediary between the designs of the Red Army and the labor pool that could produce the desired defensive network.

My dissertation seeks to show how the people of Kursk provided the necessary support for the Red Army to successfully repel a German summer offensive for the first time in the Second World War. In addressing this issue the dissertation focuses on three areas of inquiry. First, what was the nature of the German occupation and in what condition were the people of Kursk upon liberation? What extraordinary contribution to the war cause did the Red Army demand of Kursk's population once it had liberated them? What expectations did the Soviet state have of its citizens who had just lived through eighteen months of German occupation? Second, how did the Red Army prepare to engage the German military for the summer 1943 campaign? Why did the Red Army decide to assume a deliberate defensive and how did it go about preparing Kursk's terrain for the German attack? And finally, what was the role of Kursk's leadership in mobilizing Kursk's inhabitants? How did the local authorities attempt to

motivate an exhausted population to continue to carry out heavy labor for the Red Army and the state in the midst of every kind of shortage? What was the nature of the relationship between the junior and midlevel officers of the Red Army and Kursk's civilian leadership as the two constituencies vied for scarce labor resources?

In answering these questions I argue that the ordinary people of Kursk became the prime object over which both the Red Army and the party leaders feuded in the weeks preceding the German attack. The Red Army depended on the civilian population to provide support for every aspect of its rear services functions. The variety of tasks that needed to be accomplished and the massive number of people the Red Army used demonstrate that the local civilian population became vital to the basic functioning of the activities that directly supported the Soviet military's combat effectiveness. This was before they then tasked the local people to dig a massive defensive network that required some measure of excavation skill on the part of the workforce. And this at a time when the local party leadership transferred responsibility for fulfilling Moscow's appeal for an ambitious 1943 harvest down to the district and village soviets. Even though the people had only just escaped from one-and-a-half years' worth of privation and terror, the destruction of the urban and agricultural infrastructure, and the presence of roughly one million Red Army troops preparing for a massive armored assault, the Soviet authorities exhorted civilians to carry out a spring sowing campaign of prewar proportions. In the rivalry over this scarce labor pool, leaders in both institutions relied on mechanisms of power and influence that had been developed in the prewar years. Using these tools, both groups fulfilled their tasks sufficiently to bring about victory against the Germans and satisfaction from the state. The dissertation thus demonstrates that the Soviet Union was prepared to manage this kind of crisis through the mobilization of all human resources.

Owing to the prewar culture of mobilization to handle various crises, the Red Army leadership could calculate a plan for withstanding the German offensive because it had some measure of confidence in its capacity to transform the field of battle to its greatest advantage. Such belief in its capacities in the face of an enemy gave it some measure of advantage over the enemy. Even though the German forces had the momentary edge in quality of equipment and troops, the Red Army commanders knew they had superior numbers. More importantly, they knew they were fighting on their own turf and they had a large, generally sympathetic local population that they could count on for foodstuffs and labor. Thus, when the High Command decided to assume a deliberate defensive posture, it had the excavation force at hand that it knew could fulfill its vision for the kind of below ground defense system that could withstand the assault of a dozen panzer divisions.

Finally, this dissertation argues that the mobilization in Kursk Oblast in 1943 was “total.” This conclusion stems from the debate over the concept of “total war” over which historians Roger Chickering and Stig Förster presided in a series of essay collections dedicated to the topic. For many years, scholars of modern warfare identified a trend in interstate conflict, beginning with the French Revolution, accelerating during the industrialization of the nineteenth century, and then culminating in the World Wars. They called this trend the “march to total war.”² The idea is rooted in Carl von Clausewitz’s concept of “absolute war” a philosophical ideal type of unrestricted warfare that never occurred in historical fact due to real world inhibitions and structural realities that prevented endless escalation, even when several states possessed overwhelming nuclear force. This apparent dichotomy has led to a large number of

² Changes in political mobilization and industrial capacity necessitated the complete mobilization of all societal resources for the prosecution of war that caused the escalation of aims such as indiscriminately targeting the civilian workforce of an enemy state to encompassing the total elimination of adversaries, and even of an adversary's populace.

contradictory definitions and applications of the term total war. Continued exploration of the concept led Chickering and Förster to develop a more rigorous and restrictive use of the term.³

In an essay co-written with Miriam Gessler, Förster stipulates four criteria for total war: 1) total war aims, 2) total methods, 3) total mobilization, and 4) total control. Further, while applying the Clausewitzian notion of an ideal type of war, they argue that “neither the individual elements nor their combination has materialized fully in practice.”⁴ My research has found evidence that the combined mobilizations of the Red Army and local party leaders produced a situation in Kursk that came as close as it possibly could to “total mobilization.”

Despite the enormous body of literature on the Second World War in general and the Battle of Kursk in particular, no author has addressed the questions I examine in this dissertation. Existing scholarship on the Soviet Union at war tends to self-select into two large spheres of activity in the war: military histories and studies of Soviet society at war. The military histories of the Eastern Front delineate the war in a top-down manner, giving priority to the highest level of political and military leadership.⁵ The best Western scholars’ treatments of the Battle of Kursk devote the bulk of their attention to the operations and the combat itself. These studies showcase a variety of figures in high command, some discussion of soldiers, and fulsome description of the machinery of war, especially tanks and airplanes.⁶ Civilian labor merits only a

³ Roger Chickering, “Total War: Use and Abuse of a Term” in Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, eds., *The Shadows of Total War: Europe, East Asia, and the United States, 1919-1939* (Washington D.C.: German Historical Institute, 2003), 13-28.

⁴ Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Bernd Greiner, eds., *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1945* (Washington D.C.: German Historical Institute, 2005), 56.

⁵ The most valuable books that describe the Eastern Front are: Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East: The Nazi-Soviet War, 1941-1945* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005); Richard Overy, *Russia’s War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998); John Erickson, *The Road to Berlin: Stalin’s War with Germany*, Volume Two (Hartford, CT: Yale University Press, 1999); Alexander Werth, *Russia at War, 1941-1945* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1964).

⁶ The best treatments of the battle include: David M. Glantz, *The Battle of Kursk* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1999); Geoffrey Jukes, *Kursk: The Clash of Armour* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969); Robin Cross, *Citadel: The Battle of Kursk* (London: Michael O’Mara Books, 1993); and Niklas Zetterling, *Kursk 1943: A*

passing mention in the books. As a result, historians portray the trenches, and other civilian-built infrastructure in abstract terms as merely one aspect of the panoply of defensive measures deployed. Studies of Soviet society during war tend to treat the activities of the civilian population as separate from the catastrophic organized violence carried out by the Soviet and German militaries. None of these works, however, has shed light on how the Soviet civilian population and Red Army soldiers worked together in the mud and blood of the front line. As a result, scholarship compartmentalizes the conflict in narratives that describe the front and rear as separate spaces of activity. Such studies elide one of the true reasons for Soviet success and one of the single most important characteristics of human conflict in the twentieth century: the erasure of the very concept of front and rear, which rendered war making the sole endeavor for the entire society.

In a similar vein, Soviet and Russian scholarship on the Great Patriotic War and on individual battles suffers from a triumphalist tone that emphasizes the developing competence of generals, the bold decisions of commanders, and the heroism of soldiers on the battlefield, subordinating the rural population to the secondary role of loyal supporter.⁷ Soviet and Russian provincial presses have supplemented the larger narratives with short runs of memoir and document collections, but these treatments also tend to celebrate the heroic exploits of a given region's residents.⁸ Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, some Russian regional scholars have

Statistical Analysis (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2000). However, none of these books is based on unpublished archival sources.

⁷ The six-volume history of the Great Patriotic War is the best example of this type of literature. P. N. Pospelov, *Istoriia Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny Sovetskogo Soiuz, 1941-1945* (Moscow: Voen. Izd-vo, 1960-1965).

⁸ V. D. Bazhenov, *50 ognennykh dnei: Vospominaniia veteranov-uchastnikov srazhennii na kurskoi duge* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo RAGS, 2003); V. A. Zhilin, *Kurskaia bitva: Khronika, fakty, liudi* (Moscow: Olma Press, 2003); V. N. Zamulin, *Zasekrechennaia Kurskaia bitva: Neizvestnye dokumenty svidetel'stvuiut* (Moscow: Iuza, 2008); G. A. Koltunov, *Kurskaia Bitva* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1970). While more recent treatments focus on individuals' actions, the Soviet literature tends to be marred by Marxist ideology, often filtering the events of the war through a prism of contemporary political priorities.

published studies based on local archives. While these shed some light on the undertakings of figures at the local level, they still compartmentalize the functions of the military, the party, and the people into three separate spheres of activity.⁹

Methodologically, this dissertation stands at the intersection of social and military history. Examining the interactions that junior and senior Red Army officers had with local political leaders, I delineate the areas of contestation and agreement between the two parties. I observe that while sharing common goals in defeating an enemy bent on the Soviet Union's annihilation, they were often at cross purposes as how to achieve their goals. The employment of the region's labor pool emerged as the primary point of contention. The Soviet military felt it had unlimited access to the civilian population to carry out a host of tasks all of which it considered to be of urgent military necessity, and therefore, worthy of the highest priority. The civilian leaders did not deny the urgency of the Red Army's needs, yet they also had to satisfy the expectations of a state that required all liberated territory to shift to agricultural production. In effect, the oblast's officials had to maintain balance between two large institutions making excessive claims on a commodity that was exhausted and in short supply. In this role, they had the ultimate responsibility for fulfilling the mobilization demands of the Red Army officers, while also retaining enough labor for agricultural work. The fact that they were the gatekeepers of labor in this scenario gave them a small measure of power in their relationship with the Red Army.

⁹ K. V. Iatsenko, *V bor'be za korennoi perelom: Voennno-organizatorskaia deiatel'nost' organov vlasti Tsentral'nogo Chernozem'ia vo vtoroi period Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny (noiabr' 1942 g.–dekabr' 1943 g.)* (Kursk: Izdatel'stvo Kurskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo universiteta, 2001). While Iatsenko's book stands out as the only work that touches directly on civilian labor as part of a broader study of Soviet military activities in the Central Black Earth region, it was written for a general audience.

One of the aspects intrinsic to the mobilization for the Red Army's defense in Kursk centered on the fact it they could mobilize so many laborers in so little time. More importantly, women by far comprised the largest portion of the workforce that dug, built, repaired, and provided medical services for the military. The sources, however, provide remarkably little data on their role as laborers. The only information in this regard consists of lists of citations for exceeding work norms for a special railroad construction project between the towns of Staryi Oskol and Rzhava. While the names of women predominate on these award lists, the documents provide little other information on their experience or the nature of the work. The mobilization orders from oblast officials down to their counterparts at the district and village council levels employ gender neutral language, using the word "*chelovek*" or "person," in the vast majority of cases. I came across no documentation with regard to possible special needs for these women. Despite these silences, I determined that the people generally complied with the demands made of them, but they also resisted the mobilizations, shirked work, withheld food, and occasionally pilfered needed items or tools because they had to in order to survive. This kind of protection of self-interest suggests a level of tension between the general population and the two institutions insisting on their labor for the war effort that heretofore has not been explained in any discussion of the Battle of Kursk.

This dissertation is rooted firmly in documents I examined in The State Archive of Social and Political History of Kursk Oblast, *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv obshchestvenno-politicheskoi istorii Kurskoi oblasti* (GAOPIKO), which houses the records of the party oblast committee (*obkom*). They include the minutes of meetings, correspondence between the oblast committee and the district committees, as well as between the oblast committee and Moscow and the Red Army. This archive also contains materials related to the Communist Youth League, or

Komsomol and its counterparts at the district level. The State Archive of Kursk Oblast, *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Kurskoi oblasti* (GAKO), holds documents of the executive committee of the Kursk Oblast Soviet of Workers and Peasants Deputies, or *oblispolkom*. The oblispolkom carried out the majority of the day-to-day coordination and maintenance of the mobilizations and served as the point of contact between the civilian and military officials. Similar to the obkom, the oblispolkom engaged in heavy correspondence with the executive committees of the district soviets (*raiiispolkoms*) as well as the village soviets or councils. The collections of the raisspolkoms and village soviets proved useful in getting closer to how the Red Army and the state's demands played out on the ground. The State Archive of Kursk Oblast also holds materials related to various institutions in the oblast that carried out a variety of functions related to basic services

While materials from the archives in Kursk provided the backbone of the dissertation, my research was enhanced by several other sources. The local newspaper, *Kurskaia pravda*, provides an invaluable basis for examining the propaganda campaign that the local authorities' implemented in the months immediately after the liberation from the German occupiers. I accessed the entire run for 1943 in the N. N. Aseev Library of Kursk Oblast. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum granted me access to a cache of materials from the Extraordinary Commission that carried out detailed investigations into all possible atrocities committed by the Germans in the wake of liberation by the Red Army.¹⁰ I used these documents to describe the occupation in chapter 1. I also have supplemented my research with several published document collections. The most important of these is the twenty-four-volume series of documents pulled

¹⁰ The official title of this organization was the Extraordinary State Commission to Investigate German-Fascist Crimes Committed on Soviet Territory (Chrezvychainaia gosudarstvennaia komissiia po ustanovleniiu i rassledovaniu zlodeianii nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov).

from the Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense (Tsentralnyi arkhiv ministerstva oborony, TsAMO) edited by V. A. Zolotarev.

My study comprises five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces Kursk Oblast. Here I provide basic information on the demographic makeup of the oblast, the economy, and the topography. I conclude that the Wehrmacht administrators implemented the policy goals they had established in the 1930s through a sustained campaign of destruction and terror. Their departure culminated in a final gasp of mass shootings and destruction that ultimately left the population exhausted. The Red Army's liberation of the territory necessitated a series of massive military operations that touched on every district in the oblast. As soon as the Soviet military forces passed through a territory, it instructed the inhabitants to perform duties in its rear services area that proved vital to its sustained combat effectiveness. The Red Army tasked the returning civilian authorities with the organization of labor carried out by the people. At the outset of this relationship a tension between the Red Army and local officials arose over efficacy of the help the people showed to the Red Army.

Chapter 2 focuses on the desperate situation the returning oblast officials found in the weeks after liberation and describes how they prioritized tasks in order to begin the process of rehabilitation. The state intruded on this massive undertaking by making demands that all liberated territories must achieve a harvest of prewar proportions. Such an order required the people to prepare to launch a "normal" agricultural season only weeks after the occupying army had left and while it remained poised at the perimeter of the oblast with the intention of reconquering the territory. The fact that the Germans had taken or destroyed much of the agricultural machinery, horses, and communal property on the collective farms seriously jeopardized the farmers' ability to carry out a successful spring sowing campaign.

Chapter 3 examines the propaganda campaign Kursk's officials implemented as a means to motivate an exhausted population to give their meager material possessions, food, and labor to the Red Army soldiers bivouacked in their territory. The chapter argues that the local leaders had neither the material wherewithal nor the coercive power to generate high performance on the part of the population. They therefore had to develop a sophisticated propaganda campaign to convince the people that the Germans were evil, the Red Army was competent, the Soviet Union had strong and willing allies, and victory was in sight. Further, Kursk's officials created a relationship between the Red Army and the people in which the Soviet military acted both as the people's saviors and their instrument of revenge against a hated, annihilistic aggressor. Conversely, the propagandists insisted that the people had incurred a debt to the Red Army for having liberated them and could repay it only through their labor.

Chapter 4 discusses the Red Army's rationale for assuming a posture of deliberate defense against the Germans, how it organized that defense, and the initial mobilizations it made on the people specifically for defense construction. This chapter recognizes the importance of contingency in the Soviet military's decision to take a defensive stance given the offensive-minded culture of the Red Army leadership and the High Command's predilection for launching headlong offensives. Further, it contends that a small number of Soviet military leaders understood that Soviet victory at Kursk lay in strong defense designed to destroy as many enemy tanks and soldiers as possible and exhaust the German forces, followed by a robust counteroffensive. But the leaders had to solve the military problem of converting open, tank-friendly country into a trap for German armor. They achieved this by creating a vast network of below-ground defenses. This required a massive labor force to report to excavation sites all over the oblast where they would engage in the complex task of digging field fortifications.

Chapter 5 delineates the interactions that Red Army engineers had with local leaders over the increasingly scarce labor pool in Kursk oblast. In the course of trying to secure greater access to the labor power of Kursk's collective farms, both groups used methods that had existed before the war for leveraging authority against rivals. For example, the Red Army manipulated existing legal codes to redefine and criminalize behavior it believed worked against its interests. The civilian leaders relied on the network of relationships that allowed for mutual protection. The people thus remained at the call of two masters. Over the course of the mobilization process, the Red Army and Kursk's authorities developed ways to rationalize the mobilization process thus granting access to formerly undesirable laborers, such as children and the elderly.

CHAPTER 1

FROM THE FIRE AND INTO THE FRYING PAN

Kursk Oblast represented a low priority for the invading forces of the Wehrmacht in 1941.¹¹ It took several weeks for it to take over most of the oblast in October and November of that year. The policies the Germans carried out in Kursk resembled those of the Nazi administration throughout the occupied territories in the Soviet Union. The Germans enacted a reign of terror, pillage, and deprivation. Within weeks of moving into Kursk Oblast, they began implementing murderous policies they had developed in Germany in the prewar period. For example, they carried out a euthanasia campaign against patients in Kursk's hospital for the mentally ill. The occupation lasted eighteen months, leaving the population exhausted and the much of the economic infrastructure destroyed.

The Red Army liberated the oblast in February and March 1943. While the Soviet High Command, or Stavka, intended its military forces to pass through Kursk Oblast quickly as they pushed westward to Kiev and Smolensk, the Germans offered stiff resistance, stalling the Red Army's advance in the territory. In order to maintain combat effectiveness in the face of the German army, the Soviet military began to mobilize the local population to perform vital functions of its rear services. These included the maintenance of lines of logistics, medical care for the wounded, and food provision for the soldiers. The ability to enlist thousands of people to provide important support duties gave the Red Army an advantage in terms of their deployment

¹¹ In Operation Barbarossa, the German leadership directed Army Group Center to take Moscow and Army group South to take Kiev and then press on to the Donbass region. Lying between these two objectives and offering the Germans no immediate strategic advantage, the Wehrmacht only took Kursk in the course of carrying out its more pressing tasks.

of military manpower while it also foreshadowed possible future uses for Kursk's civilians. Further, the ready employment of the civilian population to engage in military support activity so close to the front illustrates the unique experience of the people of the Soviet Union in the Second World War. They occupied a blurred zone between fighting front and rear, where they served a clear military purpose by giving the Red Army thousands more bodies to aid in its war effort. Also viewing these activities as important to the war effort, the Luftwaffe often targeted Kursk's civilians as the latter went about their work for the Red Army.

Kursk Oblast as the German Army Found It in 1941

Located in the Central Black Earth region of the Soviet Union, Kursk Oblast has humus-rich soil that long made it a valuable center of agricultural production for the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire. The oblast contained 54,700 square kilometers with its capital city, also named Kursk, in the center, located 450 kilometers south of Moscow.¹²

The population of the oblast in the 1939 census was 3,143,067 people of whom 286,134 lived in urban centers and the remaining 2,856,933 lived in the countryside. The capital city, Kursk, was home to 119,997 people and the second largest city, Belgorod, had 34,359 inhabitants. In the fifteen years leading up to the German invasion, Kursk had experienced a 15 percent decrease in its overall population, while the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic) experienced an increase of 17 percent. Kursk was not alone as ten other rural oblasts also saw their populations drop from 7 to 18 percent.¹³ While the urban population of the

¹² The central authorities divided the territory of Kursk Oblast in 1956 into two separate oblasts that were roughly equal in size. The northern hemisphere retained the name Kursk, while the southern half took the name of the largest city in the territory, Belgorod.

¹³ Poliakov, Iu. A., ed., *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1939 goda, osnovnye itogi, Rossiia* (Sankt-Peterburg: Izd-vo "Russko-Baltiiskii informatsionnyi tsentr BLITS", 1999), 20-23.

RSFSR between 1926 and 1939 more than doubled, the number of urban inhabitants in the oblast shrunk by 1 percent and its rural population dropped 11 percent. Yet Kursk city, which was the only urban center in the region with a population greater than 50,000, grew by 21.5 percent in the same period.¹⁴ This shows contradictory trends occurred in Kursk Oblast in that certain cities in the oblast grew while the oblast experienced an overall larger outmigration than most territories in the RSFSR.

The gender breakdown among inhabitants in the oblast shows that men represented the larger percentage of people leaving the oblast. In 1926, men constituted 48 percent of the total population and this dropped to 46 percent by 1939. Conversely, the percentage of women in the oblast increased from 52 to 54 percent over the same time period.¹⁵

At 95 percent, the vast majority of Kursk's population was ethnically Russian. Ukrainians made up 4.3 percent of the population with an indeterminate number of ethnic groups comprising 0.7 percent of the population.¹⁶ Kursk's Jewish population was significantly lower than the average for the RSFSR. Reports after the liberation of the oblast indicate that the Jewish population stood at roughly 2,000 people whereas Jews comprised 0.87 percent of the RSFSR's population.¹⁷ According to the 1939 census, more than 97 percent of the population regarded Russian as their mother tongue. Given such an ethnic and linguistic composition, Kursk Oblast was fairly homogenous.¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibid., 24-26.

¹⁵ Ibid., 20-23.

¹⁶ Ibid., 45.

¹⁷ A population of 2,000 means that Jews comprised only 0.0006 percent of the population of Kursk Oblast.

¹⁸ Poliakov, *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1939 goda, osnovnye itogi, Rossiia*, 59.

In terms of literacy, Kursk's population mirrored the same increase marked by the RSFSR from 1926 to 1929. The number of literate women over the age of nine had grown from 32.8 percent to 69.3 percent. These numbers were slightly lower than for the RSFSR but women in Kursk were closing the gap with the average of the republic.¹⁹ For both the RSFSR and Kursk Oblast, a greater percentage of men over nine years old were literate. In 1939, 92.6 percent of men were literate while only 69.3 percent of women could read. Kursk Oblast trailed behind the RSFSR with regard to the percentage of people who had completed a secondary education, but the data show that Kursk Oblast had a higher percentage of educated among its urban population as compared to the RSFSR but a lower percentage of the rural population. In Kursk itself women made up a higher percentage of the urban educated while far fewer women than men in the countryside received a secondary diploma. These discrepancies between genders help explain why the state (or local society) prepared rural men to take administrative or managerial positions more so than women.

The oblast's economy was based on agricultural production and food processing. The people cultivated grains, sugar beets, sunflowers, and hemp. Kursk ranked second, behind Vinnitsia Oblast, in sugar beet production and processing in all the Soviet Union. It also had developed an intensive livestock base, especially cattle and a resulting leather processing industry. Kursk's urban residents were engaged in other light industry, such as textiles. The state had recently begun exploiting some of the regions iron ore deposits.²⁰

¹⁹ In 1926, 40.2 percent of women in the RSFSR and 32.8 percent of women in Kursk could read. These percentages grew 73 percent for the RSFSR and 69.3 percent for Kursk Oblast.

²⁰ Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. 7021, op. 29, d. 1049, ll. 16-18.

The German Occupation

Unlike its spectacular victories to the west, the Wehrmacht slowly swallowed up the territory of Kursk Oblast over five weeks in October and November 1941. Even then, it did not conquer the entire oblast as it stopped short at the Tim and Northern Donets rivers. The almost careless takeover of the oblast resulted from the invaders having prioritized the seizure of Kiev and Moscow and the fact that Kursk's territory lay at the dividing line between Army Group Center and Army Group South, two of Germany's the three primary invasion forces.²¹ Once the Wehrmacht took over a district, however, the Extraordinary Commission reports indicate that the occupiers quickly established an administrative regime under the leadership of the German military command and authority.²² Following the same administrative divisions as the Soviet power they had just deposed, the Germans installed a mid-level officer, such as a captain or a major to serve as the district's authority. Proximity to lines of communication determined the size and composition of the staff that oversaw the security apparatuses. Towns located at railway junctions, such as Ryl'sk and Valuikii, along with larger cities such as Belgorod and Kursk, hosted larger staffs comprised of personnel from the military and Gestapo.²³ District centers in more remote locations had a smaller contingent of German officers (usually a captain) and the Extraordinary Commission testimonies do not indicate any presence of Gestapo officers.

²¹ Germany's military planners tasked three primary army groups to reach three separate targets for Operation Barbarossa. It ordered Army Group Center to take Moscow, Army Group South to take Kiev, and Army Group North to take Leningrad.

²² Two reports list most of the administrative centers in the oblast with the corresponding German officers that made up the district commandant staff, see GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 1049, ll. 14, 28-32. See also GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 984, l. 5.

²³ The testimonies in the Extraordinary Commission reports often distinguish between Gestapo commanders and members of the German military authority (*voennaia vlast'*).

Soon after the Wehrmacht had occupied the territory, each district's new administrative regime established its own sense of order through arbitrary arrest and incarceration. The Extraordinary Commission testimonies describe punitive squads (*karatel'nyi otriad*) or police units that made calculated raids against specific individuals or groups whom the authorities considered a threat. The testimonies do not detail explicitly whether or not these groups were Einsatzgruppen (special mobile killing units), Wehrmacht units, or reserve police, but all of them were staffed with German or Hungarian soldiers. While the arresting agents did not present any official charge to the suspect, the Germans considered a host of activities worthy of incarceration. They sought out any possible challenge to their authority by arresting known Communist Party members, partisan sympathizers, insubordinate persons, and even those they found to harbor anti-German feelings.²⁴ Over the course of the occupation the occupiers began targeting kolkhoz leaders and their families. The Germans viewed any person in a former position of authority as a threat and removed him or her to keep the remaining populace cowed into submission. The authorities also arrested civilians for property destruction, maintaining hiding spaces, and possessing contraband items, such as communications equipment or firearms.²⁵ The testimonies indicate that Kursk's inhabitants understood the arbitrary nature of arrest by the occupying authorities as several survivors observed that being listed in a Gestapo agent's memo represented sufficient cause for arrest.²⁶

The increase in the number of people arrested required the administration in each district to create holding facilities. The occupation forces usually repurposed an existing building

²⁴ GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 984, l. 5; GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 1028, l. 132; GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 979, l. 12.

²⁵ GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 5, l. 43.

²⁶ GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 984, l. 5.

located near the administrative offices to function as an improvised prison and hired local collaborators to serve as jailers.²⁷ The testimonies indicate that the Germans often hired local persons to serve under them in the district's administration and police force.²⁸ The inmates endured horrible conditions and subsisted on meagre daily rations. They received regular beatings from the guards and those thought to have connections with the partisans experienced torture at the hands of Gestapo agents during interrogations.²⁹ The need for such stringent security measures likely resulted from the fact that the proximity to the frontline would have made the Wehrmacht more concerned about intelligence on troop displacements and other information of value to the Red Army. The German Second Army and Hungarian Second Army also used several of the districts between Kursk city and the Oskol River as a main staging area for the Germans' summer 1942 offensive codenamed Operation Blue. Such a great concentration of men and materiel required the Germans to be extra vigilant in dealing with possible intelligence gathering threats.

The testimonies point out that a large portion of the prison populations in a host of districts consisted of Red Army prisoners of war. Unlike the territories of Belorussia and Ukraine, where the Wehrmacht herded the hundreds of thousands of soldiers they captured into mass open-air camps, each of Kursk's district military authorities held a contingent of POWs in improvised prisons. They tended to separate the POWs from the pool of local civilian prisoners, but this was not always the case. Many of the testimonies observe that in some of the larger towns they held the captured soldiers in wired-in enclosures with no protection from the

²⁷ GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 5, l. 43; GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 984, l. 5; GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 979, l. 25.

²⁸ GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 1049.

²⁹ GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 978, l. 2.

elements. The warders gave the prisoners no proper clothing or sufficient food. They beat prisoners who accepted food offered by sympathetic inhabitants of the host town. The Germans employed the POWs in heavy labor, such as gathering fire wood or hauling fresh water from nearby sources.³⁰ The combination of exposure to the elements of the oncoming winter, lack of food, overwork, and no healthcare all combined to reduce the inmates to utter exhaustion and at this time the Germans would then shoot a POW on the spot.

Shootings became a regular part of prison life for both the soldiers and the civilians. While it is true that the authorities released some civilians from this fate, they shot many whom they arrested, and the testimonies detail not one case where a POW's life was spared. Nor do the testimonies offer rationales for the shootings, which occurred in every district and throughout the period of occupation. The occupiers usually selected a specific location outside the city center to serve as the site of execution and burial yet they never went to great lengths to hide atrocities from witnesses who lived near the killing fields. For example, the occupation authorities in Kursk city sent more than 1,000 of approximately 2,000 victims to the village of Shetkina, at the northwestern outskirts of the city, for execution and burial. They used this location from November 1941 to February 5, 1943 (only three days before the Red Army liberated the city). Even though the Germans threatened Shetkina's residents with execution had they spoken of the shootings to people outside the village, they saw no reason to hide their atrocities.³¹ The most voluminous and detailed information in the testimonies concerns the location, size and contents of the mass graves of civilians and prisoners of war.

³⁰ GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 978, l. 1.

³¹ GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 1051, l. 2. Such openness to their crimes was a fairly common occurrence. See also GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 978.

While the Germans eliminated perceived threats to their authority and the security of their armed forces, they also targeted several other groups in Kursk Oblast for murder. The first category of victims comprised the patients of the Sopogovskii Psychiatric Hospital located about seven kilometers north of Kursk city. The occupation authorities began to push for this action within days of taking Kursk city. The chief physician of the city garrison informed the Russian head of the city public health department and the director of the Sopogovskii Psychiatric Hospital that German law considered the mentally ill to be dead weight to society and therefore the patients at the hospital were to be liquidated. He further explained that German law extended to all occupied areas and therefore the patients in the hospital needed to be killed. When the director informed his staff of the Germans' orders, it refused to comply. Their initial dissent proved useless as the Germans cut off the food supply and the hospital director began hoarding much of the remaining supply for himself. By the beginning of December 1941 starvation had claimed roughly 300 patients. Even with this number of victims the German authorities grew more adamant about killing the remaining patients. The hospital director returned from another meeting with his superiors in Kursk city in early December and again told his staff that it must carry out a mass killing of the patients. This time the hospital staff agreed. After some failed experiments with opium, it settled on a solution of chloral-nitrate, which it forcibly administered to 600 to 650 patients over the four-day period. The hospital's workers buried the bodies in craters near the hospital.³²

The Germans also took reprisals against local people whom they believed aided and abetted the partisans and their activities. A dense forest covers much of the territory in the northwestern region of the oblast, which offered partisan bands a secure space to carry out

³² GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 22.

harassing activities against the German military. After several months of trying to flush out and destroy the partisans in the summer of 1942, the occupiers organized a series of mass burnings from October 12 to November 15, 1942, in Mikhailovskii District. They would first terrorize the inhabitants of a selected village into providing them with information about the partisans' whereabouts. Failing to get the necessary information, they would burn down the entire village and shoot all the inhabitants. In order to secure this sector of their rear area, they incinerated 566 homes and killed 520 villagers over the four-week period.³³ The Germans also considered local prostitutes a possible threat to the well-being of their soldiers. The authorities in Kursk city arrested 300 women who had been alleged to have transmitted syphilis to German soldiers. After serving an unspecified time in prison, the Germans shot all 300 women.³⁴

The Jewish community in Kursk met the same fate at the hands of the Germans as Jews throughout the rest of occupied Europe. The occupation authorities murdered Kursk city's entire population of 2,000 Jews.³⁵ While the information provided in the Extraordinary Commission's materials says little about the experience of Jews throughout the oblast, one report notes that sixteen Jews lived in Dmitriev city when the Germans arrived. Several of these people worked important jobs and were known figures in the community. For example, a Mr. Kaplun served the community as a dentist and a Mr. Perskii managed the local pharmacy. Other individuals were engaged in highly skilled work. The Germans propagated slurs against the small Jewish population to discredit them before the community. This was followed by an extortionate

³³ GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 979, ll. 39-40.

³⁴ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2952, l. 120.

³⁵ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2899, l. 11. This information was announced in a speech the Secretary of Kursk Obkom delivered at the party plenum in April 1943, seven weeks after liberation. While party leaders from time to time pointed out that the Germans had specifically targeted the Jewish community in the oblast, they did not offer any details other than the fact that the Germans destroyed the city's Jewish community.

monthly tax, which the report characterized as legalized theft, after which the Germans robbed them of their personal belongings. The officials denied the Jews the right to work at the jobs for which they were trained and forced them to perform degrading or menial tasks, such as cleaning out cesspools and digging trenches. Finally, they were forced to wear a Star of David on their clothing and to live in one domicile that served as the city's "ghetto." The authorities prohibited them from maintaining any contact with non-Jews in the city. Completely cut off, the Jews remained in the ghetto until shortly before the Red Army returned. Anticipating the Germans' desire to kill them before retreating, they tried to flee into the woods. Only one person escaped.³⁶

Like many other regions under occupation, the Germans viewed Kursk's youth as a slave labor pool for the Reich. While one testimony indicates that the Germans coerced the youths of Belgorod city into forced labor after seizing control,³⁷ other testimonies suggest that they first tried to recruit the oblast's young people to relocate to Germany with promises of good jobs and reasonably comfortable lives.³⁸ The occupation authorities established a "Labor Exchange" in the district administrative center staffed by German officers with the help of local collaborators to help in processing the first volunteers.³⁹ While the labor exchanges might have experienced some initial success, the testimonies all state that at some point recruitment shifted to conscription and coercion. Usually the conscript received a notice to report to the labor exchange, which included a warning that refusal to comply would result in arrest. Some

³⁶ GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 979, ll. 19-20.

³⁷ GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 978, l. 5.

³⁸ GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 979, l. 22.

³⁹ GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 979, l. 22. GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 8, l. 119.

conscripts tried to circumvent the summons by claiming illness, but this seldom worked.⁴⁰

Others refused to go or tried to hide, but the authorities sent security detachments to round up shirkers.⁴¹ One young woman who worked at a factory for the manufacturer, Engesor, in the city of Iserlohn in northern Germany, described her ordeal in brief but striking detail. After an eight-day journey in a tightly-packed train with only two meals of 250 grams of bread, she arrived at a holding camp with no protection from the elements. The conditions at the factory where she worked a machine that pressed bullets were no better. The laborers received a daily ration of bread, experienced harsh disciplinary measures for poor performance, and slept on a concrete floor, which yielded a small harvest of corpses every morning.⁴² In this way the Germans sent as many as 38,797 young men and women from the oblast to a variety of factories and other concerns in the Reich.⁴³

Apart from the widespread and nearly constant campaign of terror the Germans perpetrated during the occupation, they also carried out a persistent campaign of pillage that then culminated in the wholesale destruction of property before the Red Army drove them out in 1943.⁴⁴ While the occupation forces concentrated their pillage on livestock and other foodstuffs, they also stole thousands of pieces of machinery in whole or in part. The physical destruction focused on public property both in throughout the countryside and in the cities. On the collective

⁴⁰ GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 8, l. 119.

⁴¹ GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 19, l. 1.

⁴² GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 3, l. 2-3.

⁴³ GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 1049, ll. 10, 19. This folder contains two reports on losses incurred during the occupation and arrive at different figures for the total number of people sent to slave labor. One report indicates the number listed above while the other states that the Germans took 34, 688 people.

⁴⁴ GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 979, ll. 21-22.

farms, the Germans damaged or razed 91 percent of all barns, over 20,000 grains elevators, 9,500 storage facilities. They also wrought damage to kolkhoz ponds, wells, bridges, and garden plots. In the cities, the occupiers destroyed many structures for which they had no use. They destroyed 86 percent of shops, 75 percent of storehouses, 94 percent of communal structures such as schools, while they wrecked only 50 percent of hospitals and clinics and 11 percent of residential structures. Moreover, when they abandoned the oblast in February 1943, they burned or blew up many of the buildings they had occupied during their tenure. At this time they targeted administrative structures, public utilities and transport, and other facilities.⁴⁵ This physical destruction left the population traumatized by terror, exhausted from pillage, and adrift in piles of rubble that had provided so many people places to work, shop, and carry out their quotidian lives.

The Arrival of the Red Army and Liberation of Kursk Oblast

The successful encirclement of the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad in November 1942, began a period of inconsistent victory and loss, in which the Red Army reclaimed the territory the Germans took the previous summer yet failed to achieve its primary goal: to surround and destroy several large contingents of German soldiers. The Soviet High Command, Stavka, wanted to capitalize on the burgeoning victory in Stalingrad, ordering a handful of follow-on operations along the frontline that ran the length of the country. After two successful operations against Italian and Hungarian forces in January 1943, Stavka had visions of taking Kiev and capturing Smolensk. Stavka's plans came to frustration, however, due to Red Army field commanders' logistical overreach and poor understanding the enemy's capabilities. The

⁴⁵ GARF, f. 7021, op. 29, d. 1049, ll. 24-27.

Wehrmacht compounded these problems with tenacious defense, superior air cover, and outstanding generalship. In the course of combat in February and March 1943, the Red Army liberated most of Kursk Oblast, but not without heavy fighting throughout most of the territory.

Several armies of the Voronezh and Briansk fronts (army groups) began their offensives in January 1943 with two major operations in the middle Don River region. On January 13 and 14, the 40th Army and the 3rd Tank Army of the Voronezh Front launched the Ostrogozhsk-Rossosh Operation, striking out west from the Don River. Within two weeks they crossed Voronezh Oblast while destroying the Alpine Corps of the Italian Eighth Army and a significant portion of the Hungarian Second Army. By January 24, these Red Army units reached several points on the Oskol River that flowed north-south along the eastern border of Kursk Oblast.⁴⁶ The sudden success of this thrust to the west exposed the right flank of the Axis forces located in the northern section of Voronezh Oblast giving Stavka cause to plan a follow-on offensive, originally named the Voronezh-Kastornoe Operation. Stavka ordered the Voronezh Front's commander, Colonel General F. I. Golikov, to use the 60th, 38th, and elements of the 40th armies to take Voronezh city and then converge on the important railroad junction of Kastornoe about fifty kilometers to the west, during the course of which they would surround a concentration of German and Hungarian forces. The High Command tasked the 13th Army of the Briansk Front to lend a hand with a thrust from the north. Within ten days the Red Army had reached Kastornoe, liberating the remainder of Voronezh Oblast and successfully trapping the Hungarian forces and several German infantry divisions.⁴⁷ By the end of January, the Red Army had

⁴⁶ *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 1 (February 1973): 62-67.

⁴⁷ See John Erickson, *The Road to Berlin: Stalin's War with Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 33-34.

secured a series of bridgeheads along the eastern edge of Kursk Oblast and was poised to press further west.

Allowing only a few days to rest, Stavka ordered the forces along the Oskol River to resume the offensive, but along three different avenues of attack. It sent the first contingent, comprising the 40th, 69th, and 3rd Tank armies to advance through the southeastern section of Kursk Oblast on its way to take Belgorod and Kharkov, and then press on to the Dnepr River. Stavka tasked the second group, which included the 60th and 38th armies to press due west across Kursk Oblast and ordered the 48th and 13th Armies to participate in the encirclement and destruction of the German Second Army then concentrated in Orel Oblast. While the commanders were keen to resume the attack, they had to do so in the face of several serious problems. First, their forces had been greatly weakened in the previous weeks' fighting and required rest. Second, with roads in disrepair and severe weather conditions, they did not have time to bring their supply depots forward to properly support the advancing forces. Third, having destroyed the Italian and Hungarian forces in the Ostrogozhsk-Rossosh and Voronezh-Kastornoe operations, they now faced more elite German forces that were better trained and equipped than their Axis partners. This made for bitter fighting throughout Kursk Oblast.

Of the three armies beginning to move on Kharkov, the 40th Army experienced the lightest initial opposition. The 69th Army and 3rd Tanks Army, however, had to fight through elite German formations further south on the Oskol River. For example, Panzer Grenadier Division "GrossDeutschland" and regiments of SS Panzer Division "Das Reich" held the line in Novyi Oskolskii, Volokonovskii, and Valuiskii districts. When the 40th Army resumed the attack on February 2, it moved quickly through Skorodnianskii, Prokhorovskii, Belenikhinskii, and Sazhnovskii districts. One German infantry division converted the administrative center of

Korochanskii District, the town of Korocha, into a strong point. 40th Army's left wing reached Korocha on February 5 and bypassed it leaving a handful of units to destroy the Germans. The 69th and 3rd Tank Armies experienced much greater difficulty as the German forces they attacked created more fortified towns that impeded their advance. For example, the forces of Panzer Grenadier Division "GrossDeutschland" fortified the district center of Veliko-Mikhailovskii District forcing two rifle divisions of the 69th Army to spend five days subduing this resistance. The Germans repeated the same tactic in Shebekinskii District and in many districts in Kharkovskii Oblast.⁴⁸ The Wehrmacht commonly used towns located at important crossroads as fortified zones when executing a controlled retreat. The standing structures offered effective above-ground defensive structures, which when fortified could hold off an enemy advancing force while the main body moved further west and prepared another town. In this way they could wear down and exhaust the advancing Red Army forces as it sought an opportune moment for a counterstrike.⁴⁹ The Germans bided their time for the next two weeks as they slowly retreated and strung Golikov's forces beyond Kharkov. They then unleashed a masterful counteroffensive that eventually pushed the Red Army forces back to the southern border of Kursk Oblast.⁵⁰ This formed the "south face" of the Kursk salient.

⁴⁸ Glantz, *From the Don to the Dnepr*, pp. 170-71.

⁴⁹ Such a tactic, called a "hedgehog defense," is designed to thwart mechanized advances. The defenders choose specific points and strengthen their complete perimeter, forcing the advancing army to draw troops away from the spearheads to attempt to reduce the strongpoints. Many after action reports show that the Germans often strengthened villages, farms and other population centers as they were usually located on important transport routes and the buildings provided useful protection. Center for Military History, *Military Improvisations During the Russian Campaign*, Washington DC: United States Army, 1986. Located through Davis Library online catalogue at <http://permanent.access.gpo.gov/gpo9902/www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/milimprov/fm.htm>.

⁵⁰ For a more detailed discussion of the German counteroffensive see Erickson, *The Road to Berlin*, 63-67; Glantz, *From the Don to the Dnepr*.

Soon after Golikov's armies began their push to Kharkov, the Soviet armies that had fought in the Voronezh-Kastornoe Operation resumed their westward thrusts. The 60th and 38th armies of the Voronezh Front advanced due west and southwest. While their major responsibility was to protect the 40th Army's right flank as it moved on Belgorod and Kharkov, these two armies liberated Kursk city and the smaller towns of Shchigry and Oboian'. Compared to the fighting to the north and the south, the 60th and 38th armies met less resistance and continued their advance at a slow pace until they reached the western districts of Ryl'skii and Sudzhanskii in early March. At this time the German units opposing them joined in the general counteroffensive that had begun to the south and reclaimed a little bit of territory before the winter campaign ceased.

The 48th and 13th armies of the Briansk Front continued their advance beyond the Kastornoe railroad line until they came to the eastern approaches of the town of Maloarkhangel'sk.⁵¹ Using this town as an anchor, the German forces had constructed a line of fixed defenses that stopped the 48th Army's advance. The 13th Army succeeded in turning the German's left flank south of Maloarkhangel'sk and advanced west across Shchigrovskii, Svobodinskii, and Zolotukhinskii districts, eventually reaching Fatezh city by February 8. This push to the west coincided with the gains made by 60th and 38th armies, described above. With these actions the Red Army created a wide gap between the German Second Panzer Army in the Orel region and German Second Army in the Kharkov region. Seeing an opportunity to exploit this gap, in early February Stavka sent the 2nd Tank Army from its strategic reserves and

⁵¹ V. A. Zolotarev, et al. eds, *Ruskii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia: Preliudiia Kurskoi bitvy: Dokumenty i materialy, 6 dekabria 1942 g. – 25 apreliia 1943 g.* Vol. 15, 4 (3) (Moscow: Terra, 1999), 22. From TsAMO f. 3, op. 11556, d. 12, 71, 72. This book is one of a series of edited document collections of the holdings of the Central Archives of the Ministry of Defense that was compiled in the 1990s.

redeployed the 65th from the Stalingrad region to occupy the space between the Bryansk and the Voronezh fronts in the northwest territory of Kursk Oblast. The High Command also cobbled together 70th Army from internal security forces and NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) border guards and ordered it to join the other two armies in the attack on the German Second Panzer Army.⁵² Stavka organized these three armies as the Central Front and placed Colonel General K. K. Rokossovsky, who had just overseen the surrender of the German forces at Stalingrad, in command.

Stavka wanted Rokossovsky to launch an attack on February 15 from its proposed staging areas in Fatezhskii and Konyshchevskii districts in order to help the Bryansk Front encircle and destroy the German Second Panzer Army.⁵³ Again, the realities of the limitations of the Red Army's logistics infrastructure, along with poor weather, contrived to frustrate the plan, forcing Rokossovsky to delay the attack. All of the armies that comprised the Central Front detrained in towns 60 to 250 kilometers east of their operational staging areas.⁵⁴ They had to transport themselves, their equipment, and supplies across this distance in inclement weather over poor roads. Drifting snow often impeded their progress and on clear days they had to contend with German aviation. Such poor conditions took their toll on the military machinery. For example, the 2nd Tank Army detrained from Livny with 408 machines and required seven days to move 220 kilometers to the operational jumping-off point west of Fatezh, yet 130 tanks broke down or

⁵² Zolotarev, et al. eds, *Ruskii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia: Stavka Verkhovnogo Glavnokomandovaniia: Dokumenty i materialy, 1943 god.* Vol. 16, 5 (3) (Moscow: Terra, 1999). Stavka created the Central Front on February 5, 1943. Stavka had ordered Chistiakov's 21st Army to join the Central Front. The 21st Army arrived at its collection point in Fatezhskii District in late February but it was sent south as a reserve for the Voronezh Front to suppress Manstein's push north of Kharkov in March 1943.

⁵³ Zolotarev, *Predliudiia Kurskoi bitvy*, 26-27. TsAMO, f. 3, op. 11556, d. 12, ll. 181-82.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 26-27, 286-288. TsAMO, f. 3, op. 11556, d. 12, ll. 181-82; TsAMO, f. 62, op. 321, d. 33, ll. 26-31.

mired en route. Of the 278 tanks that arrived to the staging area by February 23, 96 required maintenance. Therefore, only 182 tanks could be committed to the attack that began on February 25.⁵⁵ The divisions of the 70th Army, which were to have taken the position between the 65th and 13th Armies, had only just completed detraining near Livny, forcing the 65th Army to advance on an exceptionally wide front.⁵⁶ They did not arrive to their proper jumping off points until the first week of March.

Adding to the difficulties Rokossovsky faced, Stavka had to redirect four armies it had earmarked for the Central Front further to the south to ameliorate the developing disaster of the German counteroffensive in the Donbass.⁵⁷ This severely limited the Central Front's offensive striking power as it tried to advance out of Kursk Oblast and encircle the German Second Panzer Army on February 25. The Germans also frustrated The Bryansk Front's attempts to break their German defenses in Maloarkhangel'skii District. Even though the armies of both the Central and Bryansk fronts continued to make fruitless attacks over the next three weeks, the German forces responded with increasing resistance and counterattacks supported by several divisions of reinforcements.

All operations simmered down between March 22 and 25, leaving a stable frontline between the opposing forces that roughly traced the outline of Kursk Oblast along its northern, western, and southern borders. To be sure, the Germans still occupied portions of Kursk's border districts, but the Red Army had successfully liberated the majority of the territory. While most of Kursk's inhabitants could find relief from grinding German occupation, they now

⁵⁵ Glantz, *After Stalingrad*, 283-84.

⁵⁶ Zolotarev, *Predliudiia Kurskoi bitvy*, 286-288. TsAMO, f. 62, op. 321, d. 33, ll. 26-31.

⁵⁷ Zolotarev, *Predliudiia Kurskoi bitvy*, 41-42. TsAMO, f. 3, op. 11556, d. 12, ll. 233, 235, 239. Stavka sent the 64th Army to the Voronezh, the 62nd and 66th Armies to the Southwestern Front, and held the 24th Army in reserve in Voronezh Oblast.

occupied a land that would become the center of attention for both militaries for the next five months. So, while the terror of the Gestapo and Wehrmacht had come to an end, Kursk's civilians now had to support its army of liberation.

Kursk Oblast's Incorporation into the Red Army's Rear Services

Once Soviet power had returned to administer Kursk Oblast, Red Army commanders began submitting requests for them to organize labor for road clearing and maintenance, provisioning of foodstuffs, hospital construction, and care of the wounded among a host of other tasks. Establishing specific channels for the request of needs and services based upon specific regulations and laws meant that Soviet power wanted to reestablish a form of order that would not only attempt greater efficiency but reimpose the legitimacy of its rule.

As the Red Army advanced against the Germans in February and March 1943, Kursk Oblast was drawn into its active rear services area. Red Army doctrine dictated that it coordinate the planning of supply and transportation of its forces with local civilian leaders, as a result of which Kursk party officials had to meet the demands and needs of the liberators.⁵⁸ Kursk's residents became subject to the needs of the Red Army, albeit through a chain of command that passed through local party leadership. Further, the Red Army integrated local resources into their own rear services protocols. In effect, they converted all of Kursk's able-bodied civilians into a vast paramilitary organization.

The Red Army turned to Kursk's leaders to help with four major components of its rear services operation so that it could carry out its offensive operations in February and March.

⁵⁸ *War Department Technical Manual TM 30-430, Handbook on U.S.S.R Military Forces, Chapter VII, Logistics* (War Department: Washington DC, 1945) p. 1.

First, Kursk's people had to repair and maintain the road network to ensure a steady supply of munitions and fuel to the front while allowing for the evacuation of wounded soldiers and damaged vehicles. Second, the people of Kursk established scores of hospitals that provided wounded soldiers with thousands of beds in which they could convalesce and soon return to the duty of exacting vengeance on the hated enemy. Third, small groups of civilians organized into trophy companies (*trofeinye roty*) and scoured through multiple battlefields in search of usable weaponry, munitions, and scrap metal. Finally, the Red Army demanded that the liberated people supply the soldiers with their daily food provisions as well as forage for their horses.⁵⁹

Road Transportation

Like most of the Soviet Union at this time, Kursk Oblast had a dense network of largely unpaved roads that became impassible muddy tracks in rain and wet snow.⁶⁰ As the Voronezh Front moved quickly through the southeastern section of the oblast in the first half of February it moved further away from its supply bases on the Don River. Its commanders fully understood the dangers of the front's spearhead running too far beyond their supply lines and endeavored to ensure a steady supply of fuel and ammunition. On February 12, 1943, two days after 60th Army liberated Kursk city, the front's command sent a resolution to the civilian authorities in Kursk, Voronezh, and Kharkov oblasts establishing complete control over the rail and automobile

⁵⁹ *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Kurskoi oblasti* (GAKO), f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, ll. 4-6. This resolution promulgated by the Voronezh Front on February 12, 1943, details its initial demands of civilian leadership in terms of transportation availability (which includes the evacuation of trophy materials), medical support, and food supply for the soldiers.

⁶⁰ Guy Sajer provides a very detailed and visceral account of the conditions of roads in Kursk and Kharkov oblasts while he served as supply driver for the German forces fighting opposite Golikov's Voronezh Front in winter 1943. Guy Sajer, *The Forgotten Soldier* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2000), pp. 77-113.

transportation networks in order to serve the needs of the front.⁶¹ The Voronezh Front's military council sought to commandeer every car in its territory to serve only as delivery vehicles for military support cargo. It gave Chief of Autotransport and Road Services (Upravlenie avtotransportnoi i dorozhnoi sluzhby, UADS), Colonel Demenchenko, the right to mobilize the local population for the construction and maintenance of cargo roads. This included the construction of above-water bridges over the Don, Oskol, and Northern Donets rivers by April 1. Following Red Army protocol, the resolution stipulated that every population center would be allocated a stretch of road for which it must provide manpower for needed maintenance. The military council assigned local organs of Soviet power, usually a village soviet, with responsibility for ensuring the usability of their stretch of road.⁶² The resolution also indicates that the Voronezh Front had an acute shortage of drivers. It ordered another officer in the auto transport administration to arrange a short course for five hundred drivers to be ready for work by April 1. It also ordered the military council of every army to mobilize one hundred drivers with a week to locate and collect trophy vehicles.

The Executive Committee of the Kursk Oblast Soviet (*oblispolkom*) responded quickly to the Voronezh Front's request, sending orders to the executive committees of each district and large town soviet demanding that they bring all the roads of military importance in their jurisdictions to a passable condition within a day of receipt of the instruction. By passable condition they meant that the roads were to be no less than six meters wide and free of drifting snow. Neither the orders from the front nor the *oblispolkom* indicate the need for such great

⁶¹ This chapter section focuses solely on the automobile network. Chapter 6 will be dedicated to a detailed discussion of the rail network.

⁶² Red Army protocol also broke up supply roads into segments of responsibility. But a serviceman in a front or army's transportation staff maintained oversight on the supply road. Ideally such responsibility was not meant to be allocated to civilians. *War Department Technical Manual TM 30-430*, Chapter VII, *Logistics*, 12.

width. Red Army doctrine indicated that every front and army would determine roads of significant military value. That meant roads on which traffic ran directly from larger supply depots in the rear areas of the front and each army to smaller supply transfer points closer to the fighting where the cargo could be broken down and distributed to smaller units, eventually reaching soldiers in combat. The front and armies were then to determine other ancillary roads for evacuation from the frontline, thus dedicating a road to one-way traffic.⁶³ The greater width for one-way traffic would be a means to ensure that broken-down machines to carts whose horses had become incapacitated could be dragged to the side and not impede a steady flow of traffic.

The oblispolkom's order called for an open-ended mobilization of civilian labor under the direction of trusted civilian leadership. It placed ultimate priority on establishing and maintaining the passability of the roads, including bridge repair and maintenance, and did not specify the number of people or the duration of work for the task at hand. Rather, it informed district and city leaders that they were to assign one person as chief of the road department in the district to oversee all road repair. This person would divide the district's roads into subsections and give responsibility for the maintenance of each subsection to the nearest city district soviet, village soviet, or kolkhoz. The raiispolkomy (executive committees of district soviets) were then to select a special plenipotentiary from each of these territorial units to supervise road work in their assigned subsection. Establishing a third layer of control over this mobilization, district officials were to select several elders from each territorial unit to serve as helpers to the subsection plenipotentiaries. One elder from every ten-domicile block (*desiatidvorka*) in every population center assumed this role.⁶⁴ The oblispolkom's order clearly stipulated that any able-

⁶³ *War Department Technical Manual TM 30-430, Chapter VII, Logistics*, 23-27.

⁶⁴ The *desiatidvorka* apparently was a means to establish tighter control at the lowest level of society.

bodied person allocated to participate in road repair work who refused or shirked was to be prosecuted according to the laws of wartime. Finally, in extreme cases of severe snowfall or accident, the chairpersons of the village soviets along with members of the *raispolkomy* and *gorispolkomy* were to personally oversee road work.⁶⁵

District leaders passed an abbreviated version of these orders down to their subordinates in the village soviets. For example, the chairperson of the Fatezhskii District Soviet ordered that every kolkhoz take responsibility for a section of road to be made passable for two-way traffic. Instead of calling for an elder to supervise one work crew based on a ten-domicile block, it assigned the kolkhozes to maintain their brigade structure and appoint responsible people as brigadiers. The district leadership emphasized the possible punishment for nonperformance.⁶⁶

Kursk's civilian leaders called for the same type of organizational structure as described above for all subsequent initial orders concerning the road network for all districts in the oblast.⁶⁷ The military councils of the three fronts operating in Kursk Oblast always determined which roads they wished to use and sent those requests to the oblispolkom. The oblispolkom then channeled these requests down the civilian chain of command to the village soviets and kolkhozes. For example, on March 6, the oblispolkom transmitted an order to ten districts that ran from the railheads in the eastern portion of the oblast to tactical rear of the Central Front and

⁶⁵ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, ll. 4-6 and GAOPIKO, f. P-31, op. 1, d. 581, l. 1.

⁶⁶ *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv obshchestvenno-politicheskoi istorii Kurskoi oblasti* (GAOPIKO), f. P-37, op. 1, d. 217, ll. 27-28.

⁶⁷ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 4 and GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2962, l. 135. In preparation for his supposed arrival in Kursk Oblast to integrate the 24th Army into the force composition of the Central Front (and following Red Army doctrine) the 24th Army's rear services commander sent an order to both the Kursk Obkom and Oblispolkom informing them of what roads he would need cleared for the army's imminent arrival. As it turned out Stavka redirected 24th Army to support Southwestern Front once it realized the threat that Manstein's counteroffensive posed.

60th Army's forces in the western section of the oblast. The resolution listed seven roads Red Army commanders had prioritized.⁶⁸

While the commanders of the Voronezh Front's rear services faced the problem of outrunning their already extended supply lines, the Bryansk Front's rear services officers encountered a different set of problems that stemmed from their own extended supply lines. As noted in the previous section, German Second Army offered stiff resistance around Maloarkhangel'sk, but significant snowfalls and drifting snow severely hampered their ability to establish consistent resupply.⁶⁹ Further, the limited availability of the road network north of the Kastornoe-Kursk railroad line was further strained with the appearance of forces of the Central Front that began arriving in early February. The 13th and 48th armies had to share supply roads and railheads with the 65th, 70th, and 2nd Tank armies as they reached their assembly points in the vicinity of Fatezhskii District. The congestion resulted in not only limiting the resupply of 13th and 48th armies, but also caused Rokossovsky to delay his offensive operations by several days.

The needs of so many armies undertaking offensive operations caused civilian authorities to demand Kursk's collective farmers to establish round-the-clock snow removal and road repair in early March and demanded that all kolkhozes located within twenty kilometers of the roads listed in the resolution send work brigades to help maintain the roads. Those people given responsibility as "road master" for a given section of a transport line now had to hold all snow clearing tools in their place of residence and make daily inspections of the roads. The road master also had to hang a sign on his place of residence indicating his or her responsibility.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 7.

⁶⁹ Zolotarev, *Predliudiia Kurskoi bitvy*, pp. 164, 165. Several reports blame poor resupply as the reason for the failure to meet military objectives.

⁷⁰ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 7.

Such a measure would ensure that Red Army drivers always had a local contact person to complain to or seek help from. Finally, the people charged with keeping the roads clear also had to feed and accommodate the drivers.

Orders from the oblispolkom to the districts concerning the conditions of the roads continued throughout the period of offensive operations. Front and army military councils directed complaints for poor sections of roads to the oblispolkom, which, in turn, passed them down to the districts with demands to rectify the problem.⁷¹ Demonstrating the seriousness with which oblast officials took in fulfilling the Red Army's demands, members of the obkom carried out quality control inspections at important junctions in the supply chain.⁷² Once the March snows started to melt, flooding emerged as a problem that required further mobilizations to try to corduroy the road with wood mesh or improve bridges.⁷³ Even with the cessation of offensive operations in late March, oblast and district leaders continued to maintain the road network in good working order for the Red Army.⁷⁴

Hospitals

Medical facilities comprised an important component of Red Army rear services during offensive operations. Like the commanders charged with organizing supply and transport for soldiers on the frontline, medical officers coordinated with civilian authorities in expediting their duties in establishing medical facilities and evacuating wounded soldiers to areas at a safe

⁷¹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 18; GAOPIKO, f. P-37, op. 1, d. 217, ll. 27-28.

⁷² GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2962, l. 124.

⁷³ GAKO, f. R-3726, op. 1, d. 2, l. 17.

⁷⁴ GAKO, f. R-4747, op. 1, d. 2, l. 13; GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, l. 86.

distance from the frontline. The medical officer staff at every level within the front took many factors into consideration when deciding on locations for aid stations and field hospitals.⁷⁵

Lightly wounded soldiers expected to return to combat within one-to-two weeks convalesced in facilities closer to the frontline while the more severely wounded were taken to more permanent facilities in the deeper rear. The medical services relied heavily on the transportation network to facilitate the movement of incapacitated bodies and vital supplies for the convalescing. As this was the case, Red Army doctrine stipulated that medical faculties at the army and front level be located near important transportation hubs along the existing road and rail networks. Further, doctrine called for placing larger surgical and field hospitals near major supply stations (regulating stations).⁷⁶

Nine days after the Voronezh Front launched Operation Star, with the 40th, 69th, and 3rd Tank armies closing in on Kharkov, its rear services commanders made the decision to bring all of its front hospitals closer to the actual fighting. The commanders wanted first reserve hospitals organized east of the Oskol and Northern Donets rivers, and it ordered hospitals located in the deep rear to be relocated to Kursk city and Kharkov once major rail lines had been restored. Medical staff serving in front hospitals were to relocate closer to the combat zone and establish temporary medical facilities based on the existing civilian medical network in liberated districts.⁷⁷

Immediately after the 60th Army liberated Kursk city, officials attached to the oblast department of public health appointed two doctors and a labor pool of three hundred people to

⁷⁵ This begins at the company level and moves up through battalion, regiment, division, army, and front.

⁷⁶ *War Department Technical Manual TM 30-430*, Chapter VII, *Logistics*, pp. 29-30.

⁷⁷ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1. l. 4.

repair three medical facilities in the city. They began admitting wounded soldiers by February 9. Within four days that number rose to about two hundred and fifty soldiers. The Red Army also opened military hospitals in Kursk city, to which they transferred the wounded soldiers. The civilian facilities in Kursk city shifted its focus to caring for patients with typhus. Soon after restoring Kursk city's hospitals, Kursk's public health officials replicated the process in small cities located between the capital and the frontlines. Proximity to both the existing transportation infrastructure and to each army deployed on the perimeter of the salient seemed to play a significant role in which cities the public health officials selected to accommodate a larger hospital.⁷⁸ Smaller towns repurposed existing structures, such as schools, to serve as local medical facilities.⁷⁹

While the Red Army provided vital medical equipment and supplies, local authorities had to organize the availability of furniture, bedding, bandages, heating fuel, and food. They called on civilians to gather all available bedframes, mattresses, pillows, and linens and bring them to local hospitals. Such deliveries may not always have been voluntary. Daily reports (*svodki*) generated by the NKVD in Kursk city showed that security services considered certain household items to be “trophy property” (*trofeinoe imushchestvo*) and prosecuted people for possessing sheets, blankets, mattresses, and other items that were sorely needed in the

⁷⁸ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1. d. 3140, l. 77. These officials led the Otdel zdravookhranenia Kurskoi oblasti.

⁷⁹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1. d. 3140, l. 78. By July the Central Front medical administration noted that forty-eight hospitals were located throughout the oblast. One assumes that these facilities served the Central Front only. Such a great density of facilities assigned to only one aspect of the Red Army's rear services needs demonstrates the reliance of the Soviet military on Kursk's civilian population (or is it dedication of the civilians to the Soviet military?).

hospitals.⁸⁰ Medical administrators also looked on the people to provide hospitals with needed foodstuffs.

Wounded soldiers likewise found help in the districts throughout the oblast. Apart from allocating unused buildings to serve as temporary hospitals, district leaders encouraged the kolkhozniki to help wounded soldiers as much as possible. For example, the Pristenskii District Raiispolkom sent an order to kolkhoz chairpersons asking them to show any kind of help they could to the injured. This included providing them with food, administering first aid, and tending to their hygiene.⁸¹ Kursk's peasants sent bedding and other needed materials to their local hospitals. Most importantly, they contributed foodstuffs, primarily milk, eggs, chicken, and bread to the hospitals to feed the wounded.⁸²

Kursk's officials tasked the Communist Youth League (Komsomol) to establish a dedicated service to administer aid and comfort to wounded soldiers at hospitals throughout the oblast. Transmitting orders down to the local level, local Komsomol organizations coordinated the collection of furniture, bedding, eating utensils, first aid supplies, and a large amount of foodstuffs for the soldiers. More than 1,300 youths served as auxiliaries in the hospital wards performing basic nursing tasks.⁸³ They read political pamphlets and works of literature to groups of patients and put on amateur performances of plays. They helped soldiers write letters

⁸⁰ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1. d. 2964. The reports do not indicate baseline criteria for items determined to be war trophies by the security services. In the collection of reports, however, one finds a preponderance of cases where the perpetrator possessed several items of the same type. For example, the report for March 17-19 shows that one man had twenty-four blankets, two women had thirteen blankets, one woman had five blankets. But there is some inconsistency as the same report showed that one woman had two blankets. It does not seem unreasonable to have one or two extra blankets, especially in winter. One is not sure whether this is a case of hoarding during wartime or a case of reappropriation of property for the benefit of the Red Army. GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1. d. 2964, ll. 379-80.

⁸¹ GAOPIKO, f. P-82, op. 1. d. 256, l. 5.

⁸² GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1. d. 3136, ll. 40-42.

⁸³ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1. d. 3140, l. 69.

home.⁸⁴ The Komsomol leadership took great pride in the fact that Komsomolites produced numerous gifts for the convalescing soldiers that more often than not contained food and basic garments like socks.⁸⁵

Apart from providing the wounded of the Red Army with food and household possessions, the people also donated their blood. On March 1, 1943, oblast public health officials ordered a small group of medical professionals to set up a blood transfusion clinic in the city. The workers quickly organized the building allocated to them and began accepting donors ten days after the original order. Initially they did not draw in many donors and merely took blood from themselves. Their donor base grew after a small measure of promotion through leaflets and announcements in the newspaper and on the radio. By the beginning of May, they had 42 men and 665 women giving their blood. In time they were able incentivize blood donation by offering coupons to donors that could be redeemed for foodstuffs at a shop and a public cafeteria located near the facility. Their donor base had grown to 2,648 people, causing them to open two new collection centers in the city.⁸⁶ The people of Kursk were giving everything they had, including their own lifeblood for the injured soldiers convalescing in the oblast.

Captured Property

The relatively rapid advance of the Voronezh Front from the Don River to the area west of Kharkov resulted in both belligerents abandoning large quantities of weapons and war

⁸⁴ GAOPIKO, f. P-131, op. 1. d. 85, ll. 2, 4.

⁸⁵ GAOPIKO, f. P-131, op. 1. d. 85, l. 1.

⁸⁶ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1. d. 3140, ll. 74-75.

materiel. Red Army doctrine called for the collection and accounting of such property.⁸⁷ The rear services would advance unused domestic materiel to the fighting units while repairing damaged machines. They also repurposed enemy weapons and incorporated them into the front's arsenal. They labeled all abandoned material, whether of German or domestic origin, as "war trophies" or "trophy property" (*trofeinoe imushchestvo*). Citing the initial declaration of martial law promulgated on June 22, 1941, the Red Army units operating in Kursk Oblast claimed proprietary rights over all trophy property.⁸⁸ While the Soviet military held an obvious interest in returning all weapons and ammunition to its fighting forces, the state also had an interest in ensuring its citizens did not take advantage of the situation and create weapons caches for themselves.

The military council of the Voronezh Front sent an expansive resolution to the obkom and the oblispolkom, detailing the problem of abandoned equipment and more importantly, how Kursk's civilians would be mobilized to handle the problem. This order called for the formation of "auxiliary trophy companies" (*vspomogatel'nye trofeinye roty*) comprised of three 30-person platoons. While people from sixteen years old were subject to the mobilization, the military council's resolution made a provision for children as young as fourteen years old to serve in a trophy company on a voluntary basis. Two platoons took responsibility for the collection and transfer of trophy property while the third provided accounting and security of collected property. The military council wanted only vetted "honest" civilians to serve in a security function and they were to be armed. The local military commandant would appoint a junior officer from the Red Army to command the company. Trophy companies were to be quartered

⁸⁷ *War Department Technical Manual TM 30-430, Chapter VII, Logistics*, p. 33.

⁸⁸ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, ll. 7-15.

in a barracks and allowed to operate only within twenty to twenty-five kilometers of their area of residence. Defining the next level command, the resolution stipulated that four to six trophy companies would form an “auxiliary trophy battalion” under the command of a senior Red Army officer.⁸⁹ Similar to the demands the Red Army made on the civilians tasked to clear roads, it imposed military organization and direct Red Army oversight on the civilians mobilized to collect trophies.

The Voronezh Front’s military council charged those mobilized into the trophy companies to collect all manner of military materiel including infantry weapons, heavy weapons, fuel, trucks, tanks, carts, munitions, uniforms, and uneaten rations, scrap metal, etc. The companies were to establish temporary warehouses and stockpile all the items they had found. Once they had established a warehouse they would begin an accounting of all recovered items. Then they had to package and transport the items they found in their search area to the nearest collection point administered by the Red Army, which were usually located at important transportation hubs or railroad stations. The military council expected Kursk’s civilians to transport extremely dangerous items, such as live artillery shells, hand grenades, blasting caps, and explosives. To reduce the occurrence of mishaps, they included instructions on how to safely package such materials. Finally the members of the trophy companies were to take responsibility for classifying and counting the materiel they had found.⁹⁰ While the Red Army had articulated a specific method for carrying out this task, the oblast’s civilian authorities made changes to the orders they sent to district leaders.

⁸⁹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, l. 10.

⁹⁰ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, ll. 12-14.

The Kursk Obkom and Oblispolkom issued a resolution to their district counterparts that dealt with the collection of trophy property *and* state property. The resolution did not address the organization of trophy units and provided only two categories for property. Kolkhoz leaders and sovkhoz directors were to look after all agricultural property, including seed grain, livestock, and farm implements. All military munitions and uniforms were to be turned in to the village soviet for those who lived in the countryside. Civilians in close proximity to the district center were to send trophy property to the department of the NKVD while those who lived in the cities of the oblast were to leave trophy property with the local police forces.⁹¹

Although Kursk's civilian leaders modified the designs of the Voronezh Front's orders they still emphasized the importance of the collection and delivery of trophy property. Like the Red Army orders, the oblast officials' order made strict injunctions against plunder of trophy property or impeding its delivery to the military. They also took the task of accounting and delivery seriously. But such threats did not always go heeded. At the end of April the Voronezh Front's military council sent the oblispolkom a list of complaints, which included many shortcomings related to the collection and delivery of trophy property. The military council objected to the preponderance of trophy items strewn about Shchigrovskii, Sovetskii, and Kastorenskii districts. It accused the civilian authorities in these districts of allowing trophy warehouses to remain unguarded and neglecting to properly train people selected for trophy collection in the proper handling of munitions. Most importantly, it denounced the people's propensity for stripping all abandoned vehicles for spare parts.⁹²

⁹¹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d.2916, l. 7.

⁹² GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, l. 100.

The civilian authorities also clashed with the military over what exactly constituted trophy property. Apparently the soldiers and officers throughout Kursk Oblast considered anything not nailed down to be trophy property. They presented a consistent logic to support their claims although they met with resistance at all levels among the civilian population. The military council of the Central Front informed the oblispolkom of developments with which it disagreed in Besedinskii and Streletskii districts. The people of these districts had given 300 of 860 tons of potatoes to their liberators but held on to the remaining 560 tons. The oblispolkom forbade them from delivering more potatoes to the soldiers and instructed them to store them as the seed fund for the upcoming sowing season. The military council deemed the actions of the district leaders based on the instructions of the oblispolkom to be illegal and ordered the oblispolkom to instruct the district leaders to turn over all of the remaining potatoes to the soldiers.⁹³ The military council's decision rested on the logic that any and all items that were located in communal facilities upon liberation were trophies of war.

Allegations of illegality, however, went both ways. The Kastorenskii District Secretary, G. Stetsenko, informed the obkom Secretary Doronin, that the head of the trophy detachment of the 38th Army had declared all the horses of the district, regardless of their health or condition, to be trophy property and instructed his soldiers to seize them all and direct them to one location. In this case the army officer argued that he could consider the horses to be trophy property because the kolkhozniki took possession of them during the German occupation. Further, Stetsenko alleged that the army officer carried out his task without informing any district leaders. Once the civilian authorities found out and challenged the officer's actions he threatened the use of force to guarantee delivery of the horses. Stetsenko determined the army officer's actions to

⁹³ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, l. 96.

be illegal and urged Doronin to intervene on his behalf. While it appears that criteria this Red Army officer deployed to claim the horses as trophy property contradicted the Central Front's military council in the case above, the logic of the Red Army getting what it wanted remained consistent.

Red Army officers did not limit themselves merely to foodstuffs and draft animals taken from district officials. In early May, an officer of the 5th Trophy Detachment, Captain Pastukov entered a typewriter repair shop in Kursk city, declared one of the repaired machines as a war trophy and demanded that it be given to him. The shop manager refused, telling Pastukov that the machine belonged to the oblispolkom and that she would accompany him to the oblispolkom or the obkom and let the civilian leaders decide on his claim. He said he did not recognize the authority of either institution and commanded his soldiers to take the machine. The shop manager threw herself on the machine and again told him to take his claim to the civilian authorities. Pastukov agreed and offered to drive them to the authorities, but once they entered his car he restrained the shop manager and drove her to an army office where she was detained. Pastukov returned with three armed soldiers and demanded the oblispolkom's typewriter. By this time the machine had been taken to the oblispolkom so he seized the typewriter earmarked for the Oblast Land Department (*Oblzo*). A shop employee tried to resist to no avail.⁹⁴

On the same day the Secretary of Oktiabr'skii District reported that, as he was going about his district on business in his Mercedes Benz, a Captain Pastukov stopped him and demanded he and his driver present their documents.⁹⁵ The secretary and his driver complied with the captain's demand. Pastukov declared their documents illegitimate and ordered the car

⁹⁴ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d.2962, l. 66.

⁹⁵ It appears that this is the same Captain Pastukhov.

to be taken to the trophy regiment. The secretary refused so Pastukov tied a tow line to the vehicle. When the secretary tried to impede the captain's actions, Pastukov instructed his men to physically remove the secretary from the front of his car. An oblast official happened on the scene and ordered the soldiers to stop beating the district secretary. Pastukov left the civilians with the car but he took their driving papers, thus denying the secretary the means to drive the car outside of his district.⁹⁶ These cases provide evidence of the nature of the relationship between the Red Army serving in Kursk Oblast and the civilian authorities whom they had liberated from German occupation. The Red Army's consistent exercise of arbitrary power over the civilian population demonstrates the primacy of the military over party leaders in such proximity to the frontlines. The fact that local party leaders consistently resisted such arbitrary displays of power suggests, however, that they could legitimately challenge the primacy of the Soviet military, even in such proximity to the frontlines.

Even with such capricious behavior on the part of the officers of the Red Army's trophy detachments, the people of Kursk continued to collect and deliver trophy property. By April 1, several districts had delivered tremendous amounts of war materiel to the Red Army. For example, the people of Manturovskii District had gathered more than two thousand rifles, one hundred machine guns, and five hundred pairs of boots. In Urazovskii District, the population delivered one thousand rifles one million bullets, and 1,500 pairs of boots. Solntsevskii District reported it gave Soviet forces fifteen boxes of landmines, five hundred blankets, and twenty pairs of boots.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d.2962, l. 65.

⁹⁷ GAOPIKO f. 1, op. 1, d. 3136, ll. 40-42.

Foodstuffs and Forage

Stavka and the front commanders who designed the winter offensives had every expectation that the Soviet forces would sweep west from the Don River to the Dnieper River in the south and Smolensk in the center. Had events turned out as the Red Army commanders had hoped, the people of Kursk would have had to feed and labor for their liberators for a period of days as the Soviet military steamrolled forward. Fortune, and dogged German resistance, stymied Stavka's designs, and the Red Army advance stalled in Kursk Oblast. The Red Army's failure to move quickly through the oblast meant that Kursk's civilian population and leadership had primary responsibility for feeding roughly one million soldiers. From the Red Army's point of view, it was the only recipient of food in the oblast, but oblast leaders had to incorporate the demands of the Red Army with the obligations they had to the civilian population in the oblast.⁹⁸

While Red Army doctrine prioritized the supply of ammunition and fuel to the combat zones, it still needed to provision the soldiers and horses with food and fodder. Following the doctrine of countless armies before it, Soviet commanders found the solution for victualing their fighting forces from the local populations.⁹⁹ In early February, when the Voronezh and Briansk fronts were still making steady advances west, the demands they made of the people of Kursk in terms of foodstuffs and forage were reasonable. While the Voronezh Front's resolution of February 12, 1943, noted that its soldiers would feed off of local sources, it established a temporary staff of thirty people from its administration of foodstuff provisions to roam through

⁹⁸ The feeding of the civilian population is discussed in greater detail in chapter 2.

⁹⁹ *War Department Technical Manual TM 30-430*, Chapter VII, *Logistics*, p 17. GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2962, ll. 127-28. For a discussion of logistics in European warfare in the modern period, see Martin van Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

the liberated territory in search of grain and flour. It demanded that local mills would grind all procured grain on site and allocated diesel fuel for this task.¹⁰⁰

The Kursk Obkom's first resolution that addressed food supply, promulgated on February 20, 1943, regarded feeding the liberating forces as one component of a comprehensive food production and distribution campaign that also included providing food to the civilian workforce and children's institutions. The oblast officials tasked their district counterparts with food collection and storage. This required all liberated districts to resuscitate their infrastructure of procurement institutions in a two-day period. The procurement institutions were to establish storage facilities (with security services) and begin stocking staple products. The resolution denied any access to seed grain and stipulated that Red Army units could be given foodstuffs only if they produced the proper documentation.¹⁰¹ The districts replicated the order, again emphasizing the need to procure food as much for civilians as for the Red Army.¹⁰²

The demands placed on the people changed in March as the Germans denied the Briansk Front forward progress at Maloarkhangel'sk, General Erich von Manstein's forces drove the Voronezh Front back to the southern periphery of the oblast, and Stavka introduced three new armies of Rokossovsky's Central Front into its order of battle. The people no longer had to supply a portion of grain to an army passing through, but now had to feed a stalled fighting force. In the first week of March, the oblispolkom sent the district leaders requests informing them the quantities of meat, potatoes, vegetables, milk, and eggs they were to deliver over the course of

¹⁰⁰ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, ll. 4-6.

¹⁰¹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2916, l. 1.

¹⁰² GAOPIKO, f. P-37, op. 1, d. 217, ll. 4-6. The Fatezhskii District committee ordered the District Procurement Union (raipotrebsoiuz) and the Sel'po to immediately organize the procurement of all necessary agricultural products.

the month. Of these totals they were to hand 90 percent of the meat and 85 percent of the vegetables to the Red Army. This order emphasized the importance of maintaining a constant supply of foodstuffs for the Soviet forces in the oblast and suggested that the district fulfill the totals incrementally during the month.¹⁰³ Oblast officials understood that the demands the soldiers would place on the people would tax food reserves so they urged the district leaders to organize additional collections. While the civilian leaders began to prioritize their food distribution to the Red Army, they still endeavored to make transactions in an organized and “legal” manner. The order stipulated that soldiers or officers had to produce a proper requisition (*chekovoe trebovanie*) in order to receive food products.¹⁰⁴

With no sign of making a substantive penetration into Second Panzer Army’s position in Orel Oblast, on March 9, the Briansk Front’s military council issued a resolution to Kursk’s officials articulating their food needs for the period of the spring rainy season (*rasputitsa*). They expected each district in which their soldiers were located to produce six thousand tons of grain, as well as meat, milk, potatoes, vegetables, and hay. They even expected the districts where some of the heaviest fighting had taken place, Maloarkhangel’skii and Dmitrievskii districts, to deliver five hundred tons of grain by March 25. The resolution called for members of Kursk’s oblispolkom and obkom to work with the Briansk Front’s chief of the Administration for Food Supply (*Uprodsnab*), chief of *upolnarkomzaga* and the military council to make all the necessary arrangements.

¹⁰³ In their initial orders to the district leaders the oblispolkom instructed them to deliver the foodstuffs not in one bulk shipment, but to deliver a certain percentage of the ordered amount over the course of the month. This puts a greater onus on the supplier as they have to create storage space for harvested grains and they have to feed livestock until the Red Army is ready to accept them as delivered. In a time of extreme scarcity, this is a problem.

¹⁰⁴ GAOPIKO, f. P-110, op. 1, d. 437, l. 3.

In response to the demands of the Red Army, the oblispolkom issued orders to various districts to make advance deliveries of grain and other agricultural products to the military. The oblispolkom modified the product types and amounts from district to district and ordered some districts to process the grain into flour prior to delivery.¹⁰⁵ One week later, the Central Front's military council reiterated the supply demands of the Briansk Front with some slight amendments.¹⁰⁶ It reduced the amount of grain demanded from each district by one thousand tons, but still maintained that the districts should supply the soldiers meat and other agricultural products.¹⁰⁷ Moscow reinforced the demands of the Red Army with resolutions demanding that the oblast supply two hundred tons of livestock in the second quarter of 1943 (fifty tons in April and seventy-five tons in May and June) with a further delivery of three hundred tons of meat in the third quarter.¹⁰⁸

The state and the oblispolkom tried to ameliorate the difficulties its constituents faced in the districts. The state offered to write off arrears of the previous years of mandatory deliveries of grain and oilseeds to the state.¹⁰⁹ The obkom negotiated with the supply services of the Red Army for it to return potato scraps back to the peasants to serve as a seed base for the next crop.

¹⁰⁵ For example, the oblispolkom demanded 200 tons of grain, 200 tons of grain, and 200 tons of sunflower seeds from Pristenskii District while it required Shchigrovskii District to deliver 200 tons of grain and 5 tons of hemp. As the Voronezh Front located its headquarters in Pristenskii District, one may assume that it was to have been the recipient of the agricultural products collected in the district. While the archives contained no order with the Voronezh Front's demands for foodstuffs in March and April, one assumes that they did not differ greatly from those of the Briansk and Central Fronts.

¹⁰⁶ Stavka disbanded the Briansk Front on March 11, 1943. It redeployed 61st Army to the Western Front and allocated the 3rd, 48th, and 13th Armies to the Central Front. Zolotarev, *Ruskii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia: Predliudiia Kurskoi bitvy*, p. 50. On March 24, 1943, Stavka transferred the 60th Army from the Voronezh Front to the Central Front. Zolotarev, *Ruskii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia: Predliudiia Kurskoi bitvy*, 55.

¹⁰⁷ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2962, ll. 127-28.

¹⁰⁸ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 3, l. 10; GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 2. L. 260.

¹⁰⁹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 15, ll. 13-14.

It is impossible to determine the degree to which these measures actually helped Kursk's civilian population, but they suggest that the oblast's officials made some attempt to keep the people from starving.¹¹⁰ Just as Kursk's party leaders could do little to ameliorate the demands of the Red Army, they also provided little protection from the predations of hungry soldiers whom were not fed by the military.

Red Army personnel looted and pillaged from the civilian population throughout the oblast. A report from the Korochanskii District Soviet to the oblispolkom provides a useful illustration of the types of crimes perpetrated. On March 11, a group of soldiers from an unknown unit took 1,700 kilograms of seed grain and some cows. In a different village in the district on March 19, soldiers took 1,500 kilograms of grain and four horses from one village. At a different village on the same night soldiers heisted two heifers, slaughtered a bull and took a portion of the meat. Three nights later, different groups of soldiers and their commanders seized roughly 10,000 kilograms of grain from three different kolkhozes. The report notes that apart from the above-listed theft many cases of wanton destruction of public buildings and shootings occurred during this time.¹¹¹ In certain cases soldiers dismantled communal structures to use the wood as heating and cooking fuel.¹¹² Similar reports from a host of districts indicate that the soldiers tended to remove only a portion of a kolkhoz's grain stocks.¹¹³ The members of the Red Army may have been operating under the logic that only removing a portion of a peasant's food base was an acceptable price for their defense of the Motherland. It was also possible that the

¹¹⁰ But a cynic might see this for what it is: the state maintaining its labor pool while recycling every calorie it could form limited resources.

¹¹¹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 6, l-61.

¹¹² GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2959, ll. 109-11, 199.

¹¹³ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 6, ll. 61, 8, 124, 229, 232-33; GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2959, ll. 109-111, 161-62, 196, 197.

soldiers, many of whom had been conscripted from rural society, may have understood the basic needs of a family in such a crisis.

Both independent groups of soldiers and officers attached to the Red Army's food procurement services perpetrated these illegal acquisitions of foodstuffs. Soldiers bivouacked near the villages and kolkhozes where the crimes took place carried out many of the incidences of plunder. The reports often indicate the unit to which the soldiers were attached or give the name of an officer. While this evidence suggests that these were crimes of opportunity, the fact that they were often conducted with an officer present indicates that authorities higher up the chain of command tacitly approved of such behavior. Some reports, however, describe a more institutionalized allowance for plunder of civilians. An internal oblispolkom memo alleges that officers in the Uprodsnab and Upolnarkomzag of both the Central and Voronezh Fronts carried out illegal procurements using falsified documents. For example, even though oblast authorities absolved Korenevskii District of any grain deliveries, the head of the Central Front's Upolnarkomzag, Comrade Karpov allegedly overrode the oblispolkom's order and issued his own demand for four hundred tons of grain and forty-six tons of meat greater than the quota. The memo alleges that an officer of the Voronezh Front's Upolnarkomzag also sent illegal orders to district procurement officials demanding grain and meat that was not to have been allocated to him. Through these means, the procurement departments of each front removed several hundred tons of grain and meat from the peasants.¹¹⁴ At all levels, the Red Army viewed the civilian population as little more than a food bank on which it could draw at any time.

Even in the face of peasant protest and resistance to what they viewed as Red Army overreach, the soldiers and their commanders did not hesitate to resorting to physical threat or

¹¹⁴ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 6, ll. 232-33.

outright violence to get what they wanted. In most cases, the soldiers only needed to brandish their weapons or fire random shots in the air to enforce compliance. Some threats of violence, however, resulted in brutal assaults or murder. The chief of the Sazhnovskii District NKVD reported that a Red Army officer terrorized the inhabitants of a village in the district on several occasions in April. He went about in a drunken stupor with a pistol in his hand and randomly arrested people and relieved them of any food items he found on them.¹¹⁵ Earlier in the month, in Dmitrievskii District an officer and soldier arrived in a village with the purpose to procure tobacco and carts. They first drunkenly went to the kolkhoz storeroom to take oats for their horses. The deputy chair of the kolkhoz attempted to stop them so they beat him and took twelve kilograms of oats. They then went about the village in search of tobacco and beat those who refused. They selected carts to take back to their unit, but the chairman of the village soviet objected to their removal. The officer struck the chairman in the chest and pulled a pistol from his boot. He fired once into the air, shot the chairman in the shoulder, then fired wildly in the air (killing his own horse and wounding others in the process).¹¹⁶ In Staro-Oskolskii District, an army captain shot and killed a village soviet chairman, when the civilian official did not immediately address the demands made by the officer.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

¹¹⁵ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 6, l. 1.124. The NKVD officer reported that he searched the commandant's quarters and found several puds of potatoes, among other items. He claims that he retrieved the potatoes, but speaks of no punishment meted out to the commandant.

¹¹⁶ GAOPIKO, f. P-13, op. 1, d. 612, l. 7. The report concludes that the account of the story had been sent to the military prosecutor for further investigation.

¹¹⁷ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2959, ll. 627-29. Like those above, the report of this incident indicates only that an investigation was pending.

Stavka's optimistic vision for offensive success in the first quarter of 1943 came crashing to reality in the frozen black earth of Kursk Oblast. What was initially to have been a speedy liberation where the Red Army blazed through the territory on its way to Kiev and Smolensk ground down to a stall in the face of determined German resistance and poor logistical support. For the people of Kursk, this resulted in a kind of extended occupation where they exchanged one massive military force that required irregular material support implemented with a naked reign of terror for another that called on the people persistently to give their labor for a variety of tasks, donate foodstuffs, and provide medical support for wounded soldiers. While liberation meant that the stark fear that the people had experienced under the heel of German occupation had been lifted from their throats, the Red Army's presence in the oblast was in some ways no less onerous in a material sense to Kursk's population.

The German occupation bound Kursk's population up in a reign of terror that lasted for up to eighteen months. Upon arrival, the German military established an administrative apparatus throughout the oblast that served as a means to control the population. Shortly after establishing the occupation, the Germans began implementing policies of euthanasia, mass starvation, and the liquidation of the oblast's Jewish population. It saw the people as a source of foodstuffs for the occupiers and source of slave labor for the Reich as it sent 35,000 youths to work in the Reich. While its policies drained the population, it was not until the Red Army began to push the Germans west that, in a final orgy of violence, the Wehrmacht destroyed as much of the territory's infrastructure as possible in an effort to slow down the Soviet military's advance. This left the people in a state of total exhaustion.

While the Red Army saved Kursk's population from the horrors of German occupation, it immediately called upon the people to contribute their labor power to activities that would help

the military carry on in the fight. Incorporating Kursk's civilians into its rear services area, the Red Army demanded that the people provide assistance for a host of tasks of military importance. The people helped maintain the army's lines of communication by ensuring that the roads were clear. In an attempt to bolster the fighting strength of the army, the people were tasked with the removal of corpses and human waste, while also implementing measures to mitigate against epidemic disease. The Red Army turned to the civilian authorities to convert dozens of structures to hospitals and enjoined the people to donate bedding and other medical materials as well as volunteers to care for the wounded. Finally, the Soviet military ordered local leaders to organize groups of civilians to roam through the fields of recent fighting to gather together weapons and other materiel that could be returned to the Red Army's arsenal and redeployed for the fight.

As the Red Army advance ground down to a standing fight, it turned to the local population to feed the soldiers operating in Kursk Oblast. Similar to the manner in which labor and medical facilities had been organized for the Red Army, local civilian leaders took responsibility for providing food to the soldiers. Civilian officials sought to create an orderly system of food provision that earmarked a certain portion of grains and other products for military consumption while still safeguarding enough food for the civilian population. While each of the districts succeeded in delivering some measure of foodstuffs to the Red Army, incidences of violence and pillage indicate that soldiers believed that they were not receiving adequate nutrition from the local population.

In the end, the Red Army saved Kursk's civilian population from a horrible existence under Nazi occupation, but this was not without a price. Through their labor and sacrifice the

people contributed indirectly to their liberation, by working in the Red Army's rear services area and bolstering its fighting capacity against the German military.

CHAPTER 2

ON THE DESPERATE EDGE OF NOW¹¹⁸

When the civilian authorities returned to Kursk Oblast behind the spearheads of the Voronezh Front, they immediately set about reestablishing Soviet power, providing government administration to the people and meeting the demands placed on local leaders by Moscow. All this work had to be done while feeding, housing, and hosting one million Red Army soldiers preparing for the Wehrmacht's next massive summer offensive. The Germans had left the oblast in physical ruin, destroying thousands of municipal and collective farm structures and the communication and transportation networks. During the occupation the Germans killed and deported thousands of people. The returning civilian authorities found the oblast on the verge of chaos with widespread hunger and outbreak of disease imminent and a traumatized population without any leadership.

The civilian officials realized they could do little without first reestablishing the panoply of local governmental institutions to organize the reconstruction process and implement policy and demands sent from Moscow. In December 1942, weeks before the commanders of the Voronezh and Briansk fronts launched the Voronezh-Kastornoe Operation, Kursk's civilian leadership gathered in the city of Eletsk, located 190 kilometers northeast of Kursk city, and began preparing for the reestablishment of Soviet power. Party leaders chose V. V. Volchkov¹¹⁹ to chair the meeting and elected other members of the planning bureau. It tasked the Kursk

¹¹⁸ Taken from Adam Curtis, *The Living Dead: Three Films about Power and the Past* (London: BBC Two, 1995).

¹¹⁹ V. V. Volchkov was born in Kursk Oblast and served his entire life there. He served as chairman of the oblispolkom before the war and resumed this position after the occupation.

Oblast Committee (*obkom*) department of organization and instructors with staffing the oblpotrebsoiuz (*oblastnoi soiuz potrebitel'skikh obshchestv*, or the Oblast Union of Consumer Societies), obltorg (*otdel trgovli oblasti*, or the Oblast Department of Trade), oblpromsovet (*promyshlennyi sovet oblasti* or the Oblast Industrial Council) and the oblast land department with Communists.¹²⁰ These institutions would play an important role in transferring the demands of the state and the Red Army to the oblast's districts and eventually to the village soviets and collective farm administrations. In the first half of January, the bureau selected secretaries for the district committees (*raikoms*) of the soon-to-be-liberated territorial units of the oblast.¹²¹ With such preplanning, oblast leaders hoped to stave off a vacuum in authority by providing immediate civilian order in the wake of the Red Army's proposed advance.

This chapter examines challenges the civilian officials addressed and how they attempted to implement solutions. Kursk's civilian population, the Red Army, and the state flooded the authorities with petitions and demands. As was often the case, the needs of one constituency necessitated the involvement of one of the other groups and Kursk's leaders had to serve as both intermediary and facilitator. At every step the needs of the state and the Red Army trumped those of the people. All orders from the top passed through a chain of command that ended with the kolkhoz or village soviet chairmen and the peasants with whom they worked. Such conditions forced these people, at the grass roots of Soviet society, to tap their exhausted resources and improvise to carry out the designs of the state and army. They did not, however, meet the demands of the state at all times because they had self-interests that they sometimes prioritized over the state's claims on their energies.

¹²⁰ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 16, l. 2.

¹²¹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 16, ll. 3-7, 9.

Reestablishing Utilities and Communications

In an attempt to delay the use of Kursk as a base of military operations for the Soviet military, the Wehrmacht destroyed as much of the city's infrastructure as it could when the Red Army approached in February 1943, especially utilities. The local newspaper, *Kurskaia pravda* reported in March that, when the first workers arrived at one of the city's two water pumping stations two days after liberation, they found the building shattered and all the equipment in ruins. The workers could not, however, begin the task of rebuilding, but first had to search and demine the entire building. On February 18 a small group of carpenters commenced repairing the building and five machinists began to fix and replace the pumps and compressors. The carpenters used the rebuilding materials they had at hand, but the machinists had a much more difficult time locating the right spare parts and had to comb the entire city. The paper reported that while the workers suffered many brief setbacks due to bursting pipes and other malfunctions they got the water works online along major streets in the city by March 11.¹²² The oblast authorities also prioritized restoring the water supply: in a February 20 resolution, the oblispolkom urged city residents to restore the water supply as a precondition to reopening public baths in the city to reduce risks of epidemics.¹²³ Apparently the Germans made the restoration of electricity an easier task, as they were so proud of the power station they had built

¹²² *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 32, March 11, 1943. Kursk's topography is unique for cities in the Central Black Earth Region in that its most developed areas sit atop three low ridges, and this means that the city "centers" are a long, narrow stretch only a few blocks wide with single-family residences lying on either side of the of the main street that runs along the spine of the ridge.

¹²³ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 22, February 26, 1943.

that they refused to destroy it upon departure. The reopening of one of the city's movie theatres on February 20 stands as a clear example of the quick restoration of electricity.¹²⁴

Considering steady and fast lines of communication within the oblast vitally important, oblast leaders expressed consternation in a meeting on February 23, 1943, that the restoration process in the districts had progressed too slowly. The head of the oblast department of communications informed them in his report that mail service had not yet been restored and that only two districts had installed electronic communications. The inability to send orders to the districts and receive information and requests from them severely hampered all efforts at coordinating activity. Declaring such conditions intolerable, the obkom sought remedies. After making blanket demands to revive postal service in two days and to restore electronic communication with districts located on the main railroad lines, the obkom ordered that all the communications equipment it had left in Eletsk be forwarded to Kursk and that remaining necessary equipment be procured from Moscow. It assigned raikom secretaries and chairmen of the executive committees of district soviets (*raispolkoms*) with personal responsibility for successfully reestablishing inter-district communication and made the provision that they use horses to deliver mail. The obkom sanctioned the district authorities to commandeer trophy property to quickly achieve this end and criminalized the redeployment of horses assigned to carry mail under the law of wartime.¹²⁵ This is the only incidence I found in the archival record where civilian authorities made direct claims on booty. As such, it demonstrates not only the seriousness civilian leaders gave to intra-oblast communication links but the fact that in certain matters they prioritized their own needs over the military's.

¹²⁴ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 16, February 20, 1943.

¹²⁵ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2916, l. 4.

District leaders responded to the obkom's demands as soon as they could, but this was not all that quickly. They had established a hub-and-spoke arrangement whereby they sent mail for multiple districts from Kursk city to one district center and then forwarded the divided bundles to neighboring districts. Such improvised methods required further refinement to achieve the greatest level of efficiency. For example, the Belenikhinskii Raiispolkom chair and head of district communications informed the oblispolkom on April 8 that the current arrangement had their mail transferred through the Skorodnianskii District center, which was fifty-five kilometers to the east. Reporting that one round trip between the district centers required seven-to-eight days of travel, they asked that their mail be sent to Prokhorovskii District center at a distance of only thirteen kilometers, which they determined would cut travel time to five or six days.¹²⁶ A follow-up memo, dated May 6 (almost one month later) between two officials in the oblispolkom that addressed the proposed change illustrates the severity of communication delays.

Reestablishing Security

Recent combat and the change in rule also created security challenges in the reimposition of Soviet power. In late March, oblast authorities addressed the issue of unexploded landmines and other ordnance, sending a letter to the district leaders noting that many civilians had caused mines to detonate, and this often resulted in casualties.¹²⁷ The obkom ordered locals to clearly demarcate plots of land known to contain mines leftover from the recent fighting. The obkom

¹²⁶ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 6, l. 199. Oblispolkom officials exchanged communications in response to this request on May 6 (nearly one month later) illustrating the severity of the communication delays. GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 6, l. 198.

¹²⁷ The obkom and oblispolkom often communicated with district leaders via form letter or form memo.

instructed all districts to organize, through village soviets and kolkhozes, groups of civilians familiar with explosives to gather the unexploded ordnance. Recognizing the dangers inherent in such activity, oblast leaders advised local authorities to urge former partisans or disabled soldiers to lead these groups.¹²⁸ It also suggested that village and kolkhoz organizers ask the soldiers bivouacked nearby to train peasants in handling ordnance and to carry out demining activities. The letter says nothing about demolitions work. Rather, it informs the village and kolkhoz leaders that they are to deliver all munitions found to their local NKVD office.¹²⁹ Spring's approach made this order all the more important, as the peasants would soon take to the fields for the sowing.

More than one month later problems related to unexploded ordnance persisted. Members of the civilian groups charged with collecting and transferring unexploded ordnance had caused accidents due to unfamiliarity with such devices and had suffered injuries in resulting explosions. For example, on April 30, the military council of the Central Front informed oblast authorities that unmarked minefields in several districts had resulted in over sixty civilian deaths. Noting that great quantities of unexploded shells and bullets remained in the fields, it also expressed concern that local people were pillaging materials that rightfully belonged to the Red Army. As a means to remedy the situation, the military council ordered a Red Army colonel to form a new brigade to reconnoiter the prefrontal zone for unexploded ordnance and ordered the Kursk Obkom and Oblispolkom to organize a demining course for civilians in order to carry out landmine removal at oblast population centers. The order does not stipulate how the oblast

¹²⁸ Veterans who had sustained injuries serious enough to keep them from frontline service yet who still retained valuable experience with weapons and explosives were often asked to perform such duties.

¹²⁹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3143, l. 3; GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2959, l. 308.

authorities arranged for this course nor did they offer the services of Red Army personnel to provide training.¹³⁰

As the Germans surrounded the oblast on three sides, the Luftwaffe subjected Kursk's cities and transportation junctions to constant bombardment. The German air force depended on small groups of Heinkel He 111 or Junkers Ju 88 medium bombers to carry out its missions over the oblast. Squadrons of two to six planes dropped combinations of high explosive and incendiary devices in bombing runs in which planes rarely took more than one or two passes on a target, minimizing the effectiveness of ground-based anti-air defensive measures. To civilians on the ground, the attacks seemed to come from nowhere and end almost as soon as they began. For example, the capital city of Shebekinskii District, located in the southern half of the oblast, experienced a series of attacks from March 17 to 20. On the first day, four planes destroyed many buildings in the center and the explosions killed over thirty people and left fifty wounded. The district leaders reported that the Germans sent fewer planes in the ensuing attacks but they caused enough disruption to force party officials to evacuate to a nearby town while many civilians evacuated to other districts.¹³¹ The Germans carried out similar attacks from March to July on many different targets throughout the oblast.¹³²

Oblast authorities presented a multipronged response to the Luftwaffe's fire from above. The first measure consisted of improving existing bomb shelters and building new ones in order to minimize human losses. Oblast authorities understood that its rail junction would become a

¹³⁰ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1. 100. Given the huge losses of life the Red Army leadership accepted from its own soldiers in its military operations, it is likely that it understood the mishandling of explosives as a loss of usable property more than a loss of life.

¹³¹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 6, ll. 47-48.

¹³² The Germans launched only one massive attack over a two-day period on Kursk city itself on June 2 in an attempt to destroy the rail junction.

prime target for the Luftwaffe as it served as the primary staging platform for supply to the Central Front in the northern half of the oblast and a major terminal for supply to the Voronezh Front in the south. Kursk also possessed a significant defensive advantage in that the Sejm River divided the railroad station from the administrative center of the city with each standing atop low ridges separated by two kilometers of forest and residential areas. This did not prevent the Germans from targeting the city center, but as the Luftwaffe did not have the bombing capacity that the American or British air forces enjoyed it could not area bomb the entire city but rather had to select specific targets. On March 3, oblast leaders tasked the Kursk City Soviet with formulating a civilian anti-air command structure and with establishing a physical command center dedicated to implementing and coordinating anti-air measures in the city. The obkom also made the city soviet responsible for speeding up the construction of new bomb shelters and dug-outs designed to protect civilians caught in the open during an attack.¹³³ Concerned for the city's air-defense measures, the civilian leaders ordered inspections of bomb shelters in April and May. At this time, they included demands that bomb shelters be equipped to withstand gas attack.¹³⁴ Oblast authorities replicated similar orders for their district counterparts.

As the Luftwaffe normally dropped firebombs along with high explosive devices, civilian authorities sought to ensure that important facilities take appropriate fire prevention and firefighting measures. This included both material preparation and the organization of human capital. Resolutions from Moscow instructed local leaders to surround vital buildings with earthen barriers, construct and stock water storage facilities, and ensure the readiness of necessary fire-fighting equipment. City districts, villages, and collective farms were to form

¹³³ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 18, l. 20.

¹³⁴ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 17, l. 7; GAKO f. 3322, op. 10, d. 18, ll. 34-35.

volunteer fire-fighting brigades. Commanded by a trained chief, volunteers were to be ready for action around the clock. Moscow ordered towns and villages located near strategic forest and peat reserves to organize horse-mounted units that would protect against and fight forest fires.¹³⁵ Sovnarkom Resolution No. 508-100s contains a directive that the prosecutor of the RSFSR send an order to his counterparts at the oblast level to ensure they understand the urgency the state placed on violating its prescribed fire-prevention measures.

Both civilian and military leaders viewed the possibility of enemy activity within the oblast as a critical threat. Civilian leaders expressed a preoccupation with “enemy elements” in the form of spies, parachutists, and saboteurs intent on disrupting the logistics network or reconnoitering Red Army troop displacement. Recent Wehrmacht successes may have heightened such fears. In March, the Germans had retaken Kharkov, Belgorod, and portions of many of the districts that lined Kursk’s southern border while visiting heavy losses on the Red Army. Perhaps articulating deep-seated fears that the Germans were poised for a third consecutive summer of military success and overrun the oblast, the head of the oblast department of the NKVD Colonel P. M. Aksenov shared the results of some interrogations of collaborators in a report to an oblast plenum that took place from April 1 to April 3. The NKVD chief learned that as the Germans departed they had instructed their henchmen in the oblast to observe which civilians reported on collaboration to the returning Soviet authorities.¹³⁶ The Germans fully expected to return and many of Kursk’s civilians may have shared in this belief.¹³⁷ Given such

¹³⁵ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 2, ll. 298-99. This order presents a long term vision for a permanent organization of fire personnel. Oblast leaders were to establish a clear hierarchy of local volunteers that implies these people would attain a level of professionalism. It does not discuss payment for the fire fighters’ services but it seeks to establish a permanent organization.

¹³⁶ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2899, ll. 109-10.

¹³⁷ The oblast department of agitation and propaganda learned that many local people were not convinced that the victory at Stalingrad signified a decisive victory over Wehrmacht. See chapter 3 for a more complete discussion.

conditions, this may be one time in which paranoia about spies, saboteurs, and wreckers may not have been unwarranted.

As the spring rains came to an end and the likelihood of German attack increased, the Red Army command determined that limiting the movement of the civilian population ensured the best means of neutralizing enemy activity in the Soviet rear. On May 31, 1943, the military council of the Voronezh Front ordered oblast authorities to establish a fifty kilometer forbidden prefrontal zone (*zapretnaia prifrontovaia zona*) that stretched from the front line to the eastern bank of the Oskol River.¹³⁸ This order also called for local NKVD organs to issue certificates to all permanent residents in the district once it had taken a strict accounting of them. The NKVD was to carry out a close verification of any civilians who were temporary residents or new residents in the region and expel any who aroused suspicion to territory east of the Oskol River while issuing certificates to those who remained. The order prohibited civilians from moving outside of their villages without special permission and limited movement outside of their homes from 4 AM to 10 PM. Inhabitants could lodge someone for the night only if the perspective lodger possessed the proper documentation and received permission from the village soviet. All village soviets had to establish the institution of the “ten households” (*desiatidvorka*) and designate a plenipotentiary for each unit. The order tasked the plenipotentiary to inform the authorities about any person who did not have the right to remain in the “ten households,” carry out close inspections of all domiciles and associated buildings of the area for unknown persons, maintain a strict blackout regime, and confront any unknown person on the assumption he was a

¹³⁸ The Oskol River flows from north to south at the southeastern edge of Kursk Oblast.

parachutist or saboteur and turn him over for arrest.¹³⁹ Lastly, the military council demanded that the obkom and the district committees organize locally-raised rifle battalions for security details at all bridges, railroad junctions and communications centers, as well as to carry out sweeps through neighboring forests in search of spies and saboteurs.¹⁴⁰

The Kursk Obkom and Oblispolkom sanctioned the resolution on June 18, making few amendments to the original document. While they removed the language related to the fifty-kilometer forbidden prefrontal zone, they still honored the twenty-five kilometer forbidden prefrontal zone that they had established after much debate with both the Central and Voronezh fronts.¹⁴¹ They added detail with regard to identity documents in that the NKVD was to assign documents to all persons over the age of fifteen with children younger than that listed on the document of the head of the household. They also ordered all village soviets to organize local residents to surveil each population center in the oblast.¹⁴² With this document the obkom sought to establish tight control of the actions of the oblast's inhabitants while simultaneously mobilizing many to serve as military auxiliaries.

Public Health

Months of occupation followed by recent combat presented Kursk's authorities with several public health emergencies. The Voronezh-Kastornoe Operation and follow-on offensives

¹³⁹ Red Army doctrine emphasized the effectiveness of deception or *maskirovka*. The Red Army always sought to keep the enemy off guard in terms of its troop numbers and their deployment. Blackouts disallowed enemy pilots navigation points at night.

¹⁴⁰ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2962, ll. 70-71.

¹⁴¹ The military councils of both the Voronezh and the Central fronts established a twenty-five-kilometer evacuated zone along the entire length of the line dividing German and Soviet forces.

¹⁴² GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 16, ll. 25-27.

that liberated Kursk Oblast littered the territory with the bodies of tens of thousands of soldiers and horses.¹⁴³ In a blanket resolution issued on February 1, oblast leaders obliged civilians to bury the Red Army dead in communal graves, bury or burn German soldiers, and turn dead horses over to processing factories.¹⁴⁴ While the obkom resolution did not provide details as to how such activities were to have been carried out, they based their anticipation of this problem on official policy articulated in a State Defense Committee (GKO) resolution issued on April 1, 1942. Experience in the Moscow Offensive of 1941-42 provided state leaders with object lessons on public health threats associated with so much rotting flesh.¹⁴⁵

The GKO's resolution stipulated that all oblast and local soviets in newly liberated territories organize local populations to collect and bury enemy soldiers and officers, and liquidate all enemy cemeteries and graves located in the public squares or along the roadsides of any population center. German soldiers were to be buried (or reburied) at some distance from any population center, highway, or mass grave for Red Army soldiers and civilians. Local people were also to collect and bury Red Army and civilian dead, ensure the proper condition of the mass graves of Red Army soldiers and, if necessary, transfer the bodies of Soviet soldiers to

¹⁴³ Alexander Werth provides a description of a post-battle field littered with corpses southwest of Stalingrad, "... the steppe was a fantastic sight; it was full of dead horses, while some horses were only half-dead, standing on three frozen legs, and shaking the remaining broken one. It was pathetic. 10,000 horses had been killed during the Russian breakthrough. The whole steppe was strewn with these dead horses and wrecked gun carriages and tanks and ... no end of corpses, Rumanian and German. The Russian bodies were the first to be buried..." Alexander Werth, *Russia at War, 1941-1945* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1964), 499.

¹⁴⁴ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2915, ll. 61-63. This resolution listed a host of problems, corpse removal representing only one, that they needed to solve. At this point the oblast authorities were still in Elets and so did not even have a basic understanding of what they were facing. As this was the case, they may not have had any demands with regard to completion of these tasks. Gosudarstvennyi Komitet Oborony, Postanovleniye No. GOKO-1517, accessed on August 22, 2013, <http://www.soldat.ru/doc/gko/text/1517.html>.

¹⁴⁵ The Red Army launched a major offensive against Army Group Center on December 5, 1941, forcing Army Group Center roughly 120 kilometers to the west. The fighting continued until the spring rainy season in 1942 brought an end to all operations. For a brief description, see Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East: The Nazi-Soviet War, 1941-1945* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 120-29.

a proper resting place. The resolution ordered local civilians to locate identification papers on the corpses and establishing a registry of the dead. The resolution assigned personal responsibility to oblispolkom and raiispolkom chairs for the proper removal of all bodies, for ensuring that water sources remain uncontaminated and the forwarding of the names of the dead to the Central Bureau for a correct accounting of losses of personnel.¹⁴⁶

With the recent successes in southern Russia, Ukraine, and the Central Black Earth Region, Sovnarkom RSFSR (SNK) issued a resolution on February 24 providing instructions for corpse disposal throughout the republic. The SNK requested that oblast leaders implement, by April 1, the measures for burying German soldiers and officers stipulated in the resolution issued by the GKO the previous year.¹⁴⁷ The SNK resolution emphasized the fact that the raiispolkoms had responsibility for carrying out the mobilizations necessary to complete the corpse removal.¹⁴⁸ The SNK sent a follow up order to the oblast authorities on April 5 demanding they take the measures necessary to complete corpse removal in April.¹⁴⁹

Only a few weeks into the Voronezh Front's winter campaign, its military council issued its own resolution demanding corpse removal from the recently liberated districts in Kursk and Kharkov oblasts be completed by April 1. Like the Sovnarkom resolution, the council based its demands on the precedent of the GKO Resolution No. GOKO-1517. The Voronezh Front's

¹⁴⁶ Gosudarstvennyi Komitet Oborony, Postanovleniie No. GOKO-1517.

¹⁴⁷ This is in reference to GKO order No. GOKO-1517 issued on April 1, 1942, "On the collection of bodies of enemy soldiers and officers and on the bringing to sanitary conditions territories that have been liberated from the adversary."

¹⁴⁸ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 2, ll. 246-47.

¹⁴⁹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 2, l. 275. This order denotes a greater sense of urgency as it is less concerned with successful processing of horse corpses than quickly and safely burying them thereby removing any danger they pose as a vector for epidemic. The archives do not indicate the point when they completed this task.

military council also emphasized that raisspolkom and village soviet chairmen take personal responsibility in carrying out all aspects of the GKO resolution, yet ordered local people to send the bodies of animals to processing facilities.¹⁵⁰ The front's resolution included detailed instructions for sanitary mass grave construction that advised the burial squad to prepare ground on elevated area away from water sources. The floor of the grave was to be no closer than fifty centimeters from underlying groundwater and not be at a depth greater than one-and-a-half meters from the surface. The instructions informed the burial squad to place the corpses in three to four rows spaced thirty to forty centimeters apart but only two rows in height. They were to fill the gaps in with twigs, peat, or soil. The graves were to be covered by a mound of more than forty centimeters of earth that extended beyond the edge of the digging to reduce the amount of rainwater penetrating into the grave.¹⁵¹ The members of the burial squads were to wear special clothes that they had to disinfect at the end of every work day.¹⁵²

Corpse removal proceeded slowly throughout April and May. Doctors from the medical administration of Voronezh complained to Volchkov that many southern districts remained strewn with great numbers of enemy and horse corpses. The doctors registered disapproval over the fact that some people at a train station in Staro-Oskolskii District sold this horseflesh.¹⁵³ The Central Front's military council also objected to the shallowness of some mass graves and to the neglect of the great numbers of corpses that still littered areas near the roads to and from the district administrative center. It ordered local officials to complete the job and bring the

¹⁵⁰ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1. 16.

¹⁵¹ The instructions allowed for shell craters or trenches to be used as graves.

¹⁵² GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1.17.

¹⁵³ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 1, d. 6, l. 138.

population centers to a sanitary condition.¹⁵⁴ Both letters clearly indicate that only German soldiers remained unburied, indicating that the people had successfully interred the bodies of the Red Army's fallen. On May 7, the Streletskii District Soviet ordered all village soviet chairmen and other district organizations to form brigades of local civilians and begin the tasks articulated in a Sovnarkom resolution similar to the documents discussed above. The Streletskii Raiispolkom resolution concludes with a demand that the job be completed by the end of the month.¹⁵⁵ Evidently some district leaders had not given this task any consideration in March and April when snow cover and freezing temperatures kept obvious public health threats at bay, allowing them to focus on other seemingly more urgent matters.

The situation in Streletskii District may have not been uncommon. On May 7 the Kursk Oblispolkom ordered the police administration to determine how much of the burial work had been completed in the oblast. The police reported at the end of the month that the work crews had buried 1,048 Red Army soldiers and officers, 19,000 enemy soldiers and officers, and 12,350 horses that had been collected in fifteen districts.¹⁵⁶ The reports indicate that local authorities had organized small work crews comprising police, party members, and collective farmers. The police sent three workers from one district to another to ensure local people assigned to the job carried it out properly. The reports conclude that unburied corpses remained mainly in districts close to the frontline or in minefields.¹⁵⁷ These documents attest to the great scope and difficulty of the task assigned to the newly liberated inhabitants of Kursk Oblast.

¹⁵⁴ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, l. 100.

¹⁵⁵ GAKO, f. R-4747, op. 1, d. 2, l. 17.

¹⁵⁶ The police report indicated that the workers in Streletskii District recovered and buried only 120 enemy war dead.

¹⁵⁷ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 1, d. 6, ll. 134, 236.

Carrying out inspections of the republic's cities in February and early March, the Sovnarkom of the RSFSR discovered them to be in appalling sanitary conditions in which urban courtyards had accrued unacceptable quantities of human excrement and other waste. The report placed the greatest blame on local leaders reassigning transport vehicles designated to haul waste to other activities.¹⁵⁸ The Sovnarkom observed that the authorities had serious concerns that, were such unsanitary conditions to remain into spring, Russia's urban areas would face a serious increase in gastrointestinal illnesses. The Sovnarkom proposed a host of measures to ameliorate the dangers related to the coming thaw of excrement. The resolution ordered each city neighborhood to form a sanitation organization with its own labor force composed of the maximum number of local people possible and dedicated transportation fleet.¹⁵⁹ The sanitation crews were to haul excrement to the new garden plots in the city or to nearby kolkhozes as fertilizer. In a decision that seemed to contradict all the injunctions against contaminating water sources, the resolution suggested that workers leave excrement on the ice of frozen rivers.¹⁶⁰

The commandant of the Kursk garrison Colonel Timofeev took initiative with an order he issued on March 19. From the documentary evidence, one cannot determine whether Timofeev had any contact with city and oblast civilian authorities, but he cited the same danger of epidemics from thawing waste in the courtyards of the city. He remarked that the conditions in the immediate vicinity of army hospitals and mess halls were the worst in Kursk. He accused the military commanders of risking the health of both their soldiers and the civilian population by

¹⁵⁸ The resolution singled out Saratov, among a few other oblasts, for particular criticism.

¹⁵⁹ People attached to air defense duties were allocated to serve as extra labor power for excrement removal.

¹⁶⁰ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 3, ll. 121-23. The Sovnarkom also sent a separate order (No. 121-rs) to the Kursk Oblispolkom with many of the same provisions as SNK Resolution No. 253-54s (cited above). The only discernible distinction between the orders was that Order No. 121-rs made the provision that the oblast leaders assign control for carrying out sanitation measures to the police.

allowing a lax attitude to sanitary upkeep of the buildings and environs that their soldiers occupied. Timofeev ordered that the soldiers sanitize the buildings they occupied, and this included building toilets and trash pits within five days. He specified that, while military personnel should rely on the local civilian population for labor, they had to organize this labor through the city and district soviets. Even so, he argued that the military units must control organizational functions and supply the transportation means. Timofeev assigned the Garrison Sanitation Commission, comprised of the chairman of the Oblast Sanitation Inspectorate, the Oblast Department of the NKVD, and the chairman of the Sanitation Administration of the Front, to carry out his order.¹⁶¹ While guaranteeing that civilians handle all the work, Timofeev gave the military administrative oversight, indicating the seriousness with which the military took this problem.

As both civilian and military authorities made provisions to prevent the onset of new epidemics, Kursk's animal and human populations had already suffered outbreaks of some diseases. Many of the horses remaining in the oblast were infected with scabies. Military leaders expressed concern that they could also become a vector for glanders (*sap*), an equine respiratory illness that could be transferred to humans. At the time it was thought to have been weaponizable. On March 31, 1943, the Central Front's military council issued an order to Volchkov instructing him to charge all district authorities to construct and maintain fumigation facilities while mobilizing all available veterinary personnel to deal with infected animals.¹⁶² The local authorities presiding over areas of acute outbreak were to post warnings to people

¹⁶¹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2962, l. 131.

¹⁶² The military authorities emphasized the danger posed by the decaying corpses of animals and included a provision to liquidate all remaining bodies lying in the open.

living in the vicinity. Further, the military council's order included a provision for military veterinary personnel to help the civilian animal medical teams in heavily affected regions.¹⁶³

On April 7, *Kurskaia pravda* published the Kursk City Soviet's resolution on dealing with infected horses in the city. The document stipulated that all horse owners had to take their animals to a veterinary clinic for inspection.¹⁶⁴ All infected horses were prohibited from moving about the city and the owners had to implement veterinarian's treatment regime. The resolution ordered all horses to be fumigated and the owners be given a certificate upon the horse's treatment. All owners had to have certificates for their animals by April 20. The owner of any horse found in the city without proper certification was liable to a fine of up to 1,000 rubles.¹⁶⁵

As Soviet forces liberated Kursk's districts in February, Red Army medical units began submitting reports of typhus outbreaks to civilian leaders. These early reports often included orders for the civilian authorities to establish anti-epidemic commissions in every district (or *raion*) as well as the need for civilian authorities to take necessary measures to isolate the infected while building baths and delousing facilities. Moreover, they expressed an explicit and overriding concern that an outbreak not spread to the Red Army soldiers living among the peasants; this was not only a question of general public health, but also a matter of military necessity.¹⁶⁶ Oblast authorities responded quickly by establishing a central emergency commission to mobilize local agencies and organize the necessary facilities and personnel. Reports back from the districts indicated a lack of both construction materials and medical

¹⁶³ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, l. 98.

¹⁶⁴ One of the provisions states that a clinic would be open in each district for two days, indicating that the city lacked permanent veterinary facilities.

¹⁶⁵ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 54, April 7, 1943.

¹⁶⁶ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 6, ll. 13-18, 40, 54.

personnel and often contained requests for help. Military units deployed their own medical teams to areas of acute outbreak, but stressed the need for the civilian leadership to effectively deal with the issue.¹⁶⁷ While the Red Army usually ordered the civilian authorities to fulfill their orders with oblast resources, it took epidemic threats seriously enough to donate both the services of military personnel and equipment in solving these problems. These decisions to help during epidemiological threats suggest that Red Army command feared that disease would reduce the combat effectiveness of the Central and Voronezh fronts. Such a pattern demonstrates that it directly helped the civilians carry out orders when the outcomes directly affected military interests.

The Spring Sowing Campaign

The Sovnarkom and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union articulated a grand vision of the 1943 spring sowing campaign for the entire country in mid-March in their State Plan for the Development of Agriculture for 1943. Moscow sought to increase the area sown and maximize the yield produced, especially in the Central Black Earth Region that had been liberated from German occupation in the preceding weeks. Anticipating many of the problems the kolkhozes and sovkhozes would experience, the USSR's leaders dedicated much of the text to issues related to tillage and seed stocks. While Moscow made sweeping declarations of what and how it wanted tasks to be completed, it ordered subordinate institutions and oblast, krai, and ASSR leaderships to determine the details of its orders.¹⁶⁸ Importantly, some of the resolution articles even granted decision-making authority to

¹⁶⁷ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 18, ll. 9-10, 53-55.

¹⁶⁸ *Pravda*, no. 75, March 19, 1943. From the article "*O gosudarstvennom plane razvitiia sel'skogo khoziaistva na 1943.*"

raispolkom and kolkhoz chairmen. Kursk's leaders recognized they faced serious shortages in critical categories, such as hauling power and seed stocks. They still sought to fulfill Moscow's demands by applying pressure to the lower levels of society in Kursk. But Kursk's district leaders sometimes resisted, suggesting real limits to Soviet power.

Indeed, tractor power and transportation presented one of the greatest challenges not only to the collective farmers of Kursk Oblast, but to the entire Soviet Union. Anticipating shortfalls in agricultural mechanization, the Sovnarkom and the Central Committee promulgated a resolution on the preparation of tractors, combines, and agricultural machines of the machine-tractor stations (MTS) for the 1943 spring sowing campaign. This document assumed that the Soviet Union's agricultural sector possessed a sufficient number of mechanized vehicles and their proposed tasks related to preparing the existing tractor park for spring field-work. This required that oblast authorities constitute specialized repair teams that would work with multiple MTSs in a specific region where they could ensure the proper working order of all available tractors.¹⁶⁹ The wording of the preface of the state's plan on the development of the agricultural sector in 1943 clearly showed that it privileged the needs of the Red Army in terms of supply of tractors, horses, and other transportation means. Prioritizing the military's needs over those of the civilians represented one of the most significant contributors to the adverse conditions on the USSR's farms.¹⁷⁰

The resulting order issued after the Kursk Obkom held its first discussion on the issue of tractors in February 23, 1943, conveyed a clear lack of understanding of the conditions in the countryside. At this time it made only general demands of the district authorities. Seeking to

¹⁶⁹ *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, no. 50. March 2, 1943.

¹⁷⁰ *Pravda*, no. 75, March 19, 1943.

centralize the repair of all farm machinery at MTSs and state farms, it ordered accommodation and food service at the repair points. Collective farmers were to take tractor-drawn machines to their local MTS for repair. Oblast authorities instructed all tractor drivers to take part in repair activities and local leaders to organize groups from the civilian population to collect spare parts.¹⁷¹

On March 8 the agricultural department of Kursk Oblast issued an eye-opening report describing the current conditions on the province's tractor park and repair services. The authors noted that while the forty-five liberated districts contained 120 MTSs almost all of their supporting repair and machining sections had been thoroughly destroyed. It would have been in the interests of the recently retreating Wehrmacht to deprive the Red Army of any support services dedicated to the repair of heavy machinery. Of the eight oblast-wide machine-tractor major repair facilities (MTMs), three had been destroyed. Three had been preserved and they were still awaiting word on the last two.¹⁷² With 32 districts reporting figures on their available tractor park, the oblast had 1,740 tractors of which 533 required vital repairs, such as starter motors, carburetors, and radiators. For example, of 33 tractors in Oboianskii District only 17 had starter-motors and in Shchigrovskii District only 40 of 120 tractors were equipped with starter-motors. To complicate matters, MTSs and MTMs in the oblast suffered from severe shortages of skilled workers.¹⁷³

The follow-up resolution on March 10 reflected the results of the agricultural department's report as local authorities began to gain some idea of the true nature of conditions

¹⁷¹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2916, l. 3.

¹⁷² The obkom organized the six existing units to divide up responsibility for the oblast. GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2898, l. 78.

¹⁷³ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2898, ll. 112-15.

with regard to tractors in the oblast. This resolution detailed some aspects of the tractor-park crisis but contained some generic observations. Oblast authorities wanted collective farmers to take their implements to the MTSs and they wanted each MTS to have living quarters and a food service, but the nature of the shortage of skilled workers began to dawn on them as they ordered each district to establish its own mobile repair brigade of five-to-seven workers to provide assistance at the repair centers in the district. Further they ordered Kursk's city authorities to make an immediate accounting of all blacksmiths, lathe operators, and metal workers who were connected with defense work in order to send them to the district repair points to carry out tractor repairs until May 20. The obkom began to make specific demands for the establishment or restoration of repair facilities in specific districts. It also set a March 25 deadline for the district committees to select and confirm people in the principal leadership positions at every MTS.¹⁷⁴

The responses of party officials, at the federal, oblast, and even district levels, to the slow progress within the districts over the next few weeks showed how leaders lacked clear understanding of the stark realities in Kursk at the time. Worse still, even the lowest layer of party leadership in some locations seemed to refuse to accept the impossible situations in which the civilians found themselves. For example, Fatezhskii District officials expressed clear dissatisfaction with the conduct of the interim director by the name of Voevodskii of the Zhirovskii MTS. The report to the district committee attested that despite the Zhirovskii MTS possessing the necessary "conditions" to carry out tractor repairs, it had successfully completed work on only two machines out of thirteen by March 20. The committee cited Voevodskii for exceptional irresponsibility because he had failed to properly equip the repair shop and ensure the training of the designated repair workers. In establishing specific tasks to resolve the

¹⁷⁴ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2917, ll. 2-4.

insufficiencies, the district committee betrayed the fact that perhaps Voevodskii could not control the circumstances in which he found himself. It ordered another MTS in the district to send a repair brigade to aid the Zhirovskii MTS as it lacked qualified workers. Reiterating problems seen elsewhere in the oblast, the district Committee directed Voevodskii to encourage the tractor drivers to participate more in carrying out repairs. It also tasked Komsomolites and unaffiliated youth to gather spare parts for the tractors. The Fatezhskii District Committee concluded this series of orders by stating Voevodskii assumed personal responsibility for the successful completion of the above listed tasks. The situation in Fatezhskii District illustrates how the Soviet system, even in times of crisis, managed by charging subordinates with unrealistic tasks. In the case of interim MTS director Voevodskii, the buck stopped with him.¹⁷⁵

Along with the problems related to tractors and farm machinery, the state took pains to guide MTSs and collective farms on ensuring a full complement of competent tractor drivers. In February, the Sovnarkom established new work categories for tractor drivers for the 1943 agricultural season, “senior drivers,” and “replacement drivers.” Senior drivers would take on a host of responsibilities, from daily care and routine maintenance on the tractor and farm implements to encouraging and providing on-the-job training to the replacement driver. While the state imposed a rash of duties on the senior drivers it also used monetary incentives to encourage good performance. For example, a senior driver could earn an extra work-day of pay if both he and his charge successfully fulfilled a two-person day in one calendar day.¹⁷⁶ In the way the resolution characterized the duties of the senior driver, it is apparent that Moscow party

¹⁷⁵ GAOPIKO, f. P-37, op. 1, d. 217, ll. 12-14.

¹⁷⁶ *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, no. 50, March 2, 1943; *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 26, March 3, 1943. The Sovnarkom issued this resolution on February 27.

leaders envisioned work pairs with their one tractor tilling the Soviet Union's fields. While this one-to-one ratio of experienced to green drivers may have existed in regions that had been under cultivation in 1942, the situation on the ground in Kursk was rather different.¹⁷⁷

After taking stock of the availability of the oblast's tractor park and repair services, Kursk's authorities turned their attention to the number of qualified tractor drivers at their disposal. The report on March 8 indicated that there were 515 trained drivers available in eight districts and that the majority of MTSs in other districts had begun organizing courses for tractor drivers. Sixteen MTSs reported that they had 517 currently in courses.¹⁷⁸ On April 12 the obkom and oblispolkom issued a resolution designed to increase the number of tractor drivers on the oblast's sovkhoses by 820 persons. The obkom ordered district leaders to carry out a mobilization among youth on the collective farms to join training programs for tractor drivers that would begin no later than April 20.¹⁷⁹ As many young men liable for conscription were prohibited from taking a space in tractor training programs, oblast authorities began to make open demands that MTS and district leaders enlist young women to join the ranks of tractor drivers. By May 1, 100 women of 4,461 total, had enrolled in training programs.¹⁸⁰

Beasts of Burden

The Germans took a great many horses from the farms throughout Kursk Oblast as they retreated, leaving the people with only small numbers of malnourished or scabies-infected

¹⁷⁷ *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, no. 50, March 2; *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 26, March 3.

¹⁷⁸ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2898, l. 115.

¹⁷⁹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 15, l. 33.

¹⁸⁰ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 6. l. 160.

animals. For example, one report maintained that of 18,387 horses located in nine districts in 1941 only 1,755 remained. The Germans also destroyed a considerable number of horse-drawn farm implements in the oblast.¹⁸¹ Shortly after liberation, oblast authorities introduced measures to secure the remaining horses and restore them to health. They ordered horses, oxen, and mules to be collected from all people and housed at kolkhoz and sovkhoz stables where one farmer would provide care for no more than three animals. The farms would establish communal feed stores designed to maximize nutrition for the beasts. Sick, extremely malnourished or scabies-infected animals were to be separated from more healthy horses and receive treatment from veterinary personnel.¹⁸² In March, some districts began constructing gas fumigation chambers and other medical facilities for the purpose of combating the disease.

The Sovnarkom and Central Committee presented specific guidelines for the care and rehabilitation of horses, encouraging farmers to refrain from using horses for any kind of hauling labor in the month preceding the beginning of the spring field work. They also ordered that all collective and state farms establish a regime of rest and intensive feeding for at least three weeks prior to the spring sowing.¹⁸³ Demonstrating a marked discrepancy between the Sovnarkom's vision of the conditions of herds in the country and the stark reality in Kursk, Volchkov demanded of his audience at the April party plenum to correct many of the glaring insufficiencies with regard to the readiness of Kursk's herds for the spring sowing campaign. Volchkov observed that a majority of 20,000 horses remaining in the oblast still suffered from malnutrition and scabies. He used the conditions in a few districts to point out that much of the

¹⁸¹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2898, l. 112.

¹⁸² GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2916, l. 5.

¹⁸³ *Pravda*, no. 75, March 19, 1943.

care of horses had not yet been centralized and that many horses were still not being sufficiently housed or cared for. He reiterated the need for the kolkhozniki to provide concentrated feed to the horses. As many district leaders had informed him of the lack of concentrated feed on many farms throughout the oblast, Volchkov shot back with astonishment that as many as sixty kolkhozes could not feed even one horse. If collective farmers did not have grain feed, Volchkov suggested they could give the horses fried eggs as a supplement. In another break from the Sovnarkom's resolution, Volchkov ordered the assembled leaders to insure that the horses receive at least two weeks of rest and feeding before they were to begin the spring field work.¹⁸⁴

With the oblast depleted of mechanical and equine motive power, oblast officials sought to harness the power of Kursk's cattle herds. Even as the oblast committee leaders began to discuss the shortage of horses, they presented the training of cows for transport work as a viable supplement and ordered the crafting of yoke pairs suitable for cows and set them to hauling manure, feed, and other supplies.¹⁸⁵ By the time they drafted a March letter to be sent to all the collective farm workers in the oblast, Doronin and Volchkov acknowledged that with so few horses at the collective farmer's disposal, they would have to use cows for field work. They pointed out that collective farmers in some of the eastern districts of the oblast had used cattle successfully the previous year. They warned the remaining kolkhozniki unaccustomed to using cows in such a manner, however, that they would have to entrust this type of work to someone who understood the animals well in order to work the fields productively.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2899, ll. 40-41.

¹⁸⁵ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2916, l. 5.

¹⁸⁶ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2898, l. 109.

Leaders in the Sovnarkom and Central Committee also recognized the need and usefulness of bovine hauling power, making kolkhoz chairmen and local veterinarians responsible for selecting the working cows but ordering that the owners of the cow or the milkmaid who tended it should actually handle it. Kursk's leaders in turn used the Sovnarkom resolution as a template for the demands they would make of Kursk's cattle herds. In his April plenum speech, Volchkov ordered collective and state farm workers to switch all hauling duties from horses and oxen to cows within one month of the beginning of the spring sowing. Volchkov handed over responsibility for training the cows to the kolkhozniki and informed them that they were also to make the necessary harnesses from their own materials. While the Sovnarkom resolution presented some with a rudimentary plan for the remuneration of the collective farmer who deployed her cow to field work, Volchkov informed his audience that the details of payment would be sorted out at some later date.¹⁸⁷

Oblast authorities determined that each district would supply roughly 75 percent of their cattle for field work. In real numbers, this meant that 163,246 of Kursk's 217,662 cows would contribute to the spring sowing.¹⁸⁸ Yet the deployment of so many cattle to the fields did not guarantee that a large number of hectares would be plowed. As Volchkov noted at the April plenum, for every 4.8 hectares of soil plowed by a pair of cows, a horse could plow 10 hectares and a tractor could work through 90 hectares.¹⁸⁹ The use of so many cows also represented a significant manpower drain if each cattle pair was to be overseen by one or two people. Even with such bold pronouncements about the efficacy of bovine hauling power, the lack of

¹⁸⁷ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2899, ll. 39-40.

¹⁸⁸ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2898, ll. 80-81.

¹⁸⁹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2899, l. 24.

cooperation on the part of kolkhozniki in the oblast proved frustrating. The obkom sent letters to district leaders informing them of the failure of their districts to meet the mobilization orders. For example on April 20, 1943, oblast officials learned that only 10 percent of the ordered number of work cows had been mobilized in Staro-Oskolskii District and 16 percent in Novo-Oskolskii District while Iasenovskii District had prepared 85 percent for work.¹⁹⁰ The archives remain silent as to why people refused to volunteer their cattle for field work, but this suggests that the peasants had limits to the contributions they were willing to make on behalf of the state's cause.¹⁹¹

Seed Stocks

Just as the acute shortage of hauling power caused Kursk's leaders to worry about carrying out a successful spring sowing campaign, a serious lack of seeds further threatened agricultural production. In late February 1943 oblast leaders ordered district and kolkhoz authorities to begin to thresh the winter harvest, and to gather and count the available seed for the spring sowing. They requested that all seed stocks be cleaned, prepared, and properly stored by mid-March. While this initial order indicated that oblast authorities had some confidence that the kolkhozniki would gather a sufficient quantity of seed, they warned all kolkhoz chairmen, district soviet chairmen, and district secretaries to take great care in maintaining security of seed stocks and in making sure that seed would not be used for any other purpose without their express written permission.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ GAOPIKO, f. P-31, op. 1, d 590, l. 15.

¹⁹¹ What is resounding in all the various commands is that demands moved from top to bottom with, more often than not, the poor kolkhoznik or local MTS worker to turn the command into a reality.

¹⁹² GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2914, l. 2.

The first reports out of the districts painted a grim picture of the seed supply. By March 8, the oblast agricultural department had learned that sixteen districts had not been able to gather and store an adequate amount of grain seed; elsewhere the situation looked even worse.¹⁹³ Such a poor showing oblast-wide caused Doronin and Volchkov to send letters to individual district secretaries and district soviet chairmen informing them of their displeasure. For example, on March 15 they notified the secretary of the Pristenskii District Committee that they were well aware that seed funds had not been organized and that in the difficulties of wartime it would not be possible to easily transfer seed from one point to another. Doronin and Volchkov demanded that every household on kolkhozes in the district be informed of the tasks related to the collection and delivery of seed to kolkhoz storage facilities. Informing the district secretary of the military significance of the spring sowing campaign, they warned the district secretary that he was to take personal responsibility for the successful fulfillment of their order and that he had ten days to comply.¹⁹⁴

Collection, preparation, and the guarding of seed stocks also drew attention from higher-level authorities. In the resolution on the state plan for the development of the agricultural sector, the Sovnarkom and the Central Committee detailed instructions for farm seed-stock preparations, to be completed by April 1, 1943. Acknowledging the possibility of local seed shortages, the Sovnarkom and Central Committee together outlined terms for the accounting and repayment of borrowed seed stocks by one kolkhoz from another. Even as the state made great demands on all regions for a maximum yield, it still presented itself only as an arbitrator of

¹⁹³ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2898 l. 113.

¹⁹⁴ GAOPIKO f. P-82, op. 1, d. 257, l. 2.

contractual arrangements at local levels and not an organizer of balanced seed distribution throughout the country.¹⁹⁵

By the end of March, Kursk's authorities began to see that the seed problem had great complexity and political shadings owing to the recent German occupation. For example, the March 28 report from the oblast agricultural department indicated the difficulties experienced at one kolkhoz in Cheremisinovskii District where the chairman was found to have had some dubious relations with the Germans and also did not correctly inform the collective farmers of the proper amount of seed to be collected. His incompetence and the lack of trust the kolkhozniki had in him resulted in a severe deficiency in the communal seed stock as many of the peasants held on to their own stocks. The report pointed out that in some districts collective farms had lost much of their threshed winter grain as the majority of it had been distributed to the peasants who were then coerced into turning it over to the Germans. The document also mentioned that the peasants at one kolkhoz in Manturovskii District had divided up 60 percent of the winter harvest among themselves and sent 40 percent to the communal barn for storage. In the days before the Germans left the region they intimidated the families of party or Soviet activists into giving up their grain but did not have time to collect grain from collaborators. These administrators under the Germans redistributed the grain they held to the peasants whom the Wehrmacht had just fleeced in an attempt to lessen their guilt before their fellow peasants. From these cases the report concluded that peasants should not be allowed to store seed grains, that agricultural administrators would need to educate collective farmers in the proper political

¹⁹⁵ *Pravda*, no. 75, March 19, 1943; *Kurskaia pravda* no. 41, March 21, 1943.

attitude to take to grain storage, and that the kolkhozes should establish a more formal accounting of seed.¹⁹⁶

At the April plenum, Volchkov informed his audience of the tremendous importance of establishing and securing sufficient seed stocks for the spring sowing, faulting kolkhoz leaders and peasants in many districts for not taking the issue of seed gathering seriously enough. Volchkov observed that many districts in the oblast had collected only 20 percent of the desired amount of seed while some districts possessed less than 5 percent of the seed required for spring sowing. Volchkov complained that many kolkhoz leaders had either not addressed the matter or failed to provide concrete collection targets for their kolkhozniki. He argued that this situation demonstrated poor organization because even those few collective farmers who realized that they had little seed did not bother to go about gathering seed for their stocks. The oblispolkom chair informed his audience that one way to improve the situation would be for district leaders to take a more active role in cultivating good work habits in the kolkhozes in their territories. Volchkov reported that many districts in the oblast possessed a surplus of seed and they would need to transfer it to other districts under the terms of mutual aid.¹⁹⁷ Taking Volchkov's observations into account, the plenum issued a resolution on the spring sowing in Kursk Oblast that stipulated a rigid policy with regard to the issues related to seeds. It demanded that district leaders establish proper silage for seeds by April 10 and fully prepare the seeds for sowing five days later, while establishing tight control for their quality and security. The resolution listed fourteen

¹⁹⁶ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2898, l. 117.

¹⁹⁷ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2899, ll. 35-36.

districts believed to have seed stock surpluses, ordering them to deliver excess stocks to predetermined collection points by April 15.¹⁹⁸

Yet district authorities remained unable to fulfill the oblast committee's directives. On April 8, the Streletskii District Committee noted that the collective farms of their district had not collected enough seed for sowing. Moreover, the committee alleged that village soviet and kolkhoz administrations still had not taken the necessary measures for the preparation of seed for the spring sowing and had fulfilled only 18 percent of the plan. Not unlike federal and oblast authorities, the Streletskii District Committee placed all responsibility for the successful collection of seed on the next subordinate layer of leadership. It demanded that village soviet, MTS, and kolkhoz authorities collect grain that had been distributed in the brief period between the retreat of the Germans and the arrival of the Red Army and to confiscate grain that former administrators and other collaborators for the Germans. The order concluded with bland exhortations to show a stronger determination and initiative in their work and to increase mass-political work with the population and kolkhoz work team leaders to find more seed grain.¹⁹⁹ This order betrays a certain amount of desperation at the lower orders of party authority. They could not meet the demands from above and could make demands only on the peasants themselves to identify seed that they may or may not have had.

As part of ongoing efforts to ensure a successful harvest, on May 4, 1943, oblast leaders announced that the government had organized a supply of seed for oblasts that had recently suffered under German occupation. But these new found stocks were not simple handouts. Of the 7,000 tons of seed allocated for Kursk Oblast, the state offered only 1,500 tons in the form of

¹⁹⁸ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2897, l. 5. This process was to be overseen by oblast authorities.

¹⁹⁹ GAKO, f. R-4747, op. 1, d. 2. l. 12.

seed help. Another 1,481 tons of seed arrived from other Soviet territories in the form of a loan that was to be repaid with the 1943 harvest. The state also organized for kolkhozniki in Kursk to receive 4,019 tons of seed in a 1-to-1 exchange for grain that had just been brought in from the winter harvest.²⁰⁰ Oblast authorities issued a circular to all oblasts designated to receive seed and ordered them to allocate seed for their kolkhozes and prepare plans for its dispersal once it arrived.²⁰¹ The documents demonstrate that, while the party authorities eventually organized a seed supply for the spring sowing, they did so only after a long period of demanding that the peasants collect their own stocks. Moreover, only 21 percent of the seed they did provide was in the form of relief seed. They obliged Kursk's peasants to pay for or agree to offer later reimbursement for the seed they demanded that Kursk's residents sow so as to maximize the 1943 harvest. The state offered no charity, even in such a time of crisis and even to its own citizens who had just experienced eighteen months of pillage and privation. Just as in all the other demands made of them, the peasants of Kursk had to draw from nonexistent resources to acquire the seed to make the state's vision for agricultural output a success.

The majority of district secretaries presenting at the April plenum discussed local preparations for the spring sowing.²⁰² Only one secretary indicated that his district had a surplus of supplies, which he pledged to use in help of neighboring districts.²⁰³ One other revealed that, while seed stocks in his district were less than 100 percent of the plan, the supply was not dangerously low.²⁰⁴ Another six district leaders listed varying degrees of shortages in their seed

²⁰⁰ GAKO f. 3322, op. 10, d. 15, l. 58-59.

²⁰¹ GAOPIKO f. P-82, op. 1, d. 257, l. 14.

²⁰² GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2899, ll. 78-84, 111-24, 133-36, 184-86, 192-94.

²⁰³ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2899, ll. 133-36.

²⁰⁴ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2899, ll. 192-94.

stocks, labor reserves, and sources of motive power. Some secretaries even wondered aloud how they were going to fulfill the plan given the dire conditions of their agricultural sectors. The secretary of Polianskii District, a territory at the extreme eastern edge of the oblast that had been only partially occupied, complained that, now that his territory was considered a part of the deep rear, oblast leaders ignored his needs.²⁰⁵ These criticisms, while muted, demonstrate that the reality of the situation became more apparent at the lower levels of the chain of command. These men had spent the previous six weeks in villages, on the kolkhozes and MTSs, and provided a stark contrast to the hearty exhortations oblast leaders made about better agitation and propaganda as a means to successful sowing.

The Course of the Spring Sowing

The spring sowing campaign swung into action between April 15 and 20. At this time, acute shortages of all kinds became apparent, causing increasing tensions among those tasked with the responsibility for a successful campaign.²⁰⁶ Like the oblast leadership, district leaders sent streams of memos to village soviet, MTS, and kolkhoz authorities reporting on poor execution of the sowing campaign due to poor preparation and administration. Insufficient seed stocks and tilling power were two critical problems. Agricultural planners had few options to make up for the shortage of hauling power. The lack of discussion of horses in the memos suggests that the agricultural planners realized they had maximized the hauling power from this category and could make no more demands of it. Initially such was not the case with tractors. Reporters for some district committees charged MTS directors and district RaiZOs with gross

²⁰⁵ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2899, ll. 111-15.

²⁰⁶ GAKO, f. 3322, o. 10, d. 4, l. 16.

incompetence or willful negligence in their administration of tractor deployment.²⁰⁷ Some district leaders even went so far as to characterize the performance of a number of MTS directors as criminal and threaten them with prosecution.²⁰⁸ In one case, Besedinskii District authorities discovered that an MTS director by the name of Markov had allowed his tractors to cultivate the private plots of kolkhozniki in two village soviets, as opposed to preparing communal lands for spring seeds.²⁰⁹

As the window of the spring sowing would close in a matter of weeks, cows had to pick up the slack that the tractor drivers and horses failed to pull. By late April, oblast and district leaders began to demand that the collective and state farmers send all able-bodied cows to the fields to participate in the sowing.²¹⁰ As the presowing plans demanded only field work of 75 percent of the oblast herds, the remaining 25 percent represented a significant source of hauling power. Similar to accusations of incompetence for MTS directors, party leaders imbued a criminal quality to the improper mobilization of cows. Memos exchanged in the Belovskii District, however, provide some interesting aspects to the criminality of incompetence. On April 22, one of the oblast committee secretaries sent a letter to the Belovskii District Committee secretary informing him of mistakes reported in his district with regard to cattle mobilization for field work. In this letter oblast authorities considered such deficiencies in cattle mobilization as a “grave state crime” (*tiagchaishee gosudarstvennoe prestuplenie*). Four days later, in the memo that district authorities prepared to send to village soviet, MTS, and kolkhoz leaders, the district committee characterized the same misuse of cows as a “grave crime before the Motherland”

²⁰⁷GAOPIKO f. P-53, op. 1, d. 163, ll. 6-7; 24-25.

²⁰⁸ GAOPIKO, f. P-31, op. 1, d. 590, l. 6.

²⁰⁹ GAKO, f. R-4747, op. 1, d. 2, l. 18.

²¹⁰ GAOPIKO f. P-53, op. 1, d. 163, ll. 24-27, 49-50.

(tiagchaishee prestuplenie pered Rodinoi).²¹¹ This curious shift in language suggests that two groups occupied Kursk simultaneously, each with its own value system and set of priorities. One group, the party leadership, valued and feared the power of the state while the other, the people, valued the idea of the Motherland more. Party leaders at the district level represented the dividing line between these two groups. Oblast authorities invoked the image of the state to motivate their subordinates to act but the district officials recognized that the state was less useful a mobilizer to the leaders of the village soviets, MTSs, and kolkhozes, not to mention the peasants themselves than the concept of the Motherland.

Even with the more urgent calls for bovine mobilization and the yoking of more cows to farm implements, the pace of sowing remained extremely slow. Authorities faced similar problems with regard to seed stocks in all crop categories. While some shortages resulted from poor preparation, the reports indicate that kolkhozniki hoarded communal grain and seed stocks in the short time between the German departure and the arrival of the Red Army.²¹² Such behavior suggests that even in a state of extreme crisis, peasants' self-interest trumped selfless devotion to the needs of the Motherland.

In a July 1 report to the Sovnarkom of the RSFSR, Volchkov acknowledged that the oblast did not fulfill the spring sowing plan and sought to explain why. He argued that the lack of draft power represented the most significant reason for their failure. His report noted that cows plowed and cultivated more hectares than horses and tractors combined. Introducing a fourth category of plowing power, Volchkov explained that in thirty-six districts, 82,737 people prepared 12,245 hectares of earth for seeding. The archives remain silent as to how these people

²¹¹ GAOPIKO, f. P-31, op. 1, d. 590, l. 11, 15, 17.

²¹² GAOPIKO, f. P-53, op. 1, d. 163, l. 6. This was in Oboianskii District.

labored. Volchkov complained that many districts in the oblast did not get seed promised them by the state and of those that did, the seed did not arrive until well into May. While Volchkov lamented the poor organization and lax attitudes to work discipline that had been exhibited on some kolkhozes, he informed Sovnarkom that, throughout the entire period of the spring sowing 130,000, able-bodied people were engaged in defensive work for the Red Army and were not able to contribute to the spring sowing. Volchkov argued that this last factor contributed greatly to the slow progress in fulfilling the plan for spring work.²¹³

Conclusion

A close examination of the activities of Kursk's civilians and leaders in the period immediately after liberation provides insight into the narrow folds of twentieth-century warfare, those overlooked gaps where front and rear commingle and where combat and peaceful production share space. The Soviet state expected full participation in its economic vision in 1943 from Kursk's inhabitants only weeks after they had been liberated from the oppressive German occupation. The civilian leadership understood that it could achieve these goals only by first resurrecting governmental institutions, and second, by using them to reestablish order among the populace. Their efforts met with varying degrees of success. Part of their failure resulted from a combination of shortages of every necessary resource, horrible conditions, and unprecedented labor demands that sapped an already strained manpower supply. The peasants themselves provided another impediment to the party realizing success. With examples of resistance and the use of the chaotic conditions to advance self-interest, the decisions of the peasants complicate the story of a people giving selflessly for victory. And even though the

²¹³ GAKO, f. 3322, o. 10, d. 4, ll. 16-18.

party leaders took great pains to organize institutions of governance, too often their successes in satisfying the demands of the state and the Red Army resulted in passing orders down the chain of command to the last man and woman standing in the muck and blood of the war-torn countryside.

CHAPTER 3

THE VISION OF VICTORY: PROPAGANDA AND MOBILIZATION IN KURSK OBLAST, 1943

Soviet power returned to Kursk Oblast in the wake of the Red Army's advance in the first two weeks of February 1943. The Soviet High Command (Stavka) had intended for its forces to sweep quickly through the oblast to the Dnieper River and the Pripet Marshes, but the Germans stopped the Soviet advance at Kursk's borders, forming the famous salient that would be the site of the great tank battle later that summer. As the advance stalled, the Red Army became engaged in bitter fighting and incorporated Kursk's civilian inhabitants into its rear services. It demanded that the people restore and maintain the transportation network, provide medical services, deliver foodstuffs and forage, and furnish any form of support it deemed necessary. The people, however, had just endured eighteen months of enemy occupation that ended with the Germans taking as much usable materiel (mostly foodstuffs, livestock, and horses) as possible as they retreated. They destroyed much of what they could not take, leaving the region and its people exhausted.

Kursk's civilian leaders had two primary tasks: to serve the immediate needs of the Red Army while reestablishing Soviet institutions so that the collective farm workers could prepare for the rapidly approaching spring sowing campaign. Moscow had included Kursk Oblast in its 1943 agricultural campaign and expected it to maximize its harvest. Meanwhile, the Red Army continued intense combat operations for five weeks in the northern and western periphery of the oblast. Once the spring rains halted the fighting, more than a million men began preparing for the Wehrmacht's summer offensive. Given that the German offensives of the two previous

summers had been devastatingly successful, the Red Army had experienced significant failures along with its success in the winter 1942-43 operations, and the Wehrmacht was massing roughly 900,000 men at the neck of the Kursk salient, Stavka and Kursk's party leaders had every reason to consider the possibility that the Germans would retake Kursk. Military necessity took priority over party demands. Yet Moscow's orders for a strong harvest could not be ignored, forcing Kursk's leadership, and by extension the civilian population, to serve two exacting masters.

Kursk's officials had to mobilize the population to carry out these tasks, but had few tools to do so. They did not possess the resources to incentivize labor with monetary or material rewards, nor could they marshal the coercive capacity to force people to work. With the Germans gone, however, party leaders recovered their monopoly on information and used it as the principle means to mobilize people to work.²¹⁴ This was no easy task. Kursk's officials had to restore printing presses, radio stations, and cadres along with the rest of the oblast's infrastructure. But most important, they had to develop a comprehensive propaganda campaign to win the hearts and minds of the people.

²¹⁴ Peter Kenez affirms that the Bolshevik Party had secured unrivaled dominance over information delivery in its first years in power. He also notes that it established institutions for the creation and dissemination of propaganda that was designed as much to mobilize the masses as it was to indoctrinate them. See Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State, Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilizations, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 3-5. See also Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from the Revolution to the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000) and David Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination, and Terror under Stalin, 1927-1941* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011). In his recent book, Karel Berkhoff examines Moscow's propaganda efforts in the part of the Soviet Union that never experienced occupation. His work focuses tightly on Stalin, the top echelon of the propaganda leadership, and the party's central newspapers. He observes that in the "battle against Nazi Germany, mobilization of the entire population, soldiers and workers in particular, became the Soviet media's paramount official goal. Mobilization was not defined well, but it was essentially getting people to do what they were told, while allowing them a small measure of initiative. Agitprop cited Lenin when it warned editors that the press had roles to play in propaganda and agitation, but also in organization, meaning mobilization, and that role might occasionally become paramount. The time was now, when the press 'sets hundreds of thousands and millions of workers in motion.'" Karel C. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda during World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 4.

The locally published newspaper, *Kurskaia pravda*, became the prime vehicle for the articulation and dissemination of the party's propaganda messaging. Combining content from Moscow with local reporting,²¹⁵ party officials developed a coherent vision that promised Soviet victory and emphasized to a population brutalized by occupation that they were now on the winning team.²¹⁶ In so doing, they addressed widespread doubts about the ability of the Red Army to defeat the Wehrmacht and win the war. Thus, much of *Kurskaia pravda's* content that addressed the fighting underscored the recent competency and strength of the Soviet military, while attempting to dismantle the widely held notion of an unbeatable German army. In the geopolitical realm, the newspaper emphasized the power of the Soviet Union's allies as it pointed out the Axis's weaknesses and the Nazis' loosening grip on Western Europe. On the domestic front, Kursk's propagandists aimed to instill a sense of unity between the local population and their Soviet brethren with stories of a vast deep rear that would provide aid to the newly liberated districts working to meet the demands of the state. But the fact that the oblast served as the site of prolonged combat and a staging area for the largest tank battle in history forced the newspaper's editors to address the unique reality the people faced. Kursk's propagandists wanted the newly liberated peasants to identify with the events of the war and highlighted incidents of German atrocity during occupation. They did this to rouse hatred for the Germans and a sense of debt to the Red Army soldiers who had liberated them. They wished to

²¹⁵ The authorities began publication of *Kurskaia pravda* on February 17, 1943, and distributed the newspaper five times a week. Moscow supplied more than half of the paper's content, but oblast leaders included as much local news as possible.

²¹⁶ Jacques Ellul contends that propaganda is a means to get people to act, not merely to convince them of an idea. Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vantage Books, 1973), 25. Edward Bernays, the creator of public relations, also notes that mass action is the propagandist's goal, although he suggests that propaganda first serves to "focus and realize the desires of the masses." Edward L. Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York: Horace Liverlight, 1928), 30. Kursk's officials wished to convince the people of certain realities (all based in some amount of fact), but their goal was to get people to give their labor, their food, and other forms of help to the Red Army and the state.

convince the people of Kursk that the war was winnable, the Germans were losing, and that their labor would be rewarded with victory. They had to articulate a close relationship between Kursk's civilian population and the more than one million soldiers with whom they had to share their villages, basic infrastructure, and food.²¹⁷

In its coverage of military and international affairs, *Kurskaia pravda*'s editorial staff couched their messages in kernels of truth, yet they obfuscated or exaggerated the reporting of events to maintain a positive outlook.²¹⁸ A close examination of its local coverage evinces a clear pattern of rhetorical devices designed to encourage the people to behave in a concerted way. Its articles contained a remarkable amount of repetition of a small number of salient themes, often following a similar organizational paradigm. Articles typically began by reminding the reader of the destructive horrors of German occupation. After a brief passage recounting the joy that the Red Army had returned to the people by liberating them, the article listed concrete ways readers could repay their debt, for example by donating money, providing food to the Red Army, and offering aid to the wounded, among other tasks. The new agricultural season brought a slight change in this rhetoric, as articles often asserted that readers repay the Red Army by carrying out a full-scale grain sowing campaign. Further, the newspaper foregrounded emotional topics, especially when discussing the occupation, to instill moral indignation, unify the people, and convert their outrage into action.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ The provision of food to the soldiers became problematic. Many reports from throughout the oblast mention soldiers using violence to seize grain and livestock. *Kurskaia pravda* did not address such incidents.

²¹⁸ Ellul stresses the fact that persuasive propaganda must rest on some semblance of reality. Ellul, *Propaganda*, 20. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*, 54.

²¹⁹ Proponents of social movement theory have pointed out the importance of emotion as a means to bind people together into social networks and induce them to collectively act in a desired way. While the people of Kursk may have shared basic notions of identity (for example, language, ethnicity, religion), they also shared the trauma of occupation.

Social movements theory provides a useful lens to understand the importance of emotions in recruiting people to enlist in a cause and motivating them to act in concert.²²⁰ Sociologist James M. Jasper explains how emotions are related to emergence and decline of social movements, recruitment patterns, and movement longevity. As a foundational principle, Jasper asserts that emotions underpin all human relationships and that humans have emotional attachments to places.²²¹ According to Jasper, the interaction between the attachments an individual feels for others within a social group and reactive responses generated within an individual upon witnessing what others within a social group experience “may propel someone to ... be receptive to a recruiter’s plea.” Thus, Jasper argues that a basic means to incite people to action is to present them with “moral shocks.” He defines moral shocks as an “unexpected event or piece of information [that] raises a sense of outrage in a person.” Jasper asserts that a moral shock demands a perpetrator who can be blamed for the shocking act. Further, he maintains that the more clearly a perpetrator can be identified, the more likely outrage and indignation will occur. Having established moral shock and blame, the propagandist must create a frame to channel these emotions. It is with this frame that the propagandist can target a specific audience, stoke its members’ emotions, suggest “appropriate strategies, tactics, and targets, and appeal to them to carry out the suggested activities.”²²² The most effective framing technique is to highlight a perceived injustice. In the case of the German occupation of Kursk

²²⁰ See Doug McAdam and David A. Snow, eds., *Social Movements: Readings on Their Emergence, Mobilization, and Dynamics* (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company, 1997).

²²¹ James M. Jasper, “The Emotions of Protest: Affective and Reactive Emotions in and around Social Movements,” *Sociological Forum*, 13, no. 3 (1998): 397-424. Jasper categorizes three types of emotions involved in social movements. The first are primarily affective, such as hatred and love. The second are primarily reactive, including anger, grief, outrage, indignation, and shame. Moods, such as compassion, cynicism, pride, and dread compose the third category. This chapter is concerned principally with affective and especially reactive emotions.

²²² Jasper, “The Emotions of Protest,” 397-424.

Oblast, these injustices came most often in the form of violent atrocities and economic subjugation.

Kurskaia pravda's editors used their coverage of German atrocities to deliver emotionally-based “moral shocks,” and thereby foster anger and moral indignation in readers. Such emotions required a course of action to ameliorate this moral indignation, often in the form of revenge on the enemy. *Kurskaia pravda* did not, however, exhort the civilians to take their own vengeance. It established the Red Army as the people’s physical instrument for righteous revenge. While continually stoking moral indignation, the paper encouraged the people to achieve justice through their own labor, which would guarantee the Red Army the strength to destroy the hated enemy.²²³

Even though Kursk’s agitation and propaganda (agitprop) leaders articulated a vision for victory, they still faced a host of challenges in transmitting the message to people in the villages and on the kolkhozes. As they strove to restore district newspapers and local radio broadcasting, district officials relied on their meagre cadre reserves as the principle means to propagandize. They had to reestablish a network of cadres to read papers, lead discussions, and organize work competitions, all in the name of motivating the people for greater and greater production goals. With so many party members conscripted or disgraced, district leaders had to cultivate new agitators from the ranks of the Komsomol or, more likely, from unaffiliated people who had proven their worth by consistently exceeding production quotas.

***Kurskaia Pravda's* Messaging Campaign–The Domestic War**

²²³ For a discussion of hate propaganda in the central newspapers, see Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*, 168-201.

Oblast party propaganda leaders saw that the newly liberated people of Kursk had little faith in a Red Army that had so quickly retreated in 1941. The leaders operated on the assumption that in the intervening eighteen months German occupation authorities fed the people a steady diet of propaganda asserting German military supremacy and Red Army failure. Now that the Red Army had begun to change the fortunes of war, party propagandists needed to articulate a reality designed to portray the Red Army as a viable fighting force equal to the Wehrmacht.²²⁴ This campaign highlighted Red Army successes and emphasized constant westward movement through daily battle reports supplemented by feature articles that affirmed the quality of the Red Army's officer corps, combat effectiveness, and equipment. Perhaps most importantly, the propagandists characterized the German army as defeatable.

The twice daily reports of the Soviet Information Bureau served as the backbone for reporting on the day-to-day activities of the Red Army in the field. The agitprop administration in Moscow generated these reports and distributed them for publication in all official newspapers.²²⁵ Like most reporting on the war in party organs, these reports portrayed only positive news and hid reverses, or couched them in obtuse language.²²⁶ Party propagandists supplemented this information with features on individual soldiers or small units.

²²⁴ For a discussion on combat reporting, the emergence of the new Soviet war correspondent in the Great Patriotic War, and the formulation of propaganda related to operations, see Louise McReynolds' essay, "Dateline Stalingrad" in Richard Stites, ed., *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 28-43.

²²⁵ Transmission of these reports received priority status to ensure that all civilians were kept abreast of battlefield progress. The Soviet Information Bureau reports covered the whole front from Leningrad to the Black Sea. The reports appeared in a bullet list format of short paragraphs listing the geographic location of the fighting. They limited the detail to towns or villages captured, topographical features surmounted, and the numbers of German soldiers killed and captured, along with materiel taken.

²²⁶ It was not uncommon for the newspapers to neglect printing negative stories altogether.

Recognizing that Kursk's civilians did not appear to appreciate the importance of the Red Army's recent successes at Stalingrad and its current potential in the winter offensive, *Kurskaia pravda's* editors emphasized the Soviet military's growing fighting capacity.²²⁷ The March 5 edition included Obkom Secretary P. I. Doronin's speech to workers in the Leninskii District of Kursk city. Doronin addressed the Red Army's 1941 failures in the oblast. He admitted that the Wehrmacht at that time had been poised to capture Moscow and handily captured Kursk and Kharkov. He pointed out, however, that only scattered elements of the Red Army supplemented with local militia forces (*opolchenie*) defended Kursk against three German divisions. After calling for a moment of silence to remember those who had died to protect their native city, Doronin reported on the great changes the Red Army had experienced in the intervening time. It had received sufficient quantities of new weapons and had learned how to deal the enemy striking defeats in the field. Doronin cited the victory of Stalingrad and the subsequent capture of Kursk, Kharkov, and Rostov as evidence of these new capabilities.²²⁸ Reminding the people that the Red Army depended exclusively on the efforts at the rear to provide it the tools of war, Doronin addressed a nagging criticism of insufficient accoutrement for both the Red Army in the early disastrous stages of the war as well as the Russian Imperial army in its defeats at the German's hands between 1916 and 1918.²²⁹

²²⁷ Correspondence between oblast and district propagandists expressed concern that the people considered the Red Army to be weaker than the Wehrmacht, with the implication that the Wehrmacht could easily return or that the victory at Stalingrad was a one-off event. Such correspondence emphasizes the necessity to inform the people of the effectiveness and quality of the Red Army. See GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3039, l. 1.

²²⁸ Yet at the time Doronin delivered this speech, German Army Group South, under the command of German General Erich von Manstein, was poised to retake Kharkov after two weeks of beating back a major Red Army offensive.

²²⁹ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 27, March 5, 1943.

Local editors republished an April 4 *Pravda* article that provided a summation of the Red Army's winter military campaign that had ended on March 31. The article informs readers that Soviet forces had wrested initiative from the Germans along the entire front as they made significant strikes against the enemy at key points. While conditions had been bad, it nonetheless steadily advanced the front 600 to 700 kilometers west. The article details the economic assets repatriated to the Soviet people in the newly liberated regions as well as German losses in terms of men and materiel, concluding that one cannot overestimate the success the Red Army recently attained. Like the Soviet Information Bureau reports, the article ignores the frustrations the Western, Briansk, and Central fronts experienced against the determined resistance of Army Group Center. It elides the failures of the Southwestern and Voronezh fronts in reaching the Dnieper River and the horrible losses Erich von Manstein visited upon Vatutin and Golikov's forces in his February counteroffensive, in which Army Group South reclaimed Kharkov and Belgorod.²³⁰

Kurskaia pravda also challenged the invincibility of the Wehrmacht. The victory at Stalingrad served as the ideal opening for this narrative. The newspaper celebrated the destruction of the German Sixth Army, proclaiming the Wehrmacht's losses in terms of both men and materiel. It likewise championed the heroism of individual Red Army soldiers and units.²³¹ Like the reporting of the 1943 offensive operations, such articles glossed over the shortcomings of the Soviet military. They made no mention of the flawed intelligence estimates regarding the numbers of Axis forces the Red Army had trapped in the cauldron. Nor did the paper comment on the subsequent frustration Stavka felt by the German Sixth Army's stubborn

²³⁰ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 53, April 6, 1943.

²³¹ McReynolds, "Dateline Stalingrad," 31; Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!*, 190.

resistance that required seven Soviet armies more than two months of bitter fighting to finally force Friedrich von Paulus's surrender on February 2, 1943.²³²

The International War

Kurskaia pravda did not limit its coverage to the Red Army's activity against the Germans, but also reported on Germany's misfortunes in the North Africa campaign.²³³

Kurskaia pravda did not offer any description of how the military situation in the West had evolved over the course of the previous eighteen months. Rather, it dropped the reader into the daily newsfeed with short press releases on such topics as the Anglo-American campaign in North Africa and the Allied bombing campaign in Europe.²³⁴ It used its coverage to highlight German losses in the West. In so doing it simultaneously reinforced the idea that the Wehrmacht was not invincible and that the USSR had strong and good allies in Great Britain and the United States. The paper also included reports of civil unrest in occupied countries, announcements of Allied leaders, and the geopolitical situation in the periphery of German occupation thus demonstrating Germany's weakening political situation in the war.

Kurskaia pravda used its coverage of the British victory in North Africa not only to provide a narrative of events, but also to convey tactical successes scored by Allied forces against German panzer divisions. By the time the Red Army liberated Kursk in February, Field

²³² *Kurskaia pravda* also did not inform its readers of Marshal Zhukov's catastrophic defeat in Rzhev salient, as elements of Army Group Center blunted the Red Army offensive in Operation Mars.

²³³ Like the central newspapers, *Kurskaia pravda* dedicated only a half-page or less to international affairs, which consisted primarily of stories distributed for publication from the center.

²³⁴ Karel Berkhoff observes that the central newspapers published few stories that provided little detail on the North Africa campaign. *Motherland in Danger*, 252. But one finds that *Kurskaia pravda's* coverage of the campaign allowed readers to follow the important events of the fighting.

Marshal Irwin Rommel's Afrika Korps had experienced its point of greatest expansion to the Suez Canal. The British 8th Army had stopped it at the Battle of El Alamein in October 1942, after which it pushed the Germans westward along the Libyan coast. For the remainder of February and the first half of March, *Kurskaia pravda* provided consistent, but limited coverage of the Allies' advances into Tunisia.²³⁵ On March 23, 1943, the newspaper published an extended account of Great Britain's successful repulse of Rommel's final offensive at Medenine. It included a detailed description of antitank methods the British deployed against Rommel's armor.²³⁶ A reason why Soviet propagandists dedicated so much space to discuss tactics may have been that, as German panzer divisions had plagued the Soviet military since 1941, they wished to convey to readers that Germany's enemies were developing ways to stop the Wehrmacht's tanks.²³⁷ The assertion that British infantry could destroy German tanks gave further credence to claims that the Red Army was also successfully destroying German tanks.

The US Army's debut against the Afrika Korps provided Soviet propagandists with another opportunity for a light touch in terms of verisimilitude. The United States had landed its

²³⁵ Karel Berkhoff observes that Stalin, and by extension the central newspapers, ignored the Allied campaign in Africa because of his preoccupation that the Allies had not opened a second front. *Motherland in Danger*, 252. While *Kurskaia pravda* provided nominal coverage of the campaign against Rommel, the paper kept readers abreast of the major events related to the fighting.

²³⁶ The article begins with a fulsome description of 8th Army's advantages, both for a strong defensive stand and maneuverability for offensive thrusts, due to excellent positioning. It notes how Rommel sent his tanks and mechanized infantry under cover of a weak opening artillery barrage. The British waited until the German tanks had reached the 8th Army's first trenches and, behind the tanks, German infantry began to dismount from their trucks before unleashing a devastating howitzer barrage on the soldiers while British antitank guns cut the German armor apart. The author took the time to note that British antitank gun displacement allowed for both frontal and flanking fire and that many of the tanks destroyed included machines of the latest type. The Red Army was in the process of rethinking how it should deploy antitank guns on the defensive. Like the British here, it would use them to devastating effect in the coming summer deliberate defensive stand at Kursk.

²³⁷ While one cannot determine why the author decided to include this information regarding 8th Army's antitank gun positioning, this is also a time when Red Army artillerists began a commitment to clustered antitank gun emplacements designed to hit German tanks at their weaker side armor. The Germans sent Rommel a small number of the new Tiger tank. The fact that the author wrote that British antitank methods proved successful could have been a means to ameliorate fears about the supposed invincibility of the new armor.

first major force to face the Germans in French Morocco and Algeria in November 1942 and began to coordinate its forces to attack Rommel's western flank. The resumption of *Kurskaia pravda's* press run coincided with the six-day Battle of Kasserine Pass. Here, the American army suffered a serious defeat in this initial engagement with the Germans, but it did stop the German advance west into the Americans' rear areas. The Germans discontinued their advance and withdrew to their initial staging areas. Citing a February 25 Reuters report, *Kurskaia pravda* informed its readers of the continuing German retreat to the north and northwest of Kasserine Pass.²³⁸ This incident indicates that at least in 1943, the Soviet press extended to its allies the same charitable coverage as it gave the Red Army when reporting on setbacks.²³⁹ The following day the paper published the assessment of US Vice President Henry Wallace, in which he acknowledged that, while the American soldiers were extremely dissatisfied with the military situation in North Africa, they would not rest until they had driven the Germans from North Africa, Italy, and Berlin. Wallace assured his listeners, including those in newly liberated Soviet territories, that the American soldiers would fight to the end.²⁴⁰

Not restricting its coverage of the fighting in North Africa to operations alone, *Kurskaia pravda* also introduced its readers to their allies' military and economic strength, as well as their moral fortitude. On May 6 the TASS reporter from Algiers observed that the American units possessed a full complement of equipment and demonstrated excellent technical proficiency with their weapons. Further, they had high morale and maintained strong discipline. The author concluded by noting that both the regular soldiers and officers showed great interest in the USSR

²³⁸ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 22, February 26, 1943.

²³⁹ Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!*, 161-64.

²⁴⁰ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 23, February 27, 1943.

and have studied the military experience of the Red Army.²⁴¹ Such language fostered not only confidence in the military efficacy of the Soviet Union's allies, but also put a more human face on the men who were defeating the Germans in the West.

The propagandists in Moscow and Kursk took many opportunities to articulate and reinforce the panoply of the Soviet Union's allies and enemy's. In the articles that covered combat between 8th Army and the Afrika Korps, the author's language situated the reader on the side of the British, using the words *protivnik* (adversary) and *vrag* (enemy) to refer to German forces in the field in much the same way Soviet propagandists described them in articles that covered the Red Army's actions.²⁴² Further, when discussing joint Anglo-American operations the TASS dispatches used the term *soiuzniki* (allies). The official line for Kursk's peasantry was clear; the Americans and the British were the Soviet people's allies.²⁴³ After the Afrika Korps surrendered, *Kurskaia pravda* published several articles detailing Axis losses in terms of men and materiel.²⁴⁴ The newspaper also included a retrospective article that mocked Axis ambitions in the Middle East and celebrated its failure. The author concluded with Stalin's observation of the Allied victory in North Africa that the Red Army had made the first against the Germans in the East (in Stalingrad) and now that Germany has suffered a strike from the West from "the forces of our Allies" that had resulted in a united general strike against the fascists.²⁴⁵ While the

²⁴¹ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 75, May 5, 1943.

²⁴² *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 42, March 23, 1943.

²⁴³ As will be discussed below, many reports from Kursk's districts complained of agitators who had no conception of the USSR's allies and enemies.

²⁴⁴ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 82, May 15, 1943. Perhaps breaking with convention, *Kurskaia pravda* provided accurate information on the numbers of Axis soldiers captured.

²⁴⁵ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 83, May 16, 1943.

author in his own voice and in the voice of Stalin made it clear that the Red Army was the first force to deliver a significant blow to the enemy's land forces, each gave full-throated support to the Americans and the British as "allies" of the Soviet Union who were bound to the same goal of the Soviet leadership, the Red Army, and by extension, the people of Kursk.²⁴⁶

Kurskaia pravda's reporting on the Western Allies' strategic bombing campaign observed that German cities, as well as other targets in German-occupied Europe, were under constant bombardment. The editors kept readers apprised of the bombing campaign by publishing one report every other issue if not every issue. Coverage always included the target city (at times even a specific factory). On occasion, the articles listed the numbers of bombs dropped, the numbers of planes involved in the strike, and the losses in planes. The paper supplemented these single attack reports with monthly reports of totals of bomb tonnage dropped in the previous month and enemy planes destroyed individually by the US and British air forces.²⁴⁷ These articles did not speculate on the results of the bombing campaign on the target populations or German war production. It would have been impossible to determine concrete losses to German industry but the editors could certainly celebrate the loss of a German plane over Germany and France as that meant one less plane over the Soviet Union. The monthly bombing tonnage reports also implied that the German civilian population was also experiencing the war at a visceral level. Like the coverage of the North Africa campaign, reporting on the

²⁴⁶ The author notes earlier in the article that Hitler ordered Rommel to release two panzer division to be sent to Army Group Center for the attack on Moscow in autumn 1941. Karel Berkhoff notes that Stalin (through the central newspapers) did not give any praise to the Western Allies until 1943. See Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*, 252-53. When one considers that the Allies activities up to this point had not merited much comment from the Soviet strategic point of view, one might appreciate better Stalin's reserve of praise in 1941 and 1942.

²⁴⁷ For example, *Kurskaia pravda* published the American Army Air Force totals for March 1943 on April 3 (no. 51), and likewise for the Royal Air Force on April 11 (no. 58).

bombing campaign gave full support to the actions the Soviet Union's allies took against the common enemy.

In March *Kurskaia pravda* informed readers of the testimony that the administrator of the Lend-Lease Program, Edward Stettinius, gave to the US Congress. He told Congress that the Soviet Union produced the majority of the weapons that the Red Army used to stop and push the German army back and appealed to US lawmakers to do everything in their power to increase deliveries to the USSR.²⁴⁸ *Kurskaia Pravda* also reported on a diplomatic firestorm in Washington caused by the US ambassador to the Soviet Union, William H. Standley, who complained that the Soviet press underreported the delivery of US Lend-Lease supplies. Several senior members of Congress condemned Standley's comments, affirming that the task of defeating Axis tyranny was so great the Allied nations needed to base their unity on complete faith and understanding of one another.²⁴⁹ Even with the reporting of the diplomatic row, *Kurskaia pravda* informed readers that the Soviet Union had allies that cared for the relationship they had with the Soviet Union and were willing to support that relationship with significant material aid.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 29, March 7, 1943. While the article acknowledged that Lend-Lease played a role in hurting the enemy, it assured its readers that the role was not so great.

²⁴⁹ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 33, March 12, 1943. *Kurskaia pravda* reported that, according to Welles, such faith and understanding existed and that he believed that Ambassador Standley's comments were not meant to create doubts, but rather to liquidate any skepticism as to the presence of this faith and understanding. TASS also disclosed that the New York papers had printed the statements of Deputy Secretary of State, Sumner Welles, ambassador at-large, Wendell Wilkie, and the chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee.

²⁵⁰ On March 13, *Kurskaia pravda* published a more detailed account of Stettinius's March 7 testimony to Congress. Stettinius announced that the US had sent both raw materials for war production as well as tremendous numbers of finished goods to help the Soviet Union in its war effort. He offered details with regard to the amounts and types of raw materials and finished products that included 75,000 tons of steel railroad rails, 268,000 tons of oil products, communications equipment, 72,500 trucks, 17,500 Jeeps, 1,300 tractors, and three million pairs of boots. *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 34, March 13, 1943.

Reporting on the Geopolitical Situation

While burnishing the military and economic accomplishments of the USSR's allies, *Kurskaia pravda* portrayed a Germany in a deteriorating geopolitical situation, with discontent among the Axis powers and the need to intensify its war efforts at home. The paper made the case that many of Germany's allies viewed the loss at Stalingrad as an indicator of the decline and eventual fall of German dominance on the continent. A February 19 article reported on Hungarian Prime Minister Miklos Kallay's inability to establish a clear understanding of the fate of the Hungarian Second Army. The people of Hungary vented their frustration by sending masses of unsigned letters that accused the government of treason against the national interest. The author chided Hungary's rulers for having led their country into a hopeless war for German interests.²⁵¹ An article on April 20 mentions a serious uptick in the desertion rate in Italian army units garrisoned in cities around the country, causing the Italian government to carry out roundups that often resulted in violent clashes. Unrest among the Italian soldiers coincided with reports of an increase in antifascist sentiments in Italy. The following day *Kurskaia pravda* announced similar problems in the Bulgarian army, as many soldiers and officers had been suspected of expressing an "antifascist mood." This situation led the Germans to replace these unsuitable officers with younger men who had recently returned to Bulgaria from Germany. The author claimed that many former officers had joined the partisans, and that another group of soldiers with loose connections to the antifascist movement had been arrested and many of them had been shot.²⁵²

²⁵¹ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 15, February 19, 1943.

²⁵² *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 64, April 20, 1943, *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 65, April 21, 1943.

General unrest in countries Germany occupied provided another venue to demonstrate German weakness. Readers in Kursk learned in late February that the Polish government in exile had rejected any separate agreements with the Germans and sought friendship and cooperation with the USSR.²⁵³ In a speech to Vichy and occupied France, Charles de Gaulle encouraged French youths to do all in their power to harass the enemy, such as hiding from labor mobilizations and joining the resistance.²⁵⁴ April brought more stories of active resistance against the German occupiers in Yugoslavia and Greece. For example, a large group operating in Bosnia captured several cities.²⁵⁵ In Turin, 50,000 workers at the Fiat factory went on strike to demand peace, higher wages, and better working conditions. Lastly, a large group of German soldiers in Norway attempted to desert, announcing that Germany had already lost the war. They were rounded up and placed in concentration camps.²⁵⁶ Several stories like these appeared daily on page four of *Kurskaia pravda*. The editors published stories from all around Europe and with a variety of themes, but they all drew the same conclusion: the Germans were not invincible and people just like the people of Kursk who lived under German authority or under a collaborative regime chose to resist and challenge German authority.

When given the opportunity, Moscow's propagandists fashioned rhetorical weapons out of the enemy's own words. On February 18, 1943, Joseph Goebbels delivered a fiery speech announcing a new phase of combat: Total War. He designed the speech to mobilize the nation after a major setback and to redouble its efforts for a quicker victory. The Soviet press took it as another sign of the cracking façade of German invincibility. Three days after the "Total War"

²⁵³ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 25, March 2, 1943.

²⁵⁴ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 24, February 28, 1943.

²⁵⁵ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 54, April 7, 1943, *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 58, April 11, 1943.

²⁵⁶ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 28, March 6, 1943.

speech, *Kurskaia pravda* ran an article under the title “Goebbels Whimpers, the Hitlerite Cut-Throats Sense Their Approaching Destruction” (*Gebbel’s skulit, gitlerovskie golovorezy chuiut svoiu blizkuiu gibel’*). While Goebbels used the recent defeat at Stalingrad as the starting point for his speech, the Soviet press focused solely on the handful of references he made to this battle. The author stated through Goebbels that Germany had underestimated the military potential of the Red Army, the Wehrmacht had received a tragic blow, and it now faced a crisis on the Eastern Front. The brief article ended with Goebbels asserting that Germany could now no longer rely on its allies and must win this war on its own.²⁵⁷ In an example of clever editing, the author used Goebbels’s own words to impress upon the people of Kursk the formidable nature of the Red Army and the deep reverberations the defeat had on the Nazi leadership, which had led it to reconfigure its economic priorities and attitude to its foe to the East.

Two weeks later, *Kurskaia pravda* collated reports from around the German periphery to describe some of the new “total” measures being implemented in countries under German suzerainty. Finland and Norway had lowered the working age minimums and raised the maximums to increase the labor pool.²⁵⁸ Citing a press release from Ankara, the author reported that Germany sent a note to its close allies emphasizing to them the serious situation on the Soviet-German front. The note informed Germany’s allies that it expected them to submit a maximum of both materiel and labor for the war effort and enumerated the numbers of divisions expected from each country. The article explained how the Germans sought to extract all that it could from the nations it occupied by any means necessary. It characterized the German “New Order” as one in which all the peoples of the world were treated as slaves to be disposed of as

²⁵⁷ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 17, February 21, 1943.

²⁵⁸ Ironically, these age ranges were narrower than those imposed upon the people of Kursk under Soviet control.

their masters saw fit. To counter this, the “united nations” had to destroy Hitler’s “historic mission,” and the first sure step would be to liquidate the Tunis Front, transform it into a staging area for an advance on Europe in order to fulfill the basic strategic task, “the establishment of a second front.”²⁵⁹

Reporting on the Oblast–General Restoration

While the center provided more than half of *Kurskaia pravda*’s content, the local editor, M. Pavlov, and a handful of writers reported on events in the city and oblast. In February and March, Pavlov featured articles and other announcements detailing the restoration of basic services to Kursk and other cities in the oblast. Pavlov published many of the announcements, such as the incremental restoration of electricity throughout the city,²⁶⁰ at the bottom of page four, along with the help wanted ads and movie listings. *Kurskaia pravda* published several articles on the restoration of the city’s water supply. They praised the initiative and resourcefulness of the plumbers in bringing the pumping stations back online, applying to them heroic qualities they also attributed to the military.²⁶¹ The restoration of communications with Moscow and the resumption of mail service also merited attention.²⁶²

²⁵⁹ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 29, March 7, 1943.

²⁶⁰ Supposedly, the Germans had rebuilt the city’s electricity power station upon taking the city in 1941 and could not bear to destroy it when they retreated in 1943. This resulted in the speedy restoration of power, a much less heroic feat of the workers.

²⁶¹ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 32, March 11, 1943, *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 38, March 18, 1943. The narrative thrust of these articles began with the plumbers’ initial assessments of the destroyed water pumping stations. Such destruction required many of Kursk’s skilled workers to demonstrate a determined resourcefulness to scour the city for spare parts and work without a break until the basic needs of the people were met. The editors framed the plumbers’ timely completion of their work as a matter of honor, both encouraging and imploring them to bring the water works to working condition in the time allotted.

²⁶² *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 22, February 26, 1943, *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 24, February 28, 1943. The renewal of mail service after eighteen months resulted in the immediate release of a backlog of 30,000 letters and 6,000 issues of central newspapers. *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 31, March 10, 1943. The editors did not restrict their coverage to Kursk city alone, occasionally publishing articles on the resumption of basic services in other cities in the oblast. In the

While extoling the accomplishments of skilled workers in restoring basic utilities, *Kurskaia pravda* appealed to all people to reorganize the food supply for the workers, restore industrial enterprises, and reopen the vital railroad junction in the Kirov District of the city. It called for district authorities to reestablish the procurement system on the kolkhozes and for city authorities to set up a network of cafeterias and shops. The paper announced the opening of food distribution points as they appeared.²⁶³ *Kurskaia pravda* reported that military and civilian leaders under the direction of the oblast soviet would hasten the work required to reconstruct Kursk's rail yard and the major railroad lines in and out of the city.²⁶⁴ Even as the paper reported factory openings as they occurred, *Kurskaia pravda* published retrospective articles that offered the reader the larger picture of restoration since liberation. The editors presented readers with a host of facts and figures of the numbers and types of factories that had reopened, their production rates, often accompanied by explanations at how output increased with every passing month since liberation. The editors featured the output of individual workers who regularly overfulfilled the norm by tremendous amounts.²⁶⁵

Many articles republished from center papers spoke of "brotherly help" from the deep rear to the newly liberated regions. These articles detailed the regions of origin, the amounts of seed, livestock, and medicines allocated for the destitute, and the numbers of tractors and other farm implements (and even agronomists) that had been sent. The articles did not include,

first weeks of liberation the men and women of Oboian' city worked with great enthusiasm to restore the local power station to provide light to the city. Inhabitants of surrounding villages brought grain to the mill in their horse-drawn carts and visited the newly opened industrial combine (*promkombinat*) that provided dry goods to the people. *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 29, March 7, 1943.

²⁶³ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 22, February 26, 1943, *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 25, March 2, 1943.

²⁶⁴ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 18, February 22, 1943.

²⁶⁵ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 50, April 2, 1943.

however, the destinations of these shipments or reports of grateful collective farmers in Kursk or any of the other liberated regions. Kursk's editors presented stories on mutual aid within the oblast from the point of view of the recipients of material help and not anonymous allocators of relief goods. For example, *Kurskaia pravda* reported that 200 transports of foodstuffs had arrived in Kursk from Besedinskii District. While the collective farmers of Besedinskii prepared this gift as a means to show thanks to Stalin for having organized their liberation, they sent this evidence of "brotherly help" to fellow Kuriani in the oblast capital. Kursk's city leaders celebrated such initiative as a sign of unity among Kursk's peasants and working class in resistance to mutual subjugation by the "hated enemy."²⁶⁶ *Kurskaia pravda's* emphasis on brotherly help echoed the unified family trope that was prevalent in Moscow's newspapers and in other local papers.²⁶⁷ The invocation of a national family was not the only method Kursk's propagandists deployed to unite the people to common purpose.

The German Occupation as a Source of Moral Shock

Immediately after *Kurskaia pravda's* presses began rolling, the paper published descriptions of the German occupation from "special correspondents" and party leaders.²⁶⁸ It

²⁶⁶ The article introduced some of the peasants responsible for collecting and transporting the "gift" to the city inhabitants and provided a brief description of how they accomplished the feat. These examples of "brotherly help" were designed to serve as a model, however, as the contingent from Besedinskii publicly appealed to kolkhozniki of the oblast to take similar initiative by supplying foodstuffs to the workers of the city and the urban orphans. *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 29, March 7, 1943.

²⁶⁷ Jeffrey Jones presents a detailed discussion of the representation of the "Soviet family" in Rostov's party press in the period of reconstruction. Jones observes that the local Rostov paper represented women as caregivers who sacrificed for the Motherland, while the local party assumed the role of provider for the families of soldiers (i.e., women and children). *Kurskaia pravda's* formulations of family closely resemble those Jones noted in Rostov's local press. See Jeffrey W. Jones, *Everyday Life and the "Reconstruction" of Soviet Russia during and after the Great Patriotic War, 1943-1948* (Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2008). See also Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!*, 181-82.

²⁶⁸ This is clearly one point where external language agreed with internal language. District leaders in Kursk Oblast loudly and persistently voiced the suffering of civilians and acute shortages in their jurisdictions. One finds ample

presented atrocity both as a communal and individual experience, and did not flinch from presenting the sweep of German actions in graphic detail. The newspaper described how groups of Germans indiscriminately killed large numbers of people and destroyed public property. But it also drew readers' attention to barbarous acts of pillage and murder committed by one or two enemy soldiers against an individual person or family unit. For example, on February 20 the paper published two pieces on German actions in two districts southeast of Kursk city that were recent sites of heavy fighting. In Staryi Oskol, the Germans destroyed many buildings, and erected two gallows to publicly execute several civilians. They also ran a brothel for officers, sending many local women and girls under threat of arms. Roughly 5,000 people from the district worked as slave laborers in Germany. One inhabitant reported that the Germans shot Soviet people in local barns on a daily basis and every night the local people heard the heartrending cries of martyrs.²⁶⁹ In the same issue a brief article entitled "Atrocities of the Fascist Outlaws" (*Zverstva fascistskikh razboinikov*) noted that in Novo-Oskolskii District the Germans sent 4,000 people to slave labor, imprisoned up to 1,000 people, and shot several hundred, including entire families. The article reported that German soldiers shot the family of P. E. Aronov, including his wife, two daughters, mother and several other relatives. Providing the names of victims with a list of extended family created a personal connection between them and the reader. By combining the district's total losses with the names of family members, the editors showed readers the damage the Germans wrought on a large scale, while also engaging

evidence of this in the minutes of the April plenum. Further, oblast leaders, such as Doronin, did not discount the suffering of the people. In his opening address in the plenum, Doronin declared that the people had suffered tremendously and the oblast was currently short in terms of all resources. Having said that, he still insisted that the party leaders had to find ways to meet the demands of the Red Army and the state. GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1. D. 2899. For a discussion of internal and external language in Bolshevik Party discourse in the Civil War period, see Donald J. Raleigh, *Experiencing Russia's Civil War: Politics, Society and Revolutionary Culture in Saratov, 1917-1922* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

²⁶⁹ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 16, February 20, 1943.

readers at a personal level by emphasizing the deaths of individuals. The Germans perpetrated violence in public and private spaces and against the entire community as well as family members. Such a vision underscored German actions as the destruction of the whole of local society, one family, one person at a time. The advantage for the propagandist in reporting atrocity this way is that one can construct a community of suffering experienced by all with a series of statistics, while inserting individual tragedies. The emphasis on the destruction of one family engenders a sense of individual tragedy, or a moral shock, among a collection of statistics.²⁷⁰

On February 18 *Kurskaia pravda*'s editors requested readers to send accounts of German atrocities in their vicinity or documents, such as decrees or announcements of the German occupiers, that they had in their possession. Thus began a communal exposition of German abuse and destruction that appeared in articles from throughout the oblast. Four testimonials appeared in the March 7 issue under the banner "Tragedy in Khozle," a village in Ivaninskii District. Signed by nine inhabitants, it outlined acts the Germans had committed in the last hours before their retreat. The Germans drove fifty-two males, mostly teenagers and elderly, out of the village under the pretext of clearing roads and shot them. They murdered older women in their huts, "desecrated our daughters," and left scores of children orphans. A. S. Teterkin, with three sons in the Red Army, wrote that the Germans murdered his oldest child, along with dozens of other prisoners, outside the POW camp in neighboring Fatezhskii District. M. E. Rudenko, whose husband served in the Red Army, testified that the Germans stole livestock and destroyed infrastructure before the Red Army arrived and prevented a fire from consuming the whole village. The editors also included a two-paragraph piece from T. Rudenko entitled "Rape"

²⁷⁰ Ironically, this serves as kind of a proof of Stalin's supposed maxim that "the death of one man is a tragedy; the death of one million is a statistic."

(*nasilie*). Rudenko wrote that two “Fritzes” drove a mother and father out of their house and tied their daughter to a bed by her hair and violated her (*glumit’sia nad docher’iu*). In a separate incident, a German soldier raped a mother of three after having forced her children from the house.²⁷¹ In a visceral way, *Kurskaia pravda* compiled case after case of atrocity committed by German soldiers. Having established moral outrage and identified the agent who perpetrated the outrage, the editors offered a corresponding outlet for the people’s righteous fury: revenge.²⁷²

The apparent difficulty Kursk’s leaders faced in inciting the people to seek vengeance was that they did not want the civilians picking up weapons in search of Germans to kill. Instead they insisted on one degree of separation in the delivery of vengeance: the Red Army would be the instrument of the people’s vengeance. Testimonials of atrocity usually concluded with an appeal to the Red Army to avenge or atone for the horrors endured by the civilian inhabitants of the oblast. The paper’s editors did not only relegate civilian appeals for revenge to the final sentences of testimonials, but deployed slogans for retribution. For example, the banner across the top of the third page of the February 28 issue reads, “Comrade-Frontoviki, The Germans Killed My Four Children and Mother. Avenge Them! Shoot the Fascist Beasts without Mercy! Save Our Children from the Germans!” When reporting on atrocities, the paper presented three

²⁷¹ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 29, March 7, 1943. For a discussion of the center’s use of revenge in propaganda, see Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!*, 175-77; Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*, pp 224-34.

²⁷² Jasper calls this “frame alignment.” He observes that organizers and participants for action must achieve a common definition for a problem and a common prescription for solving it. Organizers must articulate three successive types of framing for recruitment: “diagnostic, in which a movement convinces potential converts that a problem needs to be addressed; prognostic, in which it convinces them of appropriate strategies, tactics and targets; and motivational, in which it exhorts them to get involved in these activities.” Jasper notes that an audience will more likely accept a frame if the organizers claims are empirically credible, reflect the audience’s experience and “fit with the narratives the audience [members] tell about their own lives.” See Jasper, “The Emotions of Protest,” 413. By using the voices of the victims from different districts in the oblast, *Kurskaia pravda*’s editors were attempting to construct a frame of shared experience with which all civilians in the oblast could identify. Further, Jasper argues that framing conditions as unjust is especially important in the recruitment process. As shown above, *Kurskaia pravda*’s editors articulated the unjustness of the German occupation. The paper also reminded its readers of their many brothers and sisters who remained in unjust conditions under German occupation and depended on the Red Army, supported by the labor and material donations of the people in the rear, for their liberation.

distinct groups: perpetrators, victims, and avengers. It sought to unite victims and avengers in common cause, while demarcating a division of activity between them. In no case did the paper present a civilian as demanding to kill a German, nor did the editors encourage the people to commit violence.

In the atrocity articles, the editors constructed a close, familial relationship between Kursk's civilians and the Red Army soldiers living among them. For example, a resident of Iastrebovskii District recounted that Germans shot her four young sons and her mother while she was unconscious. Having told readers of the horrors she experienced, her story shifted to her husband, then at the front defending the people from the enemy soldiers. Once she invoked the Red Army soldiers as defenders of the motherland, she introduced her appeal to all soldiers to kill the Germans in order to spare other Soviet children her fate. By naming her husband as a member of the military, the story reinforced the bonds between front and rear through family connections. *Kurskaia pravda* also examined this relationship from the soldiers' perspective. For example, it published a letter from a soldier from Novo-Oskolskii District about the arrest, torture, and shooting of family members of soldiers. The author made no direct appeal, but the letter offers little ambiguity to the audience of soldiers as to why they needed to keep up the fight.²⁷³ Further, it reinforced to the civilian audience that its brothers, fathers, and sons who served in the Red Army were aware of the people's suffering and accepted the role of the instrument of the people's justice.

Such a construction of the family, with injured women demanding that men defend the nation and destroy the invader, adhered to traditional gender norms. As *Kurskaia pravda's* editors assigned the roles of "protector" and "avenger" to men only, they overlooked the reality

²⁷³ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 24, February 28, 1943.

of the gender composition of the Red Army at this time. Female membership in the Soviet armed forces had reached its peak in 1943 and women at this time fought the Germans in a variety of capacities. They flew combat aircraft, drove tanks, sniped, and served in artillery and machine gun units. The young women serving in the Red Army in 1943 were every bit as capable as men in wreaking vengeance against the Germans, yet *Kurskaia pravda* did not speak of sisters, wives, and daughters as instruments of retribution. The paper portrayed women primarily as victims. To be sure, the paper characterized children and elderly men in the same way. In so doing, *Kurskaia pravda* equated these three categories of people by their inability to defend themselves, thus requiring the protection of young men. *Kurskaia pravda's* interpretation of women's role in the spring of 1943 resembles those made by the central newspapers, such as *Pravda* and *Komsomolskaia pravda* in 1941. Historian Anna Krylova observes that the Soviet leadership's position on women early in the war, as voiced through the central newspapers, was that their combat should be symbolic, in the form of production for the front.²⁷⁴ It is likely that Kursk's leaders, now administering a territory that had just emerged from occupation, employed similar logic, insisting on traditional gender roles in local propaganda as a means to channel the liberated population's energy into activities that supported the Red Army.

As *Kurskaia pravda* presented the point of view of the afflicted peasantry, it also inserted the voices of local authorities, who reinforced the suffering of the people in their districts, while including initial directives for concerted activity to recover from the occupation. For example, the chairman of the Maloarkhangel'skii District Soviet, G. F. Dobrikov, reported that heavy fighting in the area and the German retreat resulted in the burning of scores of buildings in the district center. Once he had listed a number of atrocities the Germans perpetrated, Dobrikov

²⁷⁴ See Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 113.

followed with a report of local inhabitants repairing the burned buildings, collecting abandoned war materiel, and the beginning of work to restore schools and industrial enterprises. He explained that the people understood that the surest way to push the Germans further away from the city was to keep the roads clear of snow and ensure a steady and fast supply of shot and shell to the front. He noted that hundreds of citizens visited the district soviet expressing one aspiration: to work as energetically as possible in order to more quickly restore the economy of the district.²⁷⁵ While this letter reinforced the editors' frame of the Red Army as guarantor of the people's security, it introduced the more mundane activity of restoring local institutions as a means to recover from the occupation.

Along with *Kurskaia pravda's* construction of the Red Army as the people's instrument of revenge, oblast propagandists formulated a complementary relationship between the people and the Red Army designed to motivate the people to collective action. They argued that as the Red Army had liberated the people of the oblast, they were now indebted to military. The people could repay this debt only through labor and donations of resources. This other formulation of the relationship characterized the people as indentured servants to the Red Army.

The Debt the Kuriani Owed to the Red Army

Kursk's leaders understood that the Red Army's advance depended heavily on the people's maximum commitment in terms of labor and materiel. Repeating messages about the myriad tasks facing Kursk's people did not guarantee their completion. Party propagandists

²⁷⁵ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 29, March 7, 1943. In another case the raikom secretary of Svobodinskii District, T. Chernyk, submitted a letter that described a group of women walking along a road, past the destroyed sanatorium, and to the railroad bridge, the site where the Germans shot several hundred Soviet citizens. People came to this place to identify the remains of fathers and sons. Chernyk then listed the material destruction in his district. Having shared some of the hardships in his district with readers, his letter abruptly shifted to a discussion of reconstruction work with a list of services they had restored and to claims that activities such as this would be the key to a new life. *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 25, March 2, 1943.

needed to develop noncoercive yet compelling reasons why people should volunteer their tired bodies for backbreaking labor, surrender their last morsels of bread from half-empty plates, and donate all of their savings to airplane and tank construction.²⁷⁶ Obkom Secretary Doronin articulated the basis upon which all appeals would rest in an article published on February 28. It describes the successes of the Red Army in the south, followed by a proclamation that the Red Army's current offensive that demonstrates the strength of the country and the power of the Red Army in fulfilling the strategic plans of Stalin.²⁷⁷ Doronin underscored the suffering endured under occupation, promising that that "savage despotism's . . . regime of the whip and hunger . . . experienced by the workers and the oblast will remain forever in the past" now that the Red Army had returned a free and genuine life to the inhabitants of Kursk Oblast. Doronin praised Lieutenant General I. D. Cherniakhovsky and his 60th Army for having liberated so many villages and cities (with Kursk city among them). He pledged that the people of Kursk would never forget "your names, the glorious soldiers who liberated [them]. The joy of fathers and mothers, wives and friends, daughters and sons, who have been returned to sunny days, will [give] much gratitude to you [the soldiers]."²⁷⁸ Doronin told the civilians of Kursk in boldface type, "The first thing/debt, the sacred obligation of the people of our oblast to the Red Army [is to] help its further advance with all of our strength." While reiterating the German army's recent losses, Doronin reminded the people of Kursk that the enemy had not been destroyed and as the Red Army continued its offensive, the people had to align with it and give all their strength to

²⁷⁶ Jeffrey Brooks observes that in the first years of the war the central party organ *Pravda* shifted its emphasis on the party, the state, or Stalin as the people's prime motivation for action to a mixture of personal motives, ranging from "patriotism, to self-interest, revenge, and protection of dear ones." Jeffrey Brooks, "Pravda Goes to War" in Richard Stites, ed., *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, 14.

²⁷⁷ Ironically, this is the day when Stavka finally accepted the danger of Manstein's counteroffensive and began to take measures to shore up the Voronezh and Southwestern fronts.

²⁷⁸ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 16, February 20, 1943.

help the front.²⁷⁹ This idea of the Red Army as “the liberator from German atrocity” and “the restorer of life” appears in many other articles.

Two weeks later *Kurskaia pravda* published an article entitled “The Debt of Every Citizen to the Red Army,” which, like so many articles that described the relationship between the civilian people and the Soviet military, underscores the Red Army’s needs in its ongoing offensive against the Germans, but shifts emphasis in the nature of the tasks to be carried out by the people. The absence of airfields in close proximity to the quickly advancing front meant that the Red Army spearheads lacked close air support of Soviet air power. The article appeals to those who had been liberated from the prison-like conditions of German occupation to rectify this situation. The author asserts that the Red Army had taken the life and honor of women under its shield and brought joy to children, stating, “Each of us must always remember . . . and not forget, that we are obliged to the Red Army for our lives and the lives of our kin.” It specified the behavior expected of the people in return: “The obligation of every citizen is to appear promptly when summoned to a collection point, to receive a [work] assignment.” The article informed the people that thousands of citizens, regardless of time and conditions, were to carry out any work task related to the Red Army’s needs.²⁸⁰

Kurskaia pravda found different ways to reiterate the debt Kursk’s peasants owed to the Red Army, such as in the article “What You (singular) Did for the Front Today.” The author singled out kolkhoz workers in Ivaninskii District who cleared the nearby road under fire from German planes. A Red Army commander ordered them to disperse but they refused, informing the officer that the Red Army had liberated them from fascist captivity and that words were not a

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 33, March 12, 1943.

sufficient way to thank their liberators. The only way to properly show gratitude was with deeds. Expanding the importance of road clearing to everyone, the author stresses that all people should participate selflessly in snow removal as it was “the holy duty of every one of us.” The article concludes that the inhabitants of all the liberated prefrontal districts were to give their all to the Red Army offensive. The Soviet organizations did not hold this “debt and obligation” alone, but first and foremost, this was “the debt of every worker.”²⁸¹

Like the kolkhozniki of Ivaninskii District, the story of Katiusha made repayment of the debt an individual matter. In this article a Red Army soldier explains how a local girl helped him and his comrades after they had been wounded and separated from their unit. She volunteered to lead his fellow soldiers to another village, and this required putting the narrator in disguise. In response to his protest of her taking on so much danger, she told him she would not leave him and, if she were to die, she should die helping him.²⁸² Other young women pledged to repay their debt by becoming tractor drivers. Two student tractor drivers testified to their horrible treatment and imprisonment at the hands of the Germans. They determined to remain incarcerated until the Red Army drove the Germans away and returned joy to their lives. They acknowledged the great debt they owed to their liberators and decided to repay them by learning to repair and drive agricultural machines.²⁸³

Doronin also invoked the debt the people owed to the Red Army in speeches he made throughout Kursk city. In one to the workers of Leninskii District, he announced that now that the Red Army had cleaned the city of the German filth the people could not limit their words of

²⁸¹ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 24, February 28, 1943.

²⁸² *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 52, April 4, 1943.

²⁸³ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 56, April 9, 1943.

thanks to their liberators with a cry of “hoorah” only to return to the calm of their own lives. He informed them that they were now to work like the people in the rear had worked and continued to work. The next step in helping the Red Army was restoring the economy of the city and then overfulfilling all production plans. Acknowledging that their lives were severe and difficult, he told them that they still had to exert all their strength because their sacred duty was to ensure that the Red Army liberated all people of the Soviet Union.²⁸⁴

Duty to the Red Army—Cash Donations for Weapons System Construction

Once Kursk’s leaders had articulated and begun disseminating the theme of “debt” the people owed to the Red Army, they published a barrage of responses, on a daily basis, from enthusiastic workers and peasants pledging to fulfill their obligations to the Red Army. The editors couched all the tasks that both the Red Army and the state required of the peasants in terms of the duty the Kuriani owed to their liberators. At times they included the more abstract concept of the Motherland as the object of their duty but the Red Army stood as the most salient recipient of their efforts.

While *Kurskaia pravda* asserted in February and March that the most immediate help the people could give the Red Army was through road clearing and airfield repair and construction. Within days of liberation, oblast leaders began campaigns to collect cash from Kursk’s peasants and workers to finance the construction of an airplane squadron and a tank column both of which

²⁸⁴ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 27, March 5, 1943. Doronin’s speech reflected sentiments he expressed to Communists behind closed doors. He was acutely aware of the suffering of the people. On certain closed-door occasions, such as the April plenum, he argued that party leaders had to recognize the people’s precarious situation and had to help them. While he did not suggest that the party leaders owed help to the people, his language suggests that party had some responsibility in terms of providing some semblance of support to the people. When one considers that Doronin also publicly acknowledged the failures of the Soviet state’s military to protect Kursk’s civilians, one gets the sense that Doronin may have considered the party to have held some responsibility for the German invasion and occupation.

they called “Kurskii Partisan.” Under a February 27 headline “We Will Build Squadrons of Avengers” (*postroim eskadrii i mstitelei*) the editors emphasized the talent and resolve of the Red Army but reminded the people that their defenders still needed fighting vehicles. They listed several other oblasts that had organized collections to fund their own units of hardware. For example, the people of Moskovskii Oblast had gathered more than 120 million rubles to build the tank column, “Moskovskii kolkhoznik.” They argued that the whole nation showed their support for the front and the Red Army through such actions and that the workers of the liberated districts of Kursk Oblast should express their joy and love for the Red Army by donating their own personal savings for the speedy construction of new hardware. Drawing their attention to a more local level, the editors printed an appeal they claimed Stalin sent to the kolkhozniki of Kastorenskii District in which the leader asked the kolkhozniki to help the “Red Army – Liberators” defeat the Hitlerites by strengthening the front.²⁸⁵

The same issue reported that people from various areas in the oblast spontaneously pooled their money as their liberators pushed the German occupiers from their kolkhozes and villages. For example, when upon liberation the people of Piatnitskoe Village in Volokonovskii District learned that people in a neighboring district had gathered money for tank construction, they decided to follow suit in support of their liberators and gathered 14,000 rubles. Workers and white-collar workers of the Novo-Oskolskii City Soviet along with other workers from local enterprises collected over 10,000 rubles from their savings. In the brief window of liberation enjoyed by the people of Belgorod (the Wehrmacht retook the city on March 19-20), individuals donated tens of thousands of rubles from their savings.²⁸⁶ These examples suggest the model-

²⁸⁵ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 23, February 27, 1943.

²⁸⁶ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 23, February 27, 1943.

shame-guilt nexus of harassment *Kurskaia pravda* persistently published. The articles present a two-part means to convince the people to behave in a way desired by party leaders. One aspect of this style of messaging models a specific behavior by informing the reader that other people are capable of performing the act described and therefore every person is capable of following suit. The second aspect of this style of messaging is designed to shame the reader into performing by implying that as so many other people in the oblast are engaging in this behavior they *should* follow suit.

Duty to the Red Army–Food Donations

Food donations or “gifts” to Red Army soldiers still in the field or convalescing in area hospitals became another way the people of Kursk could actively demonstrate their gratitude to the soldiers. A group of people from a kolkhoz organized food collection and distribution, as with the money donations. *Kurskaia pravda* often reported these stories with a quote from a speech or the comments of the provider of the food gift. For example, P. E. Ostankov, the father of two soldiers, gave food to injured combatants who liberated the people in his kolkhoz from the “German yoke” and returned honor to the country.²⁸⁷ A female collective farmer in Shchigrovskii District presented a calf to the soldiers, commenting that she had saved the calf for the Soviet soldiers, her “liberators.” She reasoned that the calf would provide them the necessary health to strike the enemy more effectively.²⁸⁸ *Kurskaia pravda* also featured the work of Komsomolites who took responsibility for providing for the needs of recuperating soldiers and officers. For instance, soldiers in a hospital in Ivaninskii District gratefully accepted

²⁸⁷ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 29 March 7, 1943.

²⁸⁸ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 51, April 3, 1943.

the eggs, milk, tobacco, and vegetables gathered for them by Komsomolite Anastasiia Rasslova and her comrades. The soldiers promised the girls that with their gifts, they would convalesce in order to return to the ranks to crush the hated occupiers with all the more fury.²⁸⁹

Duty to the Red Army—Preparation for the Spring Sowing

Along with gifts to the Red Army, *Kurskaia pravda* presented the fulfillment of the spring sowing as a means for the civilian peasants to pay down their debt to their liberators. The spring sowing debt restructuring campaign began concurrently with the other demands Kursk's leaders made of the civilian population. Again, the editors used the voices of the people to articulate the desired behaviors of the party leaders. February 28 saw the introduction of this year's agricultural season as a payment to the Red Army with the article, "We Will Not Remain in Debt to Our Liberators, We Will Prepare Well for the Sowing" (*Ne ostanemsia v dolgu pered svoimi osvoboditeliami, otlichno podgotovimsia k sevu*). After listing the cash the people of Streletskii District donated for the Kursk Partisan squadron, the road-clearing work they had performed, and the food and medical care they had provided the soldiers, the leadership of Streletskii District announced that they had been busy repairing farm implements and equipment the Germans had destroyed and collecting the necessary seed for a fruitful planting. They affirmed that the Streletskii kolkhozniki burned with one desire—to carry out a premier Soviet spring sowing campaign after their liberation in an exemplary manner.²⁹⁰ The chairman of the "Krasnyi kolos" collective farm offered gifts to wounded soldiers as a mark of gratitude for having saved his fellow kolkhozniki from fascism and promised that they would have a great

²⁸⁹ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 52, April 4, 1943.

²⁹⁰ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 24, February 28, 1943.

spring sowing campaign for the Red Army.²⁹¹ The paper also featured MTS repair work as a dedication to the Soviet military. The head of the political department of the Timskii District MTS, A. Karataev, reported that the workers thought about the Red Army every minute they worked.²⁹² I. Prokolov, the chairman of the III International Kolkhoz of Streletskii District affirmed that the first task they took on after liberation was to restore the kolkhoz in order to prepare for the spring sowing. He acknowledged that only through the Red Army's victories would they have had the opportunity to struggle for a large harvest.²⁹³

Kurskaia pravda repurposed the model-shame paradigm that it had deployed to encourage donations of food and money to the Red Army to push the oblast's collective farmers to finalize their preparations for the spring sowing. Early April brought a plethora of testimonials from throughout the oblast. The raikom secretary of Urazovskii District, M. Pybinskim, cited the preparation of several kolkhozes in his district in addressing the three major tasks expected of all collective farmers. He observed that the kolkhozes "Pobeda," "Krasnyi Iar," and several others had not only collected sufficient seed stocks, but had surplus quantities that they had begun sharing with neighboring kolkhozes in need.

He asserted that 432 work teams had been assembled throughout the oblast with many older kolkhozniki serving as work team leaders with all members having taken ten-day agronomy courses. Pybinskim admitted that their MTS had only repaired eighteen of twenty-nine tractors, but the work teams were busying themselves training cattle to perform field work.

Kurskaia pravda informs readers that the Timskii District MTS had completed repairs on all

²⁹¹ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 25, March 2, 1943.

²⁹² *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 26, March 3, 1943.

²⁹³ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 27, March 5, 1943.

tractors the week before and sent its repair personnel to help other regions. Many kolkhozes in Timskii District had prepared their seed stocks and the district had organized 218 work teams. In Svobodinskii District, the Stalin kolkhoz announced that it was completely prepared for sowing, with a full complement of seed for grain and vegetables, sufficient fertilizer, and repaired implements. All that remained for the kolkhozniki was to make soft harnesses for the cows.²⁹⁴

The paper published dozens of similar short pieces in its April issues. The collective farmers of Maloarkhangel'skii District provided quite possibly the most compelling example of the model-shame paradigm. The report from their district told readers that the farmers there had grown accustomed to working under the sound of artillery fire as the Red Army had stopped its advance in this territory. Even with so many Red Army soldiers among them and so many German soldiers a shell's flight away, the farmers held their meetings, selected their leaders, collected seed, repaired equipment, trained their cows to plow, and manured the fields. They even donated 830,000 rubles of personal savings for the squadron and gave the Red Army soldiers 2,000 tons of grain and 240 tons of meat.²⁹⁵ Not only does this provide a clear example of the possibilities for successful work, but it underscores a new kind of normal for civilians in the Soviet-German War. Front and rear in Maloarkhangel'sk District coexisted in the same space.

In discussing how the kolkhozniki of the "Krasnyi voskhod" artel challenged all other kolkhozes to a competition for the highest yield, Urazovskii District Raikom secretary, Pybinskim, reported that the collective farmers promised to "struggle in a soldier-like way" for a large harvest and strengthen their obligations to practical matters.²⁹⁶ Here, he recalled notions of

²⁹⁴ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 50, April 2, 1943.

²⁹⁵ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 53, April 6, 1943.

²⁹⁶ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 50, April 2, 1943.

duty by blending it with the concept of military-like agricultural production. Similarly, M. Dragunov, who claimed to have begun work as a tractor driver after the Germans wanted to make slaves of his people, noted that this spring he would be obliged to work as if he were at the front. As such he pledged to produce twice the daily norms.²⁹⁷ This kind of messaging served both to demonstrate the military necessity and value for victory of farm labor and also equated labor on the farm with fighting in the field. The goal was to unite the collective farmers with the Red Army. They all participated in the same struggle against a common enemy with fieldwork serving as necessary a function as combat. Svobodinskii District's Stalin kolkhoz echoed this sentiment by confirming that the collective farmers gave their word they would grow a military harvest in 1943.²⁹⁸ In articulating the plan for the spring sowing, the senior agronomist for the MTS in Kursk Oblast, S. Dolzhenkov, laid out some basic guidelines for the tilling responsibilities for tractors, horses, and cows. He made many prognostications about the number of hectares they would sow and concluded his essay that completing such work would be how they would "fight in the current warlike spring. This is what the Motherland and the front demand of us."²⁹⁹

While invoking the need for militaristic agricultural activity, Dolzhenkov also provided the first example of a new object for labor, the Motherland (*rodina*). Further down the column from Dolzhenkov's sowing plans, two attendees of a tractor driving course, N. Shmykova and A. Eliseeva, told their story of arrest and violence at the hands of the Germans and the debt they owed to their liberators. Yet *Kurskaia pravda* printed their story under the title "We Express

²⁹⁷ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 56, April 9, 1943.

²⁹⁸ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 50, April 2, 1943.

²⁹⁹ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 56, April 9, 1943.

Gratitude to the Rodina with Our Work.”³⁰⁰ Here the editors clearly conflate debt to one as debt to the other.

Unification of Front and Rear

The imagery of military harvests and front-line farmers complemented the theme of the unification of front and rear as the only solid basis upon which victory could be won. The central papers supplied many articles *Kurskaia pravda* reprinted that reiterated this theme. They appealed to patriotism and praised the achievements of the Red Army or the Soviet people.³⁰¹ Although the articles called for unity of front and rear, the Red Army clearly took primacy, leaving the rear to supply it and support it while it achieved victory at the front. Some authors invoked Lenin as the authority of precedent who knew victory resulted only from the combined efforts of the front and rear.³⁰² But the party organs also reminded the people that Stalin was the current architect who competently managed the relationship between the fighting forces and the civilian population.³⁰³ A good example that illustrates how the center presented the relationship between front and rear appears in an article that celebrated the Red Army’s achievements at the conclusion of its winter campaign. Extolling the successes of the recent past and warning of future sacrifice, the author reminded his (rarely “her”) readers that final victory was possible only through the mobilization of all resources and the exertion of all the strength of the front and

³⁰⁰ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 56, April 9, 1943.

³⁰¹ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 22, February 26, 1943, “We Will Mobilize All Strength for the Completion of Victory over the Enemy!;” *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 18, February 22, 1943, “The Inexhaustible Strength of Soviet Patriotism.”

³⁰² *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 22, February 26, 1943.

³⁰³ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 18, February 22, 1943. Seweryn Bialer supported such an assessment of Stalin as an able organizer of the mobilization of human and material resources. He drew this conclusion from an analysis of a host of memoirs of high-level Red Army commanders. Seweryn Bialer, *Stalin and His Generals: Soviet Military Memoirs of World War II* (New York: Pegasus, 1969), 36.

rear. He cautioned that the Germans continuously tried to break the nation's defenses and the Red Army had successfully rebutted them, but this was possible only if the rear helped the front. The author pointed out that the rear provided the utmost care in strengthening the military power of the country, listing a host of facts and figures as evidence of this.³⁰⁴

Addressing two districts in Kursk city, obkom secretary Doronin and fellow local leader S. Stepanov celebrated the rear's support for the front as the Red Army began to improve as a fighting force.³⁰⁵ Stepanov argued that the heroic defenses of Moscow, Leningrad, and Sevastopol, along with the victory at Stalingrad and the recent offensive, resulted from the enormous work of the people at the rear.³⁰⁶ Doronin maintained that the tireless labor of the rear in 1942, with a steady supply of materiel to the front, helped the Red Army become a better fighting force.³⁰⁷ The secretary of the Kursk city committee, P. Slizov stated that a full explanation of the unification of the rear and the front as the basis for the USSR's current success would be a useful way to counter the "false propaganda" to which the German occupiers had subjected the Kuriani for eighteen months.³⁰⁸

Some of the local reporting on the Red Army's expulsion of the Germans provided visceral examples of unity of the front and rear. A young kolkhoznik, Dmitrii Churkin, helped the Red Army take the administrative center of Mikhailovskii District.³⁰⁹ *Kurskaia pravda's*

³⁰⁴ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 53, April 6, 1943.

³⁰⁵ In the first week of March 1942, the Kursk City Soviet carried out meetings at each of the four districts within the city. The party leadership of both the oblast and the city participated in these meetings.

³⁰⁶ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 25, March 2, 1943.

³⁰⁷ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 27, March 5, 1943.

³⁰⁸ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 50, April 2, 1943.

³⁰⁹ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 28, March 6, 1943.

editors also began militarizing the peasants, characterizing the people as “Stakhanovites of Wartime” and “Soldiers of the Rear.”³¹⁰ Natal’ia Travnika, whose children and mother the Germans murdered, called not only for the Red Army to kill Germans but urged the “soldiers of the rear” to gain revenge on the enemy through selfless work for the Red Army.³¹¹

Organization of Agitation in the Districts

With *Kurskaia pravda* up and running, oblast leaders turned to district-level newspapers, cadres, radio, and film as important channels of transmission. Although party leaders worked to improve radio and print media, they expected each district committee to organize its own propaganda apparatus. But with the oblast in disarray in the aftermath of German occupation, few raikoms had the wherewithal to organize an agitation apparatus. In the weeks after liberation only members of the district committee, the executive committee of the district soviet, or the political departments of Red Army units carried out political agitation work in the countryside.³¹² As a result, Doronin and other oblast officials emphasized to district leaders the need for them to restore propaganda and agitation apparatuses.³¹³ Unlike newspapers and radio, both of which required sophisticated machinery in short supply, cadres could inform the masses of all the tasks the authorities wished them to carry out, motivate the people to action, coordinate and monitor their labor activities, and report on the people’s production figures. In order to fulfill all these functions, the average agitator needed to be reasonably educated, possess knowledge of party

³¹⁰ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 22, February 26, 1943, *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 46, March 28, 1943.

³¹¹ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 24, February 28, 1943. “Boitsy tyla! Mstite vragu samootverzhennoi rabotoi dlia Krasnoi Armii.”

³¹² GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3052, l. 112.

³¹³ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2899, l. 14.

history and ideology as well as current events both in the Soviet Union and throughout the warring world, and have enthusiasm to motivate and inform others, often while they had to perform their own principal duties.³¹⁴

The district committees established agitation collectives attached to village soviets and MTSs to organize all propaganda activities in the surrounding collective farms.³¹⁵ The raikom bureau had authority to confirm agitation collective leaders in their districts,³¹⁶ tasking party leaders to direct the agitation collectives.³¹⁷ The bureau of Bol'shie Soldatskii District informed the obkom that agitation collective leaders had to be literate or educated party members of high standing whom the bureau had vetted for political reliability.³¹⁸ Finding suitable agitation leaders proved difficult and the top positions in many agitation collectives remained vacant well into June.³¹⁹ The raikom secretary and head of agitation and propaganda in Pristenskii District held seminars on how to organize work in the agitation collectives, the tasks expected of agitators, and current events.³²⁰ The raikom bureaus organized training sessions for agitation leaders. For example, the Timskii District Bureau required its leading party assets to attend bimonthly seminars to review topics such as party history in the post-October period, issues

³¹⁴ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3052, l. 58.

³¹⁵ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, l. 39. For example, in Streletskii District eighteen agitation collectives were attached to village soviets and two were attached to MTS. GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3039, ll. 18, 20. Staro-Oskolskii District had 45 agitation collectives with 400 agitators and Pristenskii District had established fifteen agitation collectives in early April.

³¹⁶ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, l. 77. (Oboianskii District)

³¹⁷ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, l. 39; GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3052, l. 58.

³¹⁸ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, l. 53. (Bol'shie Soldatskii District)

³¹⁹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, l. 53. (Bol'shie Soldatskii District)

³²⁰ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, ll. 42-3.

related to economic production, and the political map of the world.³²¹ The Shchigrovskii District Bureau met with agitation collective leaders to discuss specific policies from Moscow and the obkom. It also outlined lectures on fact-based and inspirational topics, such as the war, the current international situation, and tasks of the Komsomol in the war. Other topics, such as the “Heroic Past of the Russian People,” were designed to appeal emotionally to peasants.³²²

Agitation collective leaders returned to their villages to lead seminars for political workers. By June the entire propaganda network became more stable and the obkom took more control in shaping the messages it wished the agitation collective leaders to impart. In mid-June, the head of the oblast’s Agitprop Department, Legasov, sent a recommended list of topics in three categories. The first category comprised statements from Stalin and other national leaders, official communications from the Central Committee, and *Pravda* editorials. They contained appeals for the people to unite and work for the leader or to defeat the hated enemy through work. Kursk Oblast provided the second group of topics that included appeals from Doronin to work harder, a reminder of the horrors of German occupation, and how to organize work on the kolkhoz. The final set focused on political work in the oblast and topics related to improving agitator performance. Agitprop leaders wanted the agitators to share the experiences they had just gained in the spring sowing campaign along with literature they had at hand to improve the skill sets of all political workers.³²³ District party leaders recruited hundreds of people to work as agitators, drawing from the pool of “better people” (*luchshie liudi*), i.e., nonparty members who still showed themselves to be exemplary workers and Komsomolites in order to ensure

³²¹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3052, l. 113. Obkom report, June 23.

³²² GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, ll. 75-6.

³²³ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3053, l. 20. (Obkom June 1943)

some level of political reliability.³²⁴ The political workers usually carried out their agitation duties where they lived. Many of them worked on the kolkhoz but others in the village, often as teachers.³²⁵

Apart from reading Soviet Information Bureau reports and other articles to the kolkhozniki and leading discussions with them, the agitators took responsibility for ensuring the kolkhozniki fulfilled (or overfulfilled) production norms. The fact that the agitators also labored in the fields allowed them a great deal of oversight of the other farmers, affording them the opportunity to influence work outcomes and to serve as role models. Agitators relied heavily on socialist competitions between work units within a kolkhoz. They pitted one group against another and sometimes organized competitions between individuals or, on rarer occasions, between kolkhozes.³²⁶ Three Komsomolites from B-Zemenskii village in Shchigrovskii District were the first women on their kolkhoz to till one-tenth of a hectare by hand. Once they had shown the other women in the field that such work was possible, tillage by hand sharply increased.³²⁷

Reports from the raikoms often tied agitation work to production totals, even to the point where reporters attributed a causal relationship between speeches or discussions and bursts in labor productivity. In May, the head of agitprop in Oboianskii District, N. S. Susloparova, attributed the completion of the spring sowing at four kolkhozes to the organization of socialist competitions. Further, Susloparova observed that several farmers overfulfilled their plowing

³²⁴ For a discussion of the growing reliance the party placed on the Komsomol as its principal pool of agitation cadres in the 1920s and 30s, see Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*.

³²⁵ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3052, l. 58.

³²⁶ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, ll. 77-8, 39; GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3053, ll. 57-64.

³²⁷ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, l. 75.

norms due to excellent agitation.³²⁸ The Bol'shie Soldatskii District Secretary, Korolychenko, singled out the laudable mass-agitation work on Kapustino Kolkhoz that resulted in overfulfilling the plan by 120 percent.³²⁹ In Streletskii District twenty political workers went to the villages to read Stalin's May First Order and a letter from Obkom Secretary Doronin to the peasants.³³⁰ The farmers responded with a promise to complete the spring sowing.³³¹ Agitprop reports also measured the quality of agitators' work by the amount of money that had been collected for the "Kurskii Partisan" air squadron, the amounts of food donated to the Red Army, and measures taken to supply hospitals. These reports listed ruble amounts and detailed the types and amounts of food supplied as well as an accounting of the furnishings and bedding supplied to hospitals.³³²

The political workers' primary means of motivating people centered on giving lectures, discussing specific topics, or reading articles from *Kurskaia pravda* or their district paper. Although yielding on occasion to the directives of Moscow, the Kursk Obkom exercised a good deal of autonomy in terms of topic selection, passing its wishes down to the raikoms, who transmitted them to the agitation collectives. The oblast and local press provided the most consistent source of material the agitators used, as party leaders sought to dispel what they considered to have been the effective and pernicious influence of the German propaganda machine. Agitators found that people did not believe in the superiority of the Red Army, were

³²⁸ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, l. 77.

³²⁹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, l. 53.

³³⁰ Stalin's May First Order is also known as Order No. 195. The order opens with a long preamble enunciating the Red Army's victories in the East and the Soviet Union's allies' victory in the West, the affirmation that these victories have forced the Germans to take extreme measures, yet with a caveat that both the allies still have a great struggle to conduct. The order then emphasizes the need for the rear to provide support for the front and that shirking from work will be punishable under the laws of war-time.

³³¹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, l. 39.

³³² GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3039, ll. 15, 18; GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, ll. 53, 75, 77-78.

convinced that the Wehrmacht would return, did not know the Soviet Union had allies, etc. Fielding the people's questions became an important part of the discussions, providing the agitators a means to respond to the people. More importantly, the questions served as a means to determine the knowledge of the people. In late May, a Comrade Gruzdev held daily meetings at Bakery No. 2 in Kursk city. He reported that the people wanted to know how the Western Allies were helping the Soviet Union, whether or not there would be a second front in 1943, and the nature of the relationship the Soviet Union had with Japan.³³³

Sometimes one deeply probing question could initiate a small propaganda campaign. For instance, during a report delivered at a meeting in Pristenskii District on June 18, a voice from the crowd asked what the party leaders were doing to ensure that the people would not fear the arrival of the Germans. The Pristenskii Raikom issued a resolution on the proper response to such a concern. It chose nine people to draft a response to the question and the district secretary and other district officials travelled the territory reading the report. The document extolled the tenacity of the Red Army, predicting that the growing power of the Soviet Union and its Allies threatened the Hitlerite regime with catastrophe. The report concluded that Pristenskii District's leaders were doing all that they could to ensure the Germans did not return.³³⁴ The answer that Pristenskii District's leaders developed to address the question provides an example of the consistency and repetitiousness of the party's messaging, even at the grass roots.

Other Methods of Message Transmission

³³³ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3039, l. 26.

³³⁴ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3039, l. 20. But apart from emphasizing the excellence of the Red Army and the growing strength of the Allies, this report was short on details on what exactly local leaders were doing to ensure the people's safety.

Concomitant with developing their human capital in the districts, party leaders demanded the restoration of the propaganda infrastructure throughout the oblast, such as newspapers, radio broadcasts, cultural events, and the showing of films. Just as the obkom emphasized the need to return *Kurskaia pravda* to circulation, it ordered district leaders to restore their own local newspapers. District papers began their first print runs intermittently, depending on the conditions of their printing facilities. The Germans left many districts without presses or other machinery necessary to produce a paper. Some district editors cobbled together various parts of machinery to begin their runs in March, but others had to wait until April or May. Urging district leaders to solve the problems that prevented the resumption of circulation, obkom authorities placed a high priority on reestablishing the papers. The evidence indicates that oblast authorities could do little to help the district papers directly other than advise them to take all the necessary ad hoc measures necessary to begin production.³³⁵ By June many of the districts produced weekly editions of four-page broadsheets smaller than those of the oblast paper.

As the obkom leadership pressed district officials to resuscitate their local papers, it also sought to coordinate the content the districts published its general propaganda campaign. District papers that got their presses rolling in March and early April usually filled their pages with press releases from the Soviet Information Bureau and TASS that they acquired through radio transmissions. By April, oblast officials began to exercise greater control over the content of district papers.³³⁶ Expressing concern over the infrequent publications of local presses in a

³³⁵ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, l. 40. On April 19 the Kursk Oblispolkom issued a resolution to restore the Administration of Publishing and Printing in Kursk Oblast, an agency that provided oversight to the day to day function of the all district papers.

³³⁶ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, l. 55. In a May 3 report to the obkom's Agitprop Department, the interim editor of *Belovskaia pravda*, Globenko, informed oblast officials that is paper had shifted away from Moscow press releases to local reports as per the obkom's order. Globenko noted that they had recruited nineteen correspondents for the preceding seven issue of the paper to cover the spring sowing campaign and the publication of socialist competition agreements. Globenko concluded his report with the assurance that in the future *Belovskaia pravda's*

June meeting, one of *Kurskaia pravda*'s editors, Vel'sh, maintained that oblast propagandists had to regulate the content of the district publications. Vel'sh asserted that the papers were in great demand and that people wanted their papers to provide "complete information" and instructions on how to restore the economy.³³⁷ He listed deficiencies in many of the papers he had surveyed. With regard to war news, Vel'sh argued that the papers should shift away from fragmentary factual reports (*svodki*) in favor of longer, more subjective pieces (*obzory*). Because certain district papers published too much international news while others included nothing from the larger world, he recommended that all papers offer a balanced representation of events outside the Soviet Union. He expressed dismay that many papers stopped printing stories about German atrocities. For example, he complained that the Bol'shie Soldatskii District paper reprinted articles from *Komsomol'skaia pravda* regarding German atrocities in oblasts other than Kursk, while German forces in Bol'shie Soldatskii District committed the very same crimes. Such a comment expresses a clear desire to keep the horror of occupation experiences local and tangible to readers. Finally, Vel'sh criticized the local papers' failure to characterize the Germans' plan to introduce private ownership of the land as the reinstitution of serfdom. He urged the editors to rectify the lack of articles that described the German "New Order."³³⁸ A June 25 report on the state of Shchigrovskii District's propaganda noted that the district paper, *Kommunar*, had published content that fell in line with the wishes of the obkom. For example, it continued to print articles featuring German atrocities in the district. It covered the spring sowing campaign, including stories about poorly performing kolkhozes. The paper printed

editors would maintain a tighter correspondence with their counterparts in Kursk city in order to meet the latter's demands.

³³⁷ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3039, l. 24.

³³⁸ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3039, l. 24.

patriotic letters of locals and soldiers along with promises of district workers to support the Red Army and the front with their labor.³³⁹ Such exchanges demonstrate the obkom's aim to control the content of the district papers, the district editors' willingness to yield to the obkom's desires, and a consistency in messaging at both the oblast and district levels.

The oblast Department of Agitprop wanted to expose as many people as possible to the party's print message, but shortages of paper stocks often limited mass circulation of newspapers.³⁴⁰ District agitators maintained two practices that had existed before the war; the wall paper (*stengazeta*) and the window display (*vitrina*). Both of these methods consisted of posting a newspaper in a public place so passers-by could stop and read the issue. Wall papers posted in kolkhozes featured articles specific to kolkhoz activists. The Oboianskii District Department of Agitprop organized a wall paper for every kolkhoz in the territory. It assigned two women, A. I. Kharlamova and M. I. Piantieva, responsibility for editing the wall papers, instructing them to focus the content of the paper to life on the kolkhozes. Although it wished to have one issue per week, it rarely succeeded. Window displays were located in prominent spaces in a town or village center. Shchigrovskii District's Department of Agitprop organized ten display windows in Shchigry city in which it posted *Kurskaia pravda* along with Soviet Information Bureau reports. Further, it sent 260 issues of the district paper, *Kommunar*, to villages to be placed on walls and in display windows.³⁴¹

Party officials also turned their attention to the restoration of libraries, reading huts, red corners (*krasnye ugolki*), and Party Education Centers (*partkabinety*). Agitprop leaders restored

³³⁹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, ll. 75-76.

³⁴⁰ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, ll. 75-76. For example, The Shchigrovskii District paper, *Kommunar*, had a circulation of 1500 copies.

³⁴¹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, ll. 75-76.

libraries in villages and cities to serve larger populations. They stocked these places with newspapers and other literature that showcased party history and ideology, staffing them with teachers who provided guidance to visiting farmers and lead discussions on specific topics.³⁴² Shchigrovskii District leaders reported that their library held 8,000 books, 500 of which they loaned to nine village centers and three military units located in the district. They had allocated twenty-four teachers to work in the four reading huts and twenty-five red corners they had reestablished on the kolkhozes. The teachers led discussions on current events and agitation work among the kolkhozniki in times of weeding and haymaking.³⁴³ In Kursk city, agitprop officials organized these institutions by neighborhood. Immediately after liberation, party workers in Dzerzhinskii District established thirty-four libraries and educational centers, stocking them with various sets of Lenin's collected works, the writings of Stalin and Marx, and several editions of the party's *Short Course of History*. Workers in Kirovskii District had to overcome serious deficiencies in literature and infrastructure. They collected more than 2,500 books, along with useful furnishings from the population in order to restore their education centers.³⁴⁴

The educational institutions in Kursk city served as centers of propaganda production and distribution. For example, in the weeks after liberation, propagandists in Kirovskii District wrote out copies of the Soviet Information Bureau communiques by hand until they procured printing machinery that increased their output. They delivered these copies to the staff at the railroad station in Kursk city who then distributed them to smaller stations along the rail lines in the

³⁴² GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2592, ll. 118-24.

³⁴³ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, ll. 75-76.

³⁴⁴ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3052, ll. 112-19.

oblast.³⁴⁵ The Kirovskii education center staff prepared and delivered lectures on a variety of sanctioned themes. They produced six different lectures on the international situation as well as reports that touched on orders and resolutions from Moscow, the need to maintain work discipline in the oblast, the Red Army's activities, the Second State War Loan, and the Soviet people's role in defeating the enemy. By June, Kursk city's education centers supported primary party organizations and agitation collective leaders in the development of effective agitation techniques.³⁴⁶ As party officials developed and increased its information dissemination methods it still maintained a consistent line of propaganda messaging.

The Kursk Oblast Agitprop Department also prioritized restoring radio broadcasts.³⁴⁷ By June 1943 officials had set up radio transmitters in Kursk city and twenty-one other districts in the oblast.³⁴⁸ The transmitter in Kursk city broadcast at 1300 watts with 2,216 receivers located throughout the city, 247 of which were installed in the buildings of party and Soviet organizations. Oblast agitation leaders also installed eight loudspeakers located along main thoroughfares, such as Lenin Street, and in city squares. Kursk city's station operated fifteen hours per day with a portion of that time dedicated to local recent news, medical and anti-air defense lectures, and literary programs.

³⁴⁵ Kursk's main railway station was located in Kirovskii District.

³⁴⁶ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3052, ll. 112-19.

³⁴⁷ James von Geldern provides an overview of evolution of the party's central radio station, Radio Moscow, over the course of the war. See James von Geldern, "Radio Moscow: The Voice from the Center" in Richard Stites, ed., *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 44-61.

³⁴⁸ Von Geldern notes that Moscow placed top-level priority on the restoration of radio service in newly liberated regions. See von Geldern, "Radio Moscow: The Voice from the Center," p. 48. Berkhoff argues that radio was highly problematic and not a very effective way to transmit information. *Motherland in Danger*, 21, 29.

Twenty-one districts had working broadcast facilities transmitting from eight to thirty watts. Five of the stations were powered from their home city's electrical grid and the remaining sixteen relied on either a dedicated generator or battery attached to the broadcast facility. Those stations connected to the city's power source transmitted daily broadcasts from Moscow from 8 AM to noon and those stations on alternative power sources broadcast "recent news" from Moscow or important state communications only four to five times per day.³⁴⁹ At this time only the Staro-Oskolskii District station broadcast local news, as all other stations lacked the necessary equipment, such as microphones or amplifiers, to produce their own content. Aiming to comply with orders from the Central Committee on local broadcasting, the obkom requested Moscow to send it twenty microphones and amplifiers and complained that their requests had not been answered. Although local stations were not equipped to transmit local content, oblast leaders ordered the raikoms to organize the necessary personnel in preparation for local production. They tasked the local paper editor to develop the station's content but ordered the second secretary of the raikom to carry out oversight.³⁵⁰ In yet another medium the party sought to maintain a balance between the news and information that would be the most immediate and meaningful to a variety of audiences yet still adhere to a tight articulation of a reality it wished to impose upon the people's consciousness.

Oblast leaders likewise tasked district agitprop workers with organizing concerts and amateur as entertainment. The Oboianskii District cultural administration organized seven concerts in the city and another twenty-three performances in the villages.³⁵¹ Even in a time of

³⁴⁹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3053, l. 7.

³⁵⁰ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3053, ll. 70-71.

³⁵¹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3051, ll. 77-78.

desperation, however, the people still demanded an acceptable level of quality in their entertainment. The inhabitants of Pristenskii District complained that their amateur plays were not interesting, demanding that they have the opportunity to hear a genuine concert.³⁵²

Years before the war Soviet leaders had incorporated motion pictures into their propaganda toolkit and once the war began they repurposed this industry to create films that would shore up morale, offer people an escape from the misery of war, and reinforce overarching themes of heroism, sacrifice, and revenge. Owing to the chaos of evacuation and limited resources, Soviet filmmakers first concentrated their efforts on documentary films and short dramas and comedies. By 1942 they began making feature films, all of which contained explicit themes of support for the war effort.³⁵³ On March 12, Kursk's officials reopened two cinemas. One showed the documentary film *The Defeat of the German Forces at Moscow* and the Civil War drama *Kotovskiy* played at the Shchepkin Theater.³⁵⁴

Screening a motion picture for only two or three weeks, the cinemas were able to provide the city's viewers with a consistent rotation of fresh feature films.³⁵⁵ Although cinema goers could see different faces and on the city's screens every fortnight, the content of the films did not contain much variety. Shortly after the departure of *The Defeat of the German Forces at Moscow*, Kursk's theaters showed other documentaries such as *Stalingrad*, reports on the war, and *Leningrad in the Struggle*. Like *Kurskaia pravda's* articles, these films followed a similar

³⁵² GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3039, l. 20.

³⁵³ For a discussion of Soviet wartime cinema see Peter Kenez, "Black and White: The War on Film." In *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia*, edited by Richard Stites, 44-61 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995).

³⁵⁴ The Shchepkin Cinema still shows films at 51 Dzerzhinsky Street in Kursk city.

³⁵⁵ *Kurskaia pravda* published film announcements, including titles and screening times on page 4 of every issue.

pattern in their representation of the war. They open with footage of the city in its prewar normalcy with the people working and enjoying the bounty of Stalin's plenty. These happy scenes are replaced by clips of advancing German soldiers. The film contains random scenes of Red Army weapons systems and units preparing for battle or firing on an unseen enemy, interspersed with clips of civilian factory workers making weapons and peasants donating food for the defenders of the Motherland. These films present the Red Army as a competent military force that, with the support of the civilian population, is successfully defeating the Germans. The films on Moscow and Stalingrad present German weakness with chilling effect by showing hundreds of destroyed and captured German war machines and long lines of prisoners of war.³⁵⁶

Kursk's cinemas also showed historical pictures such as *Kotovskiy* and *How the Steel is Tempered* along with dramas, *Mashen'ka* and *Professor Mamlok*.³⁵⁷ *Kurskaia pravda* prioritized some films over others by publishing occasional movie reviews, which reinforced themes of sacrifice, unity of front and rear, and revenge.³⁵⁸ On June 4 the paper advertised that the British film *That Hamilton Woman* (*Ledi Gamil'ton*) would be showing at the Shchepkin Theater, along with a children's matinee of the Soviet production of Mark Twain's *Prince and the Pauper*. Several days later, it announced that oblast film distribution office would be screening *Victory in the Desert* (*Pobeda v pustyne*) a documentary film of the 8th British Army's defeat of the Afrika Korps.³⁵⁹ One may surmise that screening the films of the Soviet Union's Allies might provide

³⁵⁶ *Leningrad in the Struggle* focuses more on how the people live during Blockade with an emphasis on the Road of Life on Lake Ladoga.

³⁵⁷ Peter Kenez points out that Soviet filmmakers greatly distorted history in their historical dramas and ensured that all other films were infused with patriotic themes. Kenez, "Black and White," 170-72.

³⁵⁸ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 35, March 14, 1943, *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 50, April 2, 1943, *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 52, April 4, 1943.

³⁵⁹ *Kurskaia pravda*, no. 99, June 8.

further evidence to Kursk's inhabitants that they were not alone in the struggle against the Germans.

Problems in the Districts

Oblast agitprop officials experienced serious problems in all aspects of their work. Many district agitprop leaders showed themselves to be inadequate coordinators. For example, a June 25 report to the obkom noted that the head of the Agitprop Department in Fatezhskii District, Panorenov, had not carried out any organization whatsoever.³⁶⁰ Throughout the oblast, effective agitprop work suffered from party activists who did not carry out any work and from other unacceptable behaviors occurring throughout the oblast. For many the problems stemmed from inactivity. They did not organize discussions, prepare materials for effective lectures, or carry out agitation activities.³⁶¹ Agitprop leaders expected activists to post slogans and other visual propaganda in the villages and expressed chagrin when this was not done. Perhaps the most damning deficiency among party activists was their woeful ignorance of current events, party history, and ideology coupled with a lack of desire to improve upon these failings through self-study.

An inspection of the Streletskii District's agitprop apparatus provides some compelling examples of failure. Many people did not have a clear understanding of the current geopolitical situation. A. P. Gotev believed that in North Africa, Japan and Italy had the upper hand over America.³⁶² He could not satisfactorily explain the implications of the military crisis of the Axis

³⁶⁰ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3052, ll. 112-19.

³⁶¹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3039, ll. 18, 26.

³⁶² This report was filed two months after the Germans and Italians capitulated in Tunisia.

Powers. In answering the question of with whom was the Soviet Union at war, Komsomolite, N. A. Glebova, said that Great Britain and the US were at war with Germany, France fought against Japan, Turkey fought against China and Finland was half with the Soviet Union and half against it.³⁶³ Comrade Berezhnikova demonstrated absolute ignorance of geography and ideology. When asked to identify the Mediterranean Sea she looked to the Arctic Ocean. She could locate neither Yugoslavia nor Italy on the map. She did not know that Japan and China were at war. Further, she was unaware of the recent dissolution of the Comintern and did not understand the basics of dialectical materialism. Longtime party member F. S. Semakin could not correctly identify the reasons for the dissolution of the Third International, explaining that in a time of imperialist war it had voted for war credits. E. K. Firsova, who headed an elementary school had not heard about Stalin's May First Order. She also had no idea who their enemies or allies were. Based on examples like these, the obkom concluded that the party activists in an overwhelming majority of districts could not successfully carry out party propaganda and did so in an inconsistent and haphazard manner. The obkom report cited a lack of party educational centers in seven districts in particular.³⁶⁴

It is not possible to determine the efficacy of the oblast's agitprop campaigns to mobilize Kursk's population to donate food, money, and labor to the Red Army, and work beyond personal desire for the state. While there is ample evidence that many people did contribute food, money, and labor to the Red Army there is evidence that others did not. In a time of scarcity it is not difficult to find rational reasons for noncompliance with the demands of the state. Some may have resisted the reimposition of Soviet power and the reestablishment of

³⁶³ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3052, l. 112-19.

³⁶⁴ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3052, l. 112-19.

Soviet institutions. Others may have prioritized the needs of family over the Red Army. Still others may simply have been too exhausted to comply.

Conclusion

Kursk's agitprop department understood that in February 1943 it needed to begin its operations with a host of deficits. It had to win the hearts and minds of a people who suffered real losses and atrocities at the hands of an occupying force that easily swept the Red Army from the oblast in 1941. It had to counter the influence of eighteen months of German that deprived the citizens of faith in the Soviet government or the Red Army. In order to accomplish these goals, the Agitprop Department projected a vision of the geopolitical and domestic conditions that favored Soviet victory and offered the people a position on the winning side if they donated their material possessions and labor to the great cause. With *Kurskaia pravda* as the message platform, agitprop officials depicted a Germany in retreat on all fronts, under persistent aerial attack from the West, and with growing unrest among its subjugated populations. It characterized the Soviet Union's allies as powerful and trustworthy, presenting readers with a well-equipped and competently-led Red Army that could give the enemy forces as good as they got eighteen months before.

With little recourse to state coercive measures, agitprop organizers sought to enlist the people in the struggle for victory through a multilayered propaganda campaign. This campaign aimed to mobilize the people by offering them a winning proposition whereby the devotion of their labor in the support of the Red Army would bring about victory over the Nazis. It included a host of moral shocks designed to incite moral indignation that could be resolved only through revenge. *Kurskaia pravda* presented a series of articles that enumerated outrages that the people

of Kursk had suffered and clearly directed all responsibility for these abuses to the German occupiers. By describing atrocities in detail and assigning blame for these acts to the Germans, the paper's editors instilled a sense of righteous indignation in their readers provided the Kursk's civilians with an object for their fury. Having established this connection *Kurskaia pravda* then endeavored to convince Kursk's civilian population that the Red Army was a competent and vital instrument for this revenge. It attempted to unite the people to Red Army through real and constructed familial bonds. Finally, it fabricated a debtor/creditor relationship between Kursk's civilians and their "liberators" from the Red Army. This characterization rendered the people as indentured servants to the Red Army, and by extension, the state, where help for the Red Army began as material donations and direct labor for military projects, but transformed to all labor that benefited more abstract war aims.

Kursk's leaders did not restrict themselves to the central newspaper as the sole means for mobilizing the population through propaganda. To be sure, they used *Kurskaia pravda* as the primary platform for the message in their campaign, but they still needed to organize a host of transmission methods in order to ensure as much dispersion of the information as possible. Oblast officials urged leaders at the district level to get their own local presses rolling and begin production runs of their newspapers. Kursk city directed the district papers to publish content similar to what was being presented in *Kurskaia pravda*, i.e., reports of atrocities and local people responding with stories of support for the Red Army. Kursk's propagandists endeavored to use electronic media such as radio and film to spread the message, but both of these methods had only limited reach. Oblast leaders turned to their district counterparts to organize agitation collectives comprised of local people who carry out a host of activities designed to facilitate the mobilizations. The use of agitators offered several advantages, including informing the masses

of the tasks oblast officials required of them, the ability to motivate people to action while monitoring their performance, and carry out tasks related to reporting on the people's production figures. While Kursk's leaders succeeded in soliciting many people to serve as agitators, they learned that non-trivial number of these cadres were incompetent in many aspects of their job. The litany of complaints ranged from poor organizational skills to complete ignorance of current events, party history, or ideology.

Even though it is extremely difficult to accurately assess the efficacy of Kursk's propaganda campaign, we do know that the oblast officials continued to dedicate resources to it in order that it would become a more effective instrument for mobilization. And while they could not guarantee 100 percent compliance from their target audiences, we have many instances of people donating material goods, cash, and labor to defeat the Germans at their door.

CHAPTER 4

OFFENSE WINS BATTLES, DEFENSE WINS WARS

By the end of March 1943 the Red Army had secured enough victories for propagandists to begin mythologizing these successes as substantive. Some members of the military leadership understood, however, that the accomplishments did not meet their expectations. The Red Army had regained the territory it had lost in the summer of 1942, but in a reckless and costly manner. The Soviet Union attempted to deal the Wehrmacht a spectacular front-wide knockout blow in late 1942, sending its military in headlong attacks at several sectors all along the front, winning a handful of victories at certain points while suffering major defeats elsewhere.³⁶⁵ Importantly, the Soviet leadership did not place territorial acquisition highest on its list of objectives. Instead, it prioritized the encirclement and destruction of as much German armor and personnel as possible. In this it failed because much of the territory the Red Army gained resulted from German withdrawals rather than from the destruction of German forces.

When the time came to determine the next move in March 1943, both belligerents turned their attention to one region on the front line that stretched from Leningrad to the Black Sea—the Kursk salient. It stood out to the German leadership as the ideal target for the summer offensive. The Soviet leadership arrived at a similar conclusion, although it incorporated into its calculus the intelligence it gathered regarding German intentions. Having settled on the most likely location of the summer fighting, Soviet military planners needed to determine the best course of

³⁶⁵ Historian Evan Mawdsley observes that the period between the Stalingrad encirclement and the Battle of Kursk is “one of the most complex and least studied parts of the war” although it is portrayed as part of a narrative of triumph. See Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East: The Nazi-Soviet War, 1941-1945* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 249. I would add that the fact that as this term is a liminal space between two spectacular set-piece battles that had clear outcomes contributes further to historians ignoring it.

action. Two opposing camps emerged within the High Command on the form of war the Red Army should execute. One camp, comprising many field commanders and Stalin, wanted to uphold the Red Army's culture of attack and resume the offensive. A small number of Stavka commanders, however, opted for a deliberate defensive stance. This minority, which included the liaisons between Stavka and the front and army commanders in the field, G. K. Zhukov and A. M. Vasilevsky, had studied the performance of the Red Army over the previous two years, concluding that reckless offensives did not achieve the aim of annihilation.³⁶⁶ The decision to assume a deliberate defense at Kursk was not taken lightly. Its chief proponents, Zhukov, Vasilevsky, and, to a lesser extent, A. I. Antonov, had to maintain constant pressure on their subordinates, and, perhaps, more importantly, on their Supreme Commander, Stalin, to resist the urge to preempt the German attack.

Historians have taken both the decision to go on the defensive and also the resulting success as a forgone conclusion.³⁶⁷ In fact, this choice included a great deal of risk and

³⁶⁶ Zhukov's decisive victory at Khalkhin Gol over elements of the Japanese Imperial Army in August 1939 raised his profile considerably among leaders in Moscow. As the Germans were poised to take Leningrad and Moscow in 1941, Stalin placed Zhukov in the role as "fixer." In this capacity, he coordinated the activities of armies in the defense of Leningrad and Moscow. By 1942, Zhukov and Vasilevsky shared duties along the enormous front.

³⁶⁷ To be sure, historians present the decision-making process taken by both sides in varying degrees of detail, and it is the case that many of them observe that debate among the leaders occurred. But few examine the situation in such detail that the reader would understand the level of contingency in the debate and none discusses the decision-making process in terms of the culture of the Red Army at the time. This results from the fact that historians focus more attention on the battle itself than on events that led to it. John Erickson offers the greatest amount of contingency in his discussion. See John Erickson, *The Road to Berlin: Stalin's War with Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 63-68. See also Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*, 264-66; Albert Seaton, *The Russo-German War 1941-1945* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1993), 359-60; David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House, *The Battle of Kursk* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1999), 28-30; Valerii Zamulin, *Sryv operatsii "Tsitadel'": Kurskaia bitva-grif sekretnosti sniat* (Moskva: Eksmo: Iauza, 2013), 61-63; Boris Solov'ev, *The Turning Point of World War II: The Campaigns of Summer and Autumn 1943 on the Soviet-German Front*, trans. by Robert Daglish (Moscow: Progress Publisher, 1973), 72-73; Dennis E. Showalter, *Armor and Blood: The Battle of Kursk, the Turning Point of World War II* (New York: Random House, 2013), 60-61. This has likely resulted from the fact that historians on both sides of the battle were not invested in a thorough investigation of this decision-making process. German memoirists and Western historians busied themselves with the mythology that Hitler forced the battle on his subordinates and then pulled defeat from the jaws of victory by calling off the attack in mid-July. Soviet historians were also engaged in burnishing the mythology of the unambiguous Stalingrad victory as the ultimate proof of the fighting efficacy of the Red Army. A closer examination of the success of

uncertainty. The kind of attack for which the Germans were preparing in the spring and summer of 1943 had brought about spectacular gains for four consecutive summers.³⁶⁸ A great deal was on the line with the outcome of this battle, both politically and militarily. Even though Sovinformburo's propagandists had begun to construct a mythology of the new and invincible post-Stalingrad Red Army, the Soviet fighting force was still inconsistent.³⁶⁹ Stavka's liaisons to the field commanders, especially Zhukov, had witnessed the Red Army's erratic performance and now placed what they considered the safest possible bet. Adding to the levels of uncertainty for Soviet commanders, Zhukov and Vasilevsky allowed the Germans all the time they required to prepare to launch their offensive. The Germans delayed opening the attack in the interest of increasing their offensive striking power, which included Hitler's demand that they wait until the newest generation of tanks, the Panther and Ferdinand, arrived. All the while Zhukov and Vasilevsky had to calm Stalin's nerves and keep the Voronezh Front's new commander, N. F. Vatutin, on a tight leash.

As representatives of Stavka to the field armies, Zhukov and Vasilevsky occupied a special position of coordination and oversight for the Red Army's activities during the first two years of the war. While they had orchestrated some success, they also observed considerable failure and incompetency. Modern mechanized warfare required more than daring from a

Operation Uranus shows that the Red Army leaders experienced considerable measure of good fortune. Further, Soviet scholars would have to look at all the miserable defeats and stunted victories that occurred elsewhere on the line.

³⁶⁸ The Germans debuted Blitzkrieg in Poland in 1939. The following summer, the Wehrmacht used the same tactics to sweep through France in a matter of weeks. The Germans again used these tactics to great effect in Operation Barbarossa in 1941 and Operation Blue in 1942.

³⁶⁹ A close assessment of the Stalingrad encirclement showed that the Germans had allowed themselves to be defeated more so than the Don and Stalingrad fronts overwhelmed German Sixth Army and denied it any options for self-preservation. Further, a German victory at Kursk could have cost the Soviet Union more than the loss of soldiers and material. It had the potential to reaffirm the idea that the Red Army was an incompetent fighting force and an impotent means for the Soviet state to protect its people.

commander; it demanded considerable skill at command and control of combined arms. It also depended upon a highly efficient logistics network that could handle massive transport requirements as the fighting front advanced. Even among such mixed results, a traceable pattern of victory emerged in two years of fighting. The Red Army achieved more positive results in two major situations. The first of these occurred when it executed limited offensives against the non-German Axis forces, such as in the Ostrogozhsk-Rossosh Operation. The second, and more important situation, arose when it had been forced into a defensive posture, allowed the Germans to attack and exhaust themselves, and then mounted an overwhelming counteroffensive. The two clearest examples of defensive success occurred at Moscow in late 1941 and Stalingrad in late 1942. While there is no smoking gun pointing out the true architect of the Red Army's strategy at Kursk, or the logic underlying this decision-making process, the circumstantial evidence gives a sense of the line of reasoning that resulted in the use of a deliberate defense at Kursk.

Of the victories at Moscow and Stalingrad, the latter offered the more attractive example as it resulted in the destruction of a large portion of German fighting capacity. The encirclement of General Friedrich von Paulus's German Sixth Army in Operation Uranus benefitted from several factors that greatly increased chances for Soviet success. First, General V. I. Chuikov's 62nd Army had caught German Sixth Army's spearheads in a terrain that favored the defender from September to November 1942. Second, Red Army commanders took six weeks to plan and then prepare for the Operation Uranus counterstroke, while Chuikov's defenders kept the Germans occupied in Stalingrad's urban hellscape. During this time, the Red Army brought up a full complement of well-prepared soldiers and supplies. Third, the German advance on Stalingrad narrowed as the Sixth Army became more engaged in taking the city, and this formed

a large salient. This configuration offered the Red Army the opportunity to pierce each flank with a headlong thrust at a common meeting point some distance behind Paulus's main force. The act of two forces converging on the same point in a pincer maneuver favors the attacker, creating an advantage that increases when the two penetrating forces do not have to advance so great a distance. Finally, the Soviet armies spearheading the pincers struck first at positions occupied by Romanian forces, which were much less capable than Wehrmacht soldiers.³⁷⁰ The Soviet leadership took care to exercise as much control as possible as it arranged the pieces on this chessboard and, to a great degree, everything hinged on Chuikov's defensive stand in the city itself. More importantly, the encirclement of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad satisfied Stavka's primary goal at this point in the war: the destruction of German war-making capacity.

Stavka executed a host of offensives apart from Uranus between November 1942 and February 1943 that produced a variety of results, from total failure to limited success. Such a mixed performance influenced the High Command's decision-making as the generals began to consider their options for action at the conclusion of the spring 1943 rainy season.³⁷¹ While many commanders urged some form of offensive action, one option appealed more to certain individuals in the High Command: taking a deliberate defensive stand and then shifting over to a general offensive, like they had done at Stalingrad in November 1942. If the Red Army could reengineer the Stalingrad scenario, then a greater likelihood of German defeat resulting in massive German losses was possible.³⁷² The replication of the Stalingrad scenario, however,

³⁷⁰ The Romanian Third and Fourth Armies were more poorly equipped and trained than their German allies. Compared to Germans they put up a much more pitiful defense.

³⁷¹ Military operations came to a halt for several weeks or more every fall and spring during the *rasputitsa*, or rainy season. During this time, the western Soviet Union's dirt roads became impassable muddy quagmires.

³⁷² Historian John A. Lynn describes this as "victory choosing the paradigm." By this he meant that when one army experienced a period of sustained success, it served as a paradigm for the armies of neighboring states. The model army's "core characteristics set the stage of military evolution." Further, the memory of past victories could allow

would hinge upon a robust and impenetrable defense. Two significant roadblocks stood before the execution of such a plan: The first was the Red Army's own entrenched culture of privileging the offensive.³⁷³ It would require the proponents of deliberate defense to convince the more aggressive commanders to stand down, if only for a limited time. The second obstacle was the fact that Kursk's topography was very unlike Stalingrad's.³⁷⁴ The plan at Kursk compelled the Red Army to transform the open, tank-friendly territory into a Stalingrad-like cityscape. Stalingrad's above-ground structures had provided an ideal defense against the driving momentum of German armor, but at Kursk the only option available to Stavka was to recreate an inverse cityscape, that is, below ground. The execution of this project would necessitate a dependable, immediate, and massive labor force.

The Cult of the Offensive and Decision-Making in March-April 1943

As the spring rains forced a cessation in the fighting, Stavka took the last week in March and first week in April to deliberate over how to engage the enemy once hostilities resumed in early summer. While the commanders of the Central and Voronezh fronts made initial defensive preparations, Stavka's representatives, A. M. Vasilevsky and Zhukov, inspected the region along the now stable front line. On April 8, Zhukov submitted a report to Stalin that outlined the

the model army to keep its role as the exemplar fighting force even when it fell into decline. Lynn's description of victory choosing the paradigm helps explain why Red Army commanders such as Zhukov and Vasilevsky found the defensive-to-offensive course as the safest means to achieve another significant victory in the summer of 1943. They were choosing the clearest victories of the past two years as the paradigm for the next action. See John A. Lynn "The Evolution of Army Style in the Modern West 800-2000," *International History Review* 18 (1996): 510.

³⁷³ The character of this obstacle was one of persuasion. It was internal to the leadership.

³⁷⁴ There might be a third obstacle, the Soviet leadership's need to portray the Red Army as a constant force of liberation, i.e. an attacking force that moved inexorably west. This could be a very useful political constraint but it would require a new line of research. It is possible that this argument could take you too far away from where the chapter currently is. You also may not have the materials to provide an evidentiary basis for the argument. Perhaps this could be examined in greater detail after the defense.

Wehrmacht's strategic situation, probable German intentions, and recommendations for the entire Red Army. He observed that the Germans were too weak to launch more than one major offensive and that they would need to choose a target that would most greatly damage Soviet fighting capabilities. He concluded by recommending against the Red Army mounting a preemptive offensive in the next month. Rather, he argued that it would be better for the Soviet forces to "wear the enemy down in defensive action while destroying his tanks, and then, taking in fresh reserves, going over to an all-out offensive we will finish off the enemy's main grouping."³⁷⁵ Vasilevsky, with Stalin when Zhukov's report arrived,³⁷⁶ noted in his memoirs that, while the Supreme Commander thought highly of Zhukov and knew that the General Staff supported Zhukov's plan, Stalin still wanted to know the opinion of the field commanders.³⁷⁷ He ordered the staffs of the Central and Voronezh fronts to send an assessment of German forces opposite them and probable courses of enemy action. Both of these reports indicated that, as the Germans were concentrating forces in both the Orel and Kharkov/Belgorod sectors, the Central

³⁷⁵ Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia*, (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo agentstva pechati novosti, 1969), 470. See also A. M. Vasilevsky, *A Lifelong Cause* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1981), 265. S. M. Shtemenko also credits Zhukov with submitting the same formulation to Stalin. See S. M. Shtemenko, *The Soviet General Staff at War: 1941-1945*, Book 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), 216-17. K. F. Telegin, a member of the military council of the Central Front did not directly participate in any of the meetings in Moscow, but he also presents the same formulation in his memoirs while not attributing them directly to Zhukov. See Telegin, *Voiny neschitannye versty* (Moskva: Voennoe izd-vo, 1988), 200. Zhukov's recommendation for a deliberate defense followed a lengthy report in which he informed Stalin that the Germans would have sufficient forces to launch only one major summer offensive along the entire line. He explained in some detail the series of attacks the Germans would launch to try to capture the Kursk salient as a prelude to then make an attempt to threaten Moscow. Zhukov pointed out that the Germans would rely more heavily on tank forces as the Wehrmacht's infantry forces were considerably weakened than they had been the previous year. This situation provided further incentive to use the opportunity of the German attack on the Kursk salient to destroy as much enemy armor as possible. See Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia*, 469-70.

³⁷⁶ Vasilevsky had returned to Moscow after having spent several days inspecting the Central Front's forward edge in the sectors of likely German advance.

³⁷⁷ Vasilevsky, *A Lifelong Cause*, 265.

and Voronezh fronts expected an offensive in May.³⁷⁸ The Central Front's Chief of Staff, M. S. Malinin, advocated for a preemptive strike by the combined forces of the Central, Briansk, and Western fronts to liquidate the Germans' Orel grouping and deprive it of the ability to strike at railway centers in Kursk Oblast.³⁷⁹ The Voronezh Front's staff did not offer any course of action but demanded that its forces remain in a constant state of full combat readiness.³⁸⁰ On April 12, Stalin convened a meeting with Zhukov, Vasilevsky, and Antonov at which they convinced the Supreme Commander that the Red Army in the Kursk sector should take a deliberate defensive stand. Thus the orders went to the field commanders in the Kursk salient to further develop and expand the defensive structures they had begun. On the other side of the frontline, the German forces received Hitler's order for the summer offensive, codenamed Operation Citadel, on April 15.

The decision to establish a deliberate defense and allow the Germans to attack was neither unanimous at the time nor widely praised later, even though it proved successful. An examination of the memoir literature of people closely involved in the planning sessions bears this out. According to Vasilevsky, all the Red Army leaders possessed an inherent desire to prepare for offensive action and only after a long and careful analysis of available data did they reluctantly yield to a premeditated defense. He asserted that the front commanders had developed coherent plans for concurrent offensives within days of the conclusion of the winter

³⁷⁸ The Central Front expected the attack in the second half of May while the Voronezh Front believed the Germans would launch the offensive in early May.

³⁷⁹ Shtemenko, *The Soviet General Staff at War*, 217-18. During the war Shtemenko served as Chief of the Operations Department and Deputy Chief of the General Staff.

³⁸⁰ Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia*, 473-74. Zhukov had spent several days in the last week of March and the first week of April inspecting the forward edge of the Voronezh Front's sector. The fact that Zhukov had come to his conclusion about taking a defensive posture in the face of a probable German attack while spending so much time with Vatutin's officers and troops may explain why Vatutin did not make any explicit recommendation for action in his April 10 report.

fighting and before their intelligence ascertained that the Germans intended to attack. He characterized Stavka's situation as a dilemma where the desired course of attack had to be put aside for the less attractive option of deliberate defense. Vasilevsky followed any mention of preparation for defense with a more detailed claim that the commanders were more concerned with preparing the troops for the subsequent counteroffensive.³⁸¹ He gives the reader the impression that, while the front commanders were preparing for the most ambitious defensive operation in the war, they were actually preoccupied with the counteroffensive and spent more of their mental energy in this latter endeavor.³⁸² His discussion contains a central inconsistency: while the Red Army leadership most certainly wanted to take the offensive, the less attractive option offered much greater chances for success.³⁸³

Vasilevsky's subordinate in the General Staff, S. M. Shtemenko, shared his superior's characterization of the predominance of an offensive-minded attitude within the Red Army leadership as it began to prepare for deliberate defense in the Kursk sector.³⁸⁴ According to him, both front commanders had acquiesced to the General Staff's decision to assume a defensive posture, but they wanted the flexibility to go on the offensive if the Germans delayed their attack. While describing the pressure from the General Headquarters for the fronts to have their defensive plans prepared by mid-May, Shtemenko assured the reader that they had still not fully discarded the "idea of a preemptive blow" although they had "relegated [it] to the background."

³⁸¹ See Vasilevsky, *A Lifelong Cause*, 263-64, 266, 268, 270.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 270.

³⁸³ The irony in his discussion is that while he speaks much more about attack than defense, he asserts that taking the defensive was the "only correct decision." See 265.

³⁸⁴ Like Vasilevsky, Shtemenko relays that the Central Front Chief of Staff, Malinin argued for preemptive attack. Shtemenko hints that the Voronezh Front commanders hinted at offensive action, but refrained from openly advocating preemption. See Shtemenko, *The Soviet General Staff at War*, 217-218.

He contended that the greatest challenges that faced the General Staff had been the development of solutions for the many “obscure theoretical problems” of a deliberate defense followed by a counteroffensive, the most important of which was the role of the Steppe Front. Stavka ordered it to occupy a space in the area of the Tim and Oskol rivers and spread east into Voronezh Oblast, i.e., the territory that included the major lines of strategic defense. This location offered less value as a point from which to launch a counteroffensive but served as an excellent staging area for massive strikes on the German flanks should Army Groups Center and South manage to break through the main defenses and converge at a point east of Kursk city. Shtemenko, however, described the strategic reserve of the Steppe Front as a primarily offensive force.³⁸⁵ Further, he emphasized the urge to attack when discussing Vatutin’s request to take the offensive after the Germans first delayed Operation Citadel in mid-May. Shtemenko observed that Vatutin’s desire caused the three principal proponents of the deliberate defense to hold a meeting and discuss the option before they ordered Vatutin to stand down.³⁸⁶

Further complicating the issue, field commanders and their staffs provided conflicting narratives regarding the weeks prior to the battle. Rokossovsky’s recollection of this period places him loosely in the “deliberate defense” camp.³⁸⁷ He explained that in early April a small contingent of high-ranking officials in Moscow had arrived on an inspection of the Central Front’s sector. Rokossovsky claimed that he presented his ideas for the organization of defense to them and they told him to write up his report and send it to the Supreme Commander.³⁸⁸ One

³⁸⁵ Shtemenko, *The Soviet General Staff at War*, 220-23.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 231.

³⁸⁷ Although Rokossovsky provide little detail regarding the decision-making process to make a deliberate defense.

³⁸⁸ K. K. Rokossovsky, *A Soldier’s Duty*, trans. Robert Daglish (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), 183.

surmises that this was the same document that Malinin had submitted to Moscow. Had this been the case, Rokossovsky's account conflicts with Vasilevsky's, Shtemenko's, and Zhukov's reporting of events. Further, he makes an obvious point that at a meeting of front commanders at General Headquarters several voices advocated a preemptive attack. He concluded that the commanders in Moscow were "right to reject these views."³⁸⁹ Not only did Rokossovsky appear to have been at odds with other principals, but the attitude he described in his memoir would have put him in conflict with his own chief of staff. Rokossovsky dedicated the majority of his prebattle discussion to details of the defensive preparation and said nothing of offensive action. Even when he introduced the topic of German delays, he expressed no desire to launch an early attack.³⁹⁰ Given the fact that his chief of staff's report advocated preemption, and his fellow field commander also desired to go on the attack, Rokossovsky's discussion of assuming a defensive posture in his recollection contributes to the overall confusion at the differences of opinion in late March/early April 1943.

Vatutin's own postwar interpretations remain unknown, as Ukrainian separatists killed him in April 1944. Other memoirists, however, point out that Vatutin constantly urged his superiors to let him attack.³⁹¹ Stalin shared the field commander's concern that by leaving the German delays unanswered, the Red Army was yielding the opportunity to permanently wrest the initiative from the Wehrmacht in the summer of 1943. His persistence in pressing for the offensive and the fact that Stavka refused his demands meant that certain individuals in Moscow—most likely Zhukov and, to a lesser extent, Vasilevsky—had to constantly defend the

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 185.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 185-195.

³⁹¹ Shtemenko, *The Soviet General Staff at War*, 230-35; Vasilevsky, *A Lifelong Cause*, 270-72.

wisdom and logic of deliberate defense. At the same time, this debate demonstrates that the success at Kursk, as we understand it now, was not a foregone conclusion.

The political leaders of the Central and Voronezh fronts provide a slightly different retrospective vision of the decision to assume a deliberate defense. They unsurprisingly viewed the offensive/defensive conundrum through the lens of politics and morale, but the fact that they took the time to discuss the decision in their memoirs indicates its precariousness.

Rokossovsky's political counterpart in the Central Front, K. F. Telegin, observed an inability for their armies to press the offensive, as the composition of forces involved lacked a homogenous character upon which a coherent attack could be prosecuted. Telegin maintained that the varied combat experience of the units of the Central Front reduced its offensive power.³⁹² The flood of newly conscripted soldiers mobilized from the liberated territories further weakened the front's coherence. He argued that, since these conscripts had lived under German occupation, the political cadres would require time to assimilate them politically into the Red Army.³⁹³ To be sure, Telegin characterized the problem as soluble, but he seemed to favor a defense posture at this time.

In contrast, the Voronezh Front's political leader, N. S. Khrushchev, described a fighting force that only required training to increase familiarity with their weapons and improve their tactical acumen in the coming battle. In fact, Khrushchev confidently asserted that "no special agitation was needed to convince the troops to defend their positions staunchly and take the offensive courageously."³⁹⁴ Like Vasilevsky and Shtemenko, Khrushchev minimized the

³⁹² The 70th Army had proved the weakest component of the Central Front in the February/March fighting in Kursk Oblast.

³⁹³ Telegin, *Voiny neschitannye versty*, 195-96.

³⁹⁴ Sergei Khrushchev, ed. *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, Volume 1, *Commissar, 1918-1945* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 506. Demonstrating a limited memory of events, Khrushchev tells the

defensive posture of the summer fighting and celebrated the offensive. In emphasizing the importance of the victory at Kursk, Khrushchev foregrounded the fact that the Germans held the initiative at the outset of the battle and determined its time, place, and form. Yet he followed this claim by telling his reader that both the Central and Voronezh fronts were to launch their own offensives on July 20. In fact, Khrushchev alleged that their planning had been interrupted at the beginning of the month with intelligence gathered from one captured German soldier who informed his Red Army interrogators of the impending German attack. Khrushchev inserted himself into the highest levels of the final deliberations over the Red Army's options with Stalin, claiming that he briefed the Supreme Commander of the impending attack, after which Stalin asked him, "What do you think we should do?"³⁹⁵ Khrushchev told Stalin that, after a long back-and-forth with Vatutin, the two leaders were optimistic about letting the Germans attack. "Why?" the Supreme Commander plaintively asked. To which Khrushchev answered that the defenses were strong and that they held the advantage, as it required fewer forces to defend than to attack.³⁹⁶ Khrushchev's inflation of his importance in these discussions aside, he demonstrated a lack of comfort in emphasizing the defensive as a desirable means of fighting in its own right.

reader that he did not "remember that any excesses occurred" by Red Army soldiers deployed in the southern and southeastern territory of the oblast. Interestingly, he offers this observation unsolicited, especially in light of the fact that my research has shown that many soldiers of the Voronezh Front engaged in excesses against the civilians they had only just liberated from the "fascist brigands."

³⁹⁵ Khrushchev renders this exchange as a dialogue. It seems that he wants the reader to appreciate his ability to understand and comment on military matters at this crucial stage in the war. He, of course, had the benefit of Vatutin's absence, who would have been in the better position to provide a comprehensive military-based narrative of the decision-making process at this time. Curiously, Khrushchev's rendering of the discussion fails to include any of the other military commanders who played the principal role in organizing a deliberate defense and lobbying Stalin to accept the wisdom of such a decision.

³⁹⁶ Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*. Trans. by Strobe Talbott (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1970), 208-11. Khrushchev makes another mistake in that he implied that the Voronezh Front was numerically inferior to Army Group South and was still waiting for reinforcements that would tip the balance in its favor. This was not the case. The Red Army enjoyed advantages in overall numbers of soldiers and in practically every weapons system.

Further, of the two political officers, Telegin seemed to have a better grasp of the military reality that existed in April 1943, whereas Khrushchev contributed only platitudes derived from the mythology built around the success of the deliberate defense and the counteroffensives that followed.

Only Zhukov unambiguously described in his memoirs the intentions of the High Command and the activities of the Central and Voronezh fronts as having been focused on preparing a deliberate defense. He first detailed the partisans' vital role in gathering intelligence, which contributed meaningfully to the production of his April 8 memo to Stalin. With some pride, he included the text of Hitler's April 15 order for the German offensive, codenamed Operation Citadel, to demonstrate his correct appraisal of German intentions at this time.³⁹⁷ Zhukov claimed that at no point had an offensive from the Kursk sector been planned. He explained that this would have been impossible, as the forces of the Central and Voronezh fronts had been greatly weakened in the recent offensive action and the necessary reinforcements were slow to arrive.³⁹⁸ After describing in some detail his April 12 meeting with Vasilevsky, Antonov, and Stalin, Zhukov stated that they all concluded that the front commanders had to build up their defenses. To reinforce the correctness of the decision not to attack, Zhukov observed that "*already in mid-April the Supreme Command had taken the preliminary decision on deliberate defense*" (emphasis in original).³⁹⁹ He admitted that they wrestled with this

³⁹⁷ While Zhukov wished to take all the credit for predicting German intentions himself, it is very likely that Moscow had received intelligence reports from Switzerland and Great Britain that either corroborated or predated the marshal's report.

³⁹⁸ Here, Zhukov was referring to the military actions conducted from January to March 1943.

³⁹⁹ Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia*, tom 2 (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo agentstva pechati novosti, 1974), 148. While a measure of controversy surrounds some changes Zhukov made to his memoirs concerning the actions of Leonid Brezhnev, the Field Marshal made no changes to the wording of his description of the events involving the decision to go on the defensive at Kursk. The only change he made from the 1969 edition and the 1974 edition,

decision for the next six weeks, ultimately resolving it in early June. While Zhukov acknowledged that they simultaneously prepared for the counteroffensive, he affirmed to his readers their commitment to take the defensive. He insisted that “*our forces’ defenses were in no way forced, but purely deliberate, and Stavka held the choice of the moment for the transfer to the offensive depending on the situation. It was understood that things should not be hurried, but they should also not be dragged out.*” (emphasis in original).⁴⁰⁰ He averred that Stalin made him responsible for the general supervision of both fronts and that Moscow ordered the front commanders to take a defensive position. Zhukov gives the impression that, even thirty years after the war, he was still convincing his wary colleagues of the wisdom of preparing a deliberate defense.⁴⁰¹

The Reality and Limitations of the Cult of the Offensive

This debate among memoirists illustrates the pervasiveness of the cult of the offensive in the culture of Stavka and the field commanders. The desire for attack did not arise as an ad hoc solution to deal with the German invaders in 1941, but had been woven into the fabric of the Red Army’s mindset since its inception in the 1920s. It emerged as a reaction to the static defenses of World War I and gained material form in the industrialization drive of the First Five-Year Plan, as the Soviet state began to supply the military with more tanks and airplanes. The

published at the time of his death, related to emphasis on the decision going on the deliberate defense. The 1969 edition contained no italics or boldface on this point. Every subsequent edition included this sentence in italics.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 149.

⁴⁰¹ It should be noted that in a letter submitted to the editor of *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal* in 1967, Rokossovsky challenged details regarding Zhukov’s narrative of certain events in the preparation and assessments of the Battle of Kursk. While the commander of the Central Front argues that Zhukov attributed too much credit to himself in the planning of the battle, he offers no commentary on the attitude he held toward taking a deliberate defensive stance. See his letter in *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 3 (June 1992): 30-32.

emergence of the new machinery of war allowed Red Army theorists to expand their inchoate concepts of maneuver warfare for infantry and cavalry into a more sophisticated stage of development they called “Deep Battle.”⁴⁰² After further refinement, this theory became official doctrine as it was featured in the Red Army’s 1936 field manual, which called for reckless attacks even in the absence of viable support. The idea here was that if one unit broke through the point on the line of an enemy defense it should pursue this success to try to disrupt the operational rear, working from the assumption that its action would serve as a model to neighboring units to follow along and consolidate the breach in the enemy line. The goal was either to push the enemy back or to encircle a portion of the enemy force and then annihilate the soldiers and weapons the Red Army units had trapped.⁴⁰³

While the tactics of deep battle fell into dormancy with the murder of its signal champion in the Purges, the underpinnings of offensive-mindedness remained with the Soviet military into the preliminary stages of its confrontation with the Germans.⁴⁰⁴ For example, historian John

⁴⁰² While many theorists contributed to the ideas that coalesced into Deep Battle, Mikhail Tukhachevsky remains most closely associated with the doctrine. Even though Deep Battle became Red Army doctrine in 1936, another Soviet military thinker, Aleksandr Svechin, produced a competing formulation for how the Red Army should configure its forces in the face of the next war. Svechin argued that, as the next war would be an interstate war like World War I, the Red Army should implement a strategy of attrition. The Red Army would employ a defense of maneuver in the face of an invading force and, while giving ground grudgingly, deliver punishing counterstrikes designed to weaken the enemy. Once the enemy had exhausted itself, the Red Army could go over to a general offensive and achieve a decisive outcome. He considered the campaign of 1812 against Napoleon a useful model to emulate. While the Soviet military did not adopt his ideas in the 1930s, his vision of the next war and the key to victory came to pass in the fighting from 1941 to 1943.

⁴⁰³ Narodnyi kommissariat oborony, *Vremennyi Polevoi Ustav RKKA 1936 (PU 36)* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe voennoe izd-vo Narkomata oborony SSSR, 1937), 16.

⁴⁰⁴ The orders that Stavka issued to front commanders and their subsequent orders to their subordinates show that this is exactly what they hoped to do to the Axis forces in winter 1942-43. See V. A. Zolotarev, et. al. eds., *Russkii arkhiv. Velikaia Otechestvennaia: Preliudiia Kurskoi bitvy. Dokumenty i materialy, 6 dekabria 1942 g. – 25 apreliia 1943 g.* 15 (4-3) (Moskva: Terra, 1997), 26, 38, 47-48. The orders would list the overarching goal of an attack to be the encirclement and quick annihilation of the enemy forces which they faced. Senior commanders such as Zhukov and Vasilevsky sanctioned these commands, and all received Stalin’s blessing. Officers like Vatutin, Rokossovsky, and Golikov who exhorted their subordinates with sufficient vigor held their commands, while Stavka relieved those who exhibited reticence for action.

Erickson notes that the Red Army issued a revision of the 1936 doctrine in response to the German victory in Poland in 1939. It stated that, in the event of an attack, the Red Army would go immediately on the offensive and fight the war on the enemy's territory. The Soviet forces could achieve victory with the "complete destruction" of the foe, yielding a "decisive victory at low cost."⁴⁰⁵ Further, Erickson observes that one of the major lessons that the Soviet military took from its war with Finland was that offensive operations aimed solely to encircle and destroy enemy forces.⁴⁰⁶ In the same period when the German army perfected the tactics of maneuver warfare through stunning victories in Poland and France, Red Army military thinkers tried to devise similar tactics, yet without the necessary training to make them work in the field.

The Soviet military experienced catastrophic failure in the first sixteen months of the war with Nazi Germany, but this period provided a new cohort of commanders with valuable lessons in the art of war through an intense form of trial and error. Despite a series of routs in the summer and fall 1941, a core of competent commanders emerged from the chaos, assuming leadership roles at the army and front levels.⁴⁰⁷ A desperate but firm defensive outside of Moscow in November 1941 followed by a counteroffensive on December 5 provided the basis

⁴⁰⁵ Erickson explains further that the notion of "easy victory" via the offensive adversely affected attitudes concerning defense: "For this reason, defense was officially accorded a 'supporting role', with no attention whatsoever being paid to strategic defense, or, for that matter, to the counter-offensive. Colonel Sandalov, lecturer at the General Staff Academy and one of the officers who helped to prepare Tukhachevsky's 'invasion war-game', discerned this weakness at the 1937 maneuvers. 'Defensive forces' were totally at a discount, until they fitted into the offensive design. The Academy in its work ignored the problems of operational defense', much as it ignored any persistent study of the initial period of a war." See John Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad: Stalin's War with Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), 27-29.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁰⁷ Historian David Glantz details a host of tactical victories carried out by regiment and division commanders amid larger defeats in the Battle of Smolensk. Please see David M. Glantz, *Barbarossa Derailed: The Battle for Smolensk, 10 July – 10 September 1941*, Volume 1, *The German Advance to Smolensk, the Encirclement Battle, and the First and Second Soviet Counteroffensives, 10 July-24 August 1941* (Solihull, England: Helion & Company Ltd., 2010).

for the first victorious offensive action in the war. The Red Army could not, however, sustain forward movement.⁴⁰⁸

The USSR tried to take the initiative in summer and fall 1942 with several offensives in different sectors along the frontline, but most of these resulted in disastrous defeats. For example, in June 1942, S. K. Timoshenko lost two field armies in an attempt to preempt and disrupt the Germans' summer offensive.⁴⁰⁹ Between August and November of 1942 armies of the Stalingrad Front launched a series of offensives against German Sixth Army's northern flank near the village of Kotluban'. In the first two of these offensives Stavka sought to encircle a German panzer division that occupied a twenty-kilometer gap between 62nd Army, then located in Stalingrad proper, and 66th and 1st Guards Armies, which were along a line between the Don and Volga rivers. The Germans repelled these two attacks and two more that followed. The only favorable outcomes these offensives offered for the Stalingrad sector were that they drew strength from Paulus's main spearheads, seeking to take the city and they caused the Germans to assume falsely that this was the best the Stalingrad Front could muster.⁴¹⁰

Perhaps the greatest offensive failure of this period occurred in the Rzhev salient to the west of Moscow. General Zhukov designed a major offensive, codenamed Mars, which was to be launched at the same time as Operation Uranus. The attacks resulted in a catastrophic failure

⁴⁰⁸ This is not to say that "General Frost" helped the Red Army. Rather, that while the Germans successfully annihilated great swaths of the Soviet field armies, Soviet commanders were learning to execute more controlled retreats and reform a line further to the east. In so doing, they could organize momentary, yet punishing defensive stands or muted counteroffensives. Boxing offers a reasonable analogy. The Germans delivered precise head blows but the Red Army could withstand this attack while delivering inconsistent but punishing body blows that eventually brought the German advance to a standstill as winter 1941-1942 began to add to the Wehrmacht's difficulties.

⁴⁰⁹ Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad*, 344-49.

⁴¹⁰ See David Glantz, *Armageddon in Stalingrad: September-November 1942* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 37-38, 96, 168-82, 348-49.

for the Red Army. While posterity has sought to downplay the scope of this operation, relegating it to nothing more than a large-scale diversionary action, historian David Glantz has argued that Stavka had the same hopes for success as it did for operation Uranus, i.e., the destruction of a German army, in this case, the Ninth Army. Glantz rightly points out that the Soviet leadership allocated similar resources for this attack as it did for the Stalingrad operation.⁴¹¹ What is more, even though Stalin had used perhaps his greatest asset, General Zhukov, to organize this operation, it still failed.⁴¹² The defeat of Operation Mars provided Zhukov with a stinging example of the skill and tenacity with which the Wehrmacht fought and in the limitations of the Red Army at this stage of the war.

The Red Army's offensive performance after 1942 followed the same victory/defeat binary that characterized the experiences at Stalingrad and the Rzhev salient. In December 1942 and January 1943 Stavka launched a series of offensives along the entire front, all with the goal of encircling and annihilating German forces. Its vision was nothing short of spectacular and it scored some favorable results, but the failure to meet the vision served as an object lesson for the limitations of the Red Army's offensive capacity. In the south, the Soviet military consolidated the Stalingrad cauldron. The quick response of German generals Erich von Manstein and Herman Hoth, however, denied Stavka the opportunity to increase the burgeoning victory on the Volga by thwarting the Red Army's ambition to reach Rostov-on-Don and trap another three German armies in the Kuban.⁴¹³ In January Stavka launched a pair of limited offensives north of

⁴¹¹ See David M. Glantz, *Zhukov's Greatest Defeat, The Red Army's Epic Disaster in Operation Mars, 1942* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1999), 2-4.

⁴¹² Glantz argues that while Operation Mars failed, Zhukov impressed Stalin with his "grim determination and irrepressible optimism for future victory. See Glantz, *Zhukov's Greatest Defeat*, 283.

⁴¹³ These forces survived to deliver a crushing defeat to the Red Army in February-March 1943, and formed a major component of the cohort that would attack the South Face of the Kursk salient. Stavka had prepared a plan to follow in the success of Operation Uranus. This ambitious plan, codenamed Saturn, called for elements of N.F. Vatutin's

the Great Bend of the Don River that resulted in the destruction of the Italian Eighth Infantry Corps, Hungarian Second Army, and several divisions from German Second Army.⁴¹⁴ In the Orel-Tula-northern Kursk sector in February 1943, German Second Panzer Army gave minimal territory to the Briansk, Western, and Central fronts and ground this offensive action to a stalemate while visiting heavy losses on the Soviet attackers. In the Leningrad sector the Red Army again misfired as it attempted to cut off and annihilate a group of German forces in the Demiansk Pocket. Aware of the impending attack, the Germans made a calculated decision to withdraw to a more easily defensible line. While the Red Army reclaimed a small swath of territory, it failed in its primary desire to encircle and destroy the enemy. Moreover, Zhukov had oversight of this offensive and once again saw firsthand the Red Army field commanders' inability to carry out a limited offensive.⁴¹⁵ Meanwhile, back at the Rzhev salient, the German Ninth Army performed a controlled withdrawal and shortened the line. Although propagandists could claim that the recovery of territory signified a victory for a robust and capable combat force, the Soviet leadership recognized that a major component of its nemesis,

Southwestern Front to make a thrust to Rostov-on-Don and the Sea of Azov with the goal of trapping the German forces currently fighting in the Caucasus. The Germans blunted the Red Army design with an attempt to give aid to Paulus's Sixth Army. Instead of delivering a decisive defeat for the entirety of Germany's southern armed forces, the Red Army had to settle for the consolidation of the encirclement of German Sixth Army. While this action sealed the Sixth Army's fate, it illustrates the thinking of the Soviet military leadership at this time. It was highly aggressive and thought of warfare only in terms of ambitious offensive actions of annihilation. See Erickson, *The Road to Berlin*, 27-32; Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*, 253.

⁴¹⁴ In the Ostrogozhsk-Rossosh Operation, several armies from the Voronezh and Southwestern fronts routed Italian Eighth Army as it advanced along a 100 kilometer front to the Oskol River. This action exposed the right flank of the German and Hungarian forces that were occupying the territory just north of where the Italians had been. Now these forces occupied an eastward facing salient and were vulnerable to an easy encircling attack of converging pincers. Two armies from the Voronezh Front and one army from the Briansk Front collapsed this salient in the Voronezh-Kastornoe Operation. These Red Army forces pushed the enemy forces back seventy kilometers and destroyed several German and Hungarian divisions. See TsAMO, f. 203, op. 2874, d. 42, ll. 48-54; TsAMO, f. 203, op. 2777, d. 60, ll. 292-93; TsAMO, f. 203, op. 2843, d. 488, ll. 1-16. Found in Zolotarev, *Preludiia Kurskoi bitvy*, 72-75, 305-13.

⁴¹⁵ Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*, 254-56.

Army Group Center, had not lost its battle potency.

Perhaps the most striking example of the Wehrmacht's fighting capacity and excellence in command in the post-Stalingrad period came in February and March 1943 in the Donbass region. Flush with the dual successes of the Ostrogozhsk-Rossosh and Voronezh-Kastornoe operations and thinking that the Germans were retreating and therefore at a disadvantage, the commanders of the Voronezh and Southwestern fronts submitted plans to Moscow to continue the advance.⁴¹⁶ Stavka accepted the plans and, with only two or three days' rest after the initial advances, these commanders launched new offensives with the goal of reaching the Dnieper while surrounding all the ostensibly retreating German forces and destroying them. Neither F. I. Golikov, who commanded the Voronezh Front, nor Vatutin, then in command of the Southwestern Front, took the time to consolidate their gains.⁴¹⁷ More importantly, both neglected to bring their supply bases forward and poor road conditions exacerbated the problem of stretched supply lines.⁴¹⁸ Further, they grossly underestimated the strength of the Germans on whom they advanced. The Germans, under the command of Erich von Manstein, made a controlled retreat west across the Donbass pulling the Red Army tanks further away from their supply bases. As the Germans drew back in a mobile defense, Manstein simultaneously reconfigured elements of his forces in a way that allowed them to bypass the Soviet spearheads and strike from the flank and rear. Manstein sprang his trap on February 18. For the next four weeks the Germans retook much of the Donbass and Kharkov while visiting grievous losses on

⁴¹⁶ They codenamed these offensives, Star and Gallop.

⁴¹⁷ Golikov retained command of the Voronezh Front until March 28, at which point Stavka replaced him with Vatutin.

⁴¹⁸ TsAMO, f. 203, op. 2777, d. 111, ll. 230, 361. Found in Zolotarev, *Preludiia Kurskoi bitvy*, 94.

the Voronezh and Southwestern fronts. The performance of Manstein's forces demonstrated that the Wehrmacht still had mastery of warfare of maneuver.

These missed opportunities resulted from a collection of persistent and critical failings on the part of Stavka and Red Army field commanders. Throughout the 1942-43 campaigns, officers at all levels based their decisions on poor intelligence. They often miscalculated the number and types of forces with which they were to engage and did not properly take into the consideration the nature of the terrain where the fighting would take place.⁴¹⁹ The Stalingrad encirclement provides the best example of this type of mistake. Stavka made projections for the time required to reduce the Stalingrad cauldron based on the assumption that the Red Army had trapped only 90,000 enemy troops. It was not until Soviet forces began the slow process of reducing the pocket that Stavka realized that they had encircled over 200,000 Axis combatants.⁴²⁰ The lack of proper command and control of attacking forces stood as another significant problem for field commanders. Offensive warfare at this time presented a whole host of challenges as commanders had to coordinate disparate bodies of troops that used different weapons systems and travelled at varying speeds.⁴²¹ In order to successfully organize a breakthrough, the commander had to ensure that the numerous weapons systems deployed struck at different depths of the enemy defenses simultaneously in order to allow the advancing infantry or tanks to overrun enemy positions and push into the operational rear. On several occasions Soviet officers could not coordinate the variety of forces operating in concert against German

⁴¹⁹ Harold S Orenstein, *Soviet Documents on the Use of War Experience*, Vol. 3: *Military Operations, 1941 and 1942* (London: Frank Cass, 1991) 93-97.

⁴²⁰ Erickson, *The Road to Berlin*, 36-37.

⁴²¹ For example, commanders had to coordinate the movements of soldiers marching on foot, mechanized infantry, horse-drawn artillery and supply, mechanized artillery, armor, and tactical air power.

forces. Officers at lower levels of command also failed to coordinate activities with neighboring units.⁴²² Poor attention to logistics proved a persistent problem that hampered sustained offensive action. Aware of these problems, Stavka worked through solutions to mitigate their effects, but one must still bear in mind that they had not been adequately solved by April 1943. It stands to reason that the High Command had to incorporate the reality of these problems into the decision-making calculus for the type of action to be executed in the summer of 1943.

A Theoretical Solution to the Problem

The desire for an aggressive posture suffused with the eagerness to achieve victory through the annihilation of the enemy forces in the field represented a clear invocation of what the Prussian military theorist, Carl von Clausewitz, regarded as the highest possible aim in war.⁴²³ The Soviet Union's dedication to decisive battles of annihilation in the first two years of conflict with the Germans showed a great affinity for the Clausewitzian aim of war. The fact that it resulted in so much failure might have resulted from the fact that the Red Army employed only one half of Clausewitz's great dialectic of war, i.e., the attack. It was only when Stavka embraced the Clausewitzian concept of defense that it achieved its great early successes at Moscow and Stalingrad.

Clausewitz presented the dialectic of defense and attack as one of the centerpieces of his magnum opus, *On War*. He argued that these two forms of war did not share a polarity, yet the

⁴²² See Orenstein, *Soviet Documents on the Use of War Experience*, Vol. 3. An analysis of the failed offensive of 61st and 16th Armies in June 1942 provides a useful account of poor command and control, intelligence, and supply at the army and front levels at this stage in the war.

⁴²³ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 99.

characteristics that distinguished one from the other dominated the whole of war.⁴²⁴ He described the attack as having a positive aim, as the attacker acted to take possession of territory. By contrast, defense embraced a negative aim, as its sole purpose was to resist the enemy. Even though Clausewitz considered defense's aim to have been negative, he in no uncertain terms argued that it was the stronger form of the war. Yet, because it had a negative object, Clausewitz argued that a fighting force should use it only when weakness compels it to do so.⁴²⁵ A well-executed defense should create a favorable balance of strength. Once a fighting force has gained an advantage over the adversary, it should naturally shift to the attack.⁴²⁶ So, while Clausewitz asserts that defense is the stronger form of war, he by no means advocates a permanent defensive posture. Defense is meant to be temporary and should always result in a counterattack. Clausewitz finds fault with a defender who fails to capitalize on the shift in advantage from the attacker and press his own offensive. To this end, any force that prepares for a defense should also prepare for the follow-on counteroffensive once the attacker has grown exhausted.⁴²⁷ Clausewitz argues that this is the point at which a defensive battle can produce a decisive result.⁴²⁸

Clausewitz had gained some notoriety among some commanders in the Russian Imperial Army but it was not until Lenin began to cite *On War* that the Prussian theorist rose in

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 83-84, 94.

⁴²⁵ Clausewitz argued that an army in a defensive posture can only deflect an attacker but cannot overcome an attacker if it remains in a defensive posture. In order to force the enemy to its will, the defender must go over to the offensive and annihilate the enemy.

⁴²⁶ *On War*, 358.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 370.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 390.

prominence among the Russian readership.⁴²⁹ Approving of Clausewitz's use of Hegelian principles to formulate his writing, Lenin found the dialectic between offense and defense especially compelling when adapted to revolutionary practice.⁴³⁰ More importantly, the Bolshevik Party leader attached great significance to the Clausewitzian relationship between war and politics. Clausewitz's argument that war constituted a form of politics suited the belligerent pacifism Lenin expressed during World War I and the Russian Civil War. Once in power, Lenin recommended that party leaders read Clausewitz. As the Red Army emerged from the Civil War and its cohort of new generals sought to formulate a military doctrine for a permanent standing army for the Soviet state, Leon Trotsky, the Commissar for War, used Clausewitz as a means to undermine such ambitions.⁴³¹ He maintained that war was not a science and for which permanent laws could be created to chart its conduct. But Red Army military theorists continued to cite Clausewitz in their recommendations for how the Soviet military should conceive of war and execute operations. Former Red Army Chief of Staff, B. M. Shaposhnikov, incorporated Clausewitz's ideas into his study military affairs, *The Brain of the Army (Mozg Armii)*.⁴³² In his study of Deep Battle, historian Richard Simpkin contends that the primary goal of the Red

⁴²⁹ Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 408. Lenin first read *On War* in Switzerland in 1915.

⁴³⁰ Raymond Aron, *Clausewitz: Philosopher of War* trans. Christine Booker and Norman Stone (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1985), 147-48, 267-77.

⁴³¹ See Azar Gat, "Clausewitz and the Marxists: Yet Another Look," *Journal of Contemporary History* 27, no. 2 (April 1992): 363-82. For a description of this struggle over the future of the Soviet military see Mark von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the Socialist State, 1917-1930*, (Cornell University Press, 1990), 183-206.

⁴³² John Erickson, *The Soviet High Command: a Military-Political History, 1918-1941* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 292. Shaposhnikov served as Chief of Staff for the Red Army from 1928 to 1931. Anne C. Aldis and Roger N. McDermott point out that The General Staff Academy has included *Mozg Armii* in its curriculum since its publication in 1929. They also observe that the Russian and Soviet military have had a long tradition of learning from the experiences of foreign militaries. See Anne C. Aldis and Roger N. McDermott, eds., *Russian Military Reform, 1992-2002* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), xxi.

Army's doctrine in the 1930s consisted of annihilating the enemy "in the Clausewitzian sense."⁴³³ Soviet presses also published two further editions of *On War* in translation in 1932 and 1941.⁴³⁴ Given the prevalence Clausewitz's ideas among the Soviet Union's political and military leadership in the interwar period, one can be certain that the Red Army's military thinkers would have been familiar with the importance the Prussian placed on both defense and offense.

The Red Army in fact followed Clausewitz's prescription in the defense of Moscow in 1941 and Stalingrad in 1942, but in both cases the Red Army did not carry out premeditated defenses. The defense of each of these cities came as a result of the desperate circumstances in which the Red Army found itself. Stavka's reckless offensives in other periods of fighting appeared almost as a repudiation of the idea of requiring a defense. It seems that Clausewitz had anticipated this attitude, as his discussion of defense and attack sought to convince the reader that defense, used in the manner he prescribed, was a natural and therefore not dishonorable part of war. As such, it was in a commander's interest to embrace this stronger form of war from time to time to defeat his enemy over the long run. An important criterion in Clausewitz's conception of a successful defense was that the commander who chose a temporary defense should take the time to use the advantages that terrain offers him and take the time to design his defense.⁴³⁵

⁴³³ Clausewitz argued that in combat the goal of any army was to force the enemy to its will. It achieves this by executing a decisive victory. This could involve total destruction or total acquiescence/submission of an enemy force. See Richard Simpkin, *Deep Battle: The Brainchild of Marshal Tukhachevskii* (London: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1987), 28, 88, 177-78. Simpkin also observes that Tukhachevsky, in his 1930 Academy Lecture, cited the importance of Clausewitz's relationship between politics and war. See Simpkin, *Deep Battle*, 24.

⁴³⁴ Beatrice Heuser, *Reading Clausewitz* (London: Pimlico, 2002), 19.

⁴³⁵ He seems to be trying to present a correct understanding of the relationship between these two forms of war in a time of glorification in all offensive action and denigration of defense. Clausewitz states that three things provide decisive advantages: surprise, the benefit of terrain, and concentric attack. (360) The Red Army had these three advantages at Stalingrad, albeit in different sectors of the battlefield. The situation they found themselves in Kursk was decidedly different. They could not hope to achieve concentric attack, but they could create the other two

No Longer a Defense out of Desperation, but a Defense by Design

Now that the Red Army had decided to replicate the Stalingrad scenario of a defensive-to-counteroffensive form of war, it had to rectify the defensive shortcomings of the tank-friendly terrain that Kursk Oblast offered the Wehrmacht's panzer divisions. Back in August 1942 the Red Army fell into great good fortune as, following Stalin's "not one step back" order, it retreated into an ideal defensive zone: the city of Stalingrad itself. First, Stalingrad hugged roughly twenty kilometers of the Western bank of the Volga River, which ran perpendicular to the German spearheads. From the point of view of the advancing Germans, the city presented an extremely wide yet thin line with a kilometer-wide river stretching along the length of its immediate rear. This configuration denied the Wehrmacht the opportunity for a quick encirclement of the city, such as it had executed in Smolensk or Kiev in 1941. Second, the city itself consisted of a dense collection of well-constructed industrial, institutional, and residential buildings that hindered the German tanks' mobility, while simultaneously offering Red Army infantry units countless locations for concealment and protection, as well as copious multilevel firing positions.⁴³⁶ The above-ground city structures combined with the close proximity of the two fighting forces further benefitted 62nd Army's defensive struggle as the Germans could not use heavy artillery and the industrial buildings withstood the impacts of what artillery the Germans did deploy. Stalingrad's urban landscape offered the Red Army the perfect environment to grasp Sixth Army's spearheads tightly, smother their offensive capacity, and

factors. They could manipulate the terrain to give themselves the greatest possible advantage. They could also deploy and prepare the reserves to be as mobile as possible to create surprise against the Germans.

⁴³⁶ Even though Luftwaffe has unleashed a series of devastating air attacks in late August, the majority of the building maintained a great deal of structural integrity. The buildings that failed, collapsed into their own footprint, yet the walls remained standing.

deliver punishing attacks, all while preparing for the massive counteroffensive. In order to force the Germans into a second Stalingrad scenario in summer 1943, the Red Army had to recreate the Stalingrad cityscape. As they did not have the luxury of a long, narrow, made-to-order above-ground defensive system, they had to invert the Stalingrad system and create a hive of concealment, protection, and advantageous firing positions through below-ground excavation.

In conceiving their preparations for field fortifications at Kursk, Red Army commanders reverted back to the same basic principles of below-ground defense that had been developed by European armies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and that became a hallmark of the Western Front in World War I. Following the Industrial Revolution, firearms technology boasted increased lethality, range, and rate of fire, and this forced defenders to abandon above-ground fortifications composed of earth or wood and find shelter in the earth itself. A collection of foxholes connected by trenches granted defenders several advantages over the new weapons in the attacker's arsenal. First, field fortifications provided the occupants concealment from enemy observation when prepared using the contours of the terrain and well-placed camouflage. Second, when an attacking force used explosive antipersonnel shells, defenders built special reinforced shelters along a trench system that protected soldiers from deadly shrapnel. Third, a well-designed trench system provided a large defending force with a fixed point to anchor their overall position and enhanced the defender's firepower. The combination of these three qualities enhanced the morale of the soldiers occupying them and reduced their desire to flee.⁴³⁷ The introduction of barbed wire and the increased use of the machine gun at the turn of the twentieth

⁴³⁷ Nicholas Murray, *The Rocky Road to the Great War: The Evolution of Trench Warfare to 1914* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2013), 24-35. Murray's work provides a valuable description of the evolution of below-ground defense in European warfare from the Russo-Turkish War to the Balkan Wars.

century gave a tremendous advantage to the defender, especially against a frontal assault.⁴³⁸ On the Western Front in World War I, attackers tried to neutralize this advantage by unleashing massive barrages of higher caliber artillery that allowed for indirect fire.⁴³⁹ Defenders responded by designing field fortifications that permitted soldiers to maneuver to trenches adjacent to the sector under artillery fire. The stalemate of the Western Front in World War I caused military thinkers in both Germany and the Soviet Union to devise new ways of overcoming static warfare.⁴⁴⁰ Ironically, Stavka and the field commanders at Kursk in 1943 had to create a below-ground trench system, as elaborate as any that had been produced in France, in order to ensure the failure of the German offensive.

How the Red Army Organized the Construction of the Trenches

Red Army commanders incorporated several variables into their calculus for developing the defense network at Kursk. These variables included the geographic features of the territory Soviet forces occupied, the most likely avenues of German advance, and the newest principles for field fortification and design. Terrain played a large role in how the leaders of the Central and Voronezh fronts conceived of defense, as Kursk's topography created natural hindrances to German mobility as well as likely channels for German advance. For example, ravines, some as deep as forty meters, dotted the landscape. Large forests covered several regions in the area of

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 225-35.

⁴³⁹ Indirect fire means firing a projectile beyond the line of site.

⁴⁴⁰ While neither the Eastern Front in World War I nor the conflicts the Red Army fought between 1918 and 1922 featured the level of deadlock as seen on the Western Front, Soviet military theorists sought to guarantee that the Red Army could overcome such circumstances should an enemy employ a war of attrition based on defense. The Red Army called their brand of maneuver warfare Deep Battle. The Germans took infiltration tactics they first deployed in 1918, they called *Bewegungskrieg* (maneuver warfare), added some of the Soviet military's ideas of echeloning the attack and marrying these ideas to a more traditional form of German warfare called the *Kesselschlacht* (Cauldron battle).

operations, including two sizable woods located in Army Group Center's staging area that gave the Red Army some advantage in anticipation German intentions, as they concentrated and limited the point of origin for the German attack from the north. The territory of the South Face featured more open space and was thus more favorable to Germany's mobile forces.⁴⁴¹ Two rivers ran roughly parallel to each of the front lines on the North Face and South Face of the salient: in the Central Front's sector, the Svapa River provided the foothold for the army rear line of defense for the 70th and 65th Armies, and in the Voronezh Front's sector, the 40th and 38th Armies established their army rear lines of defense on the Psel River. Meanwhile, Stavka anchored its strategic defensive lines on meridional rivers, including the Tim, the Oskol, and the Don. Stavka devoted resources especially to the region of the Tim and the Oskol rivers, as this represented the first strategic line to face the German army groups should they unite east of Kursk city.

The Soviet field commanders' first task included determining the three most likely routes of German attack and then preparing defenses to obstruct these paths. Because of the topographical restrictions that hemmed in Army Group Center, Rokossovsky operated on the assumption that all three attack axes shared the same point of origin, located due north of village of Ponyri. He considered two likely avenues of attack would lead due south to Kursk city, either along the railroad line that ran through Ponyri or east of the main Orel-Kursk highway that ran through Fatezh. He predicted the third possible path of advance to shoot east from the Maloarkhangel'sk region toward Livny.⁴⁴² Rokossovsky distributed all five of his armies along

⁴⁴¹ David M. Glantz and Harold S. Orenstein, trans., *The Battle for Kursk 1943, the Soviet General Staff Study* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 1999), 4.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 11.

the front but narrowed the width of the 13th and the 40th armies' frontages as he anticipated the attack here. He ordered four of the armies to occupy the first two echelons of defense, but organized the 13th Army to occupy three echelons of defense. This would mean that the defense line running to the north of the Kursk-Kastornoe railway would have been occupied by the five rifle divisions, one tank brigade and three tank regiments that comprised the third echelon.⁴⁴³

Vatutin also articulated three possible routes of attack. The first two emerged from Belgorod, with one making straight for Kursk city and the second progressing to a point east of Kursk city.

The third expected avenue of advance originated in Volchansk, a small town southeast of Belgorod on the Northern Donets River, and pushed northeast toward Novyi Oskol. Like

Rokossovsky, Vatutin had five rifle armies, but he deployed them differently. He ordered four of them to take a position in the first two echelons of defense, each with a frontage wider than their counterparts on the North Face. Vatutin placed the last rifle army along with a tank army behind the two armies that stood on the expected axes of attack.⁴⁴⁴ Since the Voronezh Front occupied

territory that offered the advancing German panzer divisions more room for maneuver, Vatutin wanted to give his own forces greater mobility, especially in the deeper areas of defense. He fully anticipated that the Germans would penetrate his defenses to a certain extent and expected to use his defensive mobility to strike them at the flanks. Vatutin had developed three counterstrike options for each enemy attack possibility. All of these plans required a mass of forces to make coordinated strikes at specific points between the army line of defense and the front line of defense.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 19-21.

The Red Army ordered the engineering officers and soldiers preparing the defenses to use the latest manual for the construction of field fortification.⁴⁴⁵ The new manual carried over basic information from its predecessor, but, significantly, included a more complete discussion of the rationale for constructing field fortifications, as well as more expansive instructions for constructing larger, integrated firing positions.⁴⁴⁶ For example, the 1942 manual provided a basic model for the preparation of a rifle squad firing position or trench (*okop*). This firing position consisted of each soldier from the unit digging his own foxhole in an asymmetric pattern and then joining the individual holes with a narrow trench. They would create a communication trench to the rear area, thus allowing access to resupply and reinforcements.⁴⁴⁷ The 1943 manual began with this layout, but enhanced the design of the rifle unit's firing position. The members of the squad were to construct a number of alternative firing points greater than the total number of soldiers in the squad from which the occupants could fire to sides or the rear.⁴⁴⁸ This could allow the soldiers to shift positions and concentrate their fire in one direction should the enemy bypass them. The new design encouraged soldiers to create two or more communications trenches to the rear, in addition to exit points on the sides to allow for freer movement of soldiers throughout the line. The new manual also called for the development of more dummy firing points and trenches designed to confuse the enemy as to the true potential of the field fortification. The greater emphasis on deception through dummy forces and camouflage, what the Red Army called *maskirovka*, was a hallmark of the new manual. The soldier received

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 31. While the Red Army leadership wanted the new manual to serve as the model for the field fortifications at Kursk, we cannot be sure if the local engineering soldiers used the current or preexisting manuals.

⁴⁴⁶ In fact the 1943 manual reprinted dozens of the illustrations and figures published in its predecessor.

⁴⁴⁷ S. E. Gerbanovskii, *Fortifikatsiia pekhoty* (Moskva: Voenizdat NKO SSSR, 1942), 5-12.

⁴⁴⁸ Narodnyi komissariat oborony, *Nastavlenie po inzhenernomu delu dlia pekhoty* (Moskva: Esennoe izdatel'stvo narodnogo kommissarita oborony, 1943), 25-29.

instruction on how best to use materials at hand, like sod, bushes, and trees, to conceal firing positions and trench networks.⁴⁴⁹ Using the rifle squad firing position as a basic model, the 1943 manual also included designs for firing positions for a division's various weapons squads, for example a heavy machinegun or mortar squad. Each squad's firing position would be surrounded by anti-infantry and antitank barriers, like barbed wire entanglements or landmines, but connected to one another through the threads of the communications trenches. Each of these specialized firing points was an elemental unit for the Red Army's vision for defense.⁴⁵⁰

The organization of a large number of squad-level firing positions into one cohesive cluster served as the basic defensive unit for the network under construction at Kursk, the company or battalion strong points.⁴⁵¹ In forming them, the Red Army maintained the principles of nonlinearity and asymmetry while striving to fully exploit the natural contours of the immediate environment. This resulted in each battalion's strong point achieving a circular shape. The battalion strong point represented a self-contained panoply of weapons systems. Each one could stand as its own independent center of resistance that could lay effective fire in all directions. This meant that if enemy units succeeded in overrunning one position, they would find themselves in flanking fire from the neighboring strong points. Further, as the military engineers organized the excavation of the defensive belts with the strong points packed in and among one another, the Red Army could deploy a variety of weapons systems consistently along the entire depth of the defense. In effect, every success the attacking units would achieve

⁴⁴⁹ NKO, *Nastavlenie po inzhenernomu delu dlia pekhoty*, 65-70.

⁴⁵⁰ NKO, *Nastavlenie po inzhenernomu delu dlia pekhoty*, 45-61.

⁴⁵¹ The distinction between these two units seems to be determined only by the number of soldiers that comprised them. In the Red Army's organizational structure a battalion consisted of two or three companies. The way these terms are listed in published and archival documents implies that the basic concept for this defensive unit was the same.

would be met with a fresh center of resistance. This went to a depth of several kilometers. Interspersed among the battalion strong points, the military engineers established newly conceived antitank strongpoints. These were configured like the battalion strong points in that they contained a cluster of antitank guns arrayed in circular formation that allowed fire in all directions. The principal aim here was to channel the oncoming panzers between the antitank strong points so the guns could strike at the tanks' weaker side armor. Seen from above, the outline of the patchwork of battalion strong points resembles a microscopic slide of skin cells.

The Red Army created another set of impediments to German armor by constructing a large array of antitank ditches and switch positions. Commonly constructed at the forward edge of a defensive zone, antitank ditches could slow or stop an armored assault for a period of time, thus making the tanks susceptible to artillery fire or air attack. Switch positions were trenches that ran at oblique angles from the main lines of defense among the battalion strong points.⁴⁵² In the event that the Germans achieved a breakthrough at a given point on the main line of defense, these served as barriers to lateral movement, thus denying the attacker that ability to easily surround a portion of the defense and consolidate the breakthrough. The switch positions also offered another means to channel enemy forces along specific avenues of advance making the panzers susceptible to attack from the sides. The combination of main defensive belts, the switch positions, and the scores of battalion strong points constructed in a dense patchwork of mutually supportive fields of fire formed a Stalingrad-like cityscape in the inverse. Just as Stalingrad, with its dense cluster of buildings, served as a formidable trap for German tanks, so

⁴⁵² The Red Army's 1943 field fortification manual clearly stated that a well-organized battalion strong point and its corresponding barriers, which would have included switch positions, should avoid forming straight lines or any recognizable geometric shape. As such, the switch positions crisscrossed through a given zone of defense forming uneven oblique angles. While the goal was a kind of randomness to deny the enemy the ability to identify easy points of weakness or access, the Red Army engineers carefully engineered the randomness. NKO, *Nastavlenie po inzhenernomu delu dlia pekhoty*, 65.

too would the vast cellular configuration of trenches and field fortifications mire the German panzer forces in a morass of steel and fire. Kursk's peasants, under the direct supervision of Red Army engineers, would remake Kursk into a cityscape of wood and dirt.

From Deliberate Design to Deliberate Digging: Organization and the Labor Requirements to Move the Earth

Red Army defense planners' vision called for the construction of dense network of firing points and trenches totaling thousands of kilometers, all to be excavated simultaneously and prepared in a matter of weeks. Such a Herculean task would require the labor of hundreds of thousands of civilians and soldiers working in concert and under deadline. Neither the scale nor the intricacy of the excavation can be underestimated. Stavka did not task these people simply to dig a series of wide antitank ditches that required nothing more than a sturdy spade and a strong back. Just as moving millions of cubic meters of earth required a vast pool of labor, the complexity of the project obliged thousands of specially-trained engineers to reconnoiter the grounds, mark the areas to be excavated, and provide close oversight to the mobilized labor force. For this assignment Stavka deployed several of its dedicated engineering units that specialized in defense and field fortification construction. From the beginning of the war, the Red Army had divided the administration of its engineering forces into two separate general categories. The first category included engineering units that were organic to the armies and divisions in the field, meaning that they operated under the direct authority of the army and divisional commanders who deployed them specifically for tasks related to the military unit's goals. The majority of these units consisted of sappers who laid landmines and also carried out

mine removal activities, while the remainder included a small number of groups that specialized in bridge and road construction.

The second category contained a separate branch of the Red Army's field engineering service that remained under Stavka's direct authority. Earlier in the war Stavka had ordered such units to oversee the construction carried out by mass mobilizations of civilians at many other locations, including Leningrad, Moscow, Odessa, and areas west of Stalingrad. It had also tasked some of these units to dig strategic lines of defense at a great distance away from actual operations. These units therefore could operate independently of field commanders.⁴⁵³ In circumstances such as those in Kursk in 1943, however, Stavka attached engineering units to a front to serve at the disposal of that front's commander of engineering forces. Stavka reorganized these independent engineering units into three levels of command in 1942. The UOS (*upravlenie oboronного stroitel'stva*) constituted the highest level of organization, normally with an officer at the rank of colonel in command. Each UOS comprised four to six UVPS units (*upravlenie voenno-polevogo stroitel'stva*). The most basic unit in this chain of command was the UVSR (*uchastok voenno-stroitel'nykh rabot*). Usually four or five UVSR units formed one UVPS.

When the UOSs worked at a distance from the actual fighting and required additional labor power from the local population, the commanding officer usually worked directly with the obkom secretary or oblispolkom chairman in order to mobilize workers from the cities or collective farms. Several UOSs operated in Kursk Oblast during the preparation for the German

⁴⁵³ See V. N. Maliarov, "Mobilizatsiia trudovykh i material'nykh resursov SSSR na stroitel'stvo oboronitel'nykh rubezhei v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny (1941-1945gg.)" (dissertatsiia na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni doktora istoricheskikh nauk, VITU, Sankt-Peterburg, 2000). While working from documents located in TsAMO, Maliarov offers a superficial exposition of activities of the engineering units in preparing defensive structures over the course of the war. His dissertation provides some interesting and useful information, but it glosses over the frictions that existed between military and civilian leaders and holds to the triumphalist narrative of everyone working in determined unison in defense of the Motherland.

attack. Stavka placed the 34th UOS under the command of the Central Front, while 38th UOS worked with the Voronezh Front. Overlapping areas of responsibility further complicated the situation in the southeastern sector of the oblast. The archives indicate that the 36th UOS and the 27th UOS also operated on territory occupied by troops of the Voronezh Front. Each front had its own engineering command staff, and these officers determined the general construction tasks to undertake in their sectors. They transmitted the orders to the UOSs, which were expected to bring them to fruition. As the UOSs and their subordinate units required civilian labor to carry out their tasks, they established contact with local officials at every level of political leadership. While the UOSs and UVPSs could direct the local authorities where they required labor to be sent, they did not hold the authority to order their own mobilizations. This authority came from the military councils of either the front or one of the armies. Although it seems likely that the fronts and armies had responsibility to carry out construction in the first belt of defense, the UOSs held principal responsibility for defense construction in the second belt and all army rear, front, and strategic lines of defense. As this had been the case, the armies that occupied the first zone of defense allocated soldiers to dig their own trenches. The local civilian population, on the other hand, had responsibility for preparing the remainder of the network, from the second zone of defense all the way back to the strategic line of defense on the banks of the Don River.

The trench system the Red Army ordered required an exceptional amount of planning and careful attention to the excavation itself. Once the military engineers had reconnoitered the entire area sighted for field fortifications, they made tracings of the proposed trenches on the surface using stakes and rope. Next, the engineers brought in the mobilized peasants, all lacking experience with excavation work, to produce an intricate combat defense system. The Red Army field construction manuals provided only the general layout of a firing trench with specific

dimensions for the various types of excavations. For example, a rifle pit should be 60 by 60 centimeters at the surface, 40 by 40 centimeters at the floor and 110 centimeters deep, while a communication trench to allow a single soldier to pass upright should be 80 centimeters wide at the surface, 30-40 centimeters wide at the base and 150 centimeters deep.⁴⁵⁴ But neither of these publications provided any guidance with regard to the type of labor necessary to achieve the manuals' end results. The basic assumption was that digging was digging, regardless of the type of structure to be excavated. This may have been the case for large antitank ditches, but the construction of field fortifications from which soldiers would fight tanks required some level of skill as well as an orchestrated division of labor.

Despite this dearth of detail vis-à-vis the nature of excavation work, one may use field fortification manuals produced before the war and by other armies to gain a sense of the character of the labor the Red Army demanded of Kursk's civilians.⁴⁵⁵ Such an analogy is possible because these manuals describe basic tasks and tools that match the type of labor and implements used in the Kursk salient in 1943. Red Army resolutions consistently demanded that civilians report to their worksites with spades, crowbars, and axes.⁴⁵⁶ These non-Soviet foreign

⁴⁵⁴ NKO, *Nastavlenie po inzhenernomu delu dlia pekhoty*, 39-41, 77. The manual noted that a properly made rifle pit should include a thirty centimeter parapet and a small crawl space extending from the base no fewer than fifty centimeters deep to provide protection from enemy artillery fire. The manual makes provisions for three types of communications trenches: one through which a soldier can crawl, one through which a soldier can pass at a crouch and the last through which a soldier can walk fully upright. All three types have variable depths and include a parapet along either lip. The 1942 manual made provisions for a slightly larger single-soldier fire pit, yet included the same dimensions with the same diagram for the three types of communications trench. See Gerbanovskii, *Fortifikatsiia pekhoty* (Moskva: Voenizdat NKO SSSR, 1942), 29, 36.

⁴⁵⁵ The four sources used for this include: Dennis Hart Mahan, *A Treatise on Field Fortification, Containing Instructions on the Methods of Laying Out, Constructing, Defending, and Attacking Intrenchments, with the General Outlines also of the Arrangement, the Attack and Defence of Permanent Fortifications*, 4th Ed (Richmond, VA: West & Johnston, 1862); War Office, Great Britain, *Instruction in Military Engineering*, Volume 1, Part 2. (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1879); Royal Military Academy of Great Britain. *Textbook of Fortification and Military Engineering* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1893); G. J. Fieberger, *A Textbook on Field Fortification*, 3rd Ed (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1913).

⁴⁵⁶ The orders demanded that all workers arrive to the excavation site with some sort of tool. The distinctions arose only in terms of percentage. The Red Army wanted at least 75-80 percent of the people to arrive with spades, 10-15

field fortification manuals describe the level of difficulty required in excavating safe and effective below-ground structures. Each manual divides trenching labor into two types. One worker would break apart untouched soil with a pick ax and move it to a place near his feet, where a different person would use a shovel to lift the broken earth to a parapet at the lip of the trench or throw the earth up to the ground surface. From there other laborers would be deployed to transport the spoil to be applied in another part of the fortification or to some dumping area out of sight of enemy observation.

These foreign manuals, unlike their Red Army counterparts, also discussed expected rates of work depending on the type and condition of soil being excavated and the level of experience of the workers. West Point defense fortification specialist, Dennis Mahan, established in 1862 that in loose soil an expert workman should throw from eight-to-ten cubic yards of earth, while six cubic yards should be considered a fair day's work for a soldier unaccustomed to the task.⁴⁵⁷ Later publications modified Mahan's figures rather dramatically. In 1879, Great Britain's Royal Engineers determined that an untrained soldier, in moderately loose soil, could excavate 3.7 cubic yards of earth in four hours' time with a pick and shovel if he had to throw the dirt no more than twelve feet. The Royal Engineers pointed out, however, that the same soldier could not be expected to dig much more when given six hours to labor, as he would have been exhausted in the first four hours of work.⁴⁵⁸ In 1913 West Point professor, Gustav Fieberger, published an even more nuanced set of work expectations. He argued that an untrained soldier with a shovel in easy soil should be able to move one cubic yard of earth in the first hour. Fieberger reduced

percent with crowbars, and 10-15 percent with axes. The crowbars the Kursk's civilian population used would have been analogous to pick-axes described in the manuals.

⁴⁵⁷ Mahan *A Treatise on Field Fortification*, 34-35.

⁴⁵⁸ War Office, Great Britain, *Instruction in Military Engineering*, Volume 1, Part 2 (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1879) 11-12.

this to five-sixths of a cubic yard in the second hour, one-half in the third hour, and then one-third for each of the last five hours of an eight-hour day, thus giving a total for the day of four cubic yards. Fieberger also noted that when soldiers worked in denser or frozen soil then the site manager should reduce expectations by half.⁴⁵⁹ Fieberger's modification in the face of harder soil needs to be taken into consideration when assessing the work totals of Kursk's peasants, many of whom were underfed women, as they began heavy digging in the height of an especially bitter winter.

All three authors have assumed the work would be done by fit infantrymen between the ages of eighteen and forty. Further, one may assume that these men were to be fed something close to a standard army ration at the turn of the twentieth century, which was more than 4,000 calories per day; this would give the workers a steady supply of energy to return to their labors with renewed vigor the next day.⁴⁶⁰ Even with these assumptions, both the Royal Engineers and Fieberger emphasized the strenuousness of this type of heavy labor. The British instructed military engineers carrying out long-term construction projects to rotate their work crews in eight-hour shifts in order to allow the soldiers performing spade work sufficient rest.⁴⁶¹ Referring the reader to his table describing the reduction of work over time, Fieberger argued that overall production would be greatly increased if each soldier were relieved after only two hours of work.⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁹ Fieberger, *A Textbook on Field Fortification*, 67.

⁴⁶⁰ For more information on the feeding of British soldiers, please see Anthony Clayton, *Battlefield Rations: The Food Given to the British Soldier for Marching and Fighting 1900-2011* (Solihull, UK: Helion and Company, 2013).

⁴⁶¹ War Office, Great Britain, *Instruction in Military Engineering, Volume I*, 11. This manual suggested further that diggers should only work in four-hour shifts in order avoid undue fatigue.

⁴⁶² Fieberger, *A Textbook on Field Fortification*, 68.

In contrast, the women, children, and elderly men who labored in Kursk's trenches came to the task already weakened by reduced nutrition during the German occupation. This condition did not markedly improve upon liberation, since the Red Army requisitioned much of the surplus foodstuffs the peasants held. While the archival documents do not describe average daily rations, various reports show that Kursk's civilians performed their heavy labor on only 100 to 300 grams of bread per day, which provided about 780 calories.⁴⁶³ This amount fell below the standard daily rations for not only workers expected to fulfill special higher norms (700 grams), but also white-collar workers (400 grams). The Soviet state recommended that an adult worker should consume 3,592 calories every day to maintain health, a total that rose to 4,000 calories for workers tasked to heavy labor.⁴⁶⁴ Consuming roughly 780 calories per day, the women of Kursk were receiving only 20 percent of the daily calories recommended for work of this intensity. This deficiency appears all the more striking when one considers that March and April's low temperatures would have made their tasks still more strenuous.

Yet, even with this minimal caloric intake, the women excavating battalion strong points and antitank ditches in Kursk were expected to move more earth than the foreign manuals expected from reasonably fed soldiers. In their correspondence from April and May 1943, local party leaders did not often include the expected daily norms in terms of moving earth, though they sometimes indicated that each worker should move six cubic meters of earth per day, or 7.85 cubic yards.⁴⁶⁵ Some reports praised examples of Stakhanovite labor by workers who dug

⁴⁶³ The current calorie tally has been extrapolated from information in Wendy Goldman and Donald Filtzer, eds., *Hunger and War: Food Provisioning in the Soviet Union during World War II* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), 15.

⁴⁶⁴ See Goldman and Filtzer, *Hunger and War*, 15, 23.

⁴⁶⁵ GAOPIKO, f. P-131, op. 1, d. 85a, l. 107. This report indicated that the norm was reduced to four cubic meters if the worker was digging hard soil.

up to 10 cubic meters, or 13.1 cubic yards, of soil.⁴⁶⁶ These totals far exceeded the totals expected of soldiers in the US and British armies.

The soil in which Kursk's civilians had to work presented a series of challenges for trench construction. Like many humus-rich soils, the composition of earth in Kursk included two main layers down to 110 centimeters. A fertile top layer of humus comprised of mixed-grass vegetation ranges to a depth of 55 to 80 centimeters. Beneath this horizon lies a layer of loess, a sedimentary deposit that contains a loose texture.⁴⁶⁷ As both types of soil are loose and granular, the trenches required revetments to ensure against collapses, especially under artillery fire. Both of the Red Army engineering manuals indicate that revetments could be made from boards or tree branches, usually birch, fashioned into wicker walls that could be affixed to the earthen surface.⁴⁶⁸ This would explain why the mobilization orders included demands that a certain portion of workers supply axes. The archives also indicate that the engineers sometimes tasked civilian laborers to gather wood.⁴⁶⁹ Given the harshness of the weather in late winter 1943, it is likely that the earth had not yet thawed when work began. Frozen soil would have greatly complicated the process.⁴⁷⁰

The defenses of the 6th Guards Army (formerly the 64th Army) provide some idea of the total amounts of earth that needed to be excavated to create the system of battalion strong points. This army's main defensive belt contained 290 kilometers of trenches and communications

⁴⁶⁶ GAOPIKO, f. P-131, op. 1, d. 85a, l. 109.

⁴⁶⁷ This information was located at an exhibit in the Belgorod Kraevedcheskii Museum.

⁴⁶⁸ Gerbanovskii, *Fortifikatsiia pekhoty*, 72-75; NKO, *Nastavlenie po inzhenernomu delu dlia pekhoty*, 104-08.

⁴⁶⁹ GAOPIKO, f. P-56, op. 1, d. 360, l. 3.

⁴⁷⁰ As noted above, Fieberg observed in his manual, that frozen soil would have reduced work rates by half.

trenches and the second belt boasted an additional 250 kilometers of trenches and communications trenches.⁴⁷¹ The Red Army leadership ordered that all communications trenches to have been dug to a depth where the average soldier could walk with complete concealment from enemy forces.⁴⁷² Both the 1942 and 1943 Red Army field fortification manuals state that a properly constructed communication trench should be excavated to a depth of 150 centimeters with the loose soil deposited on either side creating a banquette.⁴⁷³ The average depth of the fire trenches reached 110 centimeters. If, in the second defensive belt, half the trenches were communications trenches and the other half fire trenches, the people responsible for excavating this defensive belt for one army moved 250,625 cubic meters of earth.

In order to fulfill Stavka's order to prepare a zone of deliberate defense for the Soviet military, Red Army engineers demanded each of Kursk's civilians to carry out labor that exceeded both the workers' skill level and physical capacities. In addition, the entire project required simultaneous construction over large swaths of Kursk's countryside to be completed in a matter of weeks. This circumstance necessitated the mobilization of tens of thousands of people to relocate to distant worksites in the same period of time. Just as the Red Army had done for so many other tasks related to carrying out its immediate war aims; it again turned to Kursk's local political leaders to coordinate this massive mobilization.

Initial Mobilizations

⁴⁷¹ *Soviet general staff study*, 38.

⁴⁷² E. Kolibernov, "Osobennosti organizatsii inzhenernogo obespecheniia v Kurskoi bitve," *Voennii istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 7 (July 1983): 26-34.

⁴⁷³ Gerbanovskii, *Fortifikatsiia pekhoty*, 36; NKO, *Nastavlenie po inzhenernomu delu dlia pekhoty*, 77.

As the Red Army began retaking territory in 1943, it consolidated gains by requisitioning local labor to reinforce strategic natural barriers. Advancing southwest in the success of the Ostrogozhsk-Rossosh' and Voronezh-Kastornoe operations, the Voronezh Front ordered the local authorities to mobilize 60,000 people for various tasks.⁴⁷⁴ It made the next call for labor on February 22, four days after Manstein began his counteroffensive and the same day that Golikov responded to Vatutin's request for reinforcements to support his beleaguered forces.⁴⁷⁵ One gets a sense of the level of panic among the staff of the Voronezh Front as it doubled its January demand by ordering the oblispolkoms of Kursk, Kharkov, and Voronezh oblasts to mobilize 120,000 people and 5,000 animal-drawn carts. The resolution wanted the population to construct a defensive line along the Oskol River.⁴⁷⁶ Flowing from north to south along the eastern border of Kursk Oblast, the Oskol served as the best geographic anchor in the general area of operations for a strategic line of defense. It offered the Voronezh Front a point in space where it would have been able to maintain the territory it gained in January should the Germans put the entire front to rout. Further, the Moscow-Donbass rail line ran along the eastern bank of the waterway, giving Stavka further impetus to establish as strong a barrier in the west bank as possible. The fact that the Voronezh Front first reacted to the initial stage of Manstein's counteroffensive by ordering a massive stopgap measure in its rear area may give some indication of the commanders' lack of confidence in the Red Army's ability to perform in the face of an enemy that had dominated it for the previous two years.

⁴⁷⁴ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, ll. 20-21.

⁴⁷⁵ At this time Vatutin commanded the Southwestern Front. His forces were at the spearhead of Operation Gallop and once the German counteroffensive began to gain momentum, these spearheads were lost to the Wehrmacht's encirclements. He appealed to Golikov to send units to support the 6th Army on February 21.

⁴⁷⁶ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, ll. 20-21. The Voronezh Front called for the mobilization of 60,000 people on January 28, 1943.

While the Voronezh Front's order assigned basic responsibility for the execution of the project to three different oblasts, it provided little detail in terms of how it wanted local political leaders to operate. The resolution laid responsibility for the mobilization of the people on the oblispolkoms. Once gathered, the civilian authorities were to hand the people over to the 38th UOS that would manage the actual construction of the line. Yet the Voronezh Front's order assigned general administration of the defensive work personally to the Head of Engineering Forces for the Front, Major General I. V. Bordzilovsky.⁴⁷⁷ The 38th UOS assigned four UVSR units to different sectors along the Oskol River and each UVSR established its headquarters in a town that afforded it good command and control in its sector. The 38th UOS informed the oblispolkom of how many people it should direct to each UVSR headquarters.⁴⁷⁸ The 38th UOS allocated 10,000 people to each of the UVSRs deployed to the northern length of the Oskol River and 20,000 people to the UVSR responsible for strengthening the stretch of the river due east of Belgorod. This included the area between the river cities of Novyi Oskol and Valuiki, both of which were important crossing points for the river and transportation hubs in their own right. Further, it was this territory to the south of the Belgorod and Novyi Oskol that was under the most immediate threat. At this time the military leadership could not have known how successful the German counteroffensive would be so it stood to reason to apply the greatest effort in defensive preparation to the most vulnerable area.

⁴⁷⁷ The wording of this order also illustrates the relationship between the UOS units and the fronts. The front command formulates its own operational goals and then assigns engineering tasks that will help realize the military objectives to the UOS units. But the UOS units are not organic to the front and are assigned to a front's territory by Stavka. This order also adheres to the plenipotentiary principal of crisis management that the state established during the war. In this method of organization an individual is assigned personal responsibility for carrying out a specific task.

⁴⁷⁸ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, l. 19. The 38th UOS located the 484th UVSR in Kshen city in Sovetskii District, the 476th UVSR in Verkhne-Chufichevo Village in Staro-Oskolskii District, the 477th UVSR in Okunevska Village in Chernianskii District, and the 403rd UVSR in Golubina Village in Novo-Oskolskii District.

For many reasons, the oblispolkom took its time responding to this initial demand. As noted in chapter 1, this territory had been under German occupation for roughly eighteen months prior the February liberation and also served as a site of heavy fighting when the Voronezh Front pushed the Germans to the southwest.⁴⁷⁹ With largely leaderless districts and oblast officials preoccupied with the reestablishment of services and stability, the organization of such a grand mobilization in such a short time was not possible. The oblispolkom thus began to plan for the mobilization in March. While the archives do not offer a logic underlying the decision-making process of Kursk's officials, it is possible to piece together a basic semblance of how they organized the application of labor. The oblispolkom first selected districts adjacent to or near each UVSR's headquarters as the source for that particular UVSR. It compiled a tally of the number of homesteads in each district and used this list as the basis for the number of people to be sent. On average the oblispolkom allocated about 31.5 percent of the population from each district.⁴⁸⁰ A closer comparison, however, shows that the number of people demanded versus the total number of households varied markedly from district to district.⁴⁸¹ Such evidence suggests a level of arbitrariness in the decision-making of the oblispolkom.

The oblast leaders delayed transmitting the Voronezh Front's order to the districts until prompted by the military engineers. On March 7, the commander of the 140th UVPS sent a letter to the Volchkov, pointedly reminding the oblispolkom that he was still waiting for the 10,000

⁴⁷⁹ The previous summer it had served as German Sixth Army's staging area for Operation Blue that would have taxed the residents to an even greater extent than those in the central and western regions of the oblast.

⁴⁸⁰ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 27.

⁴⁸¹ The standard deviation in terms of percentage among all the districts ordered to provide labor was 8 percent. The numbers the oblispolkom demanded of each district were whole numbers rounded to the nearest hundred. It is possible that they rounded to the nearest hundred as a means to make each district's workforce easier to control as they moved from the home district to the worksite.

people and 450 horse-drawn carts allocated to his unit by the Voronezh Front's resolution.⁴⁸²

The oblispolkom issued its order to the district leaders two days later. The oblast officials had altered their final plan by tasking new districts with mobilizations while relieving others of any obligation, but the number most districts had to mobilize remained unchanged.⁴⁸³ The oblispolkom made the raiispolkom chairmen of each district personally responsible for carrying out the mobilization. The order stipulated that each raiispolkom select one of its members, along with at least one member of the village soviet that supplied workers, to provide oversight over the civilians on the worksite, yet it made clear that the military units had ultimate authority over the workers' actions. The order obliged the civilians to arrive with their own tools. Seventy-five percent of the people were to bring spades, 15 percent axes, and 10 percent crowbars. The breakdown in the types of tools demanded bears a striking resemblance to the division of labor presented in the field fortification manuals discussed above. Some laborers had to break apart the ground, still frozen in March, while others needed to move the earth to specific locations on the site. The oblispolkom also tasked the village soviet and kolkhoz leaders with the provision of foodstuffs and fodder, shortages of which would remain a persistent problem throughout the entire mobilization campaign.⁴⁸⁴ The oblispolkom's order failed to comply with the Voronezh Front's demands only in terms of the supply of horses, as the former asserted it could not fulfill this demand, since the few horses that the Germans had left in the districts were exhausted or sick with scabies and unfit for work.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸² GAKO, f. 3322, op. 1, d. 1, l. 25.

⁴⁸³ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 1, d. 18, l. 6.

⁴⁸⁴ The Voronezh Front's resolution, in fact, clearly stipulated that the military bore no responsibility whatsoever to provide any kind of supplies to the civilian workers.

⁴⁸⁵ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 18, l. 6.

In the first half of March, to the west of Kursk city, the 60th Army found itself in a similar situation to that of the Voronezh Front, as the German Second Army stopped its advance and launched a counteroffensive, thus creating the need for a defensive zone. Between March 7 and 10, the Germans stiffened their resistance, checking any further gains. They shifted from sporadic local counterattacks to a general counteroffensive on March 14 in an attempt to link up with Second Panzer Army in the Orel Salient. On March 13, the 60th Army's military council issued resolution No. 00317, requiring authorities in its immediate vicinity to mobilize 22,200 people and 270 horse-drawn carts for a two-month period to speed up the production of defensive work.⁴⁸⁶ The resolution listed nine districts west and southwest of Kursk city, the number of people each district was to provide, and the towns at which the people from each district were to arrive for the defensive work. Eighty-five percent of the workers were to bring their own tools and each was to supply at least twenty days' worth of food. Raiispolkom chairmen were responsible for dispatching the specified number of people to the worksite. With a mind to maintaining control and encouraging motivation, the 60th Army ordered each raiispolkom to appoint one plenipotentiary from every selsoviet to carry out mass political work and to ensure the food supply to the workers.⁴⁸⁷ Like the Voronezh Front, then, the 60th Army entrusted general management to the defense work to its own chief of engineers.

The Central Front issued its first major order for mobilization on March 16. Five days earlier, on March 11, Stavka disbanded the Bryansk Front and transferred the 3rd, 13th, and 48th

⁴⁸⁶ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 1, d. 1, l. 28. The issuance of this order coincided with the failure of Golikov's counterattack west of Kharkov on March 10, German Fourth Panzer Army's recapture of Kharkov (March 10 to 14), and German Panzergrenadier Division Gross Deutschland's successful breakthrough at the juncture between 40th and 69th Armies 100 kilometers south of 60th Army. To add to the severity of the crisis, on March 14, German Second Army joined von Manstein's forces in their advance to the northeast.

⁴⁸⁷ The 60th Army wanted a representative of the district party apparatus to monitor the actions of the plenipotentiaries.

Armies, along with the 28th Rifle Corps and 19th Cavalry Group.⁴⁸⁸ This greatly increased Rokossovsky's manpower but also expanded the territory for which he was responsible. The Central Front's resolution reflected this enlarged territorial responsibility as it required Kursk Oblast, along with Orel and Tula oblasts each to supply the front with 10,000 people and 1,000 animal-drawn carts. The smaller numbers demanded by the Central Front, in comparison with the Voronezh Front's February 22 order, likely resulted from the fact that, by March 16, the front's right flank and center had ground down to stalemate while the left wing, composed of the 2nd Tank Army and the 65th Army, continued to make slow forward progress. The rationale for the mobilization would have been for the consolidation of gains made by the Briansk and Central fronts in the previous six weeks.⁴⁸⁹ The resolution demanded the people initially mobilized to remain at work for the full sixty-day term, and allowed for the first group to be replaced with new workers in the event that all the necessary construction work had been completed.⁴⁹⁰ It placed the work force at the disposal of the 34th UOS, the engineering unit assigned to it by Stavka. While this order made no mention of tools, it stipulated that party leaders were to provide all foodstuffs and fodder for the duration of the civilians' presence at the worksites.

Once the winter fighting had ended and Stavka continued to contemplate its next move, the front commanders wasted no time in preparing the ground for defense. Rokossovsky issued an order on March 21 that directed the Central Front's engineering forces to simultaneously carry out reconnaissance of defenses and initiate construction of field fortifications. The order emphasized the importance of establishing a robust antitank defense based initially on local

⁴⁸⁸ TsAMO, f. 62, op. 321, d. 5, l. 99. Found in Zolotarev, *Preludiia Kurskoi bitvy*, 301.

⁴⁸⁹ It was not until after the Central Front issued this order that elements of German Second Panzer Army began to push Rokossovsky's left wing back in Mikhailovskii and Trosnianskii districts.

⁴⁹⁰ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 1, d. 1, l. 29.

terrain features that would serve as ideal barriers, such as the Svapa River, located in the 65th and 70th Armies' sectors. This order, however, did not make any provisions for the demarcation of deeper lines of defense in the 13th and 48th Armies' sectors. The front's command assigned its most experienced engineers to the reconnaissance task and demanded that this cohort develop a comprehensive schematic of all defenses by March 27.⁴⁹¹ Anticipating the massive requirements for labor and building supplies, the Central Front's commanders directed its engineering forces to make maximum use of local construction materials and declared that the local population and animal-drawn transport would be liable for all necessary defense construction.

The Central Front's military council issued two successive orders on March 26 and 27 to the Kursk Oblispolkom, demanding an additional 9,000 workers. The first called for the creation of four work columns of 1,000 people each, which would be placed at the disposal of the 34th UOS,⁴⁹² while the second required 5,000 people to construct a defensive line designed to protect the Kursk-Kastornoe railroad line.⁴⁹³ This defensive line not only paralleled the railroad, but it also straddled the three main anticipated axes of German advance in the depth of the 13th and 48th Armies' defensive zone. The resolution tasked the 126th UVPS, under the 34th UOS, to direct all work along this line.⁴⁹⁴ The resolution also included a schedule with all first-priority work to be

⁴⁹¹ The Central Front issued other orders for the 13th and 48th Armies' sectors. See GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, l. 32. The most reasonable explanation for the division of orders between the four armies likely resulted from the fact that winter fighting was still winding down in the 65th and 70th Armies' sector. It stands to reason that the front would give priority to measures to bring about the stabilization of this area of the front.

⁴⁹² The order gave general responsibility for organizing all defense work to the Central Front's chief of engineering forces, Major General, A. I. Proshliakov, thus subordinating the Stavka units to the needs of the front.

⁴⁹³ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 1, d. 1, l. 31. The 34th UOS was appointed to work under the auspices of the Central Front. This defensive line began just north of Kursk city's defensive perimeter, ran to the northeast, and terminated at the confluence of the Tim and the Sosna rivers. At this point it connected with the Third Front Defensive Line that ran north-south along the eastern bank of the Tim River.

⁴⁹⁴ At the time they were deployed with the 61st and 3rd armies northeast of Orel. The 126th UVPS could not be released from their duties with the 61st and 3rd Armies. The sources do not explain what sub-unit of the 34th UOS managed the construction of this defensive line. I think you might be able to find some more information on this, however, if you search through the overall complaints in terms of geography.

completed by May 10. The Central Front's resolution indicated that work should begin on April 5 with all first-priority work to be completed by May 10.⁴⁹⁵

The Voronezh Front made similar preparations. On March 27, Vatutin issued Order No. 0087, which called for the organization of three defensive zones for the entire length of the front. Zhukov may have initiated this order, since he served as Stavka liaison to the Voronezh Front and had spent several days at this time surveying the situation at the frontlines. It provides an expansive and detailed articulation of the major lines of defense that included five individual lines of defense (along with the strategic defensive line along the Oskol River) using lists of village and town names to serve as linking points for each line. For example, the second line of defense followed the contour of the frontline connecting twenty-two villages from Korenevskii District in the west to Volchanskii District to the southeast of Belgorod. When possible, they maximized Kursk's natural topography by anchoring these lines along the rivers running through the territory. For example, Order No. 0087 placed the front edge of the "reserve army defensive line" along the north bank of the Psel River, flowing east-west for 100 kilometers, from Sudzhanskii to Prokhorovskii District, where the river meanders drastically from the north and ceases to be of use. The rivers in the eastern portion of Kursk Oblast flow generally from north to south. This meant that the commanders of the Voronezh Front could only use short lengths of them as a barrier and also had to make provisions to strengthen the areas between each of the rivers. Once this line of defense passed through Prokhorovskii District it sloped to the south through Korochanskii and Bol'she-Troitskii districts and terminated in Kharkov Oblast.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁵ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 1, d. 1, l. 32.

⁴⁹⁶ TsAMO, f. 203, op. 2843, d. 323, ll. 13-16. Found in Zolotarev, *Preludiia Kurskoi bitvy*, 130-32.

Order No. 0087 gave each army responsibility for overseeing field fortification construction in its own sectors and tasked the 23rd and 38th UOSs to organize work on the first front line of defense as the 38th continued improving the defenses on the Oskol River. It stipulated where the engineers should construct switch positions and included thirteen areas in each of the first two defensive belts that the engineers should especially prepare for attack. The engineers were to prioritize the types of structures they produced to maximize the destruction of enemy tanks. The first set included antitank barriers, infantry, artillery, and antitank trenches, pillboxes, and reinforced points for command and control. The second consisted of additional trenches (including dummy trenches), anti-infantry obstructions in the deep rear, and the development of infantry trenches beyond the basic need for firing positions and concealment. The Voronezh Front commanders wanted all work throughout the entire defensive zone to begin simultaneously with primary work completed by April 5, secondary work completed by April 15, and tertiary work completed by April 25.⁴⁹⁷ It would seem that this order anticipated Stavka's April 12 decision to make a deliberate defensive stand at Kursk. While the nature of this order gives a strong indication that the decision had been made to go on a deliberate defense, the creation of structures, especially those closest to the frontline, would prove useful had the advocates for taking the offensive prevailed.

Conclusion

Historians have taken the Red Army's decision to take a deliberate defensive stance in the Kursk salient in the summer of 1943 as a matter of course. Given the tremendous success of the Red Army's success in miring the Germans' Operation Citadel to a halt after less than a week of

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

fighting, it stands to reason that few would challenge the wisdom of the Soviet military's decision-making process. One cannot, however, discount contingency in this decision. This is all the more so when one takes into consideration the many reckless and costly offensives the Red Army had prosecuted in the previous two years and the cult of the offensive that had remained prevalent in the culture and doctrine of the Soviet military leadership. The fact that Zhukov, Vasilevsky, and Antonov were able to convince Stalin and the field commanders to dig in and await attack speaks to two important phenomena that were occurring in the spring of 1943 that eventually contributed to overall victory. First, the Soviet leadership was persistently analyzing its mistakes and successes and applying those lessons to future action. Second, the ability of the champions of deliberate defense to prevail in the debates of early April through June 1943 speaks to a maturing of the Red Army from a force that blindly struck out at the hated enemy to a military on a path to becoming the most dominant land force in the world. These processes combined with many others contributed to victory over the Nazi regime.

The Red Army's ability to rely on local labor en masse in Kursk also proved an important factor in its more immediate victory in summer 1943. Once the High Command made the decision to assume a deliberate defensive, it then mobilize tens of thousands of peasants to leave their collective farms, spade in hand, and head to worksites all over Kursk Oblast. The field excavations that the civilian population constructed consisted primarily of narrow trenches intricately woven together to give Red Army soldiers concealment and protection from German tanks, artillery, and airplanes. The complexity involved in producing these purpose-built structures required massive direct oversight from specially-trained personnel and preferably some level of skill on the part of the construction crews. While the workers who dug the trenches may have been accustomed to working the earth on their collective farms, their

experience in agriculture would not have prepared them to execute tasks expected of them in creating the Stalingrad-like landscape. Further, Red Army officers and political leaders called for them to fulfill daily norms that exceeded the expectations of the engineering staffs of other armies. Not only did the civilians have to carry out specialized work, but they had to do so in an undernourished state. Even so, their labor contributed directly to the construction of the defensive structure that provided the Red Army the means to give the Germans their first summertime defeat in the war.

CHAPTER 5

THE LOYAL OPPOSITION: COMPETITION AND RIVALRY FOR LABOR IN KURSK

Once Stavka and Stalin had decided to commit to a defensive posture in the Kursk salient, the military councils of the Central, Voronezh, Steppe, and Southwestern fronts, along with many of their component armies made massive labor demands on Kursk's civilian population. These claims on the workforce strained the oblast in two ways. First, labor remained a scarce commodity, especially for a region that had just endured occupation, implemented a new conscript call-up, and needed all collective farmers in the fields sowing crops. Each of the Red Army units in the oblast made maximalist demands that initially took little consideration of the interests or needs of the civilian population. Second, the fronts and armies in the oblast made no effort to coordinate their requests vis-à-vis sourcing labor. The difficulties related to this situation became more pronounced in areas where units abutted one another and made overlapping claims on the territory's workers.

The pressure of military necessity supported by legal sanction allowed the Red Army to impose its will on the civilian population with little consideration to conditions of the people or the burdens the state levied upon the civilian leadership. Similarly, the Red Army units distributed throughout the districts of the oblast prioritized the fulfillment of their acute tasks, making immediate and massive mobilization claims on the people without any concern for the overall labor needs of the districts they listed as suppliers. To complicate matters for the civilian authorities, the fronts and armies operating in the oblast did not coordinate with one another in terms of numbers of workers they required the districts to provide. The Central, Voronezh, and Southwestern fronts at times made simultaneous claims on the same districts. The oblispolkom

responded by assigning each district to a front, which corresponded roughly to the fronts' actual area of construction activity. As the oblispolkom assumed the role of labor clearing house, it sought to impose some order and rationalize a process that would satisfy the Red Army's need for ditch diggers while protecting the delicate restoration process and the spring sowing campaign. Although the district leaders competed with the Red Army for the same precious resource, the Red Army had state authority on its side, but the oblispolkom held a home-turf advantage in its network of party leaders, who knew each other, and shared the same goals of weathering this crisis and returning to the business of supplying agricultural products to the state.

This chapter documents the measures each side took to maximize its own self interests. It then considers the contrasting relationships specific Red Army units had with Kursk's civilian leadership. It explicates how each side attempted to rationalize and improve upon the mobilizational processes it carried out, and discusses the last major mobilization of civilians in Kursk Oblast, to build the Staryi Oskol-Rzhava Railroad. It suggests that the manner in which key players interacted and exercised power represented an extension of the methods and mechanisms of local power that had developed in the 1930s. My analysis in this chapter differs from existing scholarship in that previous authors tend to compartmentalize the activities of the Red Army from the civilian authorities as separate spheres of activity by summarizing "important" measures party leaders took to advance the cause of victory.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁸ V. M. Plotnikov's work lionizes the Communist Party in Kursk in 1943. He describes the party as the prime mover of the preparation for the battle and the source of competent organization. His analysis often includes fulsome lists of tasks accomplished, quantities of items produced, and numbers of awards given. See V. M. Plotnikov, *Rol' tyla v pobede na Kurskoi duge* (Kharkov, 1969). K. V. Iatsenko takes a more measured view of the events in Kursk during the war. While he provides a more complicated picture by including narratives that address interactions between the Red Army, party leaders, and the people, the reader still gets the sense that he sees the party and the people as distinct from the Red Army. See K. V. Iatsenko, *Frontovoi region: Tsentral'noe chernozem'e Rossii v sisteme voenno-organizatorskoi deiatel'nosti mestnykh vlastnykh struktur v gody velikoi otechestvennoi voiny* (Kursk: Kursk. gos. un-t, 2006).

Red Army Complaints about Insufficient Mobilization

Oblast officials endeavored to ensure that the Red Army military councils directed all labor requests to the oblispolkom, although this did not always happen. Upon receipt of a Red Army resolution, the oblast authorities determined which districts would supply which units, allocating the number of people each district should send. They made these determinations based on the numbers of households in a district.⁴⁹⁹ While no document explains the reason for establishing this system of mobilization, one may assume that a household was both the smallest unit and would also ostensibly contain more than one able-bodied person.⁵⁰⁰ Basing their mobilization on the number of households, the authorities could strike a balance in maximizing the number of people available for labor while allowing each of the conscripted units the opportunity to implement a rotating work schedule for the able-bodied people within the household. Upon determining the number of people each district was to supply to the Red Army, the oblispolkom issued decrees to its district subordinates. Along with the numbers to be mobilized and a collection point, the decree usually included a list of stipulations regarding how people were to be organized and equipped for their time at the construction site. The districts replicated this process by apportioning the total number of people selected for labor among their constituent village soviets and placing the onus of sending workers to the Red Army collection points on the lowest layer of the party leadership. The oblispolkom's first decrees initiated a

⁴⁹⁹ In their plan to make provisions for Resolution No. 22 of the Voronezh Front, the oblispolkom drafted a document that listed all the districts that would supply workers for the mobilization. The list included the number of households in each district and the number of people liable to mobilization. See GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 27.

⁵⁰⁰ For example, a comparison of the number of households in each district to the percentage of people the oblispolkom ordered each district to submit shows tremendous variance from one district to the next. This shows a level of arbitrariness that contradicts some of the policies they instituted to establish order and consistency in their mobilization schemes. (see GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 27 and GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 18, l. 6). It is certainly possible that the oblispolkom based its decisions on a more sophisticated set of parameters based on projected labor needs from district to district. While this is possible, it seems less than likely as the chaos created by the occupation and liberation would have made such data unreliable.

rivalry between district leaders and the Red Army over the placement of labor that lasted the entire mobilization, with the Soviet military issuing the first complaints about the situation.

Each of the fronts and their subsidiary armies and engineering units that engaged in defense construction in Kursk Oblast expected immediate and complete fulfillment of their mobilization demands once they had determined the locations of the defensive structures. Soon after the oblispolkom transmitted its first mobilization decrees to the raaispolkoms it began receiving reports from military officers indicating district and village soviets officials' failure to meet the Red Army's orders. This litany of criticism and follow-up demands persisted for the entire period. Further, dozens of Red Army units distributed throughout the oblast complained of incomplete mobilizations. As one would expect, the majority of the grievances originated from the UOS and UVPS units, to which the majority of the civilian laborers had been allocated, but armies located closer to the frontline also encountered problems with low turnout.

Civilian leaders dispatched numbers of people that varied greatly from district to district, as well as from day to day, and did not follow any identifiable pattern. The Red Army objected to the general organization of the mobilization effort. For example, in the Central Front's sector, reports in late March and early April pointed out that engineering officers were "extremely dissatisfied" with how specific districts carried out the oblispolkom's March 20 resolution.⁵⁰¹ Reports from the 34th UOS and its constituent UVPSs indicated that this dissatisfaction remained until after the Red Army repelled the German offensive in July.⁵⁰² While officers from the 34th

⁵⁰¹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 58. Here they are referring to oblispolkom memo (Decision (*reshenie*) 7-s) issued on March 20. In this report, the 127th UVPS informed the oblispolkom that on April 2, Leninskii District had fulfilled its quota by 30 percent for people and 26 percent for horse-drawn carts. Medvenskii District had sent 21 percent of the demanded number of people and 6 percent of horse-drawn carts, and Besedinskii District had sent nothing.

⁵⁰² GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 102. On May 4, Colonel Ponimash, Chief of the 34th UOS, reported that in the last ten days of April Kursk city and its surrounding districts failed to send the required number of workers. He singled out Besedinskii and Medvenskii districts for the poorest performance. On May 28 Ponimash reported that

UOS and various UVPSs reported on the poor performance of district leaders, lower-level engineering units, such as the 223rd UVSR, also lodged complaints, but they focused on mobilization at the village soviets level.⁵⁰³ Complaints did not originate solely from the Stavka's engineering forces, but also came from the engineering units organic to the fronts' constituent armies.⁵⁰⁴ The Central Front did not allocate any of the 34th UOS's personnel to the 65th Army, ostensibly because it was located to the west of the anticipated axes of German advance. Therefore, the 65th Army's military council issued a mobilization order for the people of Dmitrievskii and Mikhailovskii districts.⁵⁰⁵ Like the 34th UOS, the 65th Army reported on significant shortcomings in meeting its mobilization orders.⁵⁰⁶ The situation was similar for the Voronezh Front. For example, the chief of the 484th UVSR informed the obkom and

an accounting of the worksites between May 22 and May 26 showed that Kursk city was raising its numbers. Leninskii and Stalinskii districts had supplied 66 percent of the norm, Dzerzhinsky district met 62.5 percent, while Kirovskii District sent 47 percent of the norm. One must note that Kursk's railroad station was located in Kirovskii District and labor demands required to restore and maintain consistent rail movement had as much, if not more, priority than defense construction. GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, ll. 190-91. As the anticipated date of the German offensive drew nearer, the reports indicated a greater urgency in completing the defense work and that persistent failure to meet labor demands was impeding progress. See GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 230 and 270.

⁵⁰³ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 92. On April 20, the chief of the 223rd UVSR singled out three village soviets in Streletskii District for especially poor performance. They had fulfilled between 25 and 34 percent of the plan. Representatives of the 433rd UVSR also reported on insufficient mobilization in late May and early June. See GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, ll. 185, 188, 194.

⁵⁰⁴ An organic is a specialized military unit, like engineers or artillery, that is a permanent component of a larger unit, like a front, army, or division. All Red Army fronts, armies, and divisions included engineering units dedicated to the needs of the larger body. This is opposed to the UOS, UVPS, and UVSR units, which were under the command of Stavka, yet temporarily assigned to individual fronts.

⁵⁰⁵ The 65th Army was located to the west of the anticipated axes of attack on the territory of Dmitrievskii and Mikhailovskii districts. It drew upon the labor resources from this territory only. Originally, the oblispolkom issued Order No. 16-s that obliged Mikhailovskii District to mobilize 2,000 people for the 65th Army (see GAKO, f. R-3934, op. 2s, d. 25, l. 11).

⁵⁰⁶ The oblispolkom had issued two orders (No. 112-s of May 26 and No. 139-ss of June 4) GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 196. On June 1, Dmitrievskii District allocated 461 of the 1,000 people demanded and Mikhailovskii District sent only 72 of the 1,000 demanded. On June 19, the Chief of the 65th Army's defense, a Major Slavin, complained that Orders No. 112-s and 139-ss still had not been fulfilled. See GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 237. On July 14, a junior officer from the 65th Army complained to the Dmitrievskii Raiispolkom that several village soviets in the district still had not fulfilled the oblispolkom's Order No. 16-s.

oblispolkom that on April 8 the four districts that were to have supplied him with 5,000 workers only met 45 percent of the plan.⁵⁰⁷ Moreover, all four districts sent a total of only four horses. The 1st Tank Army, tasked with constructing defenses in its own area of operation, reported that Oboianskii and Ivnianskii districts had filled only 15-20 percent of their 6,000-person quotas.⁵⁰⁸ The oblispolkom worked to have the poorer performing districts in the Voronezh Front's territory increase their numbers in May and June, but it continued to receive letters of complaint.⁵⁰⁹ While it is unclear whether the Red Army's basic requirements in terms of numbers were reasonable given Kursk's overall population, the military operated on the assumption that civilian authorities were capable of fulfilling the mobilization orders. Their persistent appeals for the intervention of oblast officials suggest an antagonistic relationship between the engineers and the local leaders, with the oblispolkom as the arbiter of the dispute. Engineering units did not restrict the complaints they lodged against local civilian leaders to the mobilizations, but also criticized what they considered to have been poor supervision of the laborers who arrived at the worksites.

⁵⁰⁷ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 83. The 484th UVSR was responsible for constructing a portion of the Third front line of defense along the headwaters of the Oskol River and the Tim River. For April 8, Oktiabr'skii District was to have supplied 1,000 people, but sent 569, or 57 percent of the plan. Sovetskii District fulfilled the 2,500 people they were to supply by just under 50 percent. The oblispolkom had obliged Cheremisinovskii District to send 700 people, but only 264 arrived on the job, meeting the plan by only 38 percent. Lastly, Volovskii District was to have sent 1,800 but only 164 or 9 percent arrived.

⁵⁰⁸ TsAMO, f. 203, op. 2777, d. 105, l. 237. Found in Zolotarev, V.A., et al. eds. *Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia: Predliudiia Kurskoi bitvy: Dokumenty i materialy, 6 dekabria 1942 g. – 25 apreliia 1943 g.* Vol. 15 (4-3) (Moskva: Terra, 1997), 136.

⁵⁰⁹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 218 and GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3143, l. 114. The deputy chief of the 139th UVPS informed both the oblispolkom and the obkom that despite the oblispolkom's orders and many separate instructions from them, the district leaders failed to mobilize the local people for the 38th UOS, which have been based on a resolution from the Voronezh Front. Ten days later, a member of the military council of the Voronezh Front, named Nikita Khrushchev sent obkom secretary Doronin a letter pointing out that the mobilization for the 38th UOS was going unsatisfactorily and asked him to send orders to all the raikoms and raiispolkoms reminding them of their obligation to mobilize workers according to the oblispolkom's resolution. GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2962, l. 46.

In addition to demanding that the authorities meet the Red Army's large mobilization quota, the military engineers also expected the civilian leaders to provide fastidious oversight of the collective farmers on the worksite. Just as they bombarded the oblispolkom with complaints about poor mobilization practices, Red Army officers bemoaned poor onsite management on the part of the civilians that threatened their conception of maximum productivity. Army engineers inveighed against all activities that reduced total number of bodies on the worksite, such as desertion or any attempt by the civilians to substitute healthy "able-bodied adults" with less fit persons. The army's concerns for productivity extended to ensuring that each person arrive with the necessary tools to work, since able hands without a spade were no better than a disabled or physically immature individual. The maximal exploitation of each laborer's abilities at the worksites was paramount.

As the initial civilian work units began arriving at the construction sites, Red Army engineers took stock of the people's labor potential and rejected those individuals they considered unfit for strenuous labor, since some district leaders attempted to meet their head counts in the initial mobilization by sending children. For example, on March 31, the 127th UVPS informed Volchkov that it dismissed 110 of the 729 workers that the Streletskii District had sent because they were between twelve and fourteen years old, claiming that it could not use underage workers.⁵¹⁰ Other reports in April indicate that some Red Army units accepted boys as young as fourteen and fifteen-year-old girls, but rejected women over fifty.⁵¹¹ Throughout April and May, district leaders continued sending children to replace adults that had responded to the

⁵¹⁰ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 50.

⁵¹¹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 78.

original mobilization calls, only to be caught out and dismissed by army engineering officers.⁵¹² The oblispolkom also received complaints from the worksites that households had substituted able-bodied adults with invalids who could not perform a similar amount of work.⁵¹³ These persistent attempts by district leaders to send people unfit to engage in strenuous labor demonstrate a willingness to subject all bodies to heavy labor without regard to individual physical capacity. Moreover, the civilian leaders' actions broke the Sovnarkom's August 12, 1942, Resolution on enlistment of civilians for labor duty in wartime. This provision stipulated that persons under the age of sixteen, women over forty-five, and invalids could not be used for labor.⁵¹⁴ Given that the Red Army also ignored the Sovnarkom's resolution on the upper and lower limit for the ages of workers, the only restriction imposed on potential laborers was each person's physical capacity to perform the work demanded by the engineers. In effect, from the outset of the mobilization, the Red Army employed the totality of the available labor pool it considered acceptable and the civilian leaders were all too willing to expand that labor source to those physically unfit for labor. In both cases, the number of people liable to heavy work exceeded the parameters set by the state. Such attitudes demonstrate some degree of total mobilization.

⁵¹² GAOPIKO, f. P-101, op. 1, d. 90, l. 22; GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 90.

⁵¹³ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 18, l. 31. The workers from each brigade selected their brigadier, but the people selected did not take proper control of the work unit. Part of this lack of control included not properly recording the number of workers on the site. The oblispolkom reports that this resulted in high turnover in the brigades, and absenteeism from day to day. There were also many cases of underage or disabled people being sent from a household.

⁵¹⁴ Prikaz s ob"iavlениem postanovleniia SNK SSSR "O poriadke privlecheniia grazhdan k trudovoi povinnosti v voennoe vremia," August 10, 1942. Downloaded December 14, 2014 from http://militera.lib.ru/docs/da/nko_1941-1942/14.html. The Resolution also exempted women from the fifth month of pregnancy, women who were nursing, women with children under eight years old and no adult supervision, and men over fifty-five.

Red Army engineers took issue with the high numbers of people who arrived at the worksites without any tools. The nature of the work, digging and moving earth and building wood-reinforced fortifications and trenches, required every worker to have her own spade, crowbar, or ax. It is possible to imagine that overall work productivity would not be greatly affected were a small percentage of people without tools. Given that many reports indicate that significant numbers of people arrived empty-handed to the worksites, however, one can determine that this would greatly reduce the labor output of those people who had arrived to the worksite.⁵¹⁵

The Red Army also had to contend with poor retention rates for workers. Since the household was the basis for recruitment, it did not have to send the same person for the entire work period. That many of the workers returned home from the worksite each night made it possible to rotate their adult workers to Red Army construction sites. As a result of this practice, the engineers spent additional time and resources on training the newly arrived workers. More importantly, the Red Army could not guarantee that every household would send a worker every day. This resulted in wild variation in the numbers of workers at a site on a given day. For example, the chief of the 139th UVPS, working in Voronezh Front's sector, reported that Staro-Oskol'skii District supplied between 443 and 1025 people between April 5 and 10.⁵¹⁶ This hampered the engineers' ability to make reliable forecasts on work progress and determine completion dates and future labor needs. Engineering units in the Central Front's territory experienced persistent high turnover of workers both in Kursk city and in the rural districts.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁵ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, ll. 50, 69, 83, 86.

⁵¹⁶ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 85. On April 5, 443 people worked; this number jumped to 1,025 on April 7 and then fell to 584 by April 10.

⁵¹⁷ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, ll. 90, 166, 190-91, 192, 218; GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 18, l. 31; GAOPIKO, f. P-101, op. 1, d. 90, l. 25, GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3143, ll. 109, 120.

Military engineers likewise groused that desertion hampered productivity. The reports up the military's chain of command and those forwarded to civilian officials cite two motives for desertion, while also noting occurrences of desertion for no apparent reason.⁵¹⁸ First, some desertion resulted from miscommunication regarding the Red Army's required length of service. In April and early May, some civilian leaders on the worksites sent workers home when they mistakenly thought their term of service had expired. Such instances increased dramatically in late May and June, as entire work groups abandoned worksites en masse, believing they had completed their work terms.⁵¹⁹ Many of the initial mobilization resolutions had complied with Soviet law stipulating that the military could impress civilian labor for only sixty days, even though the Red Army fully intended workers to remain onsite until the job had been completed. Whether by design or out of necessity, hundreds of workers took any opportunity they could to deny the Red Army their labor power and return to their homes.

Second, desertion also resulted from the lack of food for workers. Although all Red Army mobilization resolutions required that workers arrive to the worksite with several weeks' worth of food, they frequently showed up with enough food to last only a few days.⁵²⁰ In many instances, workers who ran out of food headed for home. Some claimed they would return once they had secured more sustenance, but few did. In other cases, individuals tasked with locating

⁵¹⁸ GAOPIKO, f. P-101, op. 1, d. 74, l. 15.

⁵¹⁹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, ll. 187, 219; GAOPIKO, f. P-101, op. 1, d. 90, l. 25, GAOPIKO, f. P-101, op. 1, d. 74, l. 15.

⁵²⁰ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, ll. 29, 55, 67; GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, l. 31. In this case the Central Front asked the civilian leaders to provide three-weeks' worth of food and then stated that the 34th UOS would provide food for the workers. GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, l. 28; GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 18, l. 22. There is even a case of one engineering officer demanding that 500 mobilized people bring 60 days' worth of food with them. See GAOPIKO, f. P-23, op. 1, d. 84, l. 21; GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2962, l. 90; GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2962, l. 113; GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 50.

food for their work group took their assignment as an opportunity to abandon the worksite.⁵²¹ In his report on May 25, the chief of the 433rd UVSR implied that workers deliberately used lack of food or promises of securing food for the group as an excuse to desert.⁵²² This attitude was entirely self-serving: at no point did Red Army officers consider the realities facing peasants with regard to food supply. They assumed not only that the collective farmers could deliver food sufficient to carry out the strenuous labor demanded of them for three weeks, but that every peasant household had a food stockpile sufficient for one member could remove a three-week supply and still leave enough for the rest of the household. Soviet military forces made the situation even more untenable by pressing peasants for all sorts of foodstuffs, while the civilian authorities demanded that all seed grain be conserved for the spring sowing. Soviet food policy at this time dictated that the peasants rely solely on their private plots for their food supply,⁵²³ but as it was so early in the season these plots would not yet have produced anything people could take with them to the construction sites. Of course, it was possible that the peasants deliberately reported for work with a limited food supply knowing full well they could return home, employing this weapon of the weak as a means to relieve themselves of strenuous labor.⁵²⁴

⁵²¹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 184. In this report, the (deputy?) chief of the 127th UVPS, Gavrilov implies that workers who went offsite roving for food did not return as they assumed that the steady flow of new workers arriving to the trenches meant their services were no longer required.

⁵²² GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 183.

⁵²³ William Moskoff, *The Bread of Affliction: The Food Supply in the USSR during World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 94-112.

⁵²⁴ See James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

In the southeastern section of the oblast, some peasants returned to their former worksites and dismantled pillboxes and other structures in order to scavenge wood for use as fuel or for construction on their collective farms. Soviet engineers had begun using prefabricated concrete pillboxes and gun emplacements, but the majority of the defensive structures were made of wood. By dismantling and removing portions of the defensive works, the peasants reduced their military efficacy. Commanders in both the Voronezh and Southwestern fronts took this problem very seriously, demanding that the oblispolkom and obkom order the peasants to cease and desist. Though the commanders drew from their own manpower reserves to guard defensive works, they tasked the oblispolkom with helping to provide security.⁵²⁵ The oblispolkom transmitted the Red Army's injunction against such activities to their district counterparts.⁵²⁶ While the Red Army threatened prosecution of collective farmers who were caught, this activity presents another aspect of Kursk's peasants serving their own interests over military necessity.⁵²⁷

Civilian Countercomplaints

Just as the Red Army found fault with the civilian leadership and the performance of workers in meeting production quotas, Kursk's party officials criticized Red Army labor-management practices. Like the Red Army, the civilian leadership objected to the engineering officers wasting the labor potential of people that it had allocated for defense construction. Every day a laborer spent in a trench represented a day that he or she was not on the collective

⁵²⁵ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2962, l. 58; GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 186. The Voronezh Front stipulated that army commanders and UOS commanders would organize security while construction continued. Once construction was complete, soldiers from a nearby garrison were to guard the sites. The oblispolkom had to provide security in the absence of a garrison.

⁵²⁶ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 229.

⁵²⁷ The archives do not have any further reports of peasants stealing wood. This does not, however, prove that the peasants refrained from scavenging.

farm contributing to a successful spring sowing campaign. Civilian officials also operated under the assumption that the oblast collective farmers lacked motivation to work and deplored any circumstance that negatively affected morale. The Red Army needed civilian labor in the trenches, but the party leaders also needed the people at home, engaging in either agricultural activity or urban restoration.

Oblast leaders complained about the army's failure to deploy workers who had been mobilized and had appeared at the appointed site. In one example, an onsite plenipotentiary from Sovetskii District, one A. E. Shumilina, criticized the 484th UVSR's management, informing her superiors that in early April the engineer from the 484th UVSR proved incapable of directing the workers in one sector of the site for which she was responsible. She had sent a subordinate on a five-kilometer trip to the 484th UVSR's headquarters to inquire whether it could dispatch a competent person to properly direct the workers in her sector, but was told that the 484th UVSR could not spare anyone.⁵²⁸ Shumilina detailed the effects of the absence of leadership, noting that on April 4, twenty-nine farmers from one collective farm had arrived on site so they would be ready to work the following day. On the morning of April 5, they gathered at the predetermined work area, yet could not perform any work, as the 484th UVSR had failed to send an engineer to tell them what to do.⁵²⁹ Something similar occurred the following day involving fifty-eight peasants from four different collective farms.⁵³⁰ Shumilina presented the problem as one of labor lost to the collective farms, pointing out that, because of poor

⁵²⁸ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 337. Based on the data available it is not possible to determine the manpower conditions for various engineering units, but such anecdotal evidence indicates that they were experience manpower shortages of their own.

⁵²⁹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 341.

⁵³⁰ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, ll. 337a, 338-40.

management on the Red Army's part, five collective farms were short eighty-seven laborers as the spring sowing was beginning.

With so many different engineering units operating on so many different construction sites, a group of laborers allocated to one particular worksite sometimes ended up at the wrong location. As every junior officer in charge of a worksite was understaffed and behind schedule, however, he was not likely to release labor. Such circumstances caused the oblispolkom problems, as the military unit to whom the workers were originally directed could complain that their mobilization demands were not met and order the oblispolkom to remedy this. Fulfilling the original demand with new workers meant that more bodies had to be called away from the collective farms and employed in nonagricultural work. In many cases, the oblispolkom tried to anticipate potential misallocations of labor by making competing military units aware of labor demand overlap and by informing them of the limitations that the oblispolkom imposed for total potential mobilization for a given district.⁵³¹

The oblispolkom also took issue with engineering units keeping laborers past the end of the work period to which they had agreed. The August 1942 Resolution stipulated that the Red Army could mobilize workers only for a sixty-day period. Since it was customary for the military councils of the fronts and armies to include a clause indicating the proposed length of the mobilization, oblast and district officials wished to see these agreements honored and complained to Red Army commanders when workers were held too long.⁵³² In such cases, the oblispolkom asked the Red Army commanders to release the workers.⁵³³ Once it was clear that

⁵³¹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, ll. 89, 153, 173.

⁵³² For example, see the initial resolution for the 60th Army. GAOPIKO, f. 1, op.1, d. 2962, l. 90.

⁵³³ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3143, l. 112.

the Germans had delayed the launch of Operation Citadel beyond the end-date of the initial mobilizations, Red Army commanders found ways of retaining workers: they issued new mobilization orders calling for replacements for the people currently onsite or they amended the original order with a new labor period, sometimes defined as terminating only when “the work is complete.” While this showed that the Soviet military exercised a level of control over the disbursement of labor in Kursk Oblast, the oblispolkom’s continued complaints demonstrate that it viewed this situation in terms of labor the Red Army denied the collective farms. The oblispolkom sought to comply to some degree with Red Army demands while maintaining its own agenda for recovery and agricultural output.

Civilian officials also challenged Red Army commanders for their poor onsite management and misuse of their laborers. With such a great number of worksites and independent engineering units ordered to carry out construction projects, the needless repetition of labor arose as a problem. Incidents occurred where one work group altered or even undid a different labor unit’s previously completed work. The civilians found fault with Red Army officers who ordered laborers to perform certain supporting errands that did not contribute to the completion of a defense construction task. Occasionally, engineering officers incorrectly deployed laborers with specific skills to carry out a task for which they were not trained. The officers also often gave conflicting technical instructions to the civilian foremen or brigade leaders, and this led to confusion.⁵³⁴ The criticism unifying these complaints was that Red Army

⁵³⁴ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, ll. 256-59. Complaints civilian leaders cited include one instance where the military ordered a work team to collect thatch for three days. They never used this material and it all rotted. In another case, an engineering officer requested six bricklayers to his site, but was sent five carpenters and one bricklayer. The carpenters did not work for the entire day while the bricklayer, working alone, accomplished little.

incompetence wasted labor. The oblispolkom had myriad jobs these individuals could do, and the Red Army appeared to be needlessly squandering a precious resource.

Civilian officials likewise expressed disapproval of Red Army practices that they considered harmful to the morale of workers. The oblispolkom discovered that some military personnel repurposed certain workers at the sites to perform nonconstruction tasks, such as laundering the soldiers' clothes or repairing their shoes.⁵³⁵ The officers also allowed some workers to depart from the worksite early for arbitrary reasons, adversely affecting the desire of their peers to continue their hard labor.⁵³⁶ Oblast officials argued that such caprices undermined morale and militated against attempts to retain labor on the construction sites. Although they shared in the Red Army's desire to construct a powerful defensive network to withstand the German attack, they also saw that the civilians laboring for the Red Army had other tasks waiting for them at home. They therefore believed that the Red Army ought to make the most efficient use of this labor, so the people could be released to devote their energy to the critical task of crop cultivation.

Further, the oblispolkom scrutinized the Red Army's failure to pay the workers for their labor. While the Sovnarkom's resolution of August 10, 1942, gave Red Army units the right to mobilize local civilians for construction projects, Article 5 stated that the same institution that mobilized civilians for defense work had to pay those people, according to the existing norms

⁵³⁵ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, ll. 60-61.

⁵³⁶ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 18, l. 29. According to the Sovnarkom's August 10, 1942, Resolution, mobilized civilians were required to work eight-hour days yet were subject to overtime. The strenuous nature of the digging for eight or more hours would cause most people to avoid such activity. A report of labor activities in Kursk city showed that the labor quotas for defense construction, road repair, and airfield construction were never met while the quota for hospital work was greatly overfulfilled. While working with the wounded would have been more gruesome in some ways, it certainly was less labor-intensive. And the fact that it was resoundingly the most popular activity suggests an aversion to labor-intensive work among Kursk's civilian population. See GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 105.

established for that work.⁵³⁷ Some of the Red Army units operating in Kursk Oblast acknowledged their responsibility for paying the workers. The head of the 34th UOS's political department promised Volchkov that all civilians employed by the Central Front would be paid on a piece-rate system, based on current state norms and that those who finished strong points ahead of schedule would receive bonuses. The oblispolkom took a more proactive stance when it transmitted the 60th Army's Mobilization Order No. 00317 to its district counterparts, informing the raiispolkoms of their labor responsibilities to the 60th Army while also notifying them of the 60th Army's responsibility for paying workers according to established norms.⁵³⁸ Yet Red Army promises and oblispolkom demands did not translate into cash-in-hand for the collective farmers in the trenches. In one instance, a Red Army subunit justified withholding pay because the civilian plenipotentiary onsite had failed to submit the proper paperwork.⁵³⁹

To be sure, the oblispolkom did not press the issue of payment in its complaints to the Red Army until late May and early June, when the work periods for the initial mobilizations were coming to an end and the Red Army argued that the workers had to remain at the trenches until they had completed the existing projects.⁵⁴⁰ In his correspondence with the Voronezh Front's engineering commander, Major General Iu. V. Bordzilovsky, Volchkov added requested

⁵³⁷ Prikaz s ob"iavlenniem postanovleniia SNK SSSR "O poriadke privlecheniia grazhdan k trudovoi povinnosti v voennoe vremia," August 10, 1942. Downloaded December 14, 2014 from http://militera.lib.ru/docs/da/nko_1941-1942/14.html.

⁵³⁸ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 18, l. 22.

⁵³⁹ GAOPIKO f. 1, op. 1, d. 3143, l. 163. In this case, the civilian leader was required to submit a list of all the workers in his unit along with a special work summary of the labored rendered that had been verified by the Kursk Military Department.

⁵⁴⁰ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 18, l. 31; GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 192. In this letter Volchkov informed the Chief of the Central Front's rear, Proshliakov, that the 20,000 people who have been working for the 34th UOS have yet to be paid. He followed up this statement with any recommendations or demands. It is as if he was trying to shame or guilt Proshliakov into action.

the Voronezh Front to process the cash payments it owed the workers who had been mobilized since March after he refused the commander an increase in the number of laborers working on the Oskol River.⁵⁴¹ Volchkov seemed resigned to the fact that the Red Army would not pay Kursk's civilians the money owed to them, but he could still use the fact of its refusal to abide the law to needle Bordzilovsky.

The oblispolkom recognized that food could be used to motivate Kursk's peasants to remain at the worksites. It also understood both the meagerness of the food supply and the challenges that existed in satisfying the Red Army's demand that each worker arrive at the trenches with a three-week stock. Initially, it repeated the Red Army's stipulations for a three-week food supply, but soon after work started in earnest Volchkov opened negotiations on this issue with military commanders.⁵⁴² Oblast officials first consulted with the Central Front on the topic of food, likely because of the proximity of the Central Front's engineering operations to Kursk city, and the oblast seat of authority. In one case, Volchkov asked the military council of the Central Front if it could amend the original order requiring civilian authorities to supply food for workers until April 25 (the Central Front had issued Resolution No. 00141 on March 26), after which the Central Front would provide foodstuffs.⁵⁴³ On April 8, Volchkov informed the military council that the oblast's central food stocks were dwindling and requested that the Central Front begin supplying the people on April 10. He warned that failure in this could cause the work groups to disband as laborers returned home in search of food.⁵⁴⁴ Volchkov also

⁵⁴¹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 164.

⁵⁴² GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 18, ll. 6, 22.

⁵⁴³ TsAMO, f. 62, op. 321, d. 5, l. 99. Found in Zolotarev, *Predliudiia Kurskoi bitvy*, 301.

⁵⁴⁴ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 74.

sought to modify the Southwestern Front's food sourcing clause articulated in its mobilization order of May 6. Ordering district leaders to feed their mobilized workers, he informed the Southwestern Front that civilian authorities would be unable to supply food to workers and that the 36th UOS would have to provide food with priority given to workers far from their home districts.⁵⁴⁵ In this, he likely relied on the fact that laborers on sites closer to their homes might have access to food, but was certain that workers from a greater distance would have none. As the mobilization period extended into May, the oblispolkom removed specific food supply totals from its mobilization resolutions, indicating that district leaders were responsible only for supply. As with other commodities in this time of improvisation, civilian leaders tried to make do with what they had while extracting as much as they could out of the labor force. All the while, oblast officials seemed to be acutely aware of the peoples' privations in the face of the Red Army and tried to make some sorts of accommodations.

Responses and Possible Solutions to Resolve Differences

Both Red Army officers and oblast officials objected to what they saw as wasted labor. The nature of their relationship determined the solutions each side pursued in trying to advance its self-interests. The Red Army could not use violence to mobilize workers, as it could in conducting food and supply requisitions. It also lacked the resources to force people onto to worksites throughout the oblast and keep them digging in the trenches. The military, however, had the force of law on its side and tried to martial this to bring its wishes to fruition. Although civilian leaders acquiesced to the Red Army's demands to a certain point, they had to maintain a balance between immediate military necessity and strategic military necessity. The former

⁵⁴⁵ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 18, l. 33.

manifested itself in meeting the demands of the fronts and armies in the oblast. Moscow imposed the latter through its requirements of a full harvest for the oblast's liberated territory. In meeting these demands, Kursk's civilian authorities had to allocate an appropriate labor force to agricultural work, and this meant denying the Red Army the labor military officials believed they were owed. Understanding the military's presence in the oblast was short-lived, the civilian leaders managed the Red Army's temporary nagging and pressure tactics by seeking paths of least resistance and acquiescing to demands in fits and starts.

The Red Army engineering units that worked on the defense construction sites comprised soldiers who either oversaw defense construction or engaged in activities that required construction skills in which they had been trained. They did not work as a security force to coerce labor or keep laborers against their will. As discussed above, the military complained that district authorities failed to meet their expectations in sending the required number of people to the trenches and maintaining acceptable work discipline. To improve these perceived deficiencies, Red Army commanders proposed a more regimented organization of the work groups and clear allocation of individuals to occupy leadership positions, in which each leader would assume responsibility for the execution of his/her given work unit's duties. For example, in the execution of the Voronezh Front's Resolution No. 22, Colonel Naumov, chief of staff of the Fortified Region of the Voronezh Front, urged Doronin and Volchkov to oblige all their district counterparts to take personal responsibility for carrying out the mobilizations. To improve productivity at the construction sites, Naumov recommended that each district establish its own commission comprised of the raikom secretary, the raiispolkom chairman, and the head of police to oversee onsite leadership to ensure consistent provision of foodstuffs and to combat

desertion.⁵⁴⁶ Such an organization was reminiscent of the State Defense Committee at the lowest level. He suggested that each district organize its workers into detachments of 200 people with the district committee selecting a labor leader and political leader for each. Every unit was to be subdivided into four, fifty-person work teams, each with a foreman to oversee the work and two accountants who would take a daily tally of all workers on the line. Neither Resolution No. 22 nor the oblispolkom Resolution No. 4s (of March 9) spoke to the organization of workers. Commanders in the Central Front's territory echoed Naumov's desire for a more streamlined organization of the labor groups mobilized for defense construction.⁵⁴⁷ The 65th Army's chief of construction, Major Slavnin, wanted the mobilized people from every village soviet in Mikhailovskii District organized into detachments, with each one comprising work teams of the members of the collective farms in the village soviet. He wanted a member of the local political department to command each of the units and subunits to guarantee competent onsite organization of productivity via the leadership of the most politically reliable people.⁵⁴⁸

The recommendations forwarded by Naumov and other Red Army officers created conditions in which they could employ legal constraints based on principles and laws that predated the war. In that period, the Soviet Union instituted more restrictive labor laws as a means to maximize productivity. These laws did not merely restrict collective action on the part of workers, but also used coercion to enforce labor discipline. In a Resolution issued on

⁵⁴⁶ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 69.

⁵⁴⁷ Two of the Central Front's major mobilization resolutions called for organizing the mobilized groups into five 1,000 person work columns.

⁵⁴⁸ GAOPIKO, f. P-101, op. 1, d. 90, l. 25. Slavnin made his original demand for such organization on May 30. Three weeks later he reported that the district leaders did not initially implement his plan. Even with the support of an oblispolkom resolution instructing the district leaders to comply with Slavnin's organizational principles, the district leaders continued to ignore the Red Army commander's wishes. GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 237.

December 28, 1938, the state ordered that that excessive tardiness and absenteeism would result in mandatory termination from a job.⁵⁴⁹ On June 26, 1940, the state criminalized tardiness, absenteeism, and self-initiated transfer from one's job (a major contributor to high turnover at the workplace). Such infractions warranted incarceration from two to four months, or a six-month period of wage garnishment at a rate of 25 percent. Concerned not only about the individual element of workers' labor discipline, the state added a layer of oversight by making managers of enterprises and institutions criminally liable for failing to turn over those workers guilty of such acts.⁵⁵⁰

Additionally, the Soviet state initiated a series of more politically based laws that categorized a host of many activities as counterrevolutionary, including "wrecking" and "criminal negligence." Article 58.7 (on wrecking) criminalized any act at an enterprise that the state believed exhibited negligence or incompetence. The law initially stipulated that the act had to demonstrate intent to harm the state, but the USSR Supreme Court modified the code so that a person could be prosecuted for wrecking based only on evidence that the individual had intended to commit the act.⁵⁵¹ The state became preoccupied with wrecking in the 1930s and had ordered a vigilance campaign against wreckers in 1937. Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, V. M. Molotov, in his speech at the February 1937 Plenum, argued that a person in any enterprise who committed a work violation or accident, no matter how small, should be viewed with suspicion, as if the suspect had prepared for more serious counterrevolutionary

⁵⁴⁹ This resolution also included injunctions against idleness at the worksite.

⁵⁵⁰ See Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928-1941* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1986), 144-47.

⁵⁵¹ Peter H. Solomon, Jr., *Soviet Criminal Justice under Stalin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 139.

actions. He essentially equated “wreckers” with traitors.⁵⁵² Criminal negligence was not as serious an offense, but it derived from the same sort of logic that construed an act that hurt productivity as unlawful. This logic attributes criminality less to the act itself than to its negative consequences. The Soviet legal system thereby gave Red Army officers tools to impose their will on Kursk’s peasants. A problem for the officers, however, arose from the fact that they did not have the resources to arrest those guilty of absenteeism or desertion. But imposing a hierarchical organization on the lowest tiers of leadership in the districts helped them apply legal pressure to get desired results.

Therefore, Colonel Naumov’s recommendations would allow for greater control from above. The military leaders reiterated their desire for more centralized control by asking the oblast to impose a greater sense of responsibility upon district officials. Creating only two layers of control composed of identifiable individual civilians responsible for the behavior and productivity of a large body of workers beneath them gave the understaffed engineers the opportunity to apply the legal sanctions the state granted them. Soon after the officers submitted their initial complaints to the oblast authorities, they began making sporadic yet persistent requests that the district leaders and worksite plenipotentiaries be prosecuted for poor performance.

Red Army officers blamed district and village soviet leaders for all categories of poor performance. At the same time, they characterized the collective failures in the mobilizations and onsite organization of work as evidence of an attitude held by the civilian leaders that was negligent at best, but more likely criminal.⁵⁵³ In one example, the chief of the 140th UVPS

⁵⁵² Ibid., 240-41.

⁵⁵³ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 83; GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 18, ll. 43-44; GAOPIKO, f. P-2878, op. 1, d. 741, ll. 40-41.

initially reported on a series of specific aspects of nonfulfillment of the Voronezh Front's Resolution No. 22, supporting his observations with facts and figures. Yet his report devolved into an indictment of the civilian leaders' attitude to the work, as they had allegedly promised to remedy their shortcomings and then failed to do so. He asserted that this led to intentional sabotage; he considered their attitude criminal in nature.⁵⁵⁴

As time wore on and neither the mobilizations nor work discipline at the construction sites showed marked improvement, the engineering officers began to accuse badly performing district leaders with the crime of work "disruption" (*sryv*) and demanded prosecution. Officers from all the engineering units assigned to three of the fronts in the oblast, as well as engineering commanders organic to those fronts and their component armies, deployed the term when expressing dissatisfaction with district leaders.⁵⁵⁵ This gave the officers an advantage: it provided them a great deal of latitude in evidentiary requirements and in affixing blame. The logic of the charge of "disruption" was that it did not have to address hundreds of individual labor violations, but had to target the lack of a result, in this case, in the completion of the work. Therefore, the military officers could apply it to conditions they judged to have hampered current work productivity and also any threat to future completion of the accusing officer's individual project. Further, the officers used "disruption" to indicate a range of unacceptable actions, as well as poor attitudes that resulted in outcomes detrimental to the state's central institution of defense. They thus recreated the crime of "wrecking" for the wartime Soviet Union.

Given the nature of Soviet law, it was reasonable for the Red Army to invent a crime similar to wrecking that would serve their interests. Since the Bolshevik Revolution the USSR

⁵⁵⁴ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 86.

⁵⁵⁵ The pervasiveness and ubiquity of the term suggests that the engineering officers had developed it before they began digging up Kursk's countryside.

saw a great deal of flexibility in the application of criminal law. Article 16 of the 1926 Criminal Code, addressing “socially dangerous acts,” rested on the doctrine of analogy. As opposed to the legal principle of *nullum crimen, nulla poena, sine lege*, the doctrine of analogy provided for the applicability of punishments to acts not explicitly stated in the criminal code.⁵⁵⁶ Soviet jurists applied this principle liberally in the late 1920s and early 1930s.⁵⁵⁷ In 1936, legal writers began to speak out vociferously against analogy, which restricted its scope. The crisis of wartime conditions, however, revived the doctrine of analogy.⁵⁵⁸ Yet, while prevailing legal mores existed to allow for the Red Army to create a new crime, this did not guarantee that party and legal mechanisms would accept their innovation. The fact that the Red Army looked to the oblispolkom and obkom as the proper institutions through which they could seek recourse for the failings of district officials placed the oblast authorities in the unenviable role of arbiter between two worthy disputants.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁶ This Latin term can be understood as, “There exists no crime and no punishment without a preexisting law.” This principle is the basis for the rule of law. Soviet legal writers rejected it as a bourgeois concept. Article 16 of the 1926 Criminal Code states: “If any socially dangerous act is not directly provided for by the present Code, the basis and limits of responsibility for it shall be determined by application of those articles of the Code which provide for crimes most similar to it in nature.” Harold J. Berman and James W. Spindler, trans. *Soviet Criminal Law and Procedure: The RSFSR Codes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 26. The application of the doctrine of analogy was permissible only when: “a) no statute is directly applicable to the given case, b) a statute does exist which provides for analogous cases, c) the analogous cases are similar in essential respects, and d) the given case is one which under general principles of law is subject to legal, and not merely moral, regulation.” See F. J. M. Feldbrugge, G. P. van den Berg, and William B. Simons, eds. *Encyclopedia of Soviet Law* (Boston: M. Nijhoff Publishers, 1985), 47.

⁵⁵⁷ Scott Newton has argued that the logic of the doctrine of analogy “permeated the law and underwrote the geometric expansion of liability evident for example in the notorious ‘Law of Three Spikelets’ that equated theft of kolkhoz property, including specifically harvested grain, with theft of state property and imposed the maximum penalty.” See Scott Newton, *Law and the Making of the Soviet World: The Red Demiurge* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 49.

⁵⁵⁸ Berman, *Soviet Criminal Law and Procedure*, 43-44.

⁵⁵⁹ I want to convey here that the oblast authorities agreed with both sides and worked to help both sides with their interests. In the end, I think they give more support to their district counterparts.

Occupying a difficult position between the Red Army and the hundreds of district, village soviet, and collective farm officials beneath them, oblast officials had to balance the demands of the military and Moscow while maintaining a close working relationship with their subordinates. They needed to provide guidance and support to the district leaders, while simultaneously pushing them to apply scant resources to disparate tasks. Further, oblast officials necessarily took into consideration the nature of the relationships they needed to maintain with their subordinates and the Red Army. The working affiliation with the district institutions predated the occupation and would need to be sustained long after the war's end (and they operated on the assumption that the fighting would soon proceed to the west). In the grand scheme of things, their interactions with the Voronezh and Central fronts would be brief, a tumultuous storm they, along with their district counterparts, would have to weather. Once it passed, Moscow's demands would need to be satisfied by the same raikom secretaries and raiispolkom chairmen that the Red Army disparaged and indicted. The obkom and oblispolkom's primary interest was to maintain as much consistency as possible among the comrades administering the districts.

At the same time the oblast officials gave full throated support to the mission of the Red Army and backed up their rhetoric with policies that placed huge quantities of material resources and human capital at the disposal of the Soviet military. Like any good manager, Volchkov and his associates had to establish all of their priorities and make the appropriate allocations of resources. But the immediate crisis and the nature of the relationship with the Red Army placed the oblast leaders in a position where they had to respond to the conditions of the looming battle and accommodate the demands of the military. They did not occupy a position of primacy. That said, the elements of the Red Army that occupied the oblast respected their position of authority over the deployment of the civilian population.

The same scarcity of human capital that plagued the labor needs of the collective farms and the Red Army existed at every level in the oblast. Considering the restoration of district leadership the greatest priority, the obkom devoted a great deal of its attention to assigning politically reliable people to district leadership positions. The obkom protocols are replete with notations of the individual verification process for the candidates for every district leadership position.⁵⁶⁰ But political reliability did not imply competent management skills and the conditions that existed in the oblast in spring and summer 1943 would have challenged the ablest administrator. Limited communication between the center and the districts added another layer of difficulty for the oblast authorities in trying to exert timely pressure on their subordinates.⁵⁶¹ Given the difficult conditions that district leaders faced, the cumbersome nature of locating and verifying replacements, and the fact that the remaining men may not have represented the best of the prewar candidate pool, oblast leaders would have had little incentive to yield to the Red Army's demands to carry out legal proceedings against vetted leaders.

Moscow's calls for a full harvest presented another serious factor that militated against oblast and district leaders sacrificing farm labor for military construction. The protocols at the obkom level show an institution trying to balance a variety of priorities dedicated to civilian and military matters, but privileging the need for restoration of services and demands of the state over the needs of the Red Army. The oblast plenum of April 1 offered Doronin and Volchkov another opportunity to present their conception of the matrix of responsibilities for the civilian

⁵⁶⁰ The obkom protocols in February, March, and April 1943 are filled with notations on scores of individual verifications of new raikom secretaries and raiispolkom chairmen. See GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2914, d. 2915, d. 2916.

⁵⁶¹ Merle Fainsod has commented on the difficulties of the Smolensk Oblast authorities experienced in exerting pressure on the districts in the prewar period. As military necessity privileged road access to the Red Army, civilian communication required many days, further limiting the control the center could exert on the districts. See Merle Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 86-92.

authorities. Doronin's keynote speech focused mostly on the horrors the civilians experienced under occupation and the difficulties they now faced in restoring their livelihoods.⁵⁶² To be sure, he included the obligations to the Red Army, noting that Kursk's people should give food, medical aid, and labor power to the liberators, but he also emphasized the importance of indirect methods for fulfilling obligations to the Red Army.⁵⁶³ These included restoring the institutions, enterprises, and collective farms the Germans destroyed and, more importantly, carrying out a successful spring sowing campaign. Volchkov dedicated his entire speech to conditions of Kursk's agricultural sector and his expectations for the coming agricultural cycle.⁵⁶⁴ Many of the reports made by district leaders foregrounded the difficulties they faced in restoring the principal enterprises on their territories and the efforts they made to meet Moscow's demands for acreage sown. A few noted the numbers of people they had allocated to Red Army construction projects, but even these speakers couched such reports in the larger presentation of their districts' agricultural obligations.⁵⁶⁵ Finally, of the two resolutions carried at the plenum, one was dedicated solely to measures district leaders were to take to ensure that Kursk's agricultural sector meet its production norms.

The oblispolkom walked a fine line of compliant resistance to the Soviet military. In the early phase of the mobilization, the oblispolkom did not include the allegations Red Army officers made against district leaders in communication with their subordinates. This changed as Red Army complaints became more persistent. For example, on April 12, Volchkov sent letters

⁵⁶² GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2899, ll. 3-17.

⁵⁶³ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2899, ll. 9, 9ob.

⁵⁶⁴ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2899, ll. 18-45.

⁵⁶⁵ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2899, ll. 68-69, 75-76, 148, 171.

to three raiispolkom chairmen,⁵⁶⁶ informing them that “according to the information” of the chief of the 484th UVSR they had disrupted the defense work as a result of systematic nonfulfillment of the mobilization plan. He was not making an overt indictment, but was merely serving as the messenger of the Red Army’s discontent. Volchkov broached the topic of criminality in an oblique manner. He wanted the raiispolkoms to have a “discussion” on the matter of guilt for disruption while they debated over methods to carry out more successfully the defense work. Volchkov ordered legal measures only against individuals guilty of shirking or desertion.⁵⁶⁷ He did not shy away from using law as a coercive tool, but it was clear he wanted it applied to the persons lowest on the chain of command. The varying level of threat in this letter may have resulted from the fact that he wrote for two audiences: the raiispolkom leaders and the Red Army. It was normal for copies of letters related to military demands to be sent to the Red Army even though the sender and recipient were both civilians. As this was the case, Volchkov might have deployed the language of the Red Army, i.e. “disruption,” to placate the representative of the 484th UVSR who might read the letter. By couching the most damning criticism against the raiispolkom leaders in the words of the engineering officers, Volchkov may have been deploying a kind of code to his subordinates, as if saying, “this other institution is displeased with your work, and they have brought it to my attention, which compels me to take some sort of action. So do what you can, but between you and me, you have my support.”

After the first major German delay passed in late May and several worksites of first priority remained incomplete, the crisis became more acute and the oblispolkom began issuing more strongly-worded letters to poor performing leaders. Warnings that the district leaders

⁵⁶⁶ These were Cheremisinovskii, Sovetskii, and Oktiabr’skii districts.

⁵⁶⁷ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 76.

would face retribution unless they met the Red Army's demands became more explicit. By the end of June, Volchkov used stronger language, concluding his letters with the starkest threat yet, warning each chairman "for the last time" that, if he did not fulfill the mobilization plan in two days, he would be brought to responsibility as directly guilty of disruption of the construction.⁵⁶⁸ So it is at the greatest peak in the crisis with the German offensive one week away that Volchkov used the Red Army's new crime to intimidate his subordinates.

The situation in Kursk involving the Red Army, district officials, and their oblast superiors suggests that the war had little effect on prewar justice practices. In his work on the Stalinist legal system, Peter Solomon explains that local and regional "political chieftains" regularly intervened in the course of justice in their territory. The political leaders ordered procurators to pursue prosecutions for some suspects and to refrain from prosecuting others.⁵⁶⁹ Solomon concludes that the procurators complied for two reasons: yielding to local authorities avoided conflict and afforded the procurators the opportunity to develop a close personal relationship with political power.⁵⁷⁰ The Kursk Obkom and oblispolkom exercised the same power, even in the face of Red Army demands. To be sure, letters from the oblispolkom to district leaders used the same threatening language and criminal categories as the military, but

⁵⁶⁸ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, ll. 253, 261. Volchkov sent this warning to the chairmen of the Zolotukhinskii, Shchigrovskii, Ponyrovskii, Svobodinskii, and Fatezhskii raisspolkoms on June 26 and 27, one week prior to the German attack.

⁵⁶⁹ Peter H. Solomon, Jr., *Soviet Criminal Justice under Stalin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 290. For more information on the power local political leaders had over local judicial activity see Boris Konstantinovskii, *Soviet Law in Action: The Recollected Cases of a Soviet Lawyer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 1-5 and Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule*, 192. Scott Newton describes the politics and the judiciary through the concept of state and law (*gosudarstvo i pravo*). This meant that the Soviet leadership saw that the state and law were "indissociable and mutually implicative" and one could not be conceived of without the other. See Newton, *Law and the Making of the Soviet World*, 2-6.

⁵⁷⁰ Solomon, *Soviet Criminal Justice under Stalin*, 295-97. Solomon further notes that procuracy officials in Moscow often tried to help provincial procurators but could do little to help their subordinates in dealing with local political power.

this does not mean that oblast officials agreed with engineering officers' intentions.⁵⁷¹ The NKVD issued a report detailing the numbers of prosecutions for shirking work carried out as of June 1, 1943.⁵⁷² They prosecuted 188 people from Kursk city and 83 people from thirteen districts in the oblast.⁵⁷³ Yet none of the evidence indicates that any of the district authorities were prosecuted or removed from their positions.

Given that the engineering officers from all over the oblast made persistent demands for prosecutions and that numbers of people involved in the mobilization effort reached tens of thousands, the fact that so few people were actually prosecuted demonstrates that the oblast authorities used their position to protect subordinates and the civilian population. Historian Donald Filtzer in his work on industrialization in the 1930s details this kind of protective relationship. Persistent scarcity of labor forced many factory managers to disregard minor legal infractions in order to maintain the integrity of their labor force. Even as the state implemented more restrictive laws on laborers and applied greater pressure on enterprise managers to report on those guilty of labor, managers found workarounds that served their interests.⁵⁷⁴ With

⁵⁷¹ Much scholarship has examined discursive replication in the Soviet Union. See Larry E. Holmes, *Grand Theater: Regional Governance in Stalin's Russia, 1931-1941* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), and Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever, until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006). For a discussion on how Bolshevik officials in the Civil War period manipulated language to serve political ends see Donald J. Raleigh, *Experiencing Russia's Civil War: Politics, Society, and Revolutionary Culture in Saratov, 1917-1922*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁵⁷² GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 203. The document did not indicate a start date.

⁵⁷³ The districts in question range from territory on which both the Central Front and the Voronezh Front operated. There does not seem to be any organization for the districts selected. It could simply be that they got information from these districts and not from others. What is clear is that the tally for the districts is not comprehensive. A brief review of the numbers from each district suggests a good deal of stochasticity. Of the thirteen districts listed, ten are in the single digits, while Leninskii has ten people and Skorodnianskii has eleven. The surprise here is Svobodinskii, which has twenty-three people prosecuted. One possibility for this is that the Central Front's headquarters was located in this district so there may have been more people quicker to prosecute.

⁵⁷⁴ See Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization*, 252-53.

Kursk's civilian leadership facing an acute labor shortage and the pressing need to begin a "normal" agricultural cycle, it stands to reason that it would employ every measure it could to protect its levels of junior management and labor pool.

The Difference of Proximity and Distance to the Center of Authority

Proximity to political authority played a role in mobilization and the implementation of labor. For example, Red Army engineering officers located near Kursk city took the time to cultivate a relationship with oblast authorities while those located on the periphery of the oblast assumed more authority for themselves. By comparing these interactions one sees that the officers of the UOSs operating in Kursk construed a clear difference between the oblast leadership and district leadership, according the former some measure of deference while treating the latter with contempt. Further, the ways in which midlevel authorities interacted suggested practices of the prewar period.

Military Engineer of the 2nd Rank Goriunov, who was in command of the 127th UVPS, under the 34th UOS, took advantage of the fact that his unit operated in and around Kursk city to develop a personal relationship with Volchkov and Doronin. When he first met with the oblast leaders on March 21 Goriunov spoke about how he wanted the mobilization for four districts to the northwest of Kursk organized.⁵⁷⁵ He followed up the meeting with a letter on March 31 that

⁵⁷⁵ On March 20, Goriunov addressed his first request to the oblispolkom in a generic, yet formal, manner, "to the chairman of the Kursk Oblast Soviet of Workers' Deputies." He addressed the next letter he sent to Volchkov by name. In all subsequent communication he addressed the recipient by name. All other engineering units, whether parts of the UOSs or organic to the fronts and armies in the territory addressed their communications to the oblispolkom in the same generic, yet formal, manner that marked Goriunov's first letter. Apparently, none of the other engineering officers operating in Kursk Oblast met with members of the oblispolkom. See GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, ll. 29, 52; GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1. d. 2962, l. 132. Goriunov also established a similar relationship with the obkom secretary, Doronin.

detailed the mobilization.⁵⁷⁶ Goriunov also requested that the oblast provide people for eighty-four highly skilled positions, ranging from accountants and foremen and engineers to medical doctors. He called for 240 civilians to staff the leadership positions at all levels of the eight proposed construction battalions and another 140 people to serve as support staff.⁵⁷⁷ Finally, he asked the oblast officials to select individuals to head up each of the departments of cadres, transport, foodstuffs and fodder, and mass-political work. These people were to supervise the departmental functions for the 10,000 people he wanted digging trenches.⁵⁷⁸

The excessive demand for skilled personnel was not the only factor that set Goriunov's requests apart from other Red Army engineers. He also asked for rations for 14,000 people for the month of April. He broke this total into two groups. The first group comprised the 10,000 civilians to be mobilized for heavy labor and the second group consisted of the 4,000 members of the 127th UVPS. He wanted the soldiers fed according to NKO Norm No. 3 and the civilians given a daily ration similar to Norm No. 3.⁵⁷⁹ This level of detail and the fact that Goriunov ignored the three-week food supply clause in NKO Resolution No. 243 (he asked the oblispolkom to organize a full month's food supply) sets his initial demands on the oblast leadership apart from that of his fellow engineering officers. Like his demands for skilled labor,

⁵⁷⁶ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 52. It is important to remember that state resolutions granted only fronts and armies the legal authority to impose mobilizations. UOS units and their subunits did not enjoy such a privilege. As this was the case, one may observe that this would have been another reason for Goriunov to cultivate a personal relationship with the arbiters of labor power.

⁵⁷⁷ Goriunov knew that military engineers from the Central Front were reconnoitering the region around Kursk city and marking the areas designated to be converted into trench systems or battalion strong points with wooden stakes. Goriunov's expectation was that once the ground had been staked, a civilian engineer would have been able to oversee the construction of the desired structures. He complained to Doronin that the civilians had not accomplished these types of tasks in early April. See GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2962, l. 96.

⁵⁷⁸ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 2962, l. 132. Central Front Resolution No. 096 called for the mobilization of 10,000 for defense construction of the Kursk perimeter and frontlines that extended from the west to the north of the city.

⁵⁷⁹ This list included daily amounts of items such as bread, tea, meat, salt, sugar, vegetables, etc.

Goriunov did not provide any rationale why he would expect Kursk's civilians to provide his soldiers rations for April.⁵⁸⁰ But, again, since Kursk served as a major railroad hub, he may have expected that food supply from the city would be easier to procure than from the collective farms.

Goriunov and the UVSR commanders' relationship with oblast officials was characterized by transparency through continuous communication. For example, Goriunov made Volchkov aware of the fact that he knew other engineering units made demands on the same labor pool that had been assigned to the 127th UVPS. He negotiated with Volchkov to have the oblispolkom chairman order mobilizations from the border territory of a neighboring district to make up for the labor shortfall. All the while Goriunov made clear that he was trying to accommodate Volchkov's mobilization conditions. The most important of these was that mobilized workers be sent to worksites at reasonably close distances to their homes.⁵⁸¹ Like Goriunov, his counterparts in the constituent UVSRs cultivated relationships with district and village soviet leaders in order to facilitate compliance with the mobilization demands. Apparently, these UVSR officers used their time in the villages to determine the number of people each village soviet should supply.⁵⁸² The UVSR officers also sometimes appeared at raikom bureau meetings to plead their cases for labor and encourage raikom secretaries and

⁵⁸⁰ While it is the case that the Red Army expected civilians to donate various food items, these items were usually channeled through the Red Army's food provision apparatus. It seems here that Goriunov seeks to bypass this process and have the oblast provide sustenance directly to his soldiers.

⁵⁸¹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1. d. 2962, l. 96; GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 57.

⁵⁸² It is not clear how they arrived at the numbers of people they determined each village soviet to deliver, but they recognized that each village soviet could not send equal numbers of workers. See GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 51.

raiispolkom chairmen to push their subordinates to send more workers.⁵⁸³ As the defense construction period moved into the critical phase in late May and June, UVSR representatives and village soviet chairmen issued joint reports indicating the number of people they were to have supplied according to a raiispolkom decree, the number actually mobilized, and promises to send more people to the worksite.⁵⁸⁴ The engineers collated several of these reports and sent them to Volchkov along with their overall assessment of the situation.⁵⁸⁵ The engineering officers organized these reports to include the local civilian leader as a kind of co-organizer in the mobilization rather than simply a functionary obliged to perform a task. To be sure, the identification of the local civilian official as a responsible person in writing placed the onus for action on that official, but formulating the relationship in a cooperative way served to reduce the adversarial nature of the competition over labor.

Goriunov used criticism to encourage the civilians to improve their performance, but initially his letters conveyed a sense of patience with the situation. Refraining from accusations of criminality or disruption at this early stage, Goriunov usually ended his letters by requesting that Volchkov intercede personally to prompt the raiispolkoms to send more labor.⁵⁸⁶ Further,

⁵⁸³ GAOPIKO, f. P-37, op. 1, d. 217, ll. 40-41. On May 31, the Chief of the 433rd UVSR, Major Vitkovsky, delivered a report to the Fatezhskii District Raikom Bureau that over the preceding two weeks the district had fulfilled the mobilization plan only by 35 to 40 percent and urged it to increase its mobilization for a period of thirty days in order to complete the work by June 25. He told his audience that village soviet leaders were to take personal responsibility for the success of the work or face prosecution on charges of disruption according to the laws of wartime.

⁵⁸⁴ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, ll. 183, 185, 188, 193, 194. It is worth noting that in some of these reports, the village soviet leader also noted all the other labor obligations he had to maintain. He did not offer specific numbers, but listed the types of military work in which people from his village soviet were engaged. This could be seen as a clever attempt to dissuade the UVSR officer from pressing his own demands for more labor.

⁵⁸⁵ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 184. In some cases the UVSR officer sent an extra copy of the report he submitted to the 127th UVPS. See GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 179.

⁵⁸⁶ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 50. Such reliance on personal intervention suggests that Goriunov believed that the prestige of oblast-level officials would cow their subordinates to action.

given the fact that he had taken the time to establish a personal relationship with Volchkov, it would have been wise for Goriunov to demonstrate some basic trust in the oblispolkom chairman to convince the latter's subordinates to carry out the work demanded of them. As the days passed with little serious improvement made to the mobilizations, however, Goriunov and his deputy characterized the poor performance as creating conditions that threatened to disrupt the work and hinted that such actions were criminal in nature.

The engineers stepped up this rhetoric in late May, after the Germans' first major delay in launching the offensive. The last week in May also saw an elevated rate of desertion of workers from the worksites,⁵⁸⁷ most likely resulting from an understanding, whether false or not, by the onsite village soviet plenipotentiaries that the workers' period of labor obligation had come to an end. The engineers reported the desertions to their higher-ups and to oblast officials,⁵⁸⁸ alleging that the civilians were guilty of "malicious desertion" as well as disruption and that those in positions of responsibility needed to be prosecuted.⁵⁸⁹ The engineers expressed to Volchkov that their representatives in the villages still relied exclusively on the power of persuasion to motivate people and that they abided by his demand that they keep the workers close to their homes. Despite these concessions to the wishes of civilian authority, local leaders continued to evade the Red Army's demands.⁵⁹⁰ The engineers' complaints finally reached the 34th UOS's commander, Colonel Ponimash, who expressed his own consternation at poor mobilizations and high turnover on the worksites, which threatened the completion of the work. He called for the fulfillment of

⁵⁸⁷ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 166.

⁵⁸⁸ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 183.

⁵⁸⁹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 187.

⁵⁹⁰ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 198. This report to Volchkov originated from the chief of the 433rd UVSR, Vitkovsky.

the mobilization and the prosecution of those guilty of disruption. Perhaps in an attempt to assert the authority of those with proper legal jurisdiction in this matter, Ponimash sent copies of this letter to the Central Front's Chief of Engineering Forces, General Proshliakov, and the Kursk Oblast prosecutor.⁵⁹¹ Even though the engineers applied more pressure on the civilian authorities, they still deferred to the oblast officials to administer legal coercion.

Volchkov's responses to the complaints further demonstrate his dual role as protector of his subordinates and supporter of Red Army demands. After receiving Ponimash's letter criticizing the mobilization for the 34th UOS, Volchkov sent Proshliakov a letter asking him to pay the 20,000 people currently working on the Central Front's defensive lines, according to the existing laws.⁵⁹² Volchkov's letter to Proshliakov can be construed as a counterargument to the front's right to order a mobilization. The logic here would be that, as the Central Front had not met its legal obligation to pay the soldiers, the civilian hierarchy was not wholly at fault for failing to fulfill the demands of the Central Front's engineers. In dealing with the civilian district leaders, Volchkov informed them that they should assume personal responsibility in carrying out the mobilization.⁵⁹³ It was not until June that Volchkov began to issue warnings. Even so, the oblispolkom chairman couched his admonitions in language indicating that he was the messenger and not the originator of the warning.⁵⁹⁴ In the end, his threats did not result in dismissals. Volchkov seemed to be seeking a kind of middle road, where he determined how many people should work at the Red Army construction sites, taking the brunt of the criticism from the

⁵⁹¹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, ll. 190-91.

⁵⁹² GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 192.

⁵⁹³ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, ll. 55, 97.

⁵⁹⁴ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, ll. 167, 245, 273.

engineering officers, thereby affording the district leaders the labor power to conduct the spring sowing campaign.⁵⁹⁵

Regardless, the relative civility of the interactions between Goriunov and Volchkov contrasts markedly with those engineering officers deployed further away from the center of power, where they assumed a position of greater dominance over the prosecution of mobilizations for defense construction. The 60th Army and the engineering units of the Voronezh and Southwestern fronts ignored the oblispolkom and eschewed any collaborative input from district-level leaders to impose mobilization demands directly onto the local leaders in an attempt to maximize their access to labor. Their actions created varying levels of disorganization, and in the case of the 38th UOS, some chaos.

On March 13, the 60th Army issued its mobilization order for 22,200 people to the raiispolkoms of nine districts in the central and western portion of the oblast,⁵⁹⁶ making their demands without the knowledge of the oblispolkom and gathering people from the listed districts

⁵⁹⁵ Volchkov's position vis-à-vis the Red Army and the districts agrees with much of the scholarship on how local leaders exercised power in the prewar Stalinist period. One sees that Volchkov (and Doronin, for that matter) used the prestige of his office to protect his circle from upheaval wrought by the temporary presence of the Red Army. Merle Fainsod and J. Arch Getty observed the prevalence of analogous local networks in their studies of the Smolensk party leadership in the 1930s and early 40s. Moscow referred to the phenomena as "familyness." See Merle Fainsod, *How Russia is Ruled* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 200-201; and J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933-1938* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 73-78.

⁵⁹⁶ The 60th Army was located due west of Kursk city and had responsibility for constructing defenses at the apex of the salient. Stavka had not assigned it any independent engineering units so it had to rely on its organic engineering force. It made claims on labor resources from territory on the border it shared with the 127th UVPS. The 60th Army's military council based the legitimacy of this mobilization on the order of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the SSSR from June 22, 1941, "On the Military Situation." At the time the 60th Army issued this order it was technically under the command of Golikov and the Voronezh Front. However, it had been advancing due west from Kursk city and by March was no longer operating in tandem with the main composition of the Voronezh Front that was attempting to take Kharkov. Its position on the Voronezh Front's extreme right flank meant that it took on a more conservative role of protecting the main body of the front from an encircling maneuver. As its area of operations was so distant from Golikov's goals, it determined for itself its own mobilization needs. Even though Stavka transferred the 60th Army to the Central Front on March 26, it continued to carry out its own defense construction activities without the help of the 34th UOS, and order its own mobilizations.

for work.⁵⁹⁷ Once the Central Front issued mobilization orders that drew from the some of the same districts, those district leaders informed the oblispolkom of the multiple burdens placed on them.⁵⁹⁸ The military council of the 60th Army finally submitted its resolution concerning this to the oblispolkom on April 14.⁵⁹⁹ As oblispolkom chairman, Volchkov took issue with many liberties the 60th Army had taken in conducting a mass mobilization while leaving oblast officials in the dark. This occurred at just the moment when the oblispolkom began to realize that the Central and Voronezh fronts were also making overlapping claims on inhabitants of the same districts.⁶⁰⁰

Volchkov further complained to 60th Army commander I. D. Cherniakhovsky that the 60th Army sent orders to the Fatezhskii and Shchigrovskii raiispolkoms to mobilize people to work in territory to the southwest of Kursk city. Stressing that Fatezhskii District was located 60 kilometers from the proposed worksite, while Shchigrovskii District's peasants would have to travel more than 100 kilometers to work, Volchkov argued that these distances were unacceptable. Volchkov may have had several reasons for his reaction. First, keeping workers close to home would ameliorate the need to find the workers shelter and food on site. Second, close proximity to the worksites would have given kolkhoz chairmen more flexibility in rotating workers from collective farm work to defense work from day to day. Since the mobilization quotas were based on households, it did not matter whom the household sent, so long as it was an able-bodied adult worker. Kolkhoz chairmen could also draw labor off the worksite if demand

⁵⁹⁷ Judging from the districts on their list, they made their selections based on districts they had liberated. This meant that some of the districts they ordered for mobilization were located a great distance to the east from their position in March 1943.

⁵⁹⁸ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 59.

⁵⁹⁹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 344.

⁶⁰⁰ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 308.

became acute on the collective farm. Third, civilians journeying great distances over the countryside would have passed other military units in need of labor and risked being impressed into work for which they had not been allocated. This caused confusion, as the Red Army unit to which they had been allocated would complain of absenteeism, while their home collective farm would be short a great many farmhands. Finally, keeping people closer to home allowed for greater control over their movements. With so much worry about spies and German parachutists, severe restrictions had been placed on movement.

Volchkov admonished Cherniakhovsky that the 60th Army's commanders needed to end future confusion when they wished to mobilize civilians. Volchkov asked that various subunits of 60th Army cease direct contact with raiispolkoms when they sought to mobilize labor. He demanded that all new labor requests be submitted to the oblispolkom. Volchkov reinforced the oblispolkom's prerogatives with the decree it issued the next day, which reduced the total number of people to be mobilized for the 60th Army by 2,200, and reformulated the source districts and the numbers each was to provide. While the oblispolkom informed the district leaders that representatives of the 60th Army would lead workers from their home districts to the worksites, it stated that all worksites should be located in the workers' home district or a neighboring district. The decree also informed the 60th Army that it was to pay the workers according to established norms. The stipulations for the organization and leadership of the workers remained similar to other mobilization orders.⁶⁰¹ Such provisions relieved the 60th Army of all responsibility for the wellbeing of the workers and attempts to maximize the labor potential of those who arrive on site.

⁶⁰¹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 18, l. 22. Every village soviet and raiispolkom was to name one plenipotentiary for the worksite. Each district was to send ten-to-fifteen horses. The people were to arrive with tools and a twenty-day supply of food. They were also to provide the military construction units any local materials they may require.

Later in the mobilization the territory along a stretch of the Oskol River became a site of contestation within the Red Army. Rival units used subterfuge, deceit, and occasional threats of violence against civilians to recruit workers to their worksites. With labor in such tight supply, the engineers operated in a zero-sum game. Originally, the oblispolkom's March 9 decree ordered all districts in the southeastern section of the oblast to allocate workers for the Voronezh Front's primary engineering unit, the 38th UOS. The numbers of people stipulated in this decree stood as the baseline for each district's mobilization targets in the eyes of the oblispolkom.⁶⁰² In early May, the Southwestern Front, located on the Voronezh Front's left flank,⁶⁰³ complicated this arrangement by issuing a resolution to the oblispolkom calling for the mobilization of 7,000 people and 300 horse-drawn carts for its primary engineering unit, the 36th UOS, for a period up to June 30.⁶⁰⁴ On May 4, the oblispolkom complied with the basic tenets of the Southwestern Front's order but modified it as it informed three raiispolkoms that they were to mobilize 5,500 people and 100 horse-drawn carts.⁶⁰⁵ It also unilaterally refused the Southwestern Front's request to access workers from districts further north of their location, arguing that these locations were too far from the worksites.⁶⁰⁶ It is not clear whether the oblispolkom informed

⁶⁰² Once a number had been established, the oblispolkom usually did not allow the military to exceed its initial demands. In cases when a particular Red Army unit made an additional demand from specific district, the oblispolkom informed the issuing unit that it make arrangements for a portion of the total number of workers at various construction sites to be redirected to the site at which they wished work to have been carried out.

⁶⁰³ The Southwestern Front was deployed to the south of the Voronezh Front. It occupied all of Valuiskii District and a portion of Volokonovskii District.

⁶⁰⁴ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, ll. 90-92. The Southwestern Front's commanders assigned the 36th UOS to construct defenses along the Tikhia Sosna River. GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 1, l. 92a.

⁶⁰⁵ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 18, l. 33. The oblispolkom, in Decision 15-s, ordered Novo-Oskol'skii District to mobilize 2,000 people, Valuiskii District to mobilize 1,500 people, Volokonovskii District to mobilize 2,000. This decree conflicted with the March 9 decree that had ordered these three districts to mobilize laborers for the 38th UOS (Novo-Oskol'skii District was to have supplied 2,500 people; Valuiskii District, 2,500; and Volokonovskii District 3,500). GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 18, l. 6.

⁶⁰⁶ While the oblispolkom clearly informed the Southwestern Front of its modifications in terms of persons and draft animals mobilized and source districts, it took a different tack when discussing the subject of food. Normally, the

the 38th UOS that three of the districts responsible for supplying it labor had been ordered to send workers to construction sites managed by the 36th UOS.

The oblispolkom and obkom received the first complaint about poor mobilization from the 36th UOS on May 24.⁶⁰⁷ The chief of the 132nd UVPS maintained that people mobilized for his worksites had deserted them on a daily basis, and that local authorities had not taken any measures to prevent workers from leaving the site. When several engineering officers confronted local authorities, requesting that they bring the desertion to a halt, these officials promised to rectify the situation, but their assurances did not improve conditions. The chief observed that the labor situation deteriorated from day to day and that this threatened to disrupt the construction project. He asked the oblispolkom and obkom to impress upon their subordinates in the districts the necessity of fulfilling the oblispolkom's orders.⁶⁰⁸ On June 8, an obkom member and an oblispolkom deputy chairman sent letters to their counterparts in Valuiskii, Volokonovskii, and Novo-Oskol'skii districts, stating that their irresponsible conduct of the mobilization for the 132nd UVPS was disrupting the work schedule. They ordered the district leaders to carry out the mobilization in a day, but that they did not need to report on their activities until June 25.⁶⁰⁹ This delay in providing a follow-up report was uncommon for the oblast officials. The fact that persons other than Volchkov and Doronin handled this complaint

civilian workers were to supply their own food, but the oblispolkom requested the Southwestern Front to provide the mobilized workers with food. In the case of people and draft animals the oblispolkom stated unequivocally that the supplies did not exist and the Southwestern Front simply had to accept this fact. With regard to food, it informed the Southwestern Front of the reduced food stocks in the home districts and asked that they take these conditions into consideration and allocate food to the workers. This shows that the oblast officials understood that they could assert their authority vis-à-vis the Red Army in certain areas, but had to softer line of negotiation in other areas.

⁶⁰⁷ The 132nd UVPS operated under the command of the 36th UOS. The chief sent carbon copies of this letter to the Volokonovskii and Valuiskii raikom secretaries.

⁶⁰⁸ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 181.

⁶⁰⁹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, l. 164. Such a late report date was irregular. Usually oblast leaders wanted the first report on the successful completion of a task to be submitted in less than a week.

might also indicate that the oblast considered the 36th UOS's needs a secondary concern. The above irregularities and delays in the actions the oblast took in dealing with the problem illustrate the difficulties faced by engineering units operating so far from the Kursk city. In a case such as this, the engineering officers sought other avenues of action to secure needed labor.

While entreating local leaders to find solutions for its labor problems, the 132nd UVPS (under the 36th UOS) became embroiled in a confrontation with neighboring elements of the 38th UOS, as both groups sought more able-bodied civilians for their worksites. This series of events began on June 10, when a Major Shinkarenko, the deputy chief of the 132nd UVPS, ordered the chairman of Sharapovskii Village Soviet in Novo-Oskol'skii District to direct his mobilized people to the 132nd UVPS's collection site and cease sending his people to worksites operated by the 38th UOS.⁶¹⁰ Apparently the village soviet chairman obeyed Shinkarenko. One week later the deputy chief of the 38th UOS informed 132nd UVPS that the oblispolkom's resolution allocated all laborers in Novo-Oskol'skii District to work exclusively for the 38th UOS. As this was the case, the 132nd UVPS was to redirect the Sharapovskii Village workers that had been mistakenly sent to them to a worksite of the 38th UOS.⁶¹¹

In an effort to remedy the situation to its advantage, officers the 38th UOS took a series of measures to draw workers away from the 132nd UVPS's worksite.⁶¹² On June 18 some 38th UOS officers allegedly presented false written instructions to groups of collective farmers, informing them that they had been "liberated" from working for the 132nd UVPS and sent them to the 38th

⁶¹⁰ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3143, l. 156. Further, Shinkarenko claims that he had established personal contact.

⁶¹¹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3143, l. 155. Here, the 38th UOS's chief was citing the oblispolkom's March 9 resolution. It is possible that he was not aware of oblispolkom Resolution No. 15-s that allocated labor to the 36th UOS.

⁶¹² Major Shinkarenko sent a detailed letter describing the 38th UOS's actions to his superior, the Chief of the 36th UOS.

UOS's worksite. On June 19 and 20, the 38th UOS allegedly posted armed soldiers on roads in Novo-Oskol'skii District who redirected workers en route to the 132nd UVPS's worksite to their own worksites. In another incident the commander of the 38th UOS, Lt. Colonel Kosynkin, visited many village soviet chairmen in Novo-Oskol'skii District with a contingent of machine gunners and, invoking a nonexistent telegram from Stalin ordering the people of the district to work exclusively for the 38th UOS, threatened the village leaders with arrest if they sent any of their workers to the 132nd UVPS. Shinkarenko confronted Kosynkin regarding this matter, accusing the 38th UOS's chief of disrupting his defense construction. Kosynkin responded by informing Shinkarenko that as he was the "senior military chief in the district, all power lied with [him] and not one person from Novo-Oskol'skii District would hinder [him]." Shinkarenko then told the Novo Oskol'skii Raikom Secretary of the 38th UOS's actions. This news angered the secretary and he promised to provide the 132nd UVPS with workers and a steady food supply.⁶¹³

Shinkarenko's complaint faulted Kosynkin for not having made the right connections with the district leaders as the 38th UOS had carried out its mobilization of the population since March. Shinkarenko underscored the importance of personal connections, as he implied that the leadership of the 38th UOS made no effort to engage with civilian leaders. Yet Shinkarenko may have needed to cultivate personal relationships with district and village soviet leaders, as *his* engineering units had called for mobilizations on a population that had already been mobilized since March. Further, Kosynkin's reaction to Shinkarenko's complaints illustrates a civil-military relationship that contrasted starkly with the kind cultivated by Goriunov's subordinates, who operated very close to the oblast leadership. This suggests that the Red Army viewed oblast

⁶¹³ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3143, l. 160. It is interesting that the Novo-Oskol'skii District secretary promised to supply food as the oblispolkom had gone to the effort to ensure that the Southwestern Front would supply the workers with food.

leaders as equals (if not superiors) and accorded them with a modicum of respect, while treating local territories some distance away from the center as fiefdoms.

Personal contacts greased the wheels of Soviet society. As Sheila Fitzpatrick observes, the Stalinist habitat included “various informal, personalistic arrangements whereby people at every level sought to protect themselves and obtain scarce goods.”⁶¹⁴ Bureaucrats, ordinary citizens, and party leaders all engaged in a system of patronage that functioned as a mechanism for the acquisition of goods and privileges and that did not operate on bureaucratic-legal principles, but rather on personal contacts.⁶¹⁵ The Russian word, *blat*, encapsulates the concept of the practice of developing and using personal contacts in acquiring needed and desired items in conditions of scarcity. Political scientist, Alena Ledeneva, distinguishes *blat* from more insidious practices, like bribery and corruption. She characterizes *blat* as a form of non-monetary exchange based on mutual help between two individuals.⁶¹⁶ In the case of Goriunov and Volchikov, it is clear that the engineer needed labor, but what he had to offer may be harder to determine. As his engineering units were responsible for constructing the perimeter defenses around Kursk city, he could have bartered guarantees of an impenetrable barrier to Kursk’s party leadership. The obkom and oblispolkom would have valued these as they would most likely have been shot out of hand had the Germans reclaimed the oblast. Goriunov expended greater effort than his counterparts at greater distance from Kursk city in establishing a personal

⁶¹⁴ See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), 2.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 110-15.

⁶¹⁶ Alena V. Ledeneva, *Russia’s Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking, and Informal Exchange* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 34. While Ledeneva focuses her study of *blat* on the late Soviet period, she prefaces her work by pointing out that it had become a fixture in Soviet society before the war. She asserts that communication between concerned citizens and Soviet officials “indicates the pervasiveness of *blat*” in Soviet society as early as 1940. See Ledeneva, 22-24.

relationship with Volchkov and in making requests out of character with all other engineering officers in the oblast.

The example of Goriunov showing deference to the civilian leadership stands in stark contrast to Red Army officers situated out of easy access of the oblast officials. Their attitude toward the political leaders ranged from indifferent to abusive. They asserted their prerogatives in contempt of the needs or wishes of local authorities. In the case of the 38th UOS they openly manipulated local leaders and bullied civilians in a competition they carried out with rival Red Army engineering units. Such easy recourse to intimidation tactics indicates an inconsistency in the Red Army's relationship with civilian population it was charged to protect.

Rationalization of the Mobilization and the Staryi Oskol–Rzhava Railroad

As the Germans delayed the launch of Operation Citadel, what was to have been a brief period of intense labor mobilization grew into a months-long effort. The military engineers and civilian authorities explored methods to impose more rationality on the process,⁶¹⁷ negotiating over more refined ways to keep an account of workers on the worksite. Initially, the Red Army presented its demands in terms of numbers of bodies at the worksite, while its complaints

⁶¹⁷ V. N. Maliarov observes that a similar situation occurred between Red Army engineers and civilians in the maintenance of the defensive works at Leningrad. Once it became obvious the opposing forces had reached a stalemate, the Red Army found it expedient to train civilians in military engineering and produced a defense construction brigade. See Maliarov, "Mobilizatsiia trudovykh i material'nykh resursov SSSR na stroitel'stvo oboronitel'nykh rubezhei v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny (1941-1945gg.)." In describing the processes of dekulakization and collectivization, Sheila Fitzpatrick notes that both campaigns began with little preparation and were largely improvised in the early stages. Over time, and through much coercion of the peasants, the state made changes and improvements in order to organize the collective farms to serve their purposes. See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russia Village after Collectivization* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1994), 8-9. James C. Scott recognizes that one of the overriding principles of the Soviet leadership, as adherents to high-modernist ideology, was the drive to rationalize social order and social processes. While he uses collectivization as a case study for his work, one sees similar processes in Kursk even as the Red Army prepared for a massive German offensive. See James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Hartford, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

centered on the low percentages of plan fulfillment.⁶¹⁸ Nor surprisingly, reports from the Red Army and the district officials on numbers of mobilized individuals usually contained discrepancies, with the engineers presenting lower figures and the civilians higher ones. The oblispolkom questioned the Red Army's reports of low numbers,⁶¹⁹ demanding that both engineering officers and local civilian leaders improve their accounting methods. By improving the methods that the rival parties employed in counting bodies on the construction sites, it could manage the mobilization better.

The 34th UOS countered by shifting accounting terms from actual numbers of bodies on the worksites to the number of workdays it required to complete the jobs.⁶²⁰ Using workdays as a mobilization metric allowed it to employ workers that the engineers considered suboptimal yet the district leaders persisted in sending, i.e., children and the elderly. By using the expected daily production of a healthy adult as a baseline, it could then estimate output expectations for less productive individuals against the baseline. One able-bodied adult who worked a full day represented a 100 percent fulfillment of a workday. The engineers valued a full day's labor by an elderly worker as 75 percent of a standard workday and that of a child's as 50 percent of one.⁶²¹ Such metrics suggest that the Red Army did not object in principle to children or the elderly engaging in back-breaking work (although they were breaking the law, which restricted labor by age). What it valued more was the guarantee that a certain volume of earth could be

⁶¹⁸ As noted earlier, district authorities attempted to cheat by sending children and the elderly in the place of able-bodied adults.

⁶¹⁹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 18, l. 29.

⁶²⁰ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, ll. 122, 140. This occurred in late May and June. By this time the first priority work had been mostly completed and they were hurrying up to finish second priority construction. They would have had a better idea of the labor required to complete their tasks and therefore more accurately determine the number of workdays required for fulfillment of the tasks.

⁶²¹ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, ll. 256-59.

moved in a specific period of time. Such policies support the claim that Soviet authorities in Kursk carried out a general mobilization that can be characterized as “total.” Calculating the mobilization in terms of workdays also allowed the 34th UOS to create a balance sheet of labor. In the final push for completion of defensive structures and the post-Citadel transformation of defenses into structures from which to launch the counteroffensive, the engineers began to tally the numbers of workdays district leaders had not supplied and hold them in arrears.⁶²² The accounting methods the 34th UOS deployed as the crisis reached its peak were an attempt to streamline the demands it could make on the civilian leadership in order to maximize its labor interests.⁶²³

The Rationalized Mobilization: Staryi Oskol–Rzhava Railroad

Even as scores of thousands of Kursk’s peasants dug trenches and roads for the Soviet military, in early June the Voronezh Front ordered another massive mobilization causing the oblast authorities to direct a further 20,000 people to move more earth for the military. Because this mobilization differed from those of the previous several months in terms of logistics and efficiency, the oblispolkom made much tighter provisions for control over the laborers and ordered the Komsomol to take a much greater role in on-site management. The oblispolkom’s foresight demonstrated that it had learned from the postliberation mobilizations. Even though it relied on organizational and motivational methods developed in the prewar period, it took a more

⁶²² GAKO, f. 3322, op. 10, d. 13, ll. 270, 273-74. The engineering officers included the workdays in arrears in order to demand that more bodies be sent to the worksites to complete the planned construction in the specified term.

⁶²³ While they seemed to be working together on a common problem, each party was still trying to maintain its own interests. This can be seen in the discrepancies between the numbers of workers at the work site each side reported. Both the oblispolkom and the engineers argued that each side needed to improve its methods for tallying the numbers of workers onsite. For example, the oblispolkom criticized both raiispolkom leaders and the 34th UOS for poor accounting of the workers on site. It included this criticism in the basis of its argument that the labor made available to the Red Army was not being used to its maximum efficiency.

rational approach in channeling a significant amount of labor to such a finite task. The key was tight control carried out by a large group of dedicated managers: the Komsomol.

By 1943, Red Army doctrine stipulated that each front should have at least one independent railway line dedicated to its supply. Since the conclusion of the winter fighting, the Voronezh Front had shared the Kursk-Kastornoe railway line with the Central Front, and this limited the amount of materiel reaching the southern sector of the oblast. A major German air attack on the railway facilities in Kursk city on June 2 made the suboptimal logistics situation for the Voronezh Front all the more acute. On June 7, 1943, the military council of the Voronezh Front sent a letter to the GKO requesting that a dedicated railway line be constructed to connect the cities of Staryi Oskol and Rzhava. It called for the Kursk Obkom and oblispolkom to send 20,000 people and 1,000 animal-drawn transports to provide labor for the project that was to begin on June 15 and be completed by August 15.⁶²⁴ Within twenty-four hours GKO submitted a resolution to the Kursk Obkom outlining the requirements for this construction project.⁶²⁵

The demands that the GKO (i.e., Stalin) made required the oblast authorities to abandon some important tenets of their standard operating procedure for mobilizations. The 20,000 laborers were to work simultaneously along a narrow swath of territory that stretched 95 kilometer across four districts in the eastern section of the oblast. The four districts in question could not supply all 20,000 workers and the oblast could not simply transfer workers from other work sites. The districts would have to supply hundreds more workers above and beyond those that were building defenses or working on roads. As the burden for mobilization would have to

⁶²⁴ TsAMO, f. 203, op. 42595, d. 1, l. 8. Found in *Kurskaia oblast' v period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voyny Sovetskogo Soiuza 1941-1945*, gg.: *Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*. Vol 2 (Kursk: Kurskoe knizhnoe izd-vo, 1962), 70-72.

⁶²⁵ RTsKhIDNI, f. 6446, op. 1, d. 125, ll. 21-22. Found in the Museum of the Headquarters of the Voronezh Front, Kirovskii village, Pristenskii District, Kursk Oblast.

be shared by so many districts, the workers would have to travel a great distance in order to reach the worksite. Further, the complexity involved in simply getting the 20,000 laborers to reach their specific worksites on the line on such short notice required much more coordination than had been needed for the local mobilizations.

The detailed joint resolution that the obkom and oblispolkom issued on June 14 further departed from previous decrees in that it made members of the oblast leadership directly responsible for coordinating the transfer of workers from their home districts to the worksite. As with previous mobilizations, the resolution based the overall organization of workforce by home district; however, it made stricter provisions on the breakdown of each district's workers into subunits and the composition of each workgroup's supervisory body.⁶²⁶ A second secretary from every district committee of the party had to take command of that district's column. Each column also contained a political leader who held membership in either the party or the Komsomol. District column leaders then divided every column into smaller work detachments (*otriads*) of 100 people and appointed a Komsomol member or a trusted unaffiliated worker as detachment leader.⁶²⁷ Every detachment was divided into Komsomol-led brigades and work groups of varying sizes. In the reports each work unit became synonymous with the brigade leader, who had to answer for deficiencies and could be replaced if necessary.⁶²⁸ Such organization offered column leaders more points of control over productivity.

⁶²⁶ The resolution also allocated responsibility for the establishment of sound measures for food procurement, public health, communication, and a well-planned propaganda campaign.

⁶²⁷ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 31, d. 121, ll. 29-31. Found in *Kurskaia oblast' v period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny Sovetskogo Soiuza 1941-1945*, 70-72.

⁶²⁸ GAOPIKO, f. P-131, op. 1, d. 84, ll. 123-25, 173.

District leaders also formed small work brigades composed solely of Komsomolites and trusted unaffiliated youth and interspersed them among the regular work crews. Column leaders placed greater pressure on these Komsomol-youth brigades as they were expected not only to overfulfill the plan but serve as models of productivity to the other brigades on the line. The column leaders' reports laud the heightened productivity of various Komsomol-youth brigades and how their productivity inspired neighboring work groups.⁶²⁹ The members of the Komsomol-youth brigades served a secondary oversight function to nonparty work groups in their sector. While party leaders used strict organizational methods to ensure high productivity, they also deployed more inspirational motivational techniques.

The Komsomolites who worked on the Staryi Oskol–Rzhava line not only served as model producers, but also carried out a host of other duties specifically designed to monitor and directly influence worker productivity as well as buoy the mood of the workers in those few moments of rest. Upon conclusion of the day's work, brigade leaders collected production totals for each worker, used them to determine the brigade's work total and then reported these figures to detachment leaders who then passed them on to the column leader. The archives do not state how work group leaders computed daily output, but as the majority of the work performed was excavation work, the reports generally focus on amounts of earth moved. The usual daily individual work norm was 3.5 cubic meters of earth.⁶³⁰ The reports show that Komsomol leaders considered some overfulfillment of the norm to be expected, but there are many cases of workers moving upward of six and seven cubic meters of earth every day.

⁶²⁹ GAOPIKO, f. P-131, op. 1, d. 84, ll. 6-9.

⁶³⁰ GAOPIKO, f. P-131, op. 1, d. 84, l. 165.

Overfulfillment on such a scale did not go unrecognized. Party and Komsomol leaders put great stock in posting the production totals of individuals in a given brigade and the brigade itself for public viewing on bulletin boards. As in the Stakhanovite period of the late 1930s, such bulletin boards became the sites of productivity celebration, where individuals were singled out for heroic labor.⁶³¹ Conversely, brigade leaders also used the boards as a tool of public shaming in order to encourage loafers to increase productivity beyond the daily norm. For example, a particular Comrade Shabamina from detachment number 11 in the column from Staro-Oskol'skii District left the work site on a rainy day while everyone else in the group continued working and she fulfilled only 70 to 85 percent of the daily norm. Brigade leaders placed her name on the bulletin board, alleging that her attitude to the construction work demonstrated that she clearly did not understand its significance. The report suggests that this public display informed everyone in the column of Shabamina's poor attitude. While the report is silent about how Shabamina's co-workers responded to her bad attitude, it notes that after everyone found out about her, she was "literally reborn" (*ona bukval'no pererodilas'*) and not only increased her daily norm from 130 to 150 percent, but also took a much more active role in other work in the detachment in an attempt to earn authority and respect.⁶³² Such silences in the archives give one to wonder the role coercion played in motivation. To be sure, the Komsomol reports describe an overwhelming number of cases where these bulletin boards were used to praise high productivity. Further, some brigade leaders asked "better workers" to share their experiences on the bulletin boards as a means to transmit desired work values to all people on the site. Whether

⁶³¹ Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule*, pp. 417, 421; Mary Buckley, *Mobilizing Stalin's Peasants, Heroines and Heroes of Stalin's Fields* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 52-53.

⁶³² GAOPIKO, f. P-131, op. 1, d. 84, l. 168.

used for shame or praise the bulletin boards served to motivate to individuals and work groups as a whole.

Party leaders used other prewar production increasing methods such as socialist competitions as a fundamental means to shorten the term of the Staryi Oskol–Rzhava labor project and tasked on-site Komsomol members with their organization and prosecution.⁶³³ Socialist competitions were challenges agreed upon by two work groups to complete a specific amount of work within a given period of time. Komsomolites in every district work column arranged challenges at each level from individuals to entire district work columns. In most cases Komsomolites pitted one work brigade against another within a district column, posting the results on the bulletin boards for the entire column to see.⁶³⁴ Apart from pride in one's work brigade, the stakes in these competitions were not so great. Their ubiquity, however, may have helped in motivating the other 16,000 workers on the line to move more earth. In reality, the socialist competitions allowed labor supervisors to encourage open ended daily goals that might have seemed unachievable to an individual. They can also be seen as an attempt to bind workers together to reach ever greater production values as a group, thus completing work along the whole line ahead of schedule.⁶³⁵

Komsomol members performed a highly valued function of agitating among the workers during times of rest, meal breaks, and in the evenings. Party leaders used such agitation to

⁶³³ GAKO, f. 3322, op. 31, d. 121, ll. 29-31. Found in *Kurskaia oblast' v period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny Sovetskogo Soiuz 1941-1945*, 70-72.

⁶³⁴ GAOPIKO, f. P-131, op. 1, d. 84, ll. 133, 182-86.

⁶³⁵ Komsomol members did not always push the workers to produce more. In the evenings they organized dances and other performances to entertain the women and girls at the worksite. Kursk's party leaders supplemented the Komsomol shows with concerts put on by professional musicians from Kursk city. Although one wonders where the laborers found the energy to dance, the Komsomolites used these concerts and dances as a means to distract the workers from their backbreaking daily digging and hauling of dirt.

attempt to maintain a good mood among the workers and to frame the meaning and importance of the work at hand in order to imbue individual workers with the same desire for success espoused by the party. These tasks consisted of reading newspapers and leading discussions about specific topics. Kursk's party leaders, however, took newspaper reporting one step further. The obkom resolution called for a travelling editor from *Kurskaia pravda* to work on the construction site ostensibly to help produce bulletin boards. However, *Kurskaia pravda's* editors succeeded in publishing a short run of single-page flyers under the banner "*Kurskaia pravda* on the Construction Site." District presses also published short runs of the local paper for workers on the railroad line. These on-site papers reported on war news, offering stories that featured young women like those building the railroad. One article described a young woman who had answered multiple labor calls, but still left her young child at home again to break her back to help her husband at the frontline.⁶³⁶ Such gendered representations elevated the status of these women's labor to a more direct contribution to the Red Army's fight thereby attempting to inculcate a sense of patriotism among the workers on the railroad line.

Despite the Komsomol's efforts cases of desertion still occurred. The numbers of deserters remained generally in the low dozens, but spiked for some of the districts after the Germans launched their offensive on July 5. Komsomolites responded by organizing meetings and informing the workers of the battle unfolding 30 kilometers to the south in order to quell rumors and keep the workers focused on their task. Here, they did not always meet with success as workers from districts that became the sites of intense fighting, such as Prokharovka, abandoned the work site to see to their homes.⁶³⁷

⁶³⁶ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3067, ll. 205-206; from *Put' Kolkhoza na stroike*, no. 3, July 1, 1943.

⁶³⁷ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3067, ll. 58-62.

Squalid living conditions may have also contributed to the workers' desire to desert the Staryi Oskol–Rzhava railroad worksite. The circumstances these women endured varied greatly from one sector of the worksite to another. Some lucky workers found shelter in local kolkhoz living quarters but most slept in barns, sheds, lean-tos built from wood scraps, or out in the open.⁶³⁸ The oblast ordered the workers to bring a twenty-day supply of food, but few brought more than a week's supply, and some, none at all. In general most workers survived on 200 to 700 grams of bread per day, and reports indicate that some individuals worked several days at a time without anything to eat.⁶³⁹ Cases of dysentery and typhus sapped the overall labor power of every district work column. The Luftwaffe also bombed and strafed work units on the line. Finally, these women did not receive pay for labor rendered. Such conditions challenged the party's goals for high productivity on the construction project.

While the working conditions were deplorable, the work itself, excavation and earthmoving, allowed the party leaders organizational latitude. The obkom distributed the district work teams evenly along the ninety-kilometer swath of territory and each work group simultaneously graded its stretch of the line to provide a sufficient rail bed on which Red Army engineers could lay the cross-ties and rails. For the individuals in the work groups the labor required little skill but a dangerous amount of daily physical exertion.⁶⁴⁰ As the project did not depend upon the work of one individual or group to be completed before another individual or

⁶³⁸ Belgorod, Museum of the Battle of Kursk, unpublished memoir of A.P. Kuznetsova; Chuev, *Doroga muzhestva i zhizni*, p. 15.

⁶³⁹ GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3067a, ll. 3-5; GAOPIKO, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3066, ll. 100, 101, 107, 174.

⁶⁴⁰ The state enacted laws in the early 1930s that determined that women could safely haul weights only less than 20 kilograms. The amounts that the women had to haul on the Staryi Oskol-Rzhava rail line far exceeded these amounts. Melanie Ilic, *Women Workers in the Soviet Interwar Economy: From 'Protection' to 'Equality'* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1999), 125-29.

group could begin, party leaders encouraged the kind of individual achievement characteristic of the Stakhanovite movement without threatening the overall quality of the work.⁶⁴¹ Similar to the myriad other digging projects for which the oblast leaders had mobilized that summer, they appointed politically reliable civilians to serve as onsite supervisors to oversee the work and ensure maximum production totals by arranging individual and group socialist competitions.

The Saryi Oskol–Rzhava rail line began operations on July 17, 1943, only five days after the soldiers of the Voronezh Front stopped the final significant German offensive in the East. While the front suffered tremendous losses in the battle, its new supply line allowed it to replace most of the destroyed materiel so that it could launch a major counteroffensive on August 5. It retook Kharkov by the end of the month and reached the Dnieper River by October. These military successes of the Voronezh Front were in no small part due to the contribution of the women who labored on the Saryi Oskol–Rzhava railroad. Through a sophisticated matrix of organization and motivation that had been developed in the years leading up to the war, Kursk's Party leaders, with support from the Komsomol, successfully channeled the labor power of 20,000 into a tangible tool for victory.

Conclusion

Red Army units in Kursk showed an insatiable appetite for labor as they carried out defense construction and other special projects in the buildup to the German summer offensive and looked to the oblast civilian leadership to realize their demands. Oblast officials

⁶⁴¹ Donald Filtzer argues that the culture of individual achievement engendered during the Stakhanovite movement served to disrupt overall productivity in the Soviet Union's industrial sectors. See Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928-1941* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1986).

accommodated Red Army orders but used their position as arbiters of labor to provide for both the Red Army's requirements and the needs of the district leaders to carry out the spring sowing. Military officers relied on Soviet law, as it was construed in the prewar period, as the primary tool to assert their prerogatives. While all army officers rooted the legitimacy of their demands in legal fiat, some manipulated the law into a bludgeon, attempting to criminalize poor performance to coerce desirable results. Other officers took different approaches to labor acquisition given their proximity or distance to the oblast officials in Kursk city. Those closer to the oblast center established personal connections to attempt to achieve their ends as much as political leaders and bureaucrats had done in the prewar era. The civilian leadership, for its part, used its own network of personal relationships to keep the Red Army demands in check so it could get on with the job of restoring the local infrastructure and satisfy the state's needs.

Even though the military and civilian leaders appeared to stand at cross purposes at times, both parties shared the same goal: the defeat of the Nazis. As the two groups exercised power through constant negotiation and harangues, they modified aspects of the mobilizations. To be sure, each side did so in order to maximize its interests, but this process resulted in methods that rationalized accounting and implementation of labor. In so doing, they were able to widen the pool of available labor beyond the dictates of Soviet law. By including children and the elderly in available workforce, Red Army and civilian leaders sucked the last bit of labor power out of the oblast in this time of crisis, thus making the mobilization in Kursk in 1943 "total."

CONCLUSION

By early July 1943, more than two million men were poised to clash on the fields of Kursk Oblast. On the north face of the Kursk salient, General Rokossovsky commanded 510,983 soldiers who manned 10,725 guns and mortars and drove 1,607 tanks and self-propelled guns. On the south face, General Vatutin had 466,236 men, 8,584 guns and mortars, and 1,699 tanks and self-propelled guns at his disposal.⁶⁴² The reserve forces of the Steppe Front included 573,195 soldiers, 8,510 guns, and 1,639 tanks and self-propelled guns. The Germans fielded two army groups that attacked each neck of the Kursk salient. Army Group Center advanced on Rokossovsky's force with 431,000 men and 1,181 tanks and assault guns while Army Group South fought with 349,900 men with 1,747 tanks and assault guns.⁶⁴³

In the early morning of July 5, 1943, certain of the launch of the German offensive, artillery from both the Central and Voronezh fronts opened a preemptive barrage that succeeded in delaying the attacks of both Army Group Center and Army Group South. The Germans quickly regained their footing and pressed forward from the north and from the south. From the north, General Walther Model's Ninth Army of Army Group Center advanced along a front of roughly twenty kilometers on the position occupied by 13th Army. The Germans gained only a few kilometers on the first day, but the soldiers of the 13th Army gave this ground grudgingly through competent defensive combat and a series of controlled retreats. On July 6, Rokossovsky

⁶⁴² Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 338. These numbers indicate the total of combat ready troops, guns, and tanks. The total number for both fronts reached 1,333,166 men, 19,794 guns, and 3,489 tanks and self-propelled guns. Further, these numbers do not include the soldiers and materiel of the Western, Briansk, and Southwestern fronts which add another roughly 800,000 soldiers, 13,000 guns, and 1,700 tanks.

⁶⁴³ Ibid., 290-335.

attempted to halt Army Group Center's advance with counterstrikes using tank forces, but he entered them into battle piecemeal and the Germans chewed them up. By the third day of the offensive Model directed his forces to take a high point between the towns of Samodurovka and Ol'kovatka, located a short distance to the southwest of Ponyri. While Model kept throwing in fresh units to help his frontline troops make further advances, Rokossovsky replied in kind thus thwarting the Ninth Army. Further, the Red Army Air Corps had gained substantive control of the skies over the battlefield by July 8 and could use more of their heavier ground attack aircraft to target enemy tanks from above. Model continued trying to take the heights southwest of Ponyri for the next three days but did not succeed. From July 5 to July 11, the Germans failed to break through the Central Front's tactical defenses and achieve operational freedom. While punishing the defenders on the north face, Model still lost 50,000 men and 400 tanks in six days of bloody battle.⁶⁴⁴

Attacking from the south, Army Group South did not fare much better. Following normal operational procedure, the divisions in the German XXXXVIII Panzer Corps launched a reconnaissance in strength the afternoon before the official beginning of Operation Citadel. The goal in such actions was to identify the enemy's main defensive line, eliminate forward observation posts and battalion strong points, and establish a firm forward base for the ensuing offensive. While the elements of Army Group South succeeded in these goals they came at a price in many German lives. Further, they discovered that the Red Army soldiers they engaged did not flinch from attack and provided determined resistance even in the face of local defeat. This represented an ominous portent for things to come. For the moment, however, the Germans

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., 86-94, 115-121.

were optimistic as they saw only open field in the immediate distance. What they did not realize was that Soviet soldiers waited for them: below ground.

Elements of Army Group South met with some initial success in their attack, but within a few days they too would find that their victory was short lived. On July 5 and 6, the soldiers of the right flank of 6th Guards Army gave ground grudgingly to XXXXVIII Panzer Corps but the German unit to its east, the II SS Panzer Corps, exploited a weak point that could not be easily filled and began to push north along a narrow corridor about ten kilometers deep. While the Red Army yielded some territory on this path it maintained solid pressure on the left flank of the German advance, forcing it to the east, away from its intended geographic goal, the city of Oboian'. The XXXXVIII Panzer Corps continued to make slow progress due north and by July 8, one of its divisions achieved a small breakthrough of its own. As the Germans moved into the second defensive belt, a crisis appeared to be looming for the Voronezh Front's commander, General Vatutin. In response Vatutin began to make adjustments and shifted forces from less threatened areas to those in the German axes of advance. Furthermore, Stavka reassigned the 5th Guards Tank Army and 5th Guards Army from the Steppe Front to Vatutin's command. This allowed Vatutin to concentrate more manpower between the German spearheads and Oboian'.⁶⁴⁵

The Germans responded on July 9, by seeking an operational breakthrough on the northeasterly axis along which they had made some headway; to a small railroad junction called Prokhorovka. Between July 10 and 12, Operation Citadel reached its high water mark as the Red Army stopped the German advance in a spectacular tank engagement in the fields south and west of Prokhorovka. Having failed to break through the Red Army defenses, the Germans then

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid., 81-85, 94-115, 121-147.

withdrew to their July 5 starting point and began to dig in for the coming Red Army counteroffensive that would begin the inexorable drive to Berlin.

The Battle of Kursk had turned out much like Zhukov had claimed it would. Even when German forces had made gains against the Red Army in Operation Citadel, they always came at tremendous cost in men and tanks. Part of the key to the success of the Soviet defensive network was that it allowed both Rokossovsky and Vatutin the ability to shift troops quickly to crisis points. The defense had been designed for flexibility within its structure and the field commanders used such flexibility to always apply pressure to any point of German advance. This in part helped ensure that the Germans could not break through to operational depth.

The Battle of Kursk elicits images of blood, sweat, and oil on scorched wheat fields littered with the burned-up hulks of Tigers and T-34s. Yes, it was the greatest tank battle in military history and it was the swan song of Hitler's panzer divisions. By focusing on the battle alone, however, historians have ignored an important factor in the first successful resistance of the Wehrmacht's vaunted *blitzkrieg* in the Second World War. The victory was not solely the result of dedicated soldiers fighting in machines churned out by vigilant factory workers in the deep rear. The Red Army also depended on the labor and resources of the civilian population that it had just liberated. By deploying Kursk's inhabitants as military laborers, the Red Army transformed the people into a military auxiliary force. This characterization placed Kursk's population into a blurred zone between frontline and rear: a space where noncombatants engaged in military activities. Not only did their work contribute to the Red Army's combat effectiveness, but it caused the people to become targets of the German Luftwaffe, who saw their labor as a military threat. The kind of mass concerted activity between the civilian population and the military that occurred on the frontlines in Kursk stood apart from the experience of

noncombatants in other belligerent nations in the Second World War. Further, the coordinated efforts of Soviet civilians at the frontline like we see at Kursk served as a significant factor in the overall victory for the Red Army.

In reducing the experience of hundreds of thousands of civilians to a few sentences, historians have diminished the complexity and importance of the role played by ordinary people in this extraordinary time. Authors that focus on the battle present the mobilization as a single mass event in which roughly 300,000 people completed a single task of digging large antitank trenches in concentric rings within the perimeter of the Kursk salient. This dissertation has shown that the reality was much more complex, both in terms of the mobilization itself and the nature of the work the Red Army required. The Red Army did not make one large-scale demand on the people of Kursk. Rather, it made hundreds, if not thousands, of small appeals, interspersed with some larger call-ups, ordering the people to engage in tasks ranging from earth-moving to corpse removal, demining, and weapons collection. A closer examination of the reality on the ground also shows that the constant short-term mobilizations and movement of people moving to and from multiple worksites, along with poor accounting, presents difficulties in determining an exact number of people who worked for the Red Army. True, hundreds of thousands of people worked on military tasks, but not all of the people excavated field fortifications. Many worked on road maintenance while others cared for the wounded, and these people may have never set foot on a field fortification worksite, but their contributions were no less vital. In carrying out these myriad tasks the people became an indispensable arm to the Soviet military as it focused on the matter of defeating the Germans.

Liberation from Nazi occupation did not signify a return to normalcy for Kursk's inhabitants, even though in Moscow's eyes the territory was to resume normal levels of

agricultural production. Eighteen months under the heel of the German military left the people exhausted and most of the economic infrastructure destroyed. Yet, weeks after the return of Soviet power, local leaders began gearing up for a spring sowing campaign. This included the rehabilitation of the farms' tractor parks, seed stocks, and plowing implements, many of which were nonexistent. This did not matter as orders carried down the chain of command leaving people at the lowest rung of the hierarchy the ultimate responsibility for success or failure. In order to meet the demands of the state the people improvised solutions to sow the fields, such as repurposing milk cows, and in some cases harnessing the milk maids, to pull the plows. What measures of success the people mustered came as a result of such improvisation. Further exacerbating the people's perilous circumstances, the Red Army's grand advance to Smolensk and Kiev stalled at the periphery of the oblast in February and March 1943. Instead of giving soldiers passing through bundles of foodstuffs along with their gratitude, the people of Kursk became Red Army quartermasters for half of the year.

Recognizing the difficulties the civilian population faced, oblast officials turned to trusted propaganda techniques designed to encourage the people to give beyond their capabilities. The local newspaper *Kurskaia pravda* served as the platform for disseminating the message that the Red Army was a competent military force, the Soviet Union had powerful allies, and German support was crumbling. In short, it maintained that the people of Kursk were now on the winning team. Yet, simultaneously, the paper's editors informed readers that victory was not certain and only great feats of labor could increase the chances of victory. The paper presented several arguments designed to motivate as many readers as possible to devote themselves to helping the Red Army. By attempting to unite the people in moral outrage over the collective trauma they had all experienced under German occupation, the editors offered readers the Red Army as the

vehicle for revenge. The paper also created a relationship between the Red Army as liberator and the people as debtors and informed readers that labor represented the surest way to reimburse the soldiers.

For its part, the Red Army leadership tried to make good on the claims that it was a fighting force on equal footing with the enemy. Seeking to follow up the spectacular victory at Stalingrad with other grand encirclements of German forces, Stavka sanctioned a series of headlong offensives that returned mediocre or disastrous results. Even in so much failure some commanders identified a pattern for victory in Moscow and Stalingrad that hinged on a stubborn defense followed by an overwhelming counteroffensive. After weeks of determined argumentation and arm-twisting, Stavka implemented the decision to assume a deliberate defense. The persistent contestation over the deliberate defense demonstrates some measure of contingency in the decision. The fact that the Soviet military had the resolve to see this plan to its successful conclusion, however, shows that the Red Army was reaching a level of maturation in the way it designed and carried out its military operations. By 1943, the High Command was beginning to fight more intelligently and this played no small part in steady advance west after the brief defensive stand at Kursk.

Even though Stavka had conceived of a successful plan to thwart the final major German offensive on the Eastern Front, it still needed the human power to convert Kursk's tank friendly fields of wheat and sunflowers into a dense cluster of battalion strong points and antitank barriers. The standing labor pool in Kursk Oblast provided the military the means to calculate on the construction of a defensive network of sufficient size and robustness. Even though myriad military engineers complained of unmet mobilization targets among other gripes, the people still

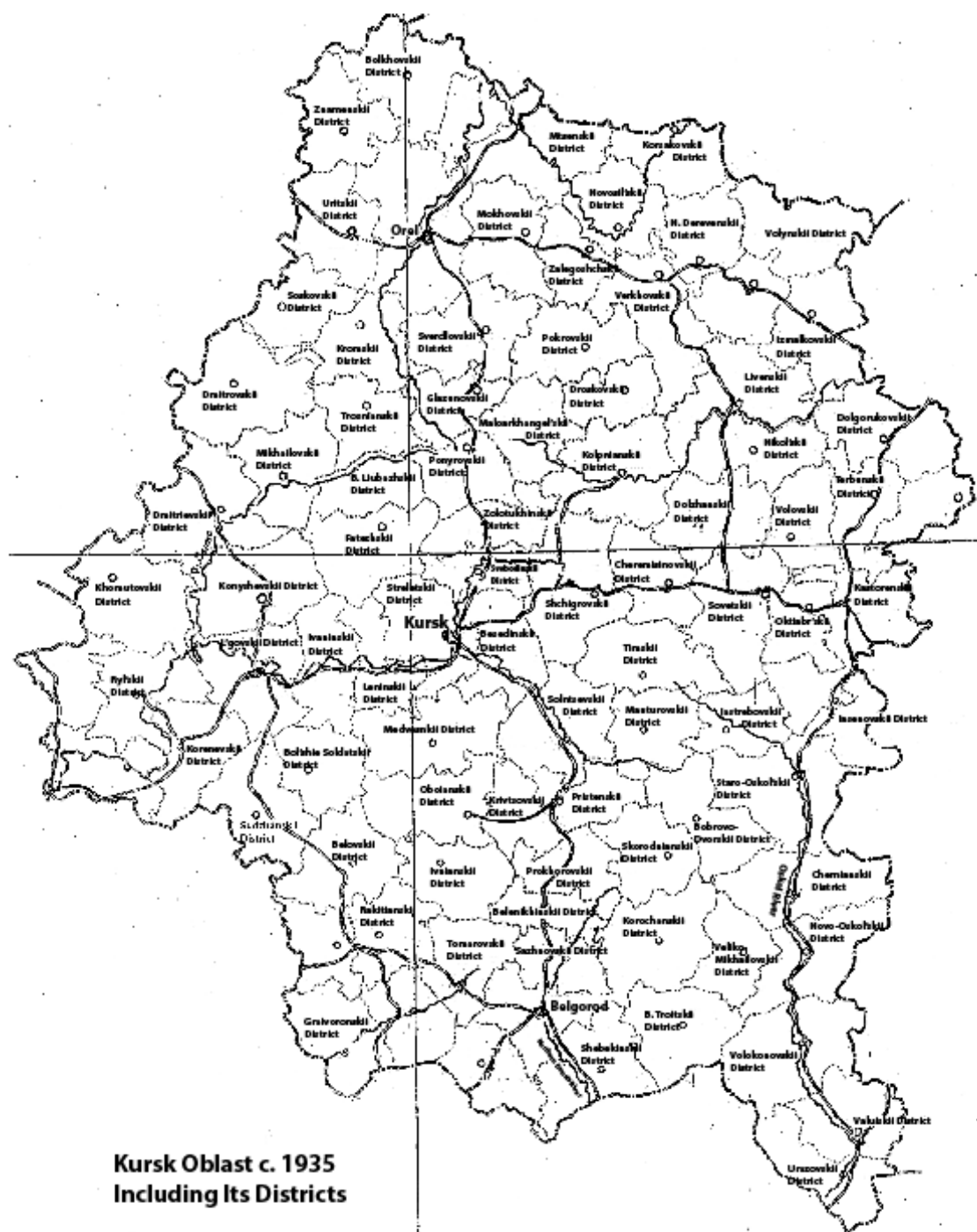
managed to complete enough excavation work to offer the Red Army the necessary field fortifications.

But the litany of grievances lodged by military engineering officers to Kursk's officials and the civilian leadership's responses to them offer insights into the exercise of authority and power in a time of crisis. One observes both the Red Army and the party leaders used the tools for the assertion of prerogatives as well as measures for resisting such threats that had been developed in the prewar period. Military leaders manipulated the law in an attempt to criminalize behavior it considered counterproductive to their desires. Civilian officials countered with a reliance on their shared responsibility for meeting the demands of the state as much as those of the army. Military and civilian leaders deployed these measures to maximize their access to the scarce labor reserves in the oblast. In the end, while each group attempted to threaten, dodge, or cajole the other, both sides shared the same goal of defeating the German forces poised to encircle them all with another summer offensive. Further, the mobilization they orchestrated, even with all the bickering between them, succeeded in stopping the German advance. Such chaotic cooperation provides a useful illustration for the characterization of the Soviet Union as a mobilization society.

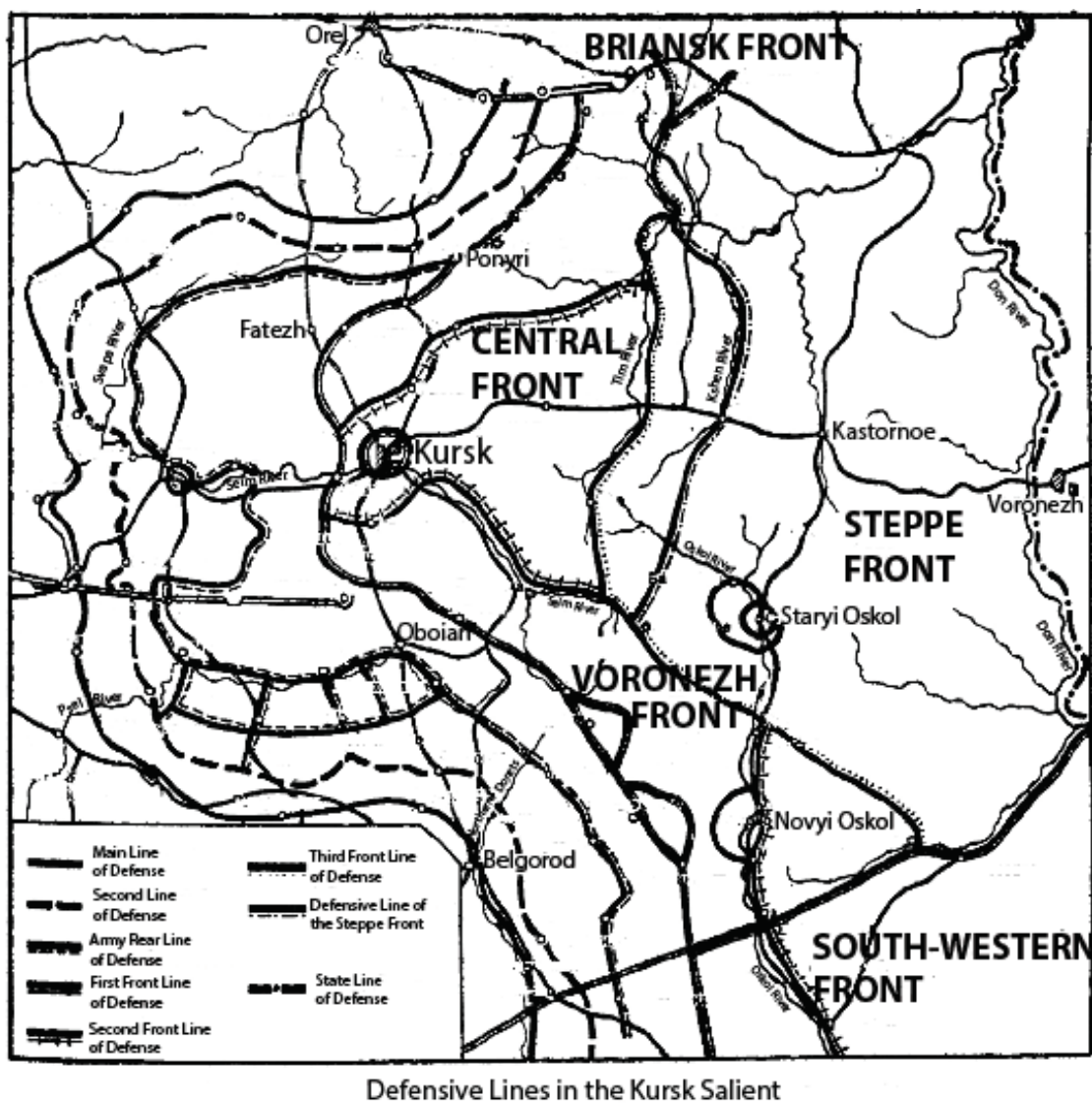
Finally, it fell to the people themselves to respond to the appeals to mobilize, to march off to the worksites in the snows of late winter and heat of summer, to move earth day in and day out with an unsteady food supply. Even with considerable evidence that some people evaded work for the Red Army when they could and prioritized their own interests over the labor demands of the military and the state, one also finds that hundreds of thousands reported for some form of duty to the Soviet military. Further, one must also consider the back-breaking labor that hundreds of thousands more collective farmers carried out for the spring sowing campaign in the

absence of tractors and draft horses. While the reality challenges the myth that the people gave selflessly for victory, one finds that this challenge is more a matter of degree rather than a complete renunciation of the party line. Another aspect of the people's participation in labor service for the Soviet military revolves around the engineering officers' and local party leaders' willingness to manipulate accounting methods to allow children and the elderly to dig earth. By breaking the state mandated age restrictions, and deploying people unfit for the labor, one sees that the mobilizations in Kursk were about as total as one could get.

APPENDIX 1: MAP OF KURSK OBLAST



APPENDIX 2: MAP OF THE DEFENSES IN KURSK IN SUMMER 1943



Source: E. Kolibernov, "Osobennosti organizatsii inzhenernogo obespecheniia v Kurskoi bitve," *Voennii istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 7 (July 1983): 27.

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