

MADE IN RUSSIA THE HOLOCAUST



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The partisan war in violation of international law

ON 22 JUNE 1941, THE COUNCIL OF THE SUPREME SOVIET imposed martial law over Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Ukraine, White Russia, Karelia, Bessarabia, as well as over the territories of Archangel, Murmansk, Vologda, Leningrad, Kalinin, Ivanovo, Yaroslav, Ryazan-Smolensk, Tula, Kursk, Moscow, Voronezh, Orel, the Crimea, and Krasnodar. General mobilization was ordered in 15 military districts.

Partisan warfare was unleashed one week later. It was a prepared measure in violation of international law for which the Wehrmacht was unprepared. Furthermore, a "Service Regulation for the Partisan War" had been in effect in the Red Army since 1933. As early as January and February 1941, large scale partisan war games were held in various military districts of the Soviet Union by the "Society for the Encouragement of Defence" (Osowiachim), in which the civilian population also took part, as reported by the Army newspaper "Red Star". Based on these experiments, the Soviet Communist Party created so-called "Destruction Battalions", even prior to the beginning of the war. When an area was to be abandoned by the Red Army, these destruction battalions were systematically supposed to destroy all businesses, communications installations, medical installations, etc. of any military or commercial importance, and to bring partisan warfare as soon as the front was overrun (56)

On 29 June 1941, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union called upon all Party, Soviet, Trade Union and Komosol organizations to form "partisan divisions and diversion groups" and to pursue and destroy the German invaders in a "merciless struggle... to the last drop of blood". (57). Two phrases occur repeatedly throughout all following announcements, orders, instructions, instructions and guidelines of the Central and Provincial authorities of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union until the end of the war. One phrase consists of all the

possible variations on the word “destroy”, and the other, all possible variations on the word “invader”. As early as 1 July 1941, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of White Russia, for example, in compliance with the order from Moscow, ordered civilians “to blow up or damage streets and bridges, fuel and food warehouses, set vehicles and airplanes on fire, cause railway accidents, give the enemies no rest either day or night, destroy them wherever one comes across them, to kill them with everything at hand: ax, scythe, crowbars, pitchforks, and knives”. A particularly remarkable sentence states: “In destroying the enemy, don’t shrink from resort to any means at all: strangle, burn, poison the fascist expectation!”

On 3 July 1941, Stalin, in his well-known radio speech “Comrades! Citizens! Brothers and Sisters! Fighters of our Army and Navy!”, which was broadcast everywhere over and over again in the following days, ordered the population to deprive the German invader of everything that might be of use: “Not single locomotive, not one single railroad car, not one kilogram of grain, not one litre of fuel must be left behind for the German enemy”. Anything that could not be taken away was to be destroyed: “In enemy-occupied areas, partisan divisional units, on both foot and horseback, must be created to fight the units of the enemy army, to set partisan warfare ablaze everywhere, to blow up bridges and streets, to destroy telephone and telegraph connections, to burn down forests, warehouses and wreck trains. Intolerable conditions must be created in the occupied territories; the enemy is to be pursued and destroyed at all time, and all enemy measures must be thwarted.” (58).

On 18 July 1941, followed the decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union entitled “On the Organization of the Struggle Behind the Lines of the Hostile Troops”, the leaders of the Republic, Area and district committees of the Party organizations were personally made responsible for ensuring that “Partisan divisions, diversion and destruction groups on foot and horse”, in compliance with Stalin’s order, were organized to “create intolerable conditions for the German invader” (59).

Stalin's speech at a celebration session of the Moscow Soviet of the Deputies of the Workers on the occasion of the 24th anniversary of the Great Socialist October Revolution on 6 November 1941 was peppered with insults directed at German soldiers: "Men with the morals of beasts", "Robbers who have lost all human face in their moral rottenness and have long since sunk to the level of beasts", "Men without conscience and honour", etc. Any expedient was permitted against them.

The population was to be mobilized "to the last man" in destroying the German enemy (60). To this purpose, on 17 November 1941, Stalin issued Order no. 428, which, in German journalism, became known as the "Arsonists Order". In the original, the order was entitled: "The monstrous crimes, cruelties and acts of violence of the German authorities in the occupied districts and territories" and stated as follows: "All settlements occupied by German troops are to be set on fire, to a depth of 40 to 60 km behind the main front line and 20 to 30 km on both sides of the roads. Air Force, Artillery and Partisan divisions groups equipped with bottles of fuel" were assigned to this task. The order is even said to have contained the following sentence:

"The search and destroy commandos shall carry on the destruction actions in the uniform of the German army and Waffen-SS. Such actions incite hatred against the fascist occupiers and facilitate the recruitment of partisans in the backcountry. At the same time, care should be taken to leave survivors to report on 'German atrocities'".

20 to 30 "courageous fighters" were to be selected for these underground guerrilla groups, to be created in each regiment. "In particular, those who destroy settlements behind the German lines in German uniforms are to be nominated for the receipt of medals", the order says. The last sentence says: **"The population must be told that the Germans burnt the villages and localities to punish the partisans"** (61). The propagandists of the Red Army followed Stalin's brutal order to the letter, even though it was chiefly directed against the Russian population. On 30 November 1941, the most powerful of these propagandists, Ilya Ehrenburg, issued the

proclamation: “Fighters, Spies, Partisans!”, in which he called upon members of these three groups to do as follows: “Anywhere there is a house in which the Germans might warm themselves, smoke the Germans out!” (62).

On 7 January 1942, the Soviet Foreign Ministry issued the following hypocritical note to their accredited diplomats in Moscow: “The Soviet Government, before the diplomatic representatives of world public opinion, objects to the cruelties, devastations and plundering committed by German troops in the Soviet territories, in which the German Wehrmacht deliberately destroys entire villages and cities and burns them to the ground, rendering the Soviet population homeless. The destruction has assumed the dimensions of widespread devastation. The Soviet population is robbed of food and clothing, while anyone who resists is shot” (63). **With these remarks, the Soviet government attempted to blame the Wehrmacht for atrocities unscrupulously committed by the Soviets themselves, against their own population.**

The demonization of the German soldiers in Soviet propaganda paved the way for partisan atrocities against the “fascist beasts”, “fascist carrion”, “band of Hitlerite cannibals”, “German robbers”, “Hitler hordes”, etc. To the partisans, this classification of the enemy was a license to kill. The cruelties of the Red Army were overshadowed by the cruelties of the partisans. German soldiers who fell into the hands of the partisans had to expect the worst. On 1 October 1941, a member of the Central Committee named Kazapalov called upon the partisans “to torture” captured German soldiers “by mutilating them before shooting them” (64). Brutalized members of the partisan hordes followed these instructions only too willingly. The Germans, in turn, commonly referred to the partisans as ‘bandits’.

German officers were not always able to prevent their soldiers from taking revenge. The bitterness was too great. What happens in a soldier who finds his comrades lying mutilated at the edge of a forest? The pay book of every member of the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS contained a document

entitled “The 10 Commandments of the German Soldier”, which was learned by every recruit. The third commandment stated: “No enemy who surrenders is to be killed, except for partisans or spies. The latter are to receive a just punishment from the courts”. These humane statements, which were entirely in conformity with international law and had been implemented in the campaigns until that time, were soon proven inadequate for the actual situation.

Despite the escalation of brutality in the partisan war, the German military leadership repeatedly called upon the soldiers of the Wehrmacht to spare the foreign civilian population. The Commander in Chief of the Army, in his “Guidelines for Fighting the Partisans”, issued on 25 October 1941, ordered that all German soldiers were to “win the trust of the population through rational and fair treatment, thus depriving the partisans of further support” (65). In the “Guidelines for the Reinforced Struggle against the Problem of Banditry in the East” (Instruction no. 46) of 18 August 1942, even Hitler had to admit that the cooperation of the population was “indispensable”, demanding “strict but just treatment” of the Soviet population. (66)

Notes

55. Fritz Becker: *Stalins Blutspur durch Europa: Partner des Westens 1933-45*, Kiel, 1995, p. 236.
56. L.V. Richard: *Partisanen. Kämpfer hinter den Fronten*, Rastatt, 1986, pp. 21, 63.
57. Direktive des Rates der Volkskommissare der UdSSR und des ZK der KPdSU, in : Heinz Kühnrich: *Der Partisanenkrieg in Europa 1939-1945*, East Berlin, 1965, p. 434, f.
58. L.V. Richard (see note 56), p. 21.
59. Heinz Kühnrich (see note 57), p. 437.
60. Joseph Stalin: *Über den Grossen Vaterländischen Krieg der Sowjetunion*, East Berlin, 1952, p. 16 ff.

61. GenStH Fremde Heere Ost II H 3/70 Fr. 6439568, National Archives Washington, series 429, roll 461; Fritz Becker (see note 55), p. 268 ff; Dimitri Wokogonow: Stalin. Triumph und Tragödie. Ein politisches Profil, Düsseldorf, 1989, p. 617 f; Ic-Berichte von Partisanen in deutscher Uniform bei Rudolf Aschenauer (see note 36), p. 153 ff. The author has not yet received [a copy of] the original order from the National Archives.

62. Joachim Hoffmann (see note 33), p. 201.

63. Fritz Becker (see note 55), p. 269.

64. Joachim Hoffman (see note 33), p. 110.

65. Befehl vom 10 October 1941 über das Verhalten der deutschen Truppen. For further information on the partisan war on Russian soil, see, among others: Heinz Künrich: Der Partisanenkrieg in Europa 1939-1945, East Berlin, 1968; Soviet Partisans in World War II, edited by John A. Armstrong, Madison, 1964; Peter Kolmsee: Der Partisanenkrieg in der Sowjetunion, East Berlin 1963.

66. Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv RW 39/69, sheet 70.

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