REVOLUTIONARY WARFARE

VOLUME II — GUERRILLA
WARFARE IN WORLD WAR II

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CONTENTS

Chapter One

GUERRILLA WARFARE IN WW II
by Major J. W. Woodmansee, Jr. ............... 1

Chapter Two

UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS (1941-1944)
by Charles V. P. von Luttichau ............... 19

Chapter Three

FRANCE (1940-1944)
by Charles B. MacDonald ..................... 47

Chapter Four

YUGOSLAVIA (1941-1944)
by Earle Ziemke .............................. 87

Chapter Five

GREECE (1942-1944)
by D. M. Condit ............................. 121
Chapter One

GUERRILLA WARFARE IN WORLD WAR II

by Major J. W. Woodmansee, Jr.
GUERRILLA WARFARE IN WORLD WAR II

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this volume is to examine the extent and nature of guerrilla, or "resistance," warfare during World War II. There will be no attempt made to prove that guerrilla warfare was a decisive factor in the ultimate outcome of the war; it was not. One reason for studying the experience of the Second World War is to establish the relationship between guerrilla and conventional warfare -- to put guerrilla warfare in perspective. Even Mao Tse-tung agrees on the subordinate relationship of guerrilla operations to large-scale conventional operations. In his treatise On the Protracted War Mao outlined the secondary role that guerrilla operations was to play in the final stage of the struggle against Japan:

Mobile warfare is the most important form of fighting in the Anti-Japanese War and guerrilla warfare comes next. When we say that in the war as a whole mobile warfare is the principal and guerrilla warfare the supplementary form, we mean that the issue of war must be mainly decided by regular warfare, especially in its mobile form, and not by guerrilla warfare... Thus the strategic role of guerrilla warfare is twofold: supporting and evolving into regular warfare. 1

However, to say that guerrilla warfare is secondary in importance to regular warfare is not to infer that the resistance in World War II was unimportant or insignificant. On the contrary, the numerous examples and diverse nature of the resistance deserve the attention of professional soldiers and are particularly appropriate in a study of revolutionary warfare. From a historical point of view there was a great deal more guerrilla warfare prevalent during the Second World War than in World War I. You have studied the Arab Revolt and the British support of these tribes in the relatively minor campaign against the Turks. But World War I does not provide any inspiring examples
of resistance movements in the occupied countries. There are several factors that seem to account for this phenomenon.

Factors Contributing to Resistance Movements in WW II

First of all there were more occupied nations in World War II than there were in World War I. The lines of communication of the Axis powers correspondingly passed through more hostile populations. Also, the LOC of an advancing army in World War I, certainly an impressive and desirable target, could not compare in its vulnerability and priority with the logistical tail of a highly mechanized military force in World War II. As the regular armed forces benefited from technological development, so did the irregular forces. Stewart Alsop points to "the plane, the parachute, and the radio" as the three inventions which were responsible for the growth of resistance warfare in WW II. 2 These items certainly allowed the Allies to furnish direction and support to the partisans while receiving in return the benefits of intelligence, more effective guerrilla operations, and returned airmen.

Secondly, as Dr. Heilbrunn explains in his book Partisan Warfare, there was the psychological factor produced by the shock of Hitler's "blitzkrieg" warfare and the sense of humiliation within the defeated countries. Further, the inhabitants of the occupied countries clearly understood the consequences of defeat. In Dr. Heilbrunn's words:

.... The war aims were more readily understood than in World War I, and while the loser in World War I would have to pay compensation, cede some territory and put up with foreign occupation for a limited time, the vanquished in World War II, had the Axis been victorious, would have had to submit to the New Order which many were unwilling to accept. 3

Another definite contribution to the rise of guerrilla warfare in World War II was the presence of international Communism, a movement which had only begun at the end of World War I. The Communists by 1939 had established sound organizations in many of the countries that were eventually occupied. These organizations were experienced in operating "underground" and had attracted and trained the disciplined, dedicated type of person who excels in guerrilla warfare. The Communist guerrillas, because of the
Russo-German Non-Aggression pact of 1939, did not turn against Germany until Hitler had attacked Russia in 1941. Even after the invasion of Russia the Communist guerrillas did not receive much assistance from Russia until 1943 when the tide of battle began to shift in favor of the Allies. Despite an initial lack of external support, the Communist guerrillas were prominent forces in Russia, Greece, France, Yugoslavia, Malaya, Philippines, and China.

WW II Resistance Previews Post-War Insurgencies

Looking at this last list of countries, the student of revolutionary warfare should deduce a further reason for studying the guerrilla campaigns of the Second World War. The countries mentioned are a roll call of many of the major insurgencies faced by the Free World after the war. It was in the crucible of World War II that Mao Tse-tung perfected his ideology, that Ho Chi Minh developed the Viet Minh organization, and that the Communist organizations and leaders in Greece, Malaya, and the Philippines gained valuable experience. It is also significant to observe that while the leaders of post-war insurgencies were learning their trade in World War II, the Allies were getting very little experience in combatting guerrilla warfare. Other than "mopping-up" operations that followed the spearheads of Allied attacks, the beaten enemy usually surrendered rather than attempt to continue a protracted guerrilla campaign.

Although the Allies did not gain much experience in countering guerrilla operations, they did learn a great deal while engaging in and supporting resistance movements. The British government appointed a Special Operations Executive (SOE) to coordinate all activities related with resistance movements. The United States had a comparable organization in its Office of Strategic Services (OSS); and the French under de Gaulle created the Central Bureau of Information and Action (BCRA). If the Allies were missing experts in counterguerrilla operations, they were producing many young competent officers who had a wealth of experience in waging and supporting irregular warfare.

In the OSS, Allen W. Dulles, later to become the director of the Central Intelligence
Agency, was the chief of mission in Switzerland. There was also Roger Hilsman, who served as the Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East under President Kennedy. Hilsman, a West Point graduate of the Class of 1943 saw extensive combat as the commander of an OSS guerrilla battalion in Burma.

**THE DIFFERING CHARACTER OF RESISTANCE CAMPAIGNS**

Every country occupied by the Axis was vulnerable to some form of resistance activity. The resistance varied in nature and intensity from desperate house-to-house fighting in a defended urban area (Poland), to classic hit-and-run tactics on enemy installations and outposts (Greece, France, Philippines, etc) down to outright collaboration with the Nazis (Norway and France).

Each resistance movement had its own distinct and often separate causative factors. For example, the nature of partisan activities in France was quite dissimilar from the fratricidal struggle between guerrilla bands in Yugoslavia or the desperate survival efforts of the Jews in Poland. The resistance in northern France never reached the magnitude of that in southern France. Therefore, each must be examined separately, and it is dangerous to generalize from a study of the experiences of only one or two campaigns. However, the resulting character of the partisan activity in each country was influenced by several common factors. These factors were the Axis occupational policies, Partisan objectives, geography, and the availability of external support.

**Axis Occupational Policies**

The German occupation in Russia and Poland, had the two-fold purpose of exploiting the economic resources of the nation and eliminating the *Untermenschen*, or inferior people. Heinrich Himmler's infamous speech at Posen in 1943 adequately illustrates the Nazi approach to pacification:

> What happens to a Russian, to a Czech, does not interest me in the slightest.... Whether nations live in prosperity or starve to death interests me only insofar as we need them as slaves for our 'Kultur', otherwise it is of no interest to me.
Whether ten thousand Russian females fall down from exhaustion while digging an anti-tank trench interests me only insofar as the anti-tank ditch for Germany is finished. 

German occupational objectives precipitated such odious practices that local resistance often took on a desperate, even suicidal, character. Faced with certain extermination, it is understandable that Jewish and Slavic resistance took on such fanaticism.

In Greece, on the other hand, the German respect for the high culture of the people was reflected in a more moderate policy of administration (at least initially). This is perhaps one reason why guerrilla activities in Greece were not as intensive as they were in Russia or Yugoslavia.

After her resounding defeat, France established a collaboration government under the popular World War I hero, General Henri Petain. The Germans occupied the northwestern portion of France but let the Petain government control the remainder of the country. This policy freed the German Army from assigning a large number of vitally needed forces to occupation duty. In Indochina the conquering Japanese Army seized this opportunity and allowed the French colonial officials to retain Japanese troops for other offensive operations. Although the absence of Axis occupational forces allowed the local resistance forces (in France - the "Maquis", and in Indochina - the "Viet Minh") more freedom to organize, the presence of an indigenous or existing government unquestionably removed some measure of public support from the guerrilla movement.

Geography

The terrain in northern France is open, rolling, and highly developed with many roads and railways. Guerrilla forces there did not have the appropriate terrain for refuge and developing secure bases. In southern France, the terrain was more mountainous and less developed, and the "Maquis" were able to develop and expand their guerrilla forces.

Resistance in urban areas in Italy and Denmark was characterized by strikes and civil disturbances, whereas the vast guerrilla sanctuaries in the forests of Russia
allowed the guerrillas to build large-scale military organizations and engage in near-conventional operations.

Partisan Objectives

Resistance movements within countries varied due to differing objectives of the partisan movement. In Russia, guerrilla operations were designed to support the conventional operations of the Red Army. Perhaps the best known example occurred four nights before the Russian summer offensive against the Minsk salient in June 1944. The guerrillas detonated almost 10,000 charges in the rear of German Army Group Centers. In the final stages of the war, Tito's guerrilla forces in Yugoslavia regularized their formations and joined the front line with the liberating Red Army. French guerrillas also supported conventional operations. During the Normandy invasion, the guerrillas were to delay the movement of reinforcements by destroying roads, railroads, underground cables, and electrical power leading to the beachhead. The Maquis in Southern France assisted the Allied invasion of Southern France by furnishing intelligence, guiding Allied patrols and assisting in mopping-up operations. Their seizure of Marseilles in advance of the arrival of Allied troops resulted in an unequal and bloody contest with Germany heavy weapons.

But realizing that large-scale operations frequently caused harsh counter-measures by the occupying powers, some resistance movements chose more limited objectives. For example, two early goals of the French underground were to gain intelligence and assist downed Allied airmen. It would not have been wise to expand guerrilla operations in the Normandy area to such a tempo that German authorities reacted by moving in an additional division or two to suppress them. Therefore, as a general rule, the Allies did not encourage large offensive guerrilla operations in areas of intended invasion prior to the landing of Allied troops. Likewise, if there was little chance of helping countries (such as Norway or Denmark) with large scale military efforts, a limited objective of resistance movements in these countries was to tie down German forces.
One other specific objective, that of harassing enemy lines of communication, was exemplified by the operations in Greece. Rommel's main supply route was the rail line which ran through the rugged mountains of Greece to Athens and from there across the Mediterranean. The guerrilla raids (led by the British advisors) against the Gorgopotamus and Asopos bridges were designed as low-cost, low-risk operations to cut off Rommel's supplies.

Several guerrilla bands had the political objective of the propagation of Communism. As you study the campaigns in Greece, Yugoslavia, the Philippines, and China you will note a three-way struggle with the issues of a national war complicated by internecine battles between guerrilla forces. Chiang Kai-shek in China, Mihailovich in Yugoslavia, and the Nationalist guerrillas (EDES) in Greece all feared the success of Communist guerrilla forces almost as much as the success of the Axis Powers.

**External Support**

A movement that can be supplied and coordinated from external sources, such as the case in Russia and Greece, was quite naturally more highly developed than one that had to act on its own, such as Poland. In Russia, the guerrilla bases developed to such an extent that airfields were built and Russian transport planes could bring in massive amounts of supplies. In some sectors the air resupply missions, which were usually accomplished at night, constituted up to one-quarter of the total air missions flown. 7

One movement in Asia that grew with the help of American aid was that of the Viet Minh in Indochina. The Viet Minh, became the United States' prime source of intelligence and the main underground escape route for downed Allied airmen. In return, Ho Chi Minh's organization received significant amounts of arms, ammunition, and other supplies. Although the United States had extensive OSS activities in Europe and Asia, the greatest attention seems to have been devoted to the countries that were to become eventual battlefields for American soldiers such as North Africa, Sicily, the Philippines, and France. 9 Britain, on the other hand was quite willing to support guerrilla activities in the Balkans but
was astute enough to have some reservations about supporting the Communist guerrillas in Greece.

Selection of Campaigns for Further Study

The particular histories in this volume of Revolutionary Warfare have been selected because collectively they provide a good sample of the differing types of resistance movements.

The Russian experience was selected because the guerrilla operations there reached immense proportions and primarily supported the conventional operations of the Red Army. Occupation policies of the Germans also contributed to the size and intensity of the resistance.

The lesson on France shows how the movement was eventually controlled by deGaulle in England and supported by the Americans and British. It also clearly demonstrates the effect of terrain on the movement, the Maquis of southern France reaching far greater effectiveness because of the availability of isolated mountain bases. France also illustrates how the objectives of the movement may change from the limited objectives of intelligence and organization to attempt larger scale operations in support of Allied conventional operations.

Yugoslavia and Greece both illustrate the complex feature of a civil war within a national war. In Yugoslavia, the Communists ably led by Joseph Broz (Tito) won. This lesson also illustrates how a poor occupational policy of dividing the country into smaller servile states obstructed any coordinated anti-guerrilla campaign. The extent of guerrilla warfare in Yugoslavia grew extremely large and was second only to Russia.

In Greece the Communists lost, and there is an interesting comparison of the lower intensity operations carried out against a vulnerable line of communications. Of added interest is the aspect of British support and the use of advisors. In view of the current demand for American military missions and advisory teams throughout the world, this facet of study is particularly pertinent.
No Asian resistance movements were included in this volume. However, there were significant struggles that took place in China, Malaya, the Philippines, Burma, the Netherlands, East Indies, Indochina and even in Thailand. The experience in China is covered in Volume III, and a brief description of the World War II resistance movements in Malaya, the Philippines, and Indochina is covered during the study of the Post-World War II campaigns in those countries.

GERMAN ANTI-GUERRILLA OPERATIONS

Since all of the histories in this volume involve German occupation forces, it will be helpful to go into some detail on the organizational and operational aspects of German anti-guerrilla warfare.

At the beginning of the war, the German Army had paid very little attention to the problem of "rear area security." The basic assumptions during the invasion of Russia had been that the regular troops would defeat the enemy forces (regular and partisan) on the front line and the Security Service or SD (Sicherheitsdienst) would then organize the rear area, down to Army level, in such a manner to prevent any partisan resurgence. A bare minimum of regular troops was therefore committed to rear area security. Another fault was that the SD were not trained soldiers but rather political administrators, reporting to the Reichsfuehrer Heinrich Himmler. 9

It was soon apparent that this concept was inadequate, and that adjustments were necessary. More SD men were assigned down into the operational areas, and more army troops were assigned to rear area security missions. (These were frequently second-rate troops who invariably performed poorly.) Additionally, the German authorities applied more ruthless repressive measures against the population. 10

The SD later attempted to raise indigenous security forces to help maintain order. Some of these regional forces (in the Crimea and in Greece) were quite effective. To counter the major shortcoming of inadequate intelligence, the SD employed civilian agents, or as they were referred to, V-men (Vertrauensmänner). The V-men were valuable
additions in the SD efforts against partisan activities.

The Army was also forced to re-evaluate its position on counter-guerrilla activities. During the remainder of 1941 and throughout 1942 the German Army issued general guidelines for dealing with the partisan threat in Russia. Meanwhile, the individual commanders improvised methods of combating the growing menace in their rear. In von Manstein's Eleventh Army, a general staff officer took over direction of all anti-guerrilla measures. One Army Group organized "armed villages" to secure its communications; another Army Group organized 100-man "Partisan Hunter Units." This evolutionary process of developing doctrine continued until by 6 May 1944, exactly one month before the Allied invasion of Normandy, the German Army published its field manual, "Warfare Against Bands." By that time the pressure of defeat in Africa, Italy, and Russia prevented the Germans from applying this doctrine with their best units.

**German Army Emphasizes Encirclements**

The regular army found that three general techniques were effective against guerrillas. If a large number of forces were available, the preferred method of dealing with the partisans was by encirclement. Their manual emphasized: "This is the main battle technique and at the same time the most efficient means for eliminating the band menace." After the encircling forces were in position, the Germans found the following four methods most successful in eliminating the surrounded bands:

"78. (a) Battue Shooting. The encircling line is shortened while all encircling forces, proceeding at the same time, advance towards the center. This method, which seems to be the simplest one, can however only be used in small areas. In large areas it can hardly be applied, since in view of the longer line of encirclement, not all of the encircling forces can advance equally fast. Thus contact gets lost, and gaps appear through which the enemy can easily escape." (Fig 1, Fig 2, and Fig 3)
(b) The Partridge Drive. The forces of one sector of the encircling line advance, the forces opposite remain in their positions. The attacking forces press the bands, as in a partridge drive, towards the stationary forces. One must take into account the possibility of the bands trying to escape through the attacking force. Therefore, reserves have to be deployed at a sufficient distance behind the attacking forces. This method is recommended if a certain direction of escape of the bands or escape routes are known, and also where a part of the encircling forces have taken up position in an easily defendable area (river, plateau, forest belt) which makes attempts at breakthrough impossible. Then driving against this line easily leads to their destruction. (Fig 4, Fig 5 and Fig 6)
(c) Driving in Strong Wedges. Immediately after the encircling forces have taken up position, strong wedges are driven by mixed units from the encircling line towards the center of the ring or the known band camps, while the other encircling forces stay put. This method deprives the bands, right from the start, of their freedom of action. They do not have a chance to ascertain through their reconnaissance units the weakest spots in the encircling line for a break-through attempt. The bands, energetically attacked in their main camp, find themselves compelled to split up into several groups. When this has been achieved, the forces of the encircling line advance whilst moving forward strong flanking forces, take up contact with the wedges and split up the ring into several smaller rings, which can be cleared without haste. The cleaning up of large rings frequently requires fighting it out in battles which may last several days. On such cases the troops have to be given daily objectives,... (Fig 7 and Fig 8)

Fig 7

Fig 8

(d) Formation of a Shock Unit. If the band has built a permanent camp and intelligence reports make it appear probable that the band will defend its camp, the area must be encircled and from the reserves a strong group be formed. This shock group advances from the encircling line, attacks the camp and annihilates the band. The encircling forces have the task of stopping escaping bandits and subsequently of searching the area for hidden bandits. (Fig 9)
Techniques When Encirclement is not Possible

If adequate time and forces were not available, an alternative method was to attack the bands without the encircling force. The Germans referred to this technique as the "surprise attack and hunt." The German manual pointed out several considerations concerning the use of this technique:

The hunt is a more elaborate form of pursuit. Its aim is the overtaking, the containing, and the annihilation of the band. The hunt is possible only if the troops can move fast. It is recommended that ammunition and baggage be moved or carried by other units. The hunt is directed in the first place against the command headquarters of the band.14

The final measure used successfully by the Germans was the employment of Jagdkommandos. As described in the manual for "Warfare Against Bands", the formation of Jagdkommandos makes it possible to fight actively against bands even with the smallest forces.15 The Jagdkommandos, usually the size of a reinforced platoon, were to be elite groups of soldiers able to beat the guerrilla at his own game. They were well armed with automatic weapons, able to operate during extended periods without resupply, and were organized to include signal operators, combat engineers, and interpreters:

87. The leading idea behind the battle technique is: By imitating the fighting technique of the bands and assimilating themselves to local conditions, [they try] to get unobtrusively as near to the bands as possible, and then annihilate them by surprise action.16
General Comments

In considering the German anti-guerrilla measures in the following lessons, keep these points in mind:

1. The basic obstacle to the elimination of resistance movements stemmed from political decisions which dictated the economic exploitation, racial eradication, and harsh reprisal methods of containment which were to form the "cause" of the partisans.

2. An additional problem was the lack of troops available for rear area security. Also the caliber of units organized and selected for rear area duty was generally poor.

3. To aggravate the situation there were the different chains of command between the SD and the Army. Because of the split responsibility for occupation and anti-guerrilla warfare and because of Hitler's desire to prevent the Army's control of occupational policies, the SD and the Army remained reluctant to cooperate.

4. Because of these complications and also the pressing requirements of the conventional battle on the front lines, the principle German objective in their anti-partisan operations was one of containing the guerrillas instead of eliminating them. They hoped to be able to keep the rear area problems from affecting their struggle against the enemy main forces.

5. The German military tactics that evolved were sound, and the Germans usually had good results with encirclement operations when they had enough troops.
NOTES


4 Spoken by Himmler in a speech at Posen in October 1943. Quoted from Heilbrunn, Partisan Warfare, p. 169.


6 Charles B. MacDonald, "France (1940-1944)," in The Experience in Europe and the Middle East (Challenge and Response in Internal Conflict, Vol. II; Washington: Center for Research in Social Systems, 1966), p. 131 (Also found in this text on Revolutionary Warfare, p. 65.)


8 Heilbrunn, Partisan Warfare, p. 173.


10 Ibid., p. 105.

11 Ibid., p. 126.

12 Ibid., p. 203.


14 Ibid., p. 219.

15 Ibid., p. 220.

16 Ibid., p. 221.
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Each of the following Chapters in this text has an excellent selection of references for the specific campaign which it covers. For the reader who is seeking a more general, summary approach to guerrilla warfare in World War II the following books will be helpful:


Condit, D.M.; Cooper, Bert H., Jr., et al. The Experience in Europe and the Middle East, from Challenge and Response in Internal Conflict, Vol. II. Washington: Center for Research in Social Systems, 1967. This is a large collection of individual campaigns from which the remaining chapters of this text on Revolutionary Warfare were extracted. The collection also has useful studies on Italy, Poland, and Norway partisan activities in World War II.


Heilbrunn, Otto, Partisan Warfare. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962. Chapter XII was the initial source of inspiration for the idea of including in the Cadet text a summary account of World War II guerrilla activities as a "take off" point for Cadet study.
Chapter Two

UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS (1941-1944)

by Charles V.P. von Luttichau

This is one of fifty-seven chapters in a three volume series, Challenge and Response in Internal Conflict. The series was compiled under contract to the Department of the Army by the Center for Research in Social Systems (CRESS) of the American University.
UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS (1941-1944)

by Charles V. P. von Luttichau

German occupation policies during World War II stimulated the growth of a Soviet partisan movement which acted in support of the Soviet armies' main defensive efforts. German military power then had to be diverted from major offensive operations to contain the guerrilla threat to their rear area security.

BACKGROUND

Operation BARBAROSSA, which launched the German invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, was met not only by a stubborn defense by Soviet conventional arms, but also by insurgency and guerrilla warfare in the occupied rear areas. As an element of what Premier Joseph Stalin was to call the Great Patriotic War, guerrilla activities continued for three years on an ever-increasing scale. They did not end until the Red army had pushed German forces across the western frontier into Poland in the summer of 1944.

The intense and protracted struggle between the German occupation forces and the Soviet partisans has a special place in the operations of World War II because of the vast area over which it took place, the great numbers of men involved on both sides, the objectives of the two opponents, and the techniques that were employed. Many situations and problems encountered today in guerrilla and counterguerrilla operations occurred in occupied Russia, where terrain, climate, and population offered innumerable variations on the theme. It would be strange indeed if there were not lessons for future application from this "greatest irregular resistance movement in the history of warfare." 1

The Soviet Union is the largest continental state in the world—three times the size of the United States. The scene of the guerrilla warfare in World War II was European Russia, which equals in size the remainder of Europe. 2 The Germans had planned to occupy about half of European Russia, but since they did not fully succeed, the insurgency was limited to its western third.
European Russia and the Main Areas of Guerrilla Operations

European Russia is a land of low relief. Its main geographic feature is the East European Plain, which extends from northern Germany to the Ural Mountains. The heartland of this vast expanse is the Moscow region. The shortest route to Moscow from the west is the so-called northern land bridge, which runs along the blunt spine of the Smolensk–Moscow ridge. Napoleon took this route in 1812; so also did the Germans with their main thrust in 1941. To the north of the land bridge lies a wide belt of primeval forests and swamps extending toward Leningrad. In the center of this forbidding area lies Polotsk. To the south of the land bridge spreads one of the most formidable terrain obstacles of Europe, the Pripyat Marshes. Toward the east the marshes give way to an equally large, densely wooded area, whose hub is Bryansk. The Ukrainian black earth region and the steppe cover the southern portion of European Russia. Here a second invasion route leads from south Poland to the industrial regions of the Dnepr Bend and the Donbas, and eventually to the Caucasus and Urals. Great rivers—among them the Dniepr, Dnepr, Donets, Don, and Volga—impede an invader’s advance in this zone.

During World War II, the vast swamp and forest areas on both sides of the main route to Moscow became the strongholds of the partisan movement. The main centers were at Polotsk and Bryansk. In contrast, the Ukraine, whose wide open spaces offered few safe areas for partisans, remained relatively free of guerrilla activity.

Of the three main industrial regions in western Russia—Leningrad, Moscow, and a portion of the Ukraine—the Germans captured only the Donbas (Donets Basin) in the Ukraine. The areas occupied were largely agricultural, and Soviet evacuation and scorched-earth policies tended to reduce the industrial capabilities of the captured regions.

All of European Russia except for the Black Sea coast suffers the hardships of a harsh continental climate. Summers are short and hot and the relentless grip of dark winter seems endless. To make things worse, spring thaws and autumn rains turn the land and its roads into a sea of mud. During these two mud seasons, each lasting for weeks, vehicular traffic comes to a virtual standstill.

By western standards, the Russian system of communications in 1941 was wholly inadequate for the requirements of modern warfare. Only three main communications arteries extended from Poland eastward, and even these rail lines and roads were poor and often structurally unsound. The absence of lateral links in the system was one of its greatest weaknesses. In addition, communications were highly vulnerable to attack because the many bridges and culverts offered inviting targets for sabotage or demolition.

The People of the U.S.S.R. and Their Insurgent Past

In 1941 the Soviet Union had an estimated 200 million inhabitants of whom almost three-fourths were concentrated in European Russia. Approximately 50 million Russians fell under
temporary German rule. Although 182 ethnic groups were then registered in Russia and 149 different languages were spoken, five groups accounted for 90 percent of the population: the Great Russians (52 percent), the Ukrainians (19 percent), the Muslim Turkic nations (11 percent), and the Caucasian tribes and the Belorussians (4 percent each). About one-third of the people lived in cities.5

The October revolution of 1917 and the ensuing consolidation of Bolshevik control had ended a long Russian tradition of conspiracy and insurgency against established authority. After the Bolsheviks had become rulers, they had ruthlessly suppressed insurgent efforts by dissident groups.6 Even the methods and experiences of partisan warfare had been relegated to the safe repositories of history books. Despite all later propaganda claims, the Soviet partisan movement of 1941-44 was the result, not of a spontaneous uprising of the masses, but of deliberate plans and determined action on the part of the Communist party and its national, regional, and local leaders.

**German Actions Unwittingly Encourage Growth of the Guerrilla Movement**

Assuming that the as yet undefeated German force could vanquish the Soviet Union in a bold blitz campaign, the dictator of Germany, Adolf Hitler, and his advisers neglected to plan adequately for other contingencies. Guerrilla warfare was hardly considered. During the offensives of 1941, which carried the German armies to the gates of Moscow, the Germans bypassed large numbers of Soviet soldiers and scores of military depots. In their headlong rush to the east, the Germans neglected to mop up the rear areas and thus handed to the Soviet leaders the opportunity to organize the Red army stragglers into the nuclei of a partisan movement. The swift advance of the Germans also cut off many party officials, stranding them behind the front. With no chance of survival if the Germans should capture them, these bypassed Russians set to work building a Communist underground and partisan movement, for which they furnished the leadership. German tactical reverses in the winter of 1941-1942 gave the partisans the opportunity to consolidate.

The growth of an anti-German guerrilla movement was greatly aided—almost ensured—by the repressive nature of Nazi occupation policies, which were designed to enslave the Russian people, exploit the economic assets of the country, and deny large groups of the population the political freedom they were seeking. The Nazis were totally indifferent as to whether the occupied peoples, in the course of being exploited, starved to death.6 Thus the partisan movement, which at first had found little or no support among the people, gradually became the focal point of opposition to the Germans and often the only refuge for the persecuted.

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5See, for example, Chapter Four, "U.S.S.R. (1917-1921)."
INSURGENCY

In an address to the Russian people on July 3, 1941, 11 days after the German assault, Stalin signaled the formation of the Soviet partisan movement:

Partisan units, mounted and on foot, must be formed; divisions and groups must be organized to combat enemy troops, to foment partisan warfare everywhere, to blow up bridges and roads, damage telephone lines, set fire to forests, stores, transports. In the occupied regions conditions must be made unbearable for the enemy and all his accomplices. They must be hounded and annihilated at every step and all their measures frustrated. 7

This was the broad directive that governed all plans and activities of the partisan movement throughout its existence.

An Overview of the Insurgency—Its Phases and Its Strength

The movement developed in three phases. The first, from June to December 1941, was the formative period. At this time the movement was small, numbering only some 30,000 men. The German invasion and its speed of advance caught the U.S.S.R. off guard and plunged Soviet plans and preparations into a disarray that could not be overcome by improvisation. The first hard-core partisans, mostly Red army and Communist party men, lacked popular support, guerrilla training, and adequate communications. Their operations were generally unsuccessful.9

During the second phase, January to August 1942, after the German defeats in the winter battles, the partisan movement was reorganized by the Soviet High Command. Tighter control, better training, and a vast increase in logistical support accompanied an expansion in strength to about 150,000. The former battalion-size units became regiments, brigades, and larger groups, which aggressively sought control over large areas behind the German lines. Partisan missions shifted from simple harassment of rear areas to planned operations in tactical support of the Red army, with emphasis on cutting lines of communications and gathering intelligence. In these missions the partisan units were fairly effective, although their successes provoked large-scale countermeasures and often led them into pitched battle with German forces in which they suffered heavy losses.9

In the later summer of 1942, the partisan movement gradually passed into its third and mature phase. By the time of the German surrender at Stalingrad in early 1943, it had become clear that the German armies would eventually have to retreat and that the Soviets would return and reinstitute control over German-held areas. Partisan strength and local support accordingly increased. The guerrillas reached their peak number of about a quarter of a million in the summer of 1943. But the rapid growth of the movement diluted the fighting qualities of units. While the original partisan formations had consisted largely of former Red army
personnel, up to two-thirds were now local conscripts. Despite stepped-up training, efficiency remained low. This, however, was partially balanced by the change in the attitude of the population from indifference to moderate support. The organization and control of the partisan units, as well as logistics, were also improved by the Soviet High Command.

With the westward advance of the Red army, partisan missions changed from acts of terror against collaborators and sabotage against economic and industrial installations to a "war of the rails," the concerted, large-scale attack against German supply lines. These activities—coordinated in the late summer of 1943 and again in January-February 1944 with massive Red army operations—culminated in June 1944, in guerrilla attacks designed to paralyze the German army just before the launching of the final Soviet offensive. This much-propagandized effort, the effectiveness of which may have been somewhat overemphasized, was the final effort of the movement. Shortly thereafter, Soviet armies crossed into Poland, thus obviating the need for guerrilla warfare.

*Soviet Planning for Guerrilla Warfare*

While the operations of the partisan movement passed through three phases, only one basic change in its organization occurred. At the beginning of the conflict, when Stalin had called for the formation of partisan units, the instrument for executing these orders did not exist. One reason for this was the fact that the Soviet strategists apparently had envisioned an offensive toward the west, which would have made a partisan movement unnecessary. Another reason may have been the fear that open preparations for guerrilla warfare would have shaken the confidence of the people in the government. A general scheme for partisan warfare had been planned, however, though only the highest political and military leaders knew about it. Based on a regional concept, it was to be implemented by the party, the NKVD, and the Red army.¹⁰

In the initial confusion following the German invasion of 1941, which came as a complete surprise to Stalin and his close advisers, the Soviet leaders were only partially successful in implementing their secret plans. These were based on the assumption that a slow and deliberate Red army withdrawal would allow party and state officials time to organize multilayered and complex partisan and diversionist networks. The party Central Committee at the All-Union and Union Republic levels was to organize the insurgency along administrative channels leading from the *oblasts* or provinces, to the rural and city districts, and to state complexes such as the railroads, industrial plants, and government farms. At the *oblast* and district echelons, a dual command structure consisting of an overt and an underground organization was to be established. In the event of German occupation, the overt organizations were to be evacuated, together with certain key elements of the population and all essential industrial machinery; the underground cadres were to stay behind and activate a partisan movement.
The NKVD had the special task of forming a secret network of diversionist groups of agents, not exceeding seven operatives each, for active sabotage. In addition, NKVD districts were ordered to organize home defense units known as destruction battalions. The missions of these units were primarily defensive: to prevent enemy sabotage and to guard installations. The NKVD was also charged with the security function of screening prospective leaders and members of the partisan movement. As the German armies advanced deeper into Russia, the destruction battalions were assigned to the partisan movement and were incorporated as combat battalions (otryads) into the party regional underground organization.

Training and especially supply of the regional partisan movement became the responsibility of the Red army, specifically the Tenth Department of the Main Administration of Political Propaganda, which was under the immediate control of the Central Committee of the Communist party. Through these channels, army fronts (army groups) and armies were ordered to organize, direct, and supply partisan groups behind the German lines. Directives enjoined commissars and party members never to surrender; if cut off, they were to continue the battle in the German rear with sabotage and terrorism.11

**Genesis of the Guerrilla Movement and Its Political Implications**

The Red army was bypassed by the German army initially constituted a larger reservoir of manpower for guerrilla warfare than did the regional partisan units. Army leaders and political commissars proved to be an effective and fanatical core around which the tens of thousands of stragglers and escapees from prisoner-of-war camps could be organized. Partisan units were first formed in the areas in which large encirclement battles had been fought. In the Ukraine, where terrain did not favor guerrilla activities and popular support was not at first forthcoming, the Soviet command resorted to the expedient of dropping small groups of paratroop commandos behind German lines with orders to destroy specific targets and gather intelligence. These efforts, which bore the marks of hasty improvisation, achieved little or nothing.

In the eyes of the Soviet command, however, the value of the partisan movement was not diminished by its small accomplishments. Faced with a choice between abandoning the movement or trying to make it an effective instrument of political strategy and tactical operations, the Russians in the winter of 1941-42 decided on the latter. A strong argument in favor of revitalizing and reorganizing the partisan movement was undoubtedly the fact that only through an underground could the Communist party hope to maintain a political hold on the occupied areas. This factor may well have outweighed any possible military considerations.

**Development of a Centralized Partisan Organization**

If the partisan movement was to live and succeed, an effective chain of command was urgently needed. The Soviet leaders shifted emphasis: instead of dealing separately with
Numerous small and often isolated individual partisan units, they began to consider the movement as a whole. A centralized organization was gradually developed and was complete by the spring of 1942. The new organization was sufficiently flexible to allow for regional differences and shifting tactical needs, but the line of authority was always clear-cut. What was more, the new organization proved itself effective in action throughout the remainder of the struggle.

Absolute control of the partisan movement was vested in the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist party and its executive organ, the National Defense Committee. New in the chain of command was the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement, established on the same level as the Red Army Supreme Command. The Red army's influence over the partisan movement, which had been greatest during the first phase, found recognition in the appointment of Marshal Klimenti Voroshilov as its commander in chief. The real power, however, lay with the party and its representative, Panteleimon Ponomarenko, first secretary of the Belorussian Communist Party. He was the chief of staff and appears to have been the actual commander of the movement.

The central staff controlled the partisan front staffs, which were organized at the level of the various army front headquarters. Thus, for example, the Kalinin Front, West Front, and Bryansk Front, which together opposed the German Army Group Center, were each paralleled by a partisan front staff, whose function it was to pass on directives received from the central staff, issue additional orders for its own sector in coordination with the front staff, handle personnel and logistical matters, and collect intelligence data. On the level of each field army, a partisan operational group fulfilled similar missions on a commensurately narrower scale.

**Organization of Partisans Behind German Lines**

In the German rear areas, the partisan movement retained a dual chain of command—partisan and party. Operational partisan centers, similar in structure to the operational groups, were established to control partisan operations over large areas. They received their orders from their corresponding operational groups and in some instances from higher partisan staffs, including the central staff.

Next in the chain of command were the partisan brigades, sometimes also referred to or designated as regiments. The brigades had developed from the otryads, often by absorbing one or more of them during the period of expansion. The partisan units of 1941 had rarely exceeded 300 men. By 1942, however, the new brigades numbered 1,000 to 2,000 members and sometimes more. The size of a brigade was governed by practical considerations: on the one hand, the shortage of qualified commanders and the need for control and sustained operations made it imperative to enlarge the otryads; on the other hand, the strength of the brigades had to be tailored to match the resources of a given base area and the available means of communications and control. Units that grew too large became attractive targets for large-scale countermeasures.
and faced destruction. There was a great deal of variation in the organization of brigades, but most were subdivided into battalions. In some instances a partisan division command was created as an intermediate headquarters between partisan centers and brigades or independent regiments.

The Communist party held the reins through two channels. One was through a commissar and an NKVD official operating on the level of the military commander at all echelons of the
Red army and the partisan movement. The other channel was through the National Defense Committee and territorial partisan staffs, territorial party centers in the German rear, and district party committees in the occupied areas. At corresponding levels in the enemy rear, the party territorial organization and the partisan movement closely coordinated their missions.

**Logistics and Discipline**

Logistic support for the partisan movement, which had been haphazard in 1941, was tightly controlled after the new organization took hold. Ammunition, weapons, explosives, medical supplies, spare parts, and even the morale builders of tobacco, liquor, and mail were airdropped or landed on partisan-built landing strips. Key personnel were brought in and casualties—even some prisoners of war—taken out on a regular basis. Allotment and shipment of supplies was from major supply bases to subsidiary bases, and this distribution was regularly handled by supply sections. For staples the partisans continued to rely on local resources. During the last phase of the war, partisan supply developed into a large-scale logistical operation, but although partisan units were often heavily armed, in some areas even with tanks and crew-operated weapons, they were not nearly so well equipped as regular units. The Soviet command determined the flow of supplies and could gauge the expected success of any operation by the degree of support it could make available. Recalcitrant units and those that showed poor internal discipline could be brought to heel simply by withholding supplies, and the central staff never hesitated to use this method.

Discipline became a real problem after the rapid expansion of the partisan units. Later conscripts proved less willing or able than the first recruits to accept the rigid disciplinary standards that had prevailed earlier. The Soviets were able to maintain discipline only through continuous, determined efforts of the military commanders, commissars, and party officials. Oftendraconian measures had to be taken, including the shooting of culprits before assembled partisan units. By this means and because the Germans regularly shot "bandits" even when they surrendered, desertions were held to the relatively low level of 10 percent or less.

Such was the organizational structure, implemented early in 1942, of the Soviet partisan movement. That structure provided the basis for the growth and expansion of the movement and converted it into a formidable instrument of Soviet defense.

**COUNTERINSURGENCY**

The German attack on the U.S.S.R. in June 1941 followed Adolf Hitler’s decision to destroy the Soviet Union, to take possession of European Russia as far east as the Volga River and as far south as Astrakhan, and to dominate these large territories by a combination of military, political, and economic measures. After this, he reasoned, he would be master of the European continent and thus in an unassailable position.
Nazi Plans for the Invasion of Russia

Between July 1940 and June 1941, German political and military agencies worked on plans for the campaign against and the occupation of Russia. Specific plans dealt with a blitz campaign, to be conducted and successfully concluded in the summer of 1941, and with the military occupation, political administration, and economic exploitation to follow. To some degree the execution of these plans influenced the rise and development of guerrilla activities in the Soviet Union.

The military campaign plan, BARBAROSSA, assigned to three army groups—North, Center, and South—the mission of crushing the Soviet armed forces in the western border zone by a series of deep penetrations combined with successive encirclements, employing large armored forces as spearheads. A total of 142 German and the equivalent of 40 other Axis divisions, and some 3,000 tanks and planes were to be committed to the campaign. Hitler was bent on two main thrusts, one aiming at Leningrad in the north, the other at Stalingrad and the Caucasus in the south. The army, on the other hand, intended to drive straight for Moscow. The Germans never resolved these conflicting strategic concepts. Vacillating from one to the other and in the end combining them, the German High Command lost the advantage of concentrating its force, wasted time unnecessarily, and ultimately failed to obtain even one of its main objectives.14

To Hitler, the war with Russia was more than just another military campaign. His political objectives were to “destroy Bolshevism root and branch” and divide Russia into “socialist states dependent on Germany.” Later he summed up his policy as “first: conquer; second: rule; third: exploit.”15 The army’s place in this scheme was confined to defeating the Soviet armed forces. Hitler deliberately curtailed the army’s jurisdiction: as it advanced east, the army was to pass the responsibility for administering the conquered rear areas on to a political administration.

Administration of German-Occupied Areas and Rear Area Security

This political administration was delegated to a newly created ministry under the Reich Minister for Occupied Eastern Territories, Alfred Rosenberg, and to its subordinate reich commissariats that were to operate in the Baltic States, Belorussia, the Ukraine, and—so went the plans—Moscow and the Caucasus. Heinrich Himmler—who as Reichsführer SS (Schutzstaffeln der Nationalsozialistischen Deutschen Arbeiterpartei) headed a Nazi party organization having unusual political, military, and police functions—was empowered to “clean up” these areas by eliminating all Communist functionaries and other “undesirables.” The army protested against these so-called Commissar Orders as senseless and potentially damaging to rear area security. Hitler’s answer was to authorize the SS to extend its activities right into the tactical operations zone.

Deprived of an overall rear area security mission, the army assigned the responsibility for such security functions as it retained to its chief of supply and administration (G-4) and his
counterparts on the army group and army levels. For administrative purposes, the army groups and field armies subdivided their rear areas into regional, rural district, and urban areas. Rear area security was thus removed from the operational chain of command.

On the premise that the campaign would be so short that the Russians could not raise an effective partisan movement, and owing to manpower shortages, the German army planners decided to forgo organizing special counterguerrilla forces. For guarding supply routes and installations, controlling traffic, and handling prisoners of war, the army high command assigned three security divisions to each army group. A typical security division comprised one infantry regiment, one artillery battalion, and some national guard and police battalions. Except for certain specialized units, these were the forces whose principal mission would be to deal with the guerrillas. The security divisions probably had a complement of 100,000 men in 1941 and up to 150,000 in 1943, a number too small to cope with the growing partisan movement. They were poorly equipped and organized, and they lacked mobility. Their greatest deficiency, however, was their lack of training for guerrilla warfare.

The German decision not to organize counterguerrilla forces was soon seen to have been a mistake. The first incidents of guerrilla activity occurred within days of the German attack and forced combat units to turn back to pacify sectors in their rear instead of executing their primary missions. Even after security forces had been assigned, their inadequacy in numbers and capabilities required the diversion of combat elements for rear area security tasks. Field commanders were thus confronted with the dilemma of continuously having to decide between carrying out operations at their front or at their rear. The problem of countering guerrilla activity proved to be insoluble because, from the very beginning, the Germans approached it defensively.

*Germans Gain Experience With Antiguerrilla Operations*

German counterguerrilla operations may be divided into three phases coinciding with the development of the Soviet partisan movement: June–December 1941, January–August 1942, and September 1942–July 1944.

During the first phase, the Germans had an important advantage in that the partisans did not have the support of the people. Many elements of the population hoped to win German support so as to achieve at least a modest degree of political freedom, while the masses of the people were passive and did not oppose the occupation.

Most guerrilla activities were on a small-unit scale and German counteroperations generally did not involve units larger than divisions. Indeed, in most cases only battalions and regiments were involved. German tactics generally consisted of guarding main lines of communications and applying normal security precautions at headquarters and installations. When partisan bands caused trouble in specific areas, the Germans launched a large-scale attack that
usually succeeded in dispersing or eliminating them. The ratio of partisans to antiguerilla forces in these engagements averaged about one to eight. The usual tactical maneuver was encirclement and concentric attack. These tactics were most successful in the Ukraine, where the terrain and the relatively small number of partisans favored the German approach. They were least effective in the central and northern sectors of the conquered areas, where large numbers of partisans were operating.

**Germans Codify Their Tactics**

By the fall of 1941, enough first-hand experience had been gathered that the army high command could issue guidelines for antiguerilla warfare. These reflected the situation at the time and proposed tactical remedies, but did not take into sufficient account the underlying causes of the partisan movement, which were political, psychological, and economic. In any case, it was impossible for the army to adopt measures that would counteract the political blunders of Nazi functionaries in the occupied areas.

The army high command distinguished five types of antiguerilla measures. Pacification operations, involving the complete occupation by troop detachments of all significant localities in a partisan-controlled area, were effective but time-consuming and exceeded the army's capability. Large-scale operations, in which partisan groups were encircled and destroyed by far superior forces through concentric maneuver, were also an effective method, provided enough troops could be assembled to draw a tight ring around the guerrillas and their stronghold. Small-scale operations usually consisted of attacks by relatively small-unit strike forces on specific objectives, such as guerrilla armed camps; such attacks made the utmost use of the elements of surprise and prior intelligence. Mopping-up operations, employed after a partisan unit had been broken up by some other action, were intended to clear an area or supply line. The establishment of strongpoints was a defensive measure designed to protect certain localities containing troops, headquarters, or supplies and was used most often along lines of communications.

**Germans Recruit Local People Who Do Not Support Partisans**

In areas under its control, the German army soon resorted to recruiting indigenous formations, which were quite successfully employed in police and guard duty and in intelligence work. A wide variety of units was organized, among them the auxiliary guard and service troops (Hilfswachmannschaften or "Hiwi's"), engineer groups, and local auxiliary police (Ordnungsdienst). The Germans also made extensive use of locally recruited agents (Vertrauensleute or "V-Leute"). These indigenous forces materially assisted local administration, conserved German manpower, and helped to restrict partisan activities.

During the first phase of counterguerrilla operations, in the last half of 1941, the Germans were successful because the partisans were unorganized and the people did not support them. It
was a period of experimentation for the Germans. There was not enough time, however, to apply the new guidelines before one of the worst winters in Russian history combined with German military defeats to frustrate such gains as the Germans had been able to make against the guerrillas.

As Winter Sets In, Army Commanders Stress Intelligence and Psyops

The second phase of counterguerrilla operations began with the German halt before Moscow in December 1941. Throughout the winter months, it took every ounce of German strength and every last man to hold the front and to guard the tenuous supply lines. Large areas in the armies’ rear were thus stripped of garrisons and fell prey to the partisans. Disintegration of sections along the German front allowed the Russians to establish corridors to many partisan areas. The three largest stronghold positions were east and northwest of Vitebsk, north and south of Bryansk, and in the Yelnya-Dorogobuzh area south of the Smolensk-Vyazma railroad.

German commanders, meantime, had begun to apply the new doctrine and techniques in an effort to counter the growing partisan threat. They improved their intelligence capabilities through radio intelligence, reconnaissance, prisoner interrogations, and agents. Commanders were therefore generally well informed about partisan strength, dispositions, and intentions.

The German army also made progress in some of its propaganda efforts. For the first time, promises were given that the lives of commissars would be spared if they surrendered; and this policy sometimes brought unexpectedly good results. Within their narrow jurisdictions, some field armies unofficially instituted a policy of encouraging defections. Psychological advantages also accrued from the fact that many Russians served the Germans in indigenous police units.

Limitations on Antiguerrilla Operations

In counterguerrilla operations the Germans were hampered by limitations of strength. Their operations had to be highly selective and, since they required the use of sorely needed combat forces that had to be withdrawn temporarily from the front, could be launched only when the situation had become critical, or when results appeared to be extraordinarily promising.

By the spring of 1942, rear area commanders were no longer able to cope with the partisan threat to their lines of communications. The Germans were now forced to commit entire combat divisions, supplemented by security and indigenous forces and supported by planes, in carefully planned and meticulously executed encirclement operations, if they wished to pacify a large partisan-controlled area. They tried to compensate for the shortage of troops with intensive air raids and strafing of recognized partisan strongholds. In addition to the physical damage that could be inflicted on base camps, air attacks appeared to be effective in breaking down partisan morale. But the Luftwaffe never had enough planes to exploit this opportunity.
OPERATION HANNOVER
24 May-22 June 1942

Source: Adapted from Howell, Edgar M., The Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941-1944
Operation HANNOVER Breaks Up Soviet Group Belov

A good example of the type of large-scale operations the Germans launched in the spring and summer of 1942 was Operation HANNOVER. The Germans committed elements of three corps, with seven divisions and numerous smaller units, numbering 18,000 to 20,000 men, under the direction of the Fourth Army. They were deployed against Soviet Group Belov, consisting of an estimated 18,000 partisans and regular forces that the Red army had infiltrated.

The area in which Soviet Group Belov held complete control was located southwest of Vyazma, between Yelnya and Dorogobuzh. It measured about 70 miles in length and 40 miles across. To eliminate Belov, the Germans encircled the entire area; then, in operations lasting a full month (May 24 to June 22, 1942), they attacked from three sides, driving the partisans against the Fourth, pinching off sizable elements in two successive encirclements, before pushing the remnants against a final blocking position. The hard core of Belov’s group broke out of the tightening ring during the last phase, but most were wiped out in subsequent pursuit. The Germans inflicted casualties of about 18,000, including over 5,000 killed, and they captured or destroyed 16 tanks, 251 guns, and 15 planes. Approximately 2,000 guerrillas somehow managed to hide.

The Germans followed up the operation with a program of political pacification, which was greatly simplified by the fact that few males were left in the area. Efforts were made to win the support of the inhabitants and convince them that their lot would be eased if they cooperated by forming self-defense units and reporting partisans to the German authorities. These efforts were so successful that the Soviet command was unable to revive the partisan movement in this area despite repeated efforts.

Nevertheless, the Germans paid heavily for their success. They lost about 500 men killed and 1,500 wounded or missing—less than 15 percent of partisan losses but 10 percent of their own strength. The fact that Belov and his closest collaborators were able to escape proved to the Germans that they had not concentrated enough troops for the initial operation. The operation also showed that, given adequate resources, time, and support, regular troops could eliminate the partisans even in forbidding terrain. On the other hand, it should be pointed out that Operation HANNOVER was not representative of the German counterguerrilla effort. It showed what could be done under favorable circumstances, but these did not prevail in most of the German rear areas. In the sectors under its jurisdiction, the German army had developed new and efficient methods, but it lacked sufficient means to apply them. The army was thus unable to destroy the partisans before the Russian armies took the offensive.

*At that time German divisions were at best about half strength.*
As Germans Begin To Pull Back, They Come Increasingly Into Conflict With Partisans

The last phase of German counterguerrilla operations began in the fall of 1942. German armies had reached as far as the Caucasus and Stalingrad, but then the fortunes of war changed. Stalingrad was the flaming signal. On February 2, 1943, 22 German divisions, reduced to 280,000 men and cut off at Stalingrad from the rest of the German army, surrendered. From then on the Red army steadily rolled back the German lines. The great withdrawal began at the western approach to the Volga and ended in the summer of 1944 on the banks of the Vistula. As the German army fell back, it crowded into areas where the partisans had thrived with relative impunity. Although German supply lines were now shorter and should have been easier to guard, the partisan movement had grown into a more formidable threat. The Germans countered with a series of large-scale antiguerilla operations and intensification of local antipartisan actions. To conserve their own forces, they used non-German Axis troops in security missions, and recruited and employed indigenous units.

The German army had learned during the winter crisis of 1941-42 that only aggressive tactics could check the partisans. Holding garrisons and outposts, perfunctorily patrolling partisan-infested areas, and making occasional sweeps or stabs at recognized strongholds meant remaining permanently on the defensive. It had become abundantly clear that rear area security troops alone could not contain the guerrillas. Combat troops had to be committed, pressure maintained, and the support of the people won.

Hitler Approves a New Army Policy But German Authority Remains Divided

Some steps in the right direction had already been taken. The army staff had made the first move in the spring of 1941 by enjoining subordinate commands to refrain from indiscriminate collective reprisals. In August 1942, the army high command shifted the responsibility for counterguerrilla operations from the chief of supply and administration to the deputy chief of staff for operations. This decision reflected the fact that counterguerrilla operations had become as vital as operations at the front and acknowledged that both areas of operations were interdependent. Experience also had shown that tactical commanders were more eager to commit combat forces in antipartisan operations if they were given control.

Hitler sanctioned the new army policy on August 18, 1942. Not only was the war against the partisans to be considered a part of general operations, but military means were to be combined with political, economic, and psychological measures. In an attempt to pacify an increasingly hostile population, assurances were to be given of at least a minimum subsistence level in the standard of living, and rewards were to be offered to those who would collaborate against the guerrillas. Reluctantly, Hitler also approved the recruitment of native Russians for the
formation of indigenous military and paramilitary units—which had in a number of cases already been quietly accomplished—and their commitment in counterguerrilla operations.  

Although control of operations was placed in the hands of tactical commanders and the dual chain of command in the military establishment had thus been abolished, division of responsibility persisted outside the army combat zone and rear areas. Behind these, Himmler was given sole responsibility for all antipartisan actions, operating through the reich commissars and the military governors. The authority of the SS was also broadened to encompass the collection and evaluation of all intelligence on the partisan movement.

### A Series of New Moves To Counter the Partisan Warfare

To overcome the perennial shortage of security forces, Hitler ordered army training and replacement units, schools, and air force ground installations redeployed from Germany to areas under partisan pressure. He directed that security forces that had been pressed into frontline duty be returned to their primary function. The term "partisan," connoting freedom fighter, was to be replaced by "bandit," in a psychological move designed to discredit the guerrillas.

Himmler and the Armed Forces High Command (OKW) both issued formal directives on specific tactics and procedures for counterguerrilla operations in September and November 1942. The most important of these new instructions dealt with intelligence, population control, and the use of indigenous personnel. Tactics remained essentially unchanged.

The most useful source of German intelligence was the monitoring of Soviet radio broadcasts; interrogations of local residents and agents’ reports often filled in essential details about Soviet intentions. To seek out partisan units and test the loyalty of the inhabitants, the Germans formed mock partisan bands. All residents were registered and the movements of non-residents controlled.

### A Network of Strongpoints and Armed Interlocking Villages Protected by Local Units

The Germans originated a system of interlocking strongpoints along main supply arteries and raised self-defense units in the villages under their administration. They were thus able to spread a network of armed villages (Wehrdörfer)—precursors of strategic hamlets—across many districts, and they reinforced the system by providing reliable signal communications. In an extension of their strongpoint system, they declared that strips up to 10 miles wide along the supply routes were security zones and patrolled them with mobile commando groups (Jagdkommandos).

In villages the Germans raised auxiliary police forces (Ordnungsdienst or OD) to maintain order and provide local security under the direction of appointed mayors. In regions under
heavy partisan pressure, the OD was reinforced by militia units (Milizgruppen) of up to battalion strength. The objective was to provide each district with one militia battalion, subsequently renamed civil guard (Volkswehr) battalion. The expansion of the militia led in 1943 to the establishment of the Osttruppen or eastern troops, which resembled a foreign legion.

The number of indigenous forces could be quite impressive, as the example of the larger Bryansk area shows. The eastern portion of the Bryansk area, under the control of the Second Panzer Army, had 13 eastern troop and 12 civil guard battalions. In the western portion, under the control of Army Group Center, the 221st Security Division built 119 armed villages and manned them with 10,000 OD men.

**Experiments in Local Autonomy: Kaminsky and Vlasov**

In the Lokot district, some 50 miles south of Bryansk, Hitler had in one instance already permitted an experiment in quasi-autonomous government. A Russian collaborator by the name of Bronislav Kaminsky took charge of the district and formed a brigade of 12 battalions. Disciplined, mobile, and well armed, Kaminsky's followers numbered 9,000 men by the fall of 1942. With this force, he not only kept his own district free of partisans, but supplied German authorities with antipartisan units for employment in neighboring districts. While it lasted, the district was a model of successful antipartisan control achieved by gaining the support of the people.

Another opportunity for rallying the Russian people in the occupied territories was handed the Germans when captured Gen. Andrei A. Vlasov lent himself to form a movement and army known by his name. It was to be organized from among Russian prisoners of war for the purpose of uniting all Russians in an anti-Communist state. Although Vlasov had some success, especially in the field of psychological warfare, the very existence of such a movement ran counter to Hitler's long-range plans. Not until 1944, when it was much too late, did Vlasov obtain official German recognition.

**Germans Fail To Exploit Russian Grievances**

The German failure to exploit fully and completely the various collaborative indigenous movements was a singular mistake in itself, but it betrayed the basic Nazi view that the Slavs were Untermenschen, or inferior people. German activity in a number of spheres—the harsh treatment of prisoners of war, the cruel administration of forced labor, the unalleviated food shortages, the closing of local schools—provided realistic corroboration of their basic attitude toward the local peoples.

Given this view of the Slavs, it is not surprising that the Germans failed to take advantage of perhaps the principal means by which they might have obtained widespread popular support—by dividing the Soviet collective farms among the peasants, the largest population group in the
occupied zone. Plans for land reform were sporadically implemented, with some success, during 1941, and agrarian reform actually became policy in February 1942. In the areas under Nazi administration, land reform was often viewed coldly, but some reforms were instituted in army areas. In general, the reforms were poorly conceived and, in practice, the initially anti-Soviet peasant—who, under the Germans as under the Soviets, could not own land but had to meet crop quotas—was unable to perceive any advantage in a foreign administration. Even the religious issue was not exploited by the Germans; for example, German chaplains were not allowed to minister to the local population. The effect of these policies was to confirm the Soviet population's utter disillusionment with the Germans. With the battle for popular support lost through conditions beyond its control, the German army turned to military means to combat the partisan menace.

Large-Scale Operations Against Guerrillas in the Bryansk Area

Typical examples of counterguerrilla operations in 1943 are provided by actions the Second Panzer Army took in May and June of that year in the Bryansk area. During the twelve months preceding May 1943, the Germans had eliminated an estimated 5,000 guerrillas and had evacuated several thousand local residents. However, in the spring of 1943, the partisans were averaging 90 attacks a month, mostly against lines of communications—some 550 miles of roads and railroads. None of these attacks crippled German supply, but about half of them caused delays of up to twelve hours. Partisan strength in the greater Bryansk area fluctuated between 10,000 and 20,000, with half concentrated in the forests south of the town and the other half unevenly divided between the northern and western sectors. They were supported by a large number of local sympathizers. The partisans presented a great danger to the Germans in the event of a general Soviet offensive in the area, and the Second Panzer Army realized that it must deal with this threat while it could.

The panzer army planned five separate, coordinated, and large-scale operations for May and June 1943, committing an estimated 50,000 men. The two largest and most effective operations were FREISCHÜTZ, north of Bryansk, and ZIGEUNERBARON, in the southern forest. Both were executed by regular combat forces, each under an army corps. The panzer army had little time to plan the operations because the troops were needed for the planned German summer offensive at Orel; nor could enough troops be assigned to accomplish a thorough clean-up operation. Military operations were further complicated by the planned evacuation of very large contingents of the local population. In what had become a standard procedure, the partisan units were encircled and then driven against a terrain feature selected as the best blocking position. Generally, the partisans at first avoided being drawn into a set-piece battle and withdrew. When cornered, the hard core and the leaders broke out and escaped, but not without suffering very severe personnel and materiel losses and the destruction of their camps.
In the five operations in the Bryansk forests, the Germans killed or captured some 7,000 partisans and evacuated about 35,000 inhabitants, while losing some 200 killed and 600 wounded. The bands were routed and dispersed, losing their strongholds and their sources of food, shelter, and supplies. But about half of the partisans got away. With massive Soviet support, delivered mainly by air, they reorganized and attempted to resume their activities within a few weeks. The panzer army, however, kept up the pressure with a series of eight smaller operations late in June. Given more troops, time, and air support, the Germans might have eliminated the remaining partisans, who were now deprived of their supporting population. But events at the front precluded full commitment and exploitation.

**Defense of Lines of Communications During the German Withdrawal**

The war in Russia, now stretching into its third year, cut deeper and deeper into the German army's strength. The attrition showed most revealingly in the reduced quality and capabilities of security forces and air force. The Luftwaffe was no longer able to prevent reinforcement and supply of the partisan movement, an effort to which the Soviet command committed more and more of its air strength.

To hold their own, the Germans were forced to employ increasing numbers of security units: some 150 German battalions, 90 collaborator battalions, 30 satellite battalions, and about 50,000 indigenous auxiliary police, which added up to about a quarter of a million men. In addition, Hitler was compelled to shift ten training and reserve divisions to the rear areas in the east. These military security measures succeeded in keeping the German supply lines open and rear installations reasonably safe during the final German withdrawal from Russia. The achievement was limited, but the requirements of fighting a total war and the restrictions under which the army had to operate made it impossible to pacify the occupied areas.

**OUTCOME AND CONCLUSIONS**

The three-year struggle between the Soviet partisans and the German occupation forces was decided by the victory of the Red army over the Wehrmacht. In this victory, Soviet guerrillas aided the Soviet army. The significance of Russian partisan warfare lay in the fact that it emerged as a new weapon, to be reckoned with henceforth as an instrument of strategy and even of national policy.

The Russians in 1941 had been quick to realize the potential of a partisan movement and had employed it with determination in both defensive and offensive operations. Partisan activities may be judged by their objectives and the degree of their accomplishments.
Partisan Objectives and Achievements Reviewed

Partisan objectives were military, economic, and political in nature. Military missions were to harass the occupation forces, inflict maximum damage on installations and communications, and gather intelligence. The economic objective was to reduce or prevent German exploitation of the occupied areas. The political aim was to maintain the allegiance to the Soviet Union and its Communist regime of the Russian population under German domination.

The Soviet partisans were most successful in their military objectives. By adopting an organization and chain of command suitable to the missions of the partisan movement and the environment in which it had to operate, the Soviet leadership in effect created a fourth service and used it as a formidable weapon against the German invaders. Guerrillas killed an estimated 35,000 occupation troops, executed innumerable acts of sabotage, and provided valuable intelligence. But their main achievement lay in their continued presence behind German lines, where they spread insecurity, fear, and terror. They forced the Germans to assign tens of thousands of security troops to the never-ending task of protecting communications and rear area installations, and to divert combat divisions from the front. The partisans accomplished this at a small expense to the Soviet war effort because the hundreds of thousands of Russians in the occupied territories could not have served their country's cause in any other way.

Nevertheless, the partisan movement had its limitations. It could persist because the Germans failed to deal with it effectively. Partisans could operate only in favorable terrain and with massive outside support. The rapid growth of the movement diluted its units and made them vulnerable to German countermeasures. Large units lost their mobility and often were trapped in encirclements by regular forces. In such battles the partisans were invariably defeated and their usefulness, even if they avoided destruction, was greatly impaired, usually for long periods of time.

In the economic field, the partisans were unable to reduce materially the German exploitation of the country, largely because they did not control the economically vital areas such as the big cities and especially the Ukraine.

The success of the partisan movement in maintaining a political hold over the population in occupied areas was not so much the result of adroitness as of intimidation and, above all, the stupidity and ruthlessness of German occupation policies. Even so, more than a million Soviet citizens actively collaborated with the Germans; and millions more, by their indifference and passivity, abetted Nazi designs.

Some Lessons From the German Experience

The Germans, on the other hand, had initially underestimated the threat that guerrillas might present to their rear area security. When the danger suddenly became real, they lacked the techniques and the means to meet the challenge. Preoccupied with tactical operations and
hampered by a lack of manpower, their counterguerrilla operations and security measures were palliative, largely designed to keep the disease from spreading, but not to eliminate its causes.

A basic reason for the German failure in counterguerrilla operations lay in Hitler's policies of exploiting the occupied areas whatever the cost to the Soviet population. Militarily, German antiguerrilla efforts were hurt by Hitler's insistence on dividing responsibility between military and political agencies. The lack of central direction was compounded by inconsistent policies, a dismal shortage of troops, and an essentially defensive attitude. The Germans did little to compensate for the partisans' advantage of favorable terrain.

The early decision to bypass the swamps and forests and the subsequent failure to clean them out thoroughly proved to be mistakes that could not be remedied. Vital lines of communications cut through these very regions and thus were vulnerable to partisan attacks. The device of building strongpoints and clearing strips astride the main supply routes seemed to be the answer to making the supply lines secure, but the Germans never had the forces to fully implement this technique.

The Germans could not cut off outside support for the partisans, and they could not isolate them from their local support, whether voluntary or impressed. Most importantly, the Germans failed to create a climate of confidence and trust between themselves and the Russian people. Under these circumstances, the most effective German measures proved to be large-scale counterguerrilla operations and the establishment of armed villages protected by indigenous militia and civil guard units, backed by German security forces.

In World War II the Soviets used guerrilla warfare as a weapon in support of their regular army in both defensive and offensive operations. Since then, the Soviets have both fought insurgents in areas under their control and supported guerrilla warfare as a tool of insurgency in various non-Communist countries. In these new applications, the Communists have drawn upon many of the techniques used in World War II; it is to be hoped that the free world will also benefit from both the lessons and mistakes of the German experience in Russia.
NOTES


3The "Background" section is based primarily on Charles V. P. von Luttichau, Guerrilla and Counterguerrilla Warfare in Russia During World War II (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1962), ch. 1.

4Department of the Army Pamphlets: No. 20-290, Terrain Factors in the Russian Cam­paign (Washington: Department of the Army, 1951); No. 20-291, Effects of Climate on Combat in European Russia (Washington: Department of the Army, 1952); and No. 20-231, Combat in Russian Forests and Swamps (Washington: Department of the Army, 1951).

5OKH, GenStdH, General der Pioniere und Festungen beim ObdH, Denkschrift über russische Landesbefestigungen (Berlin: Reichsdruckerei, 1942), pp. 2ff.

6See statements by Reich Marshal Hermann Goering (pp. 239, 240), Alfred Rosenberg (p. 241), Himmler (p. 237), etc., re German disinterest in the welfare of occupied Soviet citi­zens, cited in International Military Tribunal, Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal (Nuremberg: International Military Tribunal, 1947), I, pp. cited above and passim.


9Von Luttichau, Guerrilla and Counterguerrilla Warfare in Russia, passim. Except where another source is cited, the material that follows is based on this work.


14George E. Blau, The German Campaign in Russia, Planning and Operations, 1940-1942 (DA Pamphlet No. 20-261a; Washington: Department of the Army, 1951).


21 When the Germans were forced to evacuate the area, they resettled Kaminsky and his followers—6,000 soldiers and 25,000 civilians. See Dallin, The Kaminsky Brigade: 1941-1944 (Columbia University, War Documentation Project "Alexander," Technical Research Report No. 7; Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University, 1952); Howell, The Soviet Partisan Movement, p. 89.
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Rear Area Security in Russia, The Soviet Second Front Behind the German Lines. (DA Pamphlet No. 20-240.) Washington: Department of the Army, 1951.


