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Surviving Total War in Kherson Region, Ukraine in 1941 – 1945

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Surviving Total War in Kherson Region, Ukraine in 1941 – 1945

by

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Dedication

To my great-grandmother, Natalia Porfirievna Yagnenko (1900 – 1999), who survived such social and political disasters of the Twentieth Century as World War I, the October Revolution of 1917, the Russian Civil War, the Russian Famine of 1921, the Holodomor, World War II, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union, yet raised three children, remained cheerful, and kept her strong faith in God till her last breath.

Acknowledgements

The following work started from the early years of my childhood, when my great-grandmother, Natalia Porfirievna Yagnenko, told me many fascinating stories from the Great Patriotic War, the German occupation of our city, and how she survived that period with her family. While drinking tea and eating the candy and cookies she always offered me, the child's imagination did not have much room to picture horrors and realities of the war, and I enjoyed her stories from the perspective of a young boy, simply as interesting tales from the war period. As I grew older and began understanding the extraordinary circumstances the people of Ukraine lived through during the years of total war, I realized that my great-grandmother and her three children could have perished anytime throughout the period of the German occupation of Kherson. This work is a tribute to those who courageously endured the Nazi rule in Ukraine, and lived to tell their stories of survival, hoping that humankind would learn valuable lessons. My goal is to tell the story of survival of my people, residents of southern Ukraine, respectfully representing voices of those, many of whom are no longer with us, but because of their courage – I am.

The process of research and writing of the following thesis involved help of many people. I would like to thank Dr. Charters Wynn and Dr. Bella Bychkova-Jordan for their guidance in this journey, valuable feedback and suggestions, and encouragement at times of my frustration. I am especially thankful to Dr. Mary Neuburger for helping fund my trip to Kherson, Ukraine to conduct field research at the local library, archive, and to interview children and veterans of World War II. My appreciation goes to Vitaliy Shalukhin and Liza Drach, who organized the interviews and various other logistics connected with this research, and to Tamara Skobnikova, who arranged for my research

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Abstract

Surviving Total War in Kherson Region, Ukraine in 1941 – 1945

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While there are plenty of published materials concerning survival in Ukraine during World War II, most of those bypass the Kherson region and focus primarily on the German occupation. This thesis is an attempt to study the complex history of people's survival in Ukraine during a large portion of the twentieth century, through a micro-history of the city of Kherson and the neighboring villages, and towns of the region. The study analyzes the actions and the consequences for the various social, political and ethnic groups of changes in the ruling regimes, emphasizing the period of the return of the Red Army to the region in 1943-1944. This work attempts to provide an answer to the question of why the population of a provincial city, which endured no major combat, was reduced from about 100,000 residents in 1941 to less than a hundred on the day of return of the Soviets in 1944?

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Preface

For the sake of consistency the transliteration of geographic locations and personal names adheres to a modified Library of Congress transliteration based on Ukrainian and Russian usages. The names of cities, villages, bodies of water and other geographic nomenclature may be known to residents of various locales of Ukraine in their Ukrainian or Russian variants. This thesis presents all such names in Ukrainian; for example, the research refers to Mykolaiv, not Nikolaev; Odesa, not Odessa; and Velyka Lepetykha, not Velikaya Lepetikha. Some names are exceptional because they are better known in their common English usage; examples are Dnieper and Crimea. Personal titles, military and civilian, are usually translated into English; for example Sekretar' Oblastnogo Komiteta Kommunisticheskoi Partii Ukrainy becomes here the Secretary of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine.

Introduction

Many studies have been published about the lives of the civilian population of Ukraine during the German occupation in the Second World War, however there are still certain aspects, such as civilians' approaches to survival in conditions of total war, that have the potential to be researched in a greater detail. Many Soviet and western studies on the German occupation of Ukraine focus on the civilian populations of cities of strategic importance, which excludes research of unique situations elsewhere, such as the Kherson region. These studies usually discuss the entrance of the German forces into Ukraine, following by the period of occupation, but omit a discussion on the return of the Soviet rule and its consequences for the local population. This research looks at ways the civilian population of Kherson region survived, where a unique set of circumstances gave the locals a range of difficult choices, before, during, and after the German occupation.

Much of the Soviet literature written on the topic of the Great Patriotic War, as World War II is called in the countries of the former Soviet Union, carries a lot of state propaganda and tends to glorify the country's war effort and villainize the Germans, rather than providing a thorough and more or less objective analysis of wartime events. Not only do the books and journals published in the Soviet Union "speak Bolshevik," using state-approved language as defined by Stephen Kotkin, unfortunately many materials concerning the wartime published in Kherson region as local history maintain

similar communist lingo.[1] Such is the case with *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny (1941 – 1945): Monografiya*, a book by Viktor Susorov published in 2010, that sounds as if it was written well before the collapse of the USSR. Another significant problem with this source, as well as many other local publications, is the lack of citations, and plagiarism, as entire paragraphs would be copied word for word without proper attribution. Perhaps communist rhetoric persists in materials published in independent Ukraine because contemporary local historians keep using for their research books published in the 1960s. Much of this information lacks proper historical analysis and consists primarily of the memoirs and recollections of war survivors, combined with Soviet propaganda. My research aims to properly analyze such published materials on wartime history of Kherson region, and make sense of the information provided by local authors.

Many western scholars, including Karel Berkhoff and Amir Weiner, have written about various cities, which had military, industrial, and historical significance, and mention only in passing cities such as Kherson and Mykolaiv in Reichskommissariat Ukraine. Precisely because the region is generally omitted by scholars, it deserves an in-depth, comparative analysis with other regions of Reichskommissariat Ukraine, in an attempt to define the unique set of geopolitical conditions, specific to the Kherson region, and establish a connection between those conditions and the strategies of survival displayed by the local population during the war.

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[1] Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 198.

This research identifies the Kherson region's similarities and differences with other regions of Reichskommissariat Ukraine and demonstrates how a geographic location influenced the fate of many people who lived there. Due to the lack of strategically and politically significant sites, the region did not see any battles of the magnitude of Kyiv or Sevastopol', and because of this many civilian lives were preserved. Living conditions in the city of Kherson and rural towns and villages will be compared in order to determine whether it was safer to remain in Kherson, or elsewhere in the countryside during the war.

Throughout all of the administrative units of the Reichskommissariat, Ukraine's ethnic composition and people's personal ethnicities played an important role in one's chances of survival. For instance, because there was no widespread Ukrainian-nationalist sentiment, as there was in the western part of the country, a large number of potential clashes between nationalists and communists, or nationalists and Germans, were avoided. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries many Germans, Poles, Greeks and Jews settled in the region, however during the German occupation the Nazi's racial ideology played a major role in ethnic segregation, fueling hatred among ethnic groups towards each other.[2] While Jews were subjected to total annihilation by the Nazis, ethnic Germans, the

[2] Veksler Iosif Naumovich, *Kherson i Ego Zhiteli* (Zaporizhzhia: RA "Tandem – U," 2005), 25-26. Veksler provides an account of life of Jewish Diaspora in Kherson in general, and his family in particular, discussing some of the ethnic and political struggles Jews of the region went through. For more on life of the Jewish population of Dnieper Ukraine see Charters Wynn, *Workers, Strikes, and Pogroms: The Donbass-Dnepr Bend in Late Imperial Russia, 1870-1905* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1992).

Volksdeutsche, were elevated to the status of the privileged in the society, above the status of average Ukrainians, who in turn were considered superior to Russians.[3]

During the period of German occupation, not only one's ethnic background influenced his or her chances of survival, but also one's political views and affiliations, and occupations. Communists were persecuted by the SS as severely as were Jews. Partisans, members of the local underground, Red Army soldiers and prisoners of war, and anyone who showed signs of being pro-Soviet were severely punished by Germans and their auxiliaries. However, local civilians who decided to work for Germans as translators, policemen, and authorities, and received certain benefits from the occupiers, were persecuted as collaborators by the Soviet authorities when they returned to the region in 1944.

After Soviet rule re-established itself in Kherson region, the NKVD's arrests and trials of the supposed collaborators ensued. The cautious Soviets suspected anyone who was left behind in the occupied territory to be a potential collaborator and a spy. As a result, many locals who were even minimally involved with the Germans received sentences to labor camps.[4] While some of the falsely accused civilians were rehabilitated after Stalin's death, particularly after the fall of the Soviet Union, some remained unpardoned for their actions as no details emerged that could prove otherwise.

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[3] Karel Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine Under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 44-45. For detailed description of the Nazi racial theory see Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 27.

[4] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 305-306.

More than four million civilians perished as the result of World War II on what is now considered Ukrainian territory, from the actions of both the Nazis and the Soviets.[5] Of these, more than one million perished at the hands of the Nazis in Reichskommissariat Ukraine.[6] In Mykolaiv region, which during the war included the modern area of Kherson region, the total loss amounted to approximately 105,000 people.[7] Considering the great size of the area in question and the overall number of civilian losses in Ukraine, 105,000 is a modest number. The goal of this research is to determine whether this number of losses fits into a model of general statistics for the losses in Reichskommissariat Ukraine, and whether it reflects an accurate picture of chances of survival in Kherson region. I will consider the extent to which the lack of military and strategically important targets in the region, the lack of great battles, the unique ethnic composition and historical background of the area, and the city of Kherson in particular, was reflected in the chances of survival of those who resided in the region. It is important to understand the locals' behavior during the German invasion, occupation, and the return of Soviet rule, and the relationships they had with each other, with the occupational authorities, and with the returning Soviet authorities, in order to determine whether they truly had a greater chance

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[5] Yury Boshyk, ed. *Ukraine During World War II: History and its Aftermath, A Symposium* (Edmonton, Canada: University of Alberta, 1986), 15. While there are no precise numbers on death toll of population of Ukraine in World War II, statistics provided in this edition agrees with that of other historians who estimate the loss of civilian population of Ukraine at approximately 4 millions.

[6] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 8.

[7] "Naddniprians'ka Pravda," *Zlochynstva Nimets'ko-Fashysts'kyh Zaharbnykiv na Khersonshchyni (Dokumenty i materialy)*. Kherson: Naddniprians'ka Pravda, 1948, 69. Several other local history sources mention 105,000 civilians dead, however it is not possible to know whether this number is accurate, as the records kept during the wartime may be either inflated, to demonstrate cruelty of the enemy, or reduced, to reflect successful struggle of the population against the Germans.

of survival than the citizens of other areas throughout the Reichskommissariat, or was their chance of survival the same.

Each of the key three stages of the war, the initial invasion of Ukraine by the German forces, the period of Nazi occupation, and the re-entrance of the Soviet authorities into the region, caused ruptures in national identity within the society and brought about dramatic changes to the local way of life. With each change of authorities, the society was forced by the extraordinary circumstances of the war to synchronously adjust to remain in existence. In this way, while the richer peasants, called *kulaks*, were persecuted by the NKVD under the Soviet authorities, they were regarded by Germans as reliable elements, who would work with them against the Soviets. With the return of the Red Army, the former *kulaks* were persecuted once again by the NKVD for collaboration with the Nazis in their war crimes.[8] Many other groups of civilians, including communists and Soviet activists, went through similar role reversals throughout the war. Regardless of which political power governed the territory of Ukraine throughout 1941 – 1945, the civilian population was under constant threat, and had to find ways to survive.

[8] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 136-137. For more information on victims of Stalin's policies of "collectivization" and "dekulakization" see Norman M. Naimark, *Stalin's Genocides* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2010), 55-56.

Chapter 1: Geopolitical History of Kherson Region

The cities of Kherson and Mykolaiv share a unique ethnic composition, culture, geography, and history of southern Ukraine. They were both part of a single administrative unit during World War II, the Mykolaiv region.[1] It is difficult to think of Kherson and Mykolaiv as purely Ukrainian settlements, as they were established by the order of the monarch of the Russian Empire, and settled by various ethnic groups, including Ukrainians, Russians, Germans, Poles, Jews, and Greeks, due to an invitation Catherine II sent to European nations.[2] This region, washed by the waters of the Black Sea and the Dnieper River, was of geopolitical and strategic importance to the Russian Empire in 18th century, and even more so to the Soviet Union during the German invasion in World War II.[3] This chapter provides a historical and geopolitical overview of Kherson and Mykolaiv, offers a comparison between this region and other key areas of German occupation in Reichskommissariat Ukraine, and explains ethnic and cultural peculiarities in the relationship between the local populations.

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[1] "Naddniprians'ka Pravda," *Zlochynstva Nimets'ko-Fashysts'kyh Zaharbnykiv*, 69.
[2] Veksler, *Kherson i Ego Zhiteli*, 25-26.
[3] Veksler, *Kherson i Ego Zhiteli*, 25, and Ol'ga Aleferko and Sergei Aleferko, *Dobro Pozhalovat' v Kherson* (Kherson: "Naddnepryanochka," 2007), 6.

THE ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF KHERSON REGION

The city of Kherson was established in 1778 by Grigoriy Potemkin and built by Ivan Hannibal (as a strong fortification and a wharf), to replace a small fortress "Aleksandr-Schantz," on the orders of the Russian Empress Catherine II.[4]

Illustration 1: "The Ochakov Gate," the remnant of the fortress established to protect the region.[5]

In 1789 Potemkin founded another port city to the northwest of Kherson, Mykolaiv, which later housed the Russian Black Sea fleet.[6] Both cities played a significant role in the development of the southern borderlands of the empire as

[4] Veksler, *Kherson i Ego Zhiteli*, 87, and Ol'ga Aleferko and Sergei Aleferko, *Dobro Pozhalovat' v Kherson*, 4.

[5] Photograph by the author, 2012. For details on history of establishment of Kherson see Ol'ga Aleferko and Sergei Aleferko, *Dobro Pozhalovat' v Kherson*, 7. The gate is one of the key historic markers of Kherson.

[6] Yehuda Slutsky, "Kherson" In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 114-115, 265. 2nd ed. Vol. 12. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007).

fortifications of strategic military importance. The region also became one of the key centers of shipbuilding in the country. However over time the territory lost its military significance to Crimea, where the Russian fleet was eventually moved. With the removal of the navy, the region also lost its initial strategic and economic importance; nevertheless Kherson and Mykolaiv remain significant industrial centers of shipbuilding even today.

During the First World War both cities were occupied, first by the Germans, and later by French and Greek forces. During their withdrawal from the region, the French and the Greek troops chased many citizens of Kherson into several barns and set those on fire. The helpless people either burned alive or were machine-gunned down while trying to escape.[7] A similar fate awaited people a few years later during World War II under the Nazi occupation. Although the occupation of the region by the western powers proved costly for the local population during both world wars, the post-revolutionary invasion of Ukraine by the Soviets was no less disastrous for the local population. The Bolsheviks started their drive for collectivization of the land that belonged to peasants, at least three million died in Ukraine, and hundreds of thousands in the southern region, in particular, from the 1932 – 1933 famine, also known as the Holodomor.[8] Southern Ukraine is located on the steppes and at the time the region was one of the largest producers of grain

[7] Veksler, *Kherson i Ego Zhiteli*, 79.

[8] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 8. For more details on famine of 1932-1933 and Stalin's crimes related to the subject, refer to Naimark, *Stalin's Genocides*, Chapter 4: The Holodomor. An estimated number of victims of the Holodomor varies among historians, however usually stays within the range of 3-5 million people.

in the country, and was as a result referred to as the "breadbasket of Europe."[9] However because peasants refused to either turn over their land, equipment, and cattle to the Soviet authorities, or work the land collectively, and because they purposely slaughtered livestock and destroyed crops to render those useless for the communists, there raged a massive famine in an area that should have had the greatest abundance of food in Ukraine, and perhaps in the entire Soviet Union.[10] Any peasant who refused to participate in collectivization was labeled as *kulak*, or a wealthy peasant, and pronounced an "enemy of the people."[11] The Soviet police, the NKVD, confiscated everything from *kulaks* and either killed them and their families, or sent to prison camps in Siberia, Kazakhstan, and elsewhere in the Soviet Union.[12] Although collective farms eventually fully replaced private agriculture, many peasants, and those members of the local population affected by the Holodomor, retained feelings of hostility towards the Soviet authorities. Remembering the horrors of the man-made famine, they used the German invasion as an opportunity to payback the communists. Some peasants welcomed the invading German troops with bread and salt.[13]

From the beginning of the development of the region, the imperial authorities allowed Jews to settle in Kherson and Mykolaiv, as the area was part of the Pale of

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[9] James Dean, "Ukraine: Europe's Forgotten Economy," *Challenge* 43, no. 6 (November-December 2000), 94.
[10] Oleksandr Dmytrovych Boiko, *Istoriya Ukraiiny: Navchal'nyi Posibnyk* (Kyiv, Ukraine: Akademvydav, 2007), 392-394.
[11] Boiko, *Istoriya Ukraiiny*, 392.
[12] Ibid., 393.
[13] Ibid., and Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 20.

Settlement, where Jews were restricted to live by law.[14] By 1939 there were 25,280 Jews in the city of Mykolaiv, or about 15.2 percent of the total population.[15] According to Iosif Veksler, a Jewish doctor who lived in Kherson in the late 19th and first half of the 20th century, there were a large number of Jews who settled in the city.[16] Jews of the region experienced persecution in pre-revolutionary czarist Russia. Railroad workers, migrant workers from other regions of the empire, peasants, and lower-middle-class business owners participated in pogroms throughout Ukraine.[17] At times, when authorities made an effort to protect Jews as "subjects of the tsar," and brought troops to regions of potential violence to reinforce the point, large pogroms were avoided, unlike the cases in which Cossacks and troops refused to protect the Jewish community from local mobs, and many people were assaulted as a result.[18] Jews were further oppressed during the Civil War and until the firm establishment of Soviet rule over Ukraine in the early 1920s.[19] Because of the Soviet policies of equality for all nationalities in the country, Jews, Ukrainians and Russians developed a fair amount of tolerance towards each other.[20] During the 1920s Stalin outlawed anti-Semitism as "the most dangerous vestige of cannibalism" and by that insured the integration of ethnic Jews into the Soviet system.[21] Unfortunately, persecutions based on ethnicity resurfaced during the drive for

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[14] Slutsky, "Kherson" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 265.
[15] Ibid., 266.
[16] Veksler, *Kherson i Ego Zhiteli*, 26.
[17] Wynn, *Workers, Strikes, and Pogroms*, 109-110, and Veksler, *Kherson i Ego Zhiteli*, 40.
[18] Wynn, *Workers, Strikes, and Pogroms*, 109-110.
[19] Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: the Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 272.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

collectivization, as Jews, along with ethnic Poles and Germans, were seen as "*kulaks* by nature."[22] Therefore, during the early 1930s, many Jews were stripped of their possessions and either shot or deported to Gulag camps.

The German occupation of the region in 1941 brought even more instability into already fragile relationships between the various ethnicities of the region. Fueled by the intense anti-Jewish propaganda machine, many locals betrayed Jews to the German authorities and their collaborators, although some Ukrainians and Russians did help Jews to either hide or escape. There does not seem to be an overwhelming majority of citizens in the area who betrayed the Jews during the wartime or helped them. In any case, Jewish families in southern Ukraine account for a large percentage of the total death toll of the civilian population in the region, as Jews were the primary targets of the occupiers. In instances where a Ukrainian or a Russian could have been fined or put in prison, a Jew would have been shot or gassed.

GEOPOLITICAL COMPARISON OF THE REGIONS OF REICHSKOMMISSARIAT UKRAINE

This section compares and contrasts the Mykolaiv region, and its two key cities, Mykolaiv and Kherson, to other regions of Ukraine at the start of the war, in order to show some of the geopolitical peculiarities and statistical differences in data related to southern Ukraine. The geographical and political intricacies of the area will provide a foundation for an understanding of the civilian population's struggle for survival under a set of circumstances unique to the region.

[22] Ibid., 139-140.

The territory of occupied Ukraine in 1941 – 1944 was very different from the modern borders of the state. The authorities of the Reich had no intention to preserve the nationhood of Ukrainians, and therefore drew the borders in accordance with their own

Figure 1: Layout of Reichskommissariat Ukraine.[23]

agenda.[24] Galicia became a district of the General Government of Poland; most of Odesa and parts of Vinnytsia, and Mykolaiv regions, and northern Bukovyna were given to Romanian authorities as Transnistria.[25] The eastern regions that were near the frontlines were under the German military command, the Crimean peninsula was under the control of both German civil and military rule, and whatever area remained from the Ukrainian

[23] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 1. This is a modified map with an addition of a marker for the city of Kherson and an emphasis of the territory of Reichskommissariat Ukraine in the legend.
[24] Boshyk, *Ukraine During World War II*, 24.
[25] Ibid.

SSR became Reichskommissariat Ukraine.[26] Due to differences of the ruling powers in each of the colonies, social and economic conditions also varied among the territories of the former Ukrainian SSR, each having a unique set of laws, social norms, and strategies for survival.

Galicia's three provinces: Lviv, Stanyslaviv and Ternopil were recognized as part of Eastern Poland on March 14, 1923 as a result of a treaty after Polish – Bolshevik War of 1919 – 1920, and remained under the Polish rule until the Soviet "liberation" of the territory upon the outbreak of World War II in 1939.[27] The Red Army was followed by the NKVD troops that set to eradicate any resistance to Soviet rule in the region, particularly from the Ukrainian intelligentsia.[28] Ethnically the region was overwhelmingly Ukrainian with 3,727,000 Ukrainians, 874,700 Poles, and 569,000 Jews.[29] In the process of the Sovietization of the region many Ukrainians, Poles and Jews were killed, imprisoned, or deported to Gulag labor camps, and the territory was repopulated with pro-Soviet migrants from other republics of the country.[30] The atrocities and deportations caused by such cleansing campaigns created enormous anti-Soviet sentiment in Galicia and triggered a further development of Ukrainian nationalism and

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Michael O. Logusz, *Galicia Division: The Waffen-SS 14th Grenadier Division 1943 – 1945* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Military History, 1997), 38-39, and Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 90.

[28] Logusz, *Galicia Division*, 39.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 20.

the formation of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, known as UPA, which later fought both the Red Army and the Wehrmacht for Ukraine's independence.[31]

Odesa, as the most important Russian naval base in the western part of the Black Sea, saw some especially fierce fighting against one German and eighteen Romanian divisions.[32] The Soviets claimed they successfully evacuated 350,000 civilians and 200,000 tons of industrial equipment to the Caucasus, and killed about 110,000 Romanian troops at Odesa.[33] Despite the heroic efforts of the Red Army to protect the most strategically important city of the southern Ukraine, Odesa and the territories between the Dniester and the Western Bug fell in two and a half months and were incorporated into Romania as Transniestria.[34] Although the heavy fighting in the region claimed the lives of many Soviet military personnel and local civilians, the Romanian occupational government was generally more lenient and less deadly than the German one, under the strict leadership of Eric Koch in the neighboring Reichskommissariat Ukraine.[35]

The Crimean Peninsula, south of Kherson, saw some of the bloodiest fighting against the German and Romanian divisions. While the Wehrmacht formations captured most of the territory of Crimea, Sevastopol', the city with the main naval base of the Black Sea fleet, held out for 250 days.[36] The German and Romanian troops outnumbered

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[31] Logusz, *Galicia Division*, 43.
[32] Alexander Werth, *Russia at War: 1941 – 1945* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1986), 208.
[33] Ibid., 208-209.
[34] Ibid., 209.
[35] Ibid., 816-817.
[36] Ibid., 399.

their Soviet counterparts nearly 2 to 1, as there were 106,000 Red Army troops and 203,000 Axis forces.[37] After the battlefield fell silent, Germans claimed to capture 90,000 Russian soldiers.[38] A great number of civilians who were unable to evacuate from Sevastopol' withstood the siege alongside the combat units and met their fate at hands of the occupiers.

Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine and one of its most populated cities, fell to German forces on September 25, 1941.[39] The loss of human life in the "Battle of Kyiv" was on an epic scale, including 700,544 Red Army troops: dead, missing, prisoners of war, sick and wounded.[40] The civilian population of the city fell by a half, from 846,300 citizens registered by the Soviet authorities on July 1, 1941 to 400,000 registered by the occupying forces on October 1, 1941.[41] While some residents evacuated prior to the German encirclement of the city, and others failed to announce their presence to the occupational government for various reasons, there is no doubt that a high number of civilians perished during the battle.

The official Soviet and German figures between July 1, 1941 and January 1, 1943 indicate that the civilian populations of such important industrial cities as Dnipropetrovs'k, Kryvyi Rih, and Zaporizhzhya, which were incorporated into Reichskommissariat Ukraine, fell almost by a half as well.[42] Similar to the situation in

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[37] Ibid., 398.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Chris Bellamy, *Absolute War: Soviet Russia in the Second World War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 262.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 317.
[42] Ibid., 318.

Kyiv, a certain portion of the population likely failed to register with the occupational authorities for various reasons, however a large number of industrial workers were able to evacuate together with their factories to the east as early as August 1941.[43] Kharkiv, Nikopol', Mariupol', and the Donbas, the key areas outside of Reichskommissariat Ukraine, were also cleared of strategically important industrial complexes, which were either hastily moved into the heart of Russia, or became victims to Stalin's scorched-earth policy, a strategy to destroy any valuable resources that could potentially fall in the hands of the enemy on the lost territories.[44] Industrial cities, especially those located in the larger Donbas-Dnieper Bend, also housed many Jews, so the number of victims of the "Final Solution" here ran fairly high.[45] The Germans killed about 12,000 Jews in Dnipropetrovs'k in October 1941 and more than 10,000 in Kharkiv in December.[46]

As a port and shipbuilding city, Kherson had a few significant industrial installations by the beginning of the war, although not on the scale of such industrial giants as Kharkiv, Kryvyi Rih, or the Donbas region. As the Communist Party of the Soviet Union issued a directive to evacuate the industrial complexes and their skilled workers to the east, the city of Kherson successfully evacuated such enterprises as Petrovsky plant and other strategically important installations.[47] It was absolutely

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[43] Werth, *Russia at War*, 214.
[44] Ibid., 213.
[45] Wynn, *Workers, Strikes, and Pogroms*, 37.
[46] Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 204.
[47] Oleksandr Ivanovych Melnyk, "Behind the Frontlines: War, Genocide and Identity in the Kherson Region of Ukraine, 1941 – 1944" (Master's thesis, University of Alberta, 2004), 23. A thorough study of Khersonians' political loyalties during the German occupation of the city, Melnyk's Master's thesis is perhaps the only source that attempts to make sense of people's motivations during the wartime in an objective manner.

necessary for the Soviets to evacuate the Petrovsky plant from the war zone, as prior to 1940 it produced tractors, combines, and other agricultural equipment.[48] After the German invasion of the country the enterprise switched to the production of military equipment and weapons.[49]

Because of the shortages of transportation there existed a certain hierarchy of those who would be evacuated first: the Communist Party elite and state authorities, factory management, and skilled workers. Hundreds of those civilians evacuated avoided the fate of living under the Nazi occupation. Those who were not associated with the evacuating industries found great difficulty in obtaining a boarding pass to travel to the east.[50] Ol'ga Malinovskaya and Mikhail Yagnenko remember that the local authorities thoroughly questioned their mother on employment and social status of her husband. Because he was deceased, and during his lifetime was neither a Party activist nor was in a position of authority, the Soviets told the family to remain in Kherson due to lack of transportation and housing for the evacuees in the east. After a local official promised their mother to soon liberate the city from the occupiers, she screamed and howled, and beat her head against the wall due to fear of living under the German rule.[51]

PREPARATIONS FOR THE DEFENSE OF KHERSON

The Central Committee of the Communist Party directive, issued on June 29, 1941, demanded that nothing of value should be left behind for the enemy, consequently

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[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Interview with Ol'ga Fyodorovna Malinovskaya (Yagnenko), Kherson, June 25, 2012.

any equipment or industry that was not evacuated should be destroyed.[52] Even after a successful evacuation of the industrial sector, the destruction battalions, created as a result of Stalin's scorched-earth policy, blew up any remaining strategically important structures, including, unfortunately, the city grain elevator, the Tissin mill, and other storages full of foodstuffs.[53] Contrary to the accounts of many witnesses, the Party official S. I. Kryvoshein states that he was one of the people in charge of the demolition campaign and that the city authorities allowed the civilian population to take all the remaining food supplies from the storages before destroying them, and that all the remaining cattle was given to those who wanted to take them.[54] He also states that the excess grain left in the port elevator was dumped into the Dnieper (later the locals supposedly told stories of Germans collecting that rotten grain from the bottom of the river and baking bread from it for the local population).[55] However other witnesses of those events, such as the non-Party affiliated citizen Vadon, tell a different story: that the Soviet authorities dumped all the grain into Dnieper, and the citizens of Kherson rushed to rescue whatever wheat they could in order to secure the food supply.[56] People were coming to the elevator in boats and fishing out the rotten grain from the river, because, in

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[52] I. Yu. Sinkevych, et al, eds. *Khersonshchyna na Pochatku Velykoii Vitchyznianoii Viiny (Cherven' – Veresen' 1941): Dobirka Dokumentiv* (Kherson: Ailant, 2011), 13.

[53] Boris Vadon, "Okkupatsiya Khersona, 1941 – 1944" (Kherson, 1993), 1. Even though Vadon's manuscript is only 5 pages long, it realistically describes some of the aspects of Khersonians' criminal behavior during the German occupation of the city, which the Soviet historians often avoided in their published works. The author donated this source to Kherson regional library, where it now resides. Vadon is frequently quoted by local and international historians in writings concerning Kherson region.

[54] Sinkevych, et al, eds. *Khersonshchyna na Pochatku Velykoii Vitchyznianoii Viiny*, 14.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Vadon, "Okkupatsiya Khersona, 1941 – 1944," 1.

fact, the Soviet authorities abandoned the city without an adequate supply of food.[57] Mikhail Yagnenko recalls that some local enthusiasts scooped the rotten grain from the bottom of the Dnieper and sold it. His family baked pancakes from this rotten grain, that had an unbearable stench, and in this way survived the food shortage.[58] Vadon states that the city authorities burned down the Tissin mill, leaving the people of the city with no bread.[59] The citizens of Kherson began breaking into the local food stores, bakeries, and plants, and carried away whatever amounts of food supplies they could by hand and in wheelbarrows.[60] Judging the preparedness of the evacuation of the city by the authorities, from this perspective, it could be concluded that the orders were carried out haphazardly and with little regard for the civilians left in Kherson. As the Party officials and skilled labor force approved for evacuation, the key communist authorities and the Soviet military personnel were steadily abandoning the city. They not only failed to help people prepare for the German invasion, but also arranged for the little amount of the food and other supplies to be destroyed, significantly decreasing civilians' chances of survival during the period of transition from Soviet rule to German occupation.

While Odesa was under siege, the Red Army attempted to hold back the Wehrmacht divisions from overrunning the entire Mykolaiv region, which included the city of Kherson. The battered Soviet 9th army found itself encircled, some units were abandoned by their commanders, commissars, and *politruks*, and barely escaped the fate

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[57] Ibid.
[58] Interview with Ol'ga Fyodorovna Malinovskaya (Yagnenko), Kherson, June 25, 2012.
[59] Vadon, "Okkupatsiya Khersona, 1941 – 1944," 1.
[60] Ibid., 1, 2.

of German imprisonment by breaking out, while suffering heavy casualties in doing so.[61] The remnants of the Soviet 9th army reached Kherson, but were unable to gather a significant force to defend the city.[62] The soldiers kept retreating further east, across the Dnieper, abandoning heavy equipment along the way and spreading panic.[63] Many of those who retreated from Mykolaiv were locals, who upon returning to their homes exchanged their military uniforms for civilian clothing and resumed their family lives.[64] The key Soviet force that was charged with the defense of Kherson simply dissolved, leaving the defenseless city to its fate at the hands of the German army.

DEFENSE OF THE CITY OF KHERSON

According to an unpublished book by Boris Vadon, a Kherson local who wrote a short diary, *Occupation of Kherson: 1941 – 1944*, about German rule in the city, there was no large-scale battle for Kherson as the political officials and the Red Army personnel abandoned the city, allowing Germans to march right in between August 18 and August 19 of 1941.[65] Because the Red Army mounted hardly any resistance as the Germans arrived, many civilian lives were spared, and much housing was preserved.

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[61] Melnyk, "Behind the Frontlines," 27, 32.
[62] Ibid., 27.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid., 31.
[65] Vadon, "Okkupatsiya Khersona, 1941 – 1944," 1.

Figure 2: Strategic movements of Danube flotilla from August to September of 1941.[66]

However the conquest of the city was not an overly easy one for the Wehrmacht, as the Luftwaffe made sure that all the strategically important sites within Kherson, such as the shipyards and factories, were bombed to the ground.[67] The Soviet navy, the Danube flotilla, attempted to repel the German offensive in the lower Dnieper region, but was forced to retreat after the loss of several battleships.[68]

Shortly before the invasion of Kherson the Luftwaffe bombed the port, railroad, and various industrial complexes, killing and injuring civilians.[69] The oil refinery plant remained in tact, because the Germans wanted to secure the fuel supply for their own

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[66] Zetser, B. E. *41 Den' na Khersonshchine: Dunaiskaya Flotiliya*. Kherson, 2010. This is a modified map with an addition of a marker for the city of Kherson.
[67] Melnyk, "Behind the Frontlines," 38.
[68] S. B. Voroshkevich, M. A. Emel'yanov, and Yu. K. Goloborod'ko, *Khersonshchina v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine 1941 – 1945* (Kherson: Khersons'ka Mis'ka Drukarnia, 2005), 12.
[69] Sinkevych, et al, eds. *Khersonshchyna na Pochatku Velykoii Vitchyznianoii Viiny*, 10.

needs, once they would conquer the city.[70] Due to the heavy fighting in the neighboring city of Odesa there was a constant flow of ships into Kherson that brought evacuees and the wounded. However, the German air force bombed non-military ships too, without regard for the large emblem of the Red Cross.[71]

Illustration 2: The view of Kherson seaport and Dnieper River.[72]

One of the first serious incidents that caused a great number of civilian casualties in the city was the Luftwaffe's bombing of Kommunarov Street, where there was a long line of people waiting to receive some flour.[73] The bomb left a large crater in the street and the torn remains of well over 100 people, mostly women and children, were found all around the vicinity of the store, before which a crowd gathered, on the rooftops of the

[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Photograph by the author, 2012.
[73] Sinkevych, et al, eds. *Khersonshchyna na Pochatku Velykoii Vitchyznianoii Viiny*, 10, 11.

neighboring buildings, in the trees, and everywhere on the street.[74] This incident appears to be one of the very few reported cases of civilian deaths due to German air raids in their assault on Kherson. While the city's river port and seaport, shipbuilding and other plants attracted the Luftwaffe fleet, the presence of an oil refinery and the fuel depot in the city helped to reduce the radius of bombings. The number of industrial complexes in Kherson was not significant enough to attract large-scale aerial bombardments of city property, which helped to reduce the number of potential civilian deaths.

S. I. Kryvoshein, the head of Kherson military council committee of the Communist Party, states that the city headquarters maintained a well-organized communication network with all the most important enterprises in all districts of Kherson, and that all the departments operated efficiently and orderly, so all the damages to the city's communications caused by the German bombings were restored quickly.[75] There are two conclusions that can be made from Kryvoshein's statement: either the city authorities indeed operated efficiently and quickly restored communications, and properly dealt with the consequences of the bombings, in which case the Luftwaffe raids on Kherson were not significant enough to spread panic and cause atrocities on a large scale, or the Party official underestimated the impact of the bombings in favor of exalting the well-organized effort of the city defense committee along the lines of the usual communist rhetoric of the wartime period. Although it is not possible to factually prove either theory as fully correct, it is safe to conclude that the truth in this case probably

[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., 9, 11.

belongs in the gray area. It is evident however that the total number of civilian casualties due to German bombings is estimated in the hundreds and not the thousands, and when coupled with the lack of significant battles for the city, due to the withdrawal of the Red Army troops prior to the arrival of Wehrmacht, it is clear that the lives of many civilians were spared due to the minimal urban warfare.

STATISTICS OF CIVILIAN LOSSES OF KHERSON REGION

There are several sources that provide statistical data for the total number of civilian casualties in the war in the region, including Soviet prisoners of war, and those who were sent to Germany as slave labor. The numbers provided in books on local wartime history vary, however such differences often occur due to authors' references to the different geographic compositions of the region. According to the data made available by the Second Secretary of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, A. T. Mel'nikov, the Nazi occupiers killed 72,130 citizens of the Kherson region and shipped off to Germany about 40,000 men and women.[76] The author uses the word "Khersonshchina" in order to describe the area that encompassed all the irrecoverable civilian losses on this territory. However, "Khersonshchina" is a reference to the modern Kherson region, which came into being only after the Soviet liberation of the territory in 1944. Prior to liberation, the area of Kherson region was a part of Mykolaiv region, therefore the statistical data provided by "Naddniprians'ka Pravda" may be correct, because it encompassed a larger area that included the city of Mykolaiv and towns, and

[76] Yu. K. Goloborod'ko, et al., *Plamia nad Step'yu: Sbornik* (Simferopol': Tavriya, 1985), 11.

villages of the entire Mykolaiv region.[77] The book claims the Germans killed over 105,000 Soviet citizens and sent more than 60,000 citizens to Germany as slave labor.[78] A possible discrepancy could also be a consequence of a difference in publishing dates, as Mel'nikov's data was published in 1985 and that of "Naddniprians'ka Pravda" in 1948. Yet another source, *Khersonshchyna za Chasiv Natsysts'koii Okupatsii 1941 – 1944*, published in 2010, claims that according to the Kherson Regional Emergency Committee, that was established in the region on May 13, 1944, two months after liberation, 28,500 civilians were shot, 43,589 civilians were tortured to death, and nearly 37,000 were sent to Germany as slave labor.[79] The 28,500 civilians that were shot and 43,589 civilians that were tortured to death make up the 72,130 civilian deaths reported by the Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine. Of this number, at least 10,000 Jews were shot in the autumn of 1941 in the city of Kherson alone, and many more were put to death throughout the various settlements of the region.[80] There were 40,000 prisoners of war executed in camps in Kherson, which included 72,130 civilians dead, which means that the deaths of POWs and Jews contributed the largest share to the total number of humans exterminated because of Nazi occupation.[81] The irrecoverable losses for non-civilian Red Army troops who fought in Kherson region for the duration of

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[77] "Naddniprians'ka Pravda," *Zlochynstva Nimets'ko-Fashysts'kyh Zaharbnykiv*, 69.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Baraniuk, *Khersonshchyna za Chasiv Natsysts'koii Okupatsii 1941 – 1944: Dobirka Dokumentiv* (Kherson: PP Khatskevych K. V., 2010), 8.
[80] Ibid., 9.
[81] Ibid., 16.

the war consisted of the 47,000 soldiers who perished, drowned while force-crossing the Dnieper, were missing in action, or died from the inflicted wounds.[82]

It could be concluded that the high death toll of the civilian population of the Kherson region during the war could be attributed to the unique geopolitical factors that developed in the territory in the course of its establishment. The diverse ethnic composition of the region served as pretext to Nazis' pronounced extermination of inferior races during the occupation. A significant role in people's survival was played by the city's strategic geographic location on the Dnieper River, near the Black Sea, and that it was situated between such battlegrounds as Odesa, Crimea, and Kryvyi Rih. While Kherson did not experience a large-scale assault from the German army in 1941, the city provided shelter to many refugees, prisoners of war and migrants from war zones nearby, as a result the city needed to accommodate an augmented civilian population. The strategic value of Kherson for the Germans was primarily in its location, as most of those significant industries operating in Kherson were evacuated to the east by the Soviets, along with many skilled laborers, prior to the Germans' entrance into the region. Much of the excess food and fuel supply was destroyed as part of Stalin's scorched-earth policy, which made it difficult for many civilians to survive the initial period of change from Soviet rule to Nazi occupational government. An atmosphere of chaos began to brew among the local population as units of the Red Army crossed the Dnieper and headed further to the east, and the city authorities, along with some of the top regional Party

[82] Ibid., 6.

bosses and key leaders of local industries and organizations, departed on the last steamer.[83]

[83] Sinkevych, et al, eds. *Khersonshchyna na Pochatku Velykoii Vitchyznianoii Viiny*, 24.

Chapter 2: Surviving the German Occupation in Kherson

The locals say that on August 19, 1941 "several motorcyclists showed up, climbed onto the trees, and after surveying the territory through binoculars resolved that there was no military stationed in the city… A few hours later the troops [Germans] occupied the city without any resistance."[1] The streets were empty. The conquered population anxiously observed, through holes in the fences and windows, the victors marching through the city streets.[2] Some locals greeted the German troops with bread and salt, as it is the custom to greet visitors in such a way, though many Khersonians stayed out of the way of the foreign invaders, as they did not know what to expect from the new regime.[3]

The following two chapters examine the period of the German occupation of the Kherson region, analyzing the survival conditions of the various groups of society from the time the Wehrmacht forces entered the city of Kherson, and until the return of the Red Army to Dnieper's southern bend region in October 1943. Survival in the city of Kherson and in the countryside will be examined separately, in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively, although juxtaposed, in order to present the similarities and differences in people's methods of survival.

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[1] Vadon, "Okkupatsiya Khersona, 1941 – 1944," 1.

[2] Interview with Ol'ga Fyodorovna Malinovskaya (Yagnenko), Kherson, June 25, 2012. Ol'ga Fyodorovna remembers the entrance of German troops into the city, as she lived on one of the central streets of Kherson, Perekopskaya Street. A girl of 9 years old, she played in the yard and heard loud engine noises and stomping of boots. Ol'ga curiously peered through the fence and saw the German troops marching down the street.

[3] Vadon, "Okkupatsiya Khersona, 1941 – 1944," 1.

The categories of the population for the city of Kherson and the countryside are classified as follows: the adult population (workforce), youth, refugees, artists, forced laborers, prisoners of war, ethnic minorities, including Jews and *Volksdeutsche*, ethnic Germans; politically aligned population: Communists, pro-Soviet activists and German collaborators, and representatives of armed factions such as partisans and the city underground movement. As some of the groups intersect with each other, and the urban population interacts with the rural population, occasionally in the discussion of a particular group there are references to other groups relevant to the one discussed. Each group is divided into specific subgroups in order to reflect differences and peculiarities within that particular stratum of the population.

Throughout the occupation the population was divided between those who chose to side with the German forces, people who decided to remain loyal to the Soviet cause and actively resist the occupational authorities, and those who maintained ideological neutrality. Due to the extremes of the wartime, no alliance between members of various groups guaranteed survival. While on the surface there appeared to be monetary and civic benefits, there was also a drawback in the loss of locals' trust and the deterioration of family ties. While ethnic Germans, the native police, the German-appointed officials and other collaborators had certain material privileges above the rest of the population, and a higher social standing, these allies of the occupational authorities could also expect retribution from the citizens inclined to support the Soviet cause. Some groups such as Jews, Gypsies, and mentally disabled could do little to secure their own survival, due to the Nazis' implementation of policies to exterminate the so-called "undesirables." Those

who chose to actively support the Soviet cause, communists, members of the Kherson underground, and partisans in the countryside, willingly exposed themselves to the danger of German persecution, greatly decreasing their chances to survive the occupation. The largest portion of the population, those natives who decided to maintain political neutrality, indirectly agreed to the terms and conditions of the occupational authorities in order to ensure survival, often leaving own fate to chance. One survivor of the German occupation in Kherson, Mikhail Yagnenko, described the locals' philosophy: "People survived in any way they could. If you want to live – subjugate yourself."[4]

THE ADULT POPULATION – WORKFORCE

The locals did not have to wait long to understand what the life under the German occupation would be like. In his memoirs Vadon writes: "From the first days of occupation the fascists forced men to clear all the blockages."[5] He continues in the same vein stating that people had to take apart the buildings destroyed by bombings, sort out the industrial trash, sweep up the streets, and generally work the most difficult menial jobs.[6] The fact that even the highly skilled foremen were rarely seen to service any equipment, signified trouble for the general population and especially those who did not possess any qualifications to perform the skilled work, or the local intelligentsia, for whom the Nazis had no purpose within the greater Reich.[7]

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[4] Interview with Ol'ga Fyodorovna Malinovskaya (Yagnenko), Kherson, June 25, 2012. Mikhail Fyodorovich Yagnenko brought up such wartime philosophy among Khersonians in the joint interview with his sister.
[5] Vadon, "Okkupatsiya Khersona, 1941 – 1944," 2.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

Survival in Kherson, and other larger cities of the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, varied from that in the smaller villages and towns. In smaller communities people knew each other well and could help one another, or betray by denouncing communists, partisans, soldiers of the Red Army and their families to German authorities. In larger cities like Kherson people depended on their family members, close friends, and frequently on strangers. Historian Karel Berkhoff presents several theories concerning the behavior of civilian populations during the war, where on the one hand in a "fragmented society people live egotistical lives and are concerned only about their own survival, callously disregarding the needs of others," an opinion often expressed by historians of Nazi Germany, and on the other "a sense of community, nationalism or patriotism shared by many, that motivated people to display solidarity," a view shared among eastern European scholars.[8] While no single society was wholly egotistical, or shared camaraderie, the local sources show that the citizens of Kherson displayed both behaviors.

Beginning on September 30, all citizens of the city ages 16 to 45 were required to register with the Labor Office, where the unemployed received ration cards, entitling them to 12 kilograms of flour and 175 grams of butter per person per month.[9] Those who failed to register were unable to receive a job and were punished by a week's delay of their ration.[10]

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[8] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 141.
[9] Novikov, *Khersonskaya Gorodskaya Kniga Pamiati*, 86.
[10] Ibid., and Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 274.

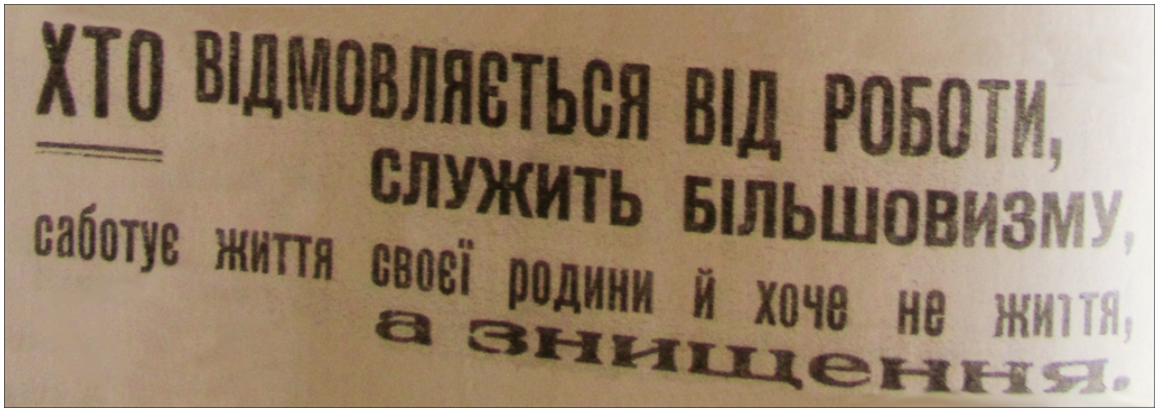

Illustration 3: German propaganda ad calling people to work.[11]

The only categories exempt from registration were married women with children and schoolchildren.[12] Those who disregarded the occupational government's directive and failed to register with the Labor Office, and find employment locally could be sent to Germany as forced labor.[13] The Germans thought it was essential to restore order among the population of the occupied city, and send people to work as quickly as possible in order to produce food and goods for the army and for the Reich. Later, the registration of locals in the Labor Office helped Germans to track down more citizens eligible to be sent to Germany as forced laborers.[14]

Many local men were employed in the factories and plants of Kherson, which were restored and fully operational by 1942.[15] Most workers held jobs that demanded

[11] Baraniuk, *Khersonshchyna za Chasiv Natsysts'koii Okupatsii*, 42. Original newspapers, "Golos Dnipra" and "Nash Put'" that were published between 1941 and 1944, from which the imagery was reprinted, are located at DAKhO. The ad translates: "Those who refuse to work serve Bolshevism, jeopardize lives of the family members and want not to live, but to be exterminated."
[12] Novikov, *Khersonskaya Gorodskaya Kniga Pamiati*, 86.
[13] Interview with Mikhail Fyodorovich Yagnenko, Kherson, June 6, 2012.
[14] Novikov, *Khersonskaya Gorodskaya Kniga Pamiati*, 86.
[15] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 275.

little skill and consequently paid very little, while skilled workers were rarely allowed to work on any equipment, and when they did, only under strict supervision.[16] It is difficult to estimate the productivity of the Kherson industrial complex, but many factors point to a general decline even before the occupation. Some of the skilled workers were evacuated with their factories to the east prior to occupation, and many of those left in the city were communists and party activists whom Germans were striving to eradicate. The rest of the workers did not feel inclined to help the occupiers in their war effort, due to their harsh treatment, long exhausting working hours, low pay, malnutrition, and their solidarity with fellow workers and countrymen. Citizens of the city, including workers, were required by law to hold a job. Many held industrial jobs because factories and plants usually provided a meal, but the majority quit working diligently, some sabotaged production, or sometimes used the available resources to help the members of the city underground.[17]

Vitaliy Zakharov recalls that during occupation he worked as a translator at a cotton-processing plant, also known as "The Scientific Research Institute of Cotton Production." At least officially, his work was not considered collaboration with the enemy, as he translated technical terminology for Germans and did not participate in the abuse of fellow locals, and did not receive any material benefits or additional food rations. When Zakharov heard there was a translator needed at the cotton-processing plant, he decided to take up the offer and work, rather than being prosecuted as a non-working saboteur. At the time of his employment he was seventeen years of age, and

[16] Ibid., 274.
[17] Novikov, *Khersonskaya Gorodskaya Kniga Pamiati*, 84.

treated by Germans as a boy, receiving no special protection, unlike those who collaborated. Zakharov remembers ordinary German soldiers as decent people, different from Germans working for the Gestapo, and adds that at the time of his employment no one asked him if he was involved with the partisans or in any other anti-German activities, perhaps due to their dire need for translators.[18]

Female employees were generally treated less harshly than males by German supervisors.[19] Many young and middle-aged women worked at military cafeterias, kitchens, offices, and even the homes of Germans, where they cleaned, cooked, unloaded foodstuffs from trucks, and performed various other chores.[20] Women who worked at German facilities and homes were provided with a meal at work and heating during the winter.[21] Working hours for females ranged from 9 to 12 a day. They averaged 60 working hours in a week in 1943, which was equal to hours worked by males. But women received only 80 percent of the average salary earned by men.[22]

REFUGEES

During the war some families and individuals moved to Kherson, seeking safety and the means to survive. Valentina Moiseenko's family were refugees who came to the city in August 1942, after their hometown of Voronezh in the Russian SSR was bombed to the ground by the Luftwaffe. Their family traveled for quite some time. First to Kyiv, where Germans almost nabbed Valentina's brother as a forced laborer to Germany, then

[18] Interview with Vitaliy Eliozarovich Zakharov, Kherson, June 11, 2012.
[19] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 274, and Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 150.
[20] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 150.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 274-275.

to Mykolaiv, as they were told in Kyiv that Mykolaiv was relatively safe. Upon their arrival there, the locals told Valentina's parents that Kherson is even safer than Mykolaiv, and the family finally made it to Kherson. As they arrived at the train station, her parents immediately went to the market, where they noticed the abundance of foodstuffs and goods, bringing back food for the children. The family registered with the German authorities and received jobs and housing, although it amounted to a corner for the entire family in a communal apartment. Eventually they received an entire room for their family. As the women of the family worked at the grain elevator, they used the opportunity to steal some of the grain by sowing small pockets into their bras and the pouches on their belts. Although they were bringing home only small amount of grain daily, it was enough extra nutrition for the family to survive. This case shows that southern Ukraine, and the city of Kherson in particular, was a quiet periphery during the war years, where even migrants who came to the region were able to receive accommodations in order to rebuild their war-torn lives.[23]

YOUTH

Youth under the age of eighteen and small children had to assume responsibility for their own survival and take part in adult activities. Those of grade school age could go to a public school, which was reopened by teachers unable to evacuate, if those children

[23] Interview with Valentina Sergeevna Moiseenko, Kherson, July 3, 2012. Valentina Sergeevna tells an incredible story of their family's survival after Germans reduced to rubble nearly 95% of Voronezh. They buried most of the valuables they could not take with them in their yard, hoping to return home after the war. In the street they found a sack of crackers and grain, which fed them in the weeks to come. Germans forced the entire population to march under a convoy toward an unknown direction. Eventually Valentina's family joined with two other families, bribed German guards with valuables, and hid, while Germans pretended they didn't see these families. After some time they made it to Kyiv by begging railroad workers to allow them to ride on cargo trains, and in the same way they made it to Mykolaiv and then Kherson.

had appropriate clothing and lived within the walking distance.[24] Often parents tried to protect their children from the possible troubles and kept them at home, assigning them various chores that would aid the family's efforts of survival. Ol'ga Malinovskaya recalls that her mother taught her and her two brothers to make artificial flowers, flower baskets, and toys for the New Year's trees.[25] While their mother was at work, the children handcrafted these goods, which their aunt later took to the market.[26] In this way the children stayed out of trouble, performed useful tasks, and helped their family to earn additional income. While it is rather surprising that people bought toys and decorations at the time, when many did not have enough money to purchase food and the other necessities of life, this example shows that even in conditions of total war certain citizens choose to maintain some form of civility and give gifts to their loved ones, especially during the holiday seasons.

Youths who were older, in their teens, had an opportunity to go to a technical school, where they would learn to work with heavy machinery and metals. Mikhail Yagnenko, who with his brother Aleksandr attended a technical school, recalls an incident for which they were fortunate to have avoided being charged with sabotage. There was heavy machinery at that school, powered by a transmission belt, and Aleksandr, perhaps for the sake of fun, put some aluminum shavings on that belt. When the worker, a Slovak, grabbed the belt to stop the machine, the shavings sliced his hand.

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[24] Ibid.
[25] Interview with Ol'ga Fyodorovna Malinovskaya (Yagnenko), Kherson, June 25, 2012.
[26] Ibid.

No one asked how those shavings appeared on the belt, but had their careless act been discovered, the consequences could have been fatal.[27]

FORCED LABOR - OSTARBEITER

In Kherson, as elsewhere in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, the occupational authorities instituted a workforce draft, which resulted in sending primarily young men and women to Germany as forced labor. These *Ostarbeiter*, the term Germans coined for the workers from the eastern front, were practically slave laborers. They were sent to the west to work in various industrial sectors, such as mining, metallurgy, chemicals, building and transport, as well as farming, and working in people's private homes.[28] At first Germans invited locals to voluntarily go to work in Germany by providing them with misleading information on how much better they will live in Germany than in their own home cities. Later, when people uncovered the German scheme and refused to go willingly, Germans instituted a countrywide draft in order to fulfill the increasing need for labor force in the Reich.

In the drafting commissions set up by the occupational authorities, there was a search for healthy young people, and those who hold no job. The two brothers Mikhail and Aleksandr Yagnenko experienced the process of drafting firsthand. Mikhail, who survived to tell the story, remembers that his brother was as strong as a horse and desperately tried to avoid being sent to the Reich by using unconventional methods: "He

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[27] Interview with Mikhail Fyodorovich Yagnenko, Kherson, June 6, 2012. Yagnenko said that he and his brother Aleksandr learned to cut metals, welding, brazing, and forging there. They also learned to work with bellows, which later saved their lives.

[28] Norman Davies, *No Simple Victory: World War II in Europe, 1939 – 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 322.

smoked tea and ran a great deal outside in the cold in order to overload his heart."[29] Young people frequently attempted either to injure themselves or contract an illness in order to fail the medical exam and avoid becoming a forced laborer. Mikhail is unsure which strategy worked for Aleksandр and how he avoided passing the medical examination, but the young man was able to stay in Kherson.[30]


РАСПОРЯЖЕНИЕ

Все лица рождения 1927 и 1926 годов, которые прошли 13 и 14 сентября Комиссию и признаны годными для поездки на работу в Германию, обязаны явиться с вещами для отправки в Германию в субботу, 25 сентября, в 7 часов утра, на вокзал.

Неявившиеся в указанный срок, будут признаны саботажниками и врагами немецкого народа и преданы суду.

Областной Комиссар

п. п. д-р ГАЙСТ

Illustration 4: (Left) An order of Gebietskommissar Geist concerning those who passed the medical examination and were obligated to travel to Germany.[31]

Illustration 5: (Right) A German propaganda photo published in the local newspaper, showing Ukrainians at work in Germany.[32]

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[29] Interview with Mikhail Fyodorovich Yagnenko, Kherson, June 6, 2012.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Baraniuk, *Khersonshchyna za Chasiv Natsysts'koii Okupatsii*, 45. An excerpt from the newspapers, "Golos Dnipra" and "Nash Put'," which were published between 1941 and 1944, and are located at DAKhO. The order translates: "All persons born in 1927 and 1926 who passed the medical examination on the 13th and 14th of September, and were approved for work in Germany, are obligated to come with their personal belongings to the railway station on Saturday, September 25 at 7am. Those absent, will be considered saboteurs and enemies of the German people, and will be prosecuted. Gebietskommissar Geist."

[32] Ibid. Photographs, such as this one, were frequently used by Germans, especially at the start of the occupation, to mislead the local population about working conditions in Germany. While the photograph shows women dressed neatly in a clean workplace, the reality of working conditions in Germany for

Mikhail's own account of the drafting process provides insight into how the system of forced labor worked in the city. Shortly before he had to appear for his medical examination, he and his brother played in the snow outside and Mikhail contracted pneumonia. After spending several days in a hospital, his mother took him by the hand and headed for the recruitment office. Once they came near the building they saw a *polizei*, the local auxiliary policeman, who asked the mother why she was crying. She said she was upset that Germans are drafting her sick son to Germany, however the *polizei* answered that they do not need sick workers in Germany, and if the medical commission determined Mikhail to be ineligible, he would walk out holding a yellow slip. Luckily for Mikhail, he did not pass the medical exam and walked out of the building holding the coveted yellow document.[33]

Not all locals entering the medical examination were as fortunate in their attempts to receive a rejection slip as Mikhail and Aleksandr. In fact, many youths were captured by Germans in the streets of the city and forced to undergo a medical examination, and if they passed, they were sent to the Reich as forced labor.[34] Valentina Sergeevna Moiseenko recalls one such instance, when one of her relatives gathered with other youths to play games in the street one evening. The Germans appeared unexpectedly, rounded-up all the boys and girls, and eventually sent them to Germany to work. When the children did not come back to their homes later that evening, the parents went to the

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Ukrainians was different. As the rumors of the hardships of eastern workers spread through the occupied territory, people were hesitant to trust the German propaganda imagery.

[33] Interview with Mikhail Fyodorovich Yagnenko, Kherson, June 6, 2012.

[34] Interview with Valentina Sergeevna Moiseenko, Kherson, July 3, 2012.

authorities, who told them that their young ones were already at the train station awaiting departure to the Reich, and that there was nothing they could do about that.[35] Such unexpected raids grew in number, as the German war effort demanded increased labor. Perhaps frustrated with their inability to succeed militarily on the eastern front, as the war dragged on Germans employed more ruthless methods of subduing and using the local population for their needs, without any regard for the lives of civilians affected by their policies.[36]

ARTISTS

The occupational authorities did not discontinue arts and entertainment in Kherson, so the theaters and movie theaters continued to function under the Nazi regime. For artists and entertainers of the city shows and concerts were not always about entertainment, but about survival. Performances encouraged the population to remain patriotic and preserved national culture and heritage, while also providing employment and meals for performers.

Already in early September 1941, Petr Ruzaev, an ethnic German, invited a large group of artists, musicians, dancers, painters, lighting technicians, and editors to meet at

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[35] Interview with Valentina Sergeevna Moiseenko, Kherson, July 3, 2012. The life story of Valentina's relative, a young woman sent to Germany, is quite tragic. After the war ended, she found herself at one of the camps for displaced people. There she met a man from Poland, whom she eventually married and with whom she later moved to Krakow, Poland. She received an education in dentistry and began working in the field, when one fateful day an NKVD agent offered her work in the NKVD. When she declined his offer, the NKVD agent branded her an "enemy of the people," and sent her to Komi to a labor camp, where she served a 7-year sentence. She was prohibited from maintaining any form of contact with her husband and from traveling to Poland when she was released. Both, she and her husband eventually remarried and had children. After the collapse of the Soviet Union she was invited to her university in Krakow for a 40-year anniversary reunion. After she found her ex-husband's family, his second wife told her that he had recently passed away, but was searching and waiting for her until the last days of his life.

[36] Davies, *No Simple Victory*, 322.

one of the city's theaters.[37] The day after the meeting, rehearsals resumed at the theater.[38] At the end of October the theater presented its first show, *Khmara,* a play by Karpenko-Karyi.[39] High-ranking officers of the German army arrived at the grand opening of the theater and told the audience that the entertainment was to raise the morale of the working people in order to increase production levels. The majority of the plays performed at the theater were written by Ukrainian authors such as Kotlyarevsky, Shevchenko, and Tobilevych.[40] Valentina Moiseenko remembers attending such operettas as "Rosemary" and "The Merry Widow," which deeply impacted her.[41] Not only Ukrainians and Russians attended the theater, but also Poles, Moldovans, and German, Rumanian, and Czechoslovak soldiers.[42]

The artists and the performers suffered from particularly low pay and rations, as musicians of the local orchestra survived on only 400 grams of ersatz bread, 300 grams of oil, 500 grams of grain, rotten vegetables, and salted fish.[43] In order to obtain more food, artists, as well as other citizens of the city, traded goods with peasants and German soldiers at the market.[44] One could bargain for bread, sugar, tobacco, canned food,

[37] Vadon, "Okkupatsiya Khersona, 1941 – 1944," 3.
[38] Ibid., 4.
[39] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 198.
[40] Ibid., 199.
[41] Interview with Valentina Sergeevna Moiseenko, Kherson, July 3, 2012.
[42] Vadon, "Okkupatsiya Khersona, 1941 – 1944," 4.
[43] Ibid., 5.
[44] Ibid.

cigarettes, blades and other goods.[45] Many women working in performance arts survived the occupation by having intimate relationships with Germans.[46]

The only two movie theaters in Kherson, "Gloriya" and "Capitol'," re-opened in September 1942. They showed German, Italian, and Romanian films without subtitles.[47] Although the films were not interesting for the locals without a translation into Ukrainian or Russian, before every showing a small folk ensemble played Ukrainian and Russian classical and folk music.[48]

PRISONERS OF WAR

Among all the groups of people hurt by the German occupation of the region, the Soviet prisoners of war took the lion share of abuse from the occupying forces and their collaborators. It is not known how many Soviet prisoners of war were brought into the city of Kherson, but it is estimated that approximately 40,000 were killed through starvation, torture, and execution.[49] Germans set up three camps for the imprisoned Red Army soldiers and navy servicemen within the Kherson city limits at a shoe factory, where the death toll reached 25,000, the city prison where 10,000 died, and the public school number 28, where 5,000 prisoners perished.[50] The living conditions in these prisoner of war camps were as extreme as elsewhere in the occupied territory, as the

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[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 200.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Baraniuk, *Khersonshchyna za Chasiv Natsysts'koii Okupatsii*, 16.
[50] Ibid., 15, and Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 224.

primary focus of Germans was to use them as expendable slave labor, replaceable at any time.

The camp located at the shoe factory was covered in trenches in which the multitude of prisoners could only stand, and if they were lucky sit down.[51] Usually there was one meal a day that consisted of boiled bran. Sometimes it was just mixed in cold water, and occasionally one could find a raw rotten potato.[52] Every prisoner of war was also entitled to 100 grams of bread daily, but they rarely received any bread.[53] The residents of Kherson frequently tried to help the prisoners and give them bread and other foods, however such attempts were often punished by the German and Ukrainian prison guards, and resulted in beatings and even the killings of those who tried to pass the food. They also could shoot those prisoners who were caught accepting it.[54] Some citizens were organizing food donation drives, which involved tens of volunteers who donated various foods for the prisoners, often robbing their own starving families of the much needed nutrients.[55] In this way the wife of a local leader of an underground group, Praskov'ya Fyodorovna Dedova, gathered a group of women who cooked and gave food to the prisoners at the shoe factory prison camp.[56] While it was extremely dangerous for civilians to help prisoners of war in any way, and especially at the level of an organized effort, Dedova used her husband's occupation as a guard at the local food depot

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[51] Baraniuk, *Khersonshchyna za Chasiv Natsysts'koii Okupatsii*, 15.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 224.
[56] Ibid.

"Plodovoshch" to help the cause.[57] In order to bypass the restrictions on feeding the prisoners set by Germans and to avoid direct contact with either the guards or the prisoners, Dedova and other women dumped all the foods they gathered and cooked, such as *borscht*, porridge, and bread into the barrels set under prison fence.[58]

The most healthy and physically fit prisoners of war were sent to Germany as slave labor. Others were assigned locally to clean streets, repair roads, prepare firewood for winter, and other onerous tasks.[59] A number of prisoners working outside the camp walls were able to escape with the help of local civilians, underground groups and partisans.[60] Some of the city residents tossed notes over the fence that contained the addresses of locals who were willing to offer shelter and hiding places to runaways.[61] Hiding escaped prisoners could be fatal not only for him, but also for those households who sheltered them. The German authorities issued an order on December 25, 1941 concerning the sheltering of the escaped prisoners of war:

> "The citizens of the city of Kherson and the surrounding area who shelter prisoners of war without the authorized release documents, expose themselves to the highest form of punishment. These citizens must immediately deny any requests for shelter from prisoners of war and send them to a prisoner of war camp, or immediately notify the camp authorities, so that the prisoners of war could be taken there."[62]

Due to the severity of the German occupational policies, assisting and sheltering the escaped prisoners required an organized effort by local underground groups and

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[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., 215.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid., 215-216.

partisans, who were able to arrange living spaces and furnish documents for escapees. The members of the communist youth underground group, "Patriot Otchizny," headed by Ilya Kulik, helped more than a hundred prisoners to escape.[63] "Tsentr" also played a significant part in organizing escapes of the Soviet prisoners of war from Kherson's camps, and helped them to join either the local partisan bands or the local underground groups.[64] An underground group headed by V. K. Dedov supplied escaped prisoners of war with the required papers and helped them to cross the Dnieper to the left bank, found shelter for some, and provided food and clothing.[65] Besides providing the imprisoned Soviet troops with food, members of the underground also distributed the Soviet propaganda and news leaflets among the inmates.[66]

The death rate in prisoner of war camps in the city of Kherson was alarming, as nearly a hundred prisoners died at any one camp daily.[67] Many factors such as malnutrition, cold weather, lack of winter clothing and shoes, disease, lack of appropriate medications and treatments from gun wounds, frostbite, and infections, and physical abuse by guards, contributed to the death of Soviet POWs on a large scale in the prison camps of Kherson region.[68] At the shoe factory prison camp, bodies of the dead, and sometimes even those who were still breathing, were tossed over the fence onto the adjacent cemetery for the locals to bury. As a result, there were nearly ninety gravesites

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[63] Novikov, *Khersonskaya Gorodskaya Kniga Pamiati*, 86.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Baraniuk, *Khersonshchyna za Chasiv Natsysts'koii Okupatsii*, 15.
[68] Ibid.

by the end of the occupation there.[69] Imprisoned Soviet troops from Crimea were used as slave labor, building railroad between Perekop and Tsyurupyns'k during the winter. They lacked proper shelter and nutrition, and worked with primitive tools and lived in dugouts.[70] S. P. Saburov, a former prisoner of war, recalls in his memoir:

"When we came close to the Dnieper shore, a terrifying picture was revealed before us. From afar, it seemed like there were some heaps piled up on the shore. Once we came close, we saw stacks, stacks made of dead human bodies."[71]

Germans decided not to bury the dead prisoners and instead piled the bodies on the shore for the spring flood to wash away and thereby conceal their war crimes.[72] Saburov finishes his story sharing his impression of the seen:

"Major Vinogradov pushed me to the side and quietly said: 'Look, and do not forget.' One cannot forget, even if one wanted, cannot erase this from memory…"[73]

The result of such living and working conditions was reflected in the high death rate among the prisoners of war of Kherson region and the low rate of survival of those who turned up at any one of the camps.

Ukrainian prison guards, the local collaborators with the German police, treated prisoners even more cruelly than the occupying troops.[74] The head of the prison camp police, a former Red Army officer Petr Perevezentsev, issued an order for all the guards to obtain short whips, with which he and all the other guards beat prisoners arbitrarily.[75]

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[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., 22.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 23.
[75] Ibid.

Perevezentsev sadistically beat prisoners with his fists and a whip, leaving many toothless and with deep scars on their bodies.[76] His favorite method of punishing the "guilty" inmates was to let a prisoner run away, chase him down and kick with the toe of his boot on the tail bone, then knock him down with a kick in a back.[77] After such severe beatings prisoners either had no strength to get up for several days, or were crippled for the rest of their lives.[78] Other guards followed Perevezentsev's example and tortured the prisoners, beating them until they would lay unconscious on the ground.[79] During the winter, guards forced the prisoners to lay naked on ice, stand with hands raised for two to three hours, or spend time outdoors exposed to strong cold winds.[80] Any interaction with civilians was persecuted, and prisoners were severely punished for picking up food or anything else locals threw over the prison fence.[81]

The Red Army naval infantrymen were treated particularly brutally by the German police and the local collaborators-guards. Many of the Soviet sailors captured at Odesa, Kerch, Bakhchysarai, and Sevastopol' were driven to Kherson prisoner of war camps where they were to spend their terms.[82] Germans took heavy losses at Odesa and in the Crimea, due to the fierce resistance of the Red Army navy; therefore the anger of the occupying troops was directed largely at the Soviet servicemen brought from those

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[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 217.
[81] Ibid., 218.
[82] Ibid., 219, and Novikov, *Khersonskaya Gorodskaya Kniga Pamiati*, 85.

locations. A local woman, E. E. Lukashevich, recalls how columns of captured Soviet navy officers and troops entered the city:

"The fascists drove prisoners of war through the city daily. I remember especially well a sailor from Sevastopol', whom four German soldiers led on stretched chains like a bull."[83]

In January 1942 locals witnessed Germans driving 25 Soviet sailors, dressed only in their underwear, through the market.[84] The prisoners were yelling: "We are dying for the motherland, death to the German occupiers!"[85] In May 1943 Khersonians witnessed a similar scene, when 130 Soviet naval infantrymen were driven through the prison gate with hands tied, and led to a site where they were shot.[86] It is not surprising that many Red Army naval servicemen tried to change into the Red Army infantry uniform, and avoided being associated with the Soviet navy.[87]

ETHNIC MINORITIES

The Nazi occupiers did not delay an implementation of their policies against what their propaganda called Judeo-Bolshevism, as arrests of Jews, communists, and other pro-Soviet citizens followed immediately after the arrival of Germans.[88] The Jewish population of the Kherson region, just as elsewhere in the German-occupied territories, suffered from tremendous cruelty and had a very low chance of survival. The city commissar Mattern announced that the entire Jewish population of the city must exhibit a

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[83] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 219.
[84] Novikov, *Khersonskaya Gorodskaya Kniga Pamiati*, 85.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 219.
[88] Baraniuk, *Khersonshchyna za Chasiv Natsysts'koii Okupatsii*, 8.

special patch on their clothes, a yellow circle to be worn on the right side of the chest and in the middle of the back.[89] A ghetto was organized in Kherson, where a large number of Jews were concentrated, and no one had the right to leave the area either during the day or at night.[90] Jews worked on the most difficult and humiliating jobs: cleaned toilets, harnessed to a cart instead of a horse they moved heavy loads and dragged vehicles with their engines turned off.[91]

In the autumn of 1941, about 10,000 Jews were killed in the city of Kherson. A local, one A. K. Mestkovsky, witnessed the following:

> "In the fall of 1941, I do not remember the exact day, I took over my duties to guard a garden… I sat under a tree and sometime later noticed that from the direction of the agricultural plant there marched a large formation of Germans. The part of the garden I guarded and an anti-tank trench nearby were surrounded. I was an involuntary witness in this encirclement. At about 9 am there arrived 7 covered vehicles, from which there came out women, children and the elderly. All those arrived were stripped naked and led to the trench. There came one German who began to take away children from women; an incredible weeping and howling began, but that German got a bottle out of his suitcase and brought it up to child's nose, and the child died immediately, and was thrown into the trench right before the eyes of its parents. The adult women and the elderly were stripped to their underwear, placed by the trench on their knees, and shot by the machine guns."[92]

Such executions continued for a few days, until the Germans massacred 8,500 people.[93] The numbers declined later on in the occupation, but there are several reasons why so many Jews perished already by September 1941. Perhaps many Jews registered with the German authorities due to general ignorance of Nazi policies towards them. On the other hand, in the beginning of the occupation more of the local residents were eager

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[89] Ibid., 8-9.
[90] Ibid., 9.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid., 14.

to help Germans discover Jews, than later in the occupation when it was clear that the Soviets were going to return.[94]

Not all Jews were targeted for destruction by the occupational forces at first, as is seen with approximately 150 Jewish women married to local Ukrainians, who were initially spared the fate of other Jews.[95] Melnyk concludes that the Germans purposely let these Jewish women live because they wanted the locals to see that their occupational policies were directed against Judeo-Bolshevism and not the Ukrainian population, so that the locals would aid the Nazis instead of resisting them.[96] In 1942 the German authorities let some of the Jewish children, whose parents were shot in the prison, be put up for adoption, on the premise they would be taken by non-Jews and converted to Christianity.[97] Some of the local women went to the prison and adopted the Jewish children, saving their lives from certain death at the hands of the Nazis.[98]

Unlike the Gestapo and Einsatzgruppen, there were common German soldiers who were unwilling to participate in the mass killing of the Jews. Vitaliy Zakharov recalled the story of a Jewish woman with a small child who did not evacuate to the east before the occupation, and later was forced to live in a hideout. Some locals helped the woman and her daughter to settle in a basement and brought her food and provided her with clothing. But another person began spreading rumors, saying: "There is a yid living nearby." Those locals caring for the woman told this person to quit spreading rumors,

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[94] Melnyk, "Behind the Frontlines," 109-110.
[95] Ibid., 48.
[96] Ibid., 48-49.
[97] Ibid., 55.
[98] Ibid.

otherwise, they threatened to kill him. Instead of listening to his neighbors' request, this individual went to the German police and denounced the Jewish woman with her daughter. As the German soldiers came to search the basement with an order for the woman's arrest, one of them entered the building with the flashlight first, staying ahead of others. This soldier spotted the mother holding her daughter tightly, shivering in a dark corner, and looking at them, he yelled to those behind him who did not yet see the Jews: "What a fool, why did he even bother, there are no Jews here. He made it all up."[99] The Jewish mother and her daughter lived to survive the war, because one German soldier made a conscious decision to spare the lives of these unarmed civilians. In this way, one's survival depended not only on the groups he or she would come in contact with, allies or enemies, but also on individuals who had the mental capacity to decide against the policy of their faction and choose an act of humanity over an act of duty.

The popular attitudes towards Jews in occupied Kherson region were not the same at the beginning of the Nazi rule as they were by the end of 1943. The anti-Semitic sentiment was never strong in the region, as Jews historically had assimilated well in Kherson and the nearby villages and towns. Although the Germans' ruthless occupational policies turned away many Ukrainians from aiding the Nazis, Jews did receive help in acquiring shelter and basic necessities from locals. With the nearing of the Red Army, the citizens of Kherson were more ready to identify themselves with the Soviet cause and assist Jews as fellow Soviets, rather than to betray them to the Germans, who at the end of 1943 were already destined for defeat.

[99] Interview with Vitaliy Eliozarovich Zakharov, Kherson, June 11, 2012.

In his memoires Vadon writes that some Khersonians willingly joined the ranks of the Gestapo and participated in the hangings on Suvorov Street of Jews, Komsomol members, Party members, members of the city underground, and partisans.[100] It is unclear, however, whether these perpetrators had anti-Semitic moods, or blindly carried out the orders of the German authorities in order to survive. Some of the most notorious native policemen, such as Val'ka "the German" and Grishka "the Gypsy," enjoyed any opportunity to abuse the population, as long as they fulfilled the Nazi policies, they remain unpunished.[101] Other locals, such as Vadon himself, tried to save Jews, as in an instance with Milya Charskaya, an eighteen-year-old Jewish girl, whom he tried to help by testifying to the Gestapo that she was Russian.[102] His effort failed, nevertheless, as some of the neighbors denounced his testimony and he was punished by the Gestapo with receiving 20 whiplashes.[103] But between natives who were eager to help the Nazis to uncover Jews, and those who risked their lives to protect them, the majority were bystanders. Locals understood that helping Jews was against the newly established law, and in order to avoid confrontation with the occupational authorities and jeopardizing their survival, the vast majority remained neutral.

Even though Stalin gave the order to deport all ethnic Germans living in the Soviet Union to Siberia and Kazakhstan in anticipation of a possible German invasion, there were simply not enough resources available to resettle nearly 1 million

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[100] Vadon, "Okkupatsiya Khersona, 1941 – 1944," 3.
[101] Ibid., and Melnyk, "Behind the Frontlines," 53.
[102] Vadon, "Okkupatsiya Khersona, 1941 – 1944," 3.
[103] Ibid.

Volksdeutsche.[104] The largest concentration of remaining ethnic Germans was in southwestern Soviet Union, where the German officials registered 185,408 *Volksdeutsche* and accounted for 66,162 deported by the Soviets.[105] While there was a large number of ethnic Germans in Transniestria, with 135,000 – 160,000 people living in the vicinity of Odesa, there were also many *Volksdeutsche* residing in Kherson region, as indicated by an evacuation of approximately 70,000 Black Sea Germans from southeastern Ukraine by the Nazis in 1943.[106]

Volksdeutsche were among the most privileged groups under Nazi rule.[107] In Kherson they had more options in selecting a workplace, and some worked as translators, while others worked for the Gestapo, police, and other governmental agencies.[108] The occupational authorities replaced many of the natives who held positions of leadership and management with ethnic Germans, including those managing housing or serving as supervisors at factories.[109] *Volksdeutsche* also received rations greater than those given to the general population, their salary was higher by 50 per cent than that of Ukrainians and Russians, and they were allowed to travel by trains.[110]

Ethnic Germans were instructed to register with the office of the city commissar, and when a store for "Germans only" opened on one of the main streets of Kherson, they had access to food and goods of better quality than what was available to the rest of the

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[104] Lumans, Valdis O. *Himmler's Auxiliaries: The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1993), 243-245.
[105] Ibid., 245.
[106] Ibid., 245, 247.
[107] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 210-211.
[108] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 274.
[109] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 142, and Novikov, *Khersonskaya Gorodskaya Kniga Pamiati*, 84.
[110] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 274-275.

local population.[111] Because they were allowed to shop at "Germans only" stores and in addition use trains, *Volksdeutsche* were able to travel and trade goods and foodstuffs, earning additional income.[112]

During the early period of German occupation of Ukraine, Himmler wanted to use ethnic Germans to increase the Germanization of the region. To do so, he insured that *Volksdeutsche* enjoyed favorable policies and material support.[113] A decree issued on September 15, 1942 granted *Volksdeutsche* the use, but not the ownership, of the land and estates they owned on January 1, 1914.[114] This ethnic group was also provided with the best collective farm lands and farming equipment and machinery from abandoned machine-tractor stations.[115] *Volksdeutsche* did not have to pay income tax, and any other tax was lower for them than for any other group on the occupied territory. Furthermore, they were given Jewish property and building materials.[116] Children of ethnic Germans attended German schools with grades beyond fourth, while all the Russian schools were closed, and Ukrainian schools only taught the first four grades, before they too were closed.[117]

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[111] Novikov, *Khersonskaya Gorodskaya Kniga Pamiati*, 84.
[112] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 211.
[113] Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 246.
[114] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 45.
[115] Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 246.
[116] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 211.
[117] Novikov, *Khersonskaya Gorodskaya Kniga Pamiati*, 84.

POLITICALLY ALIGNED POPULATION

While Nazi ideology propagated hate against Jews, the term "Jewish Bolshevism," also emphasized particular hatred for communists.[118] Along with the genocide of Jews there were mass murders of communists, members of the Komsomol, and pro-Soviet activists in Kherson region.[119] The very first announcement made by the occupational forces in the local newspaper and spread around the city, as an agitation ad, stated:

> "There is a reason to believe that persons who have a connection with the Red partisans, transmit signs through the encoded telegraph signals and the Morse code using light. May it be known that the transmission of any telegraph signals, especially near the shore after dark, will draw an immediate fire of German guns. Persons suspected in relationship with the Soviet troops or partisans will be shot."[120]

The population of the occupied territory quickly understood that in order to survive under the German rule, all ties with the former communist system must be severed. On their part, the German authorities made it clear that even the distribution of Bolshevik propaganda leaflets would lead to public execution by hanging or shooting.[121] In the eyes of the German authorities the possession of a Soviet leaflet, newspaper, or other form of information concerning the progress of the Red Army signified a connection between the owner of that item and the Red partisans and other underground communist organizations. Not all who had in their possession Soviet leaflets and newspapers were communists. Many simply wanted to know whether the Soviets would

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[118] Davies, *No Simple Victory*, 381.
[119] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 210.
[120] Novikov, *Khersonskaya Gorodskaya Kniga Pamiati*, 23.
[121] Bizer, M., et al, eds. *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny, 1941 – 1945* (Kherson, 1970), 16.

return, especially after many Khersonians witnessed the executions and imprisonment of family members, friends and co-workers by the Germans.

Many high-ranking communists, including those serving in the Red Army, or retired, employed in the evacuated factories, were able to escape to the east and avoid the fate of survival in the occupation.[122] Many of the Party members and individuals associated with Soviet political organizations left in the occupied territory were rank-and-file members. It was up to these dedicated Bolshevik men and women to keep resisting the enemy and spread the pro-Soviet agitation, reminding the population that the Red Army keeps fighting and that the Soviet order will eventually return. However, those high-ranking officials who stayed in the occupied territory had difficulty surviving. Not only were their names on official documents, they were also well-known among the local population, some of whom were upset at Soviet policies, and were ready to turn any pro-Soviet activist to the Gestapo. Perhaps it was easier to survive and work underground for the lesser-known communists and for those whom it would be difficult to track down through the official paperwork for the German authorities.

Denunciations of enemies of the people, such as *kulaks* were widespread in Soviet Union before the arrival of the Germans, and at the time of the occupation the same culture of turning in the "undesirable elements" of society continued.[123] Those locals who were listed in the NKVD's "unreliable elements" directory were generally cleared by the Nazis, and instead deemed reliable by the occupational authorities. Former NKVD

[122] Sinkevych, et al, eds. *Khersonshchyna na Pochatku Velykoii Vitchyznianoii Viiny*, 15.
[123] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 54.

informants and Soviet officials had good reason to fear persecution from the Germans and retributions from locals, whose families were hurt through their denunciations.[124] Communists became scapegoats and often locals denounced the Soviet activists to German authorities for personal gain, a desire to rid a small communal apartment of unwanted neighbors or for monetary profit.[125] Conceptually, such system was not much different from the denunciations of *kulaks* during the 1930s. In the early months of the occupation, the so-called communists arrested through a denunciation, required a chief of the region or other native official to vouch that they were not a Bolshevik and posed no threat to Germans, in order to survive.[126] Those "Bolsheviks" turned in to Einsatzgruppen were at an especially high risk of being shot, and a plea from the local officials had a little chance of saving them.

The Wehrmacht, who initially responded to such denunciations by severely punishing the suspects, quickly realized, perhaps with the help of the local translators, that many of the accusations were fraudulent.[127] The authorities in Kirovohrad, north of the Kherson region, issued a warning that those who falsely accuse others will themselves be arrested, and the avalanche of denunciations soon stopped.[128]

Germans entered the cities and towns of Ukraine and other conquered countries as liberators, hoping to convince the people that they should be thankful to Hitler for freeing them from Soviet oppression. Certainly this message met a favorable response from those

[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.

who were repressed by the communists during the 1920s and the 1930s, and people who did not agree with the Soviet system. According to a Soviet historian V. D. Susorov, many of those who were repressed under Soviet rule, including *kulaks* and small business people became loyal servants of the occupying forces, and served in the governing bodies and local police detachments, or worked as provocateurs and as paid agents of the Gestapo and Abwehr.[129] It is perhaps an overstatement that collaborators mainly consisted of those who were opposed to the Soviets, as many just sought a chance to make it through the war, gaining some benefits and sustaining a somewhat acceptable quality of life in this period.

ARMED FACTIONS

Two underground committees, eleven underground organizations, and ten partisan detachments operated in the region, totaling more than a thousand participants.[130] These were mostly Ukrainian and Russian men and women, among whom there were 105 communists, 127 members of the Komsomol, 272 workers, 101 *kolkhozniks*, and 270 clerks and students.[131] The primary objectives of the underground groups in Kherson region were the manufacturing and distribution of anti-German and pro-Soviet leaflets, sabotage and diversions on the factories and *kolkhozes*, assassination of traitors and

[129] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 192-193.
[130] Voroshkevich S. B., Emel'yanov M. A., and Goloborod'ko Yu. K., *Khersonshchina v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine 1941 – 1945* (Kherson: Khersons'ka Mis'ka Drukarnia, 2005), 15.
[131] Ibid.

collaborators, assistance to escaped prisoners of war, and the rescue of the citizens selected to go to the Reich as forced labor.[132]

One of the largest underground cells in the city of Kherson was "Tsentr," which operated from the winter of 1942 until the summer of 1943 under the direction of Phillip Antonovich Komkov, also known as Mikhail Mechenyi.[133] The decoded entries of Komkov's personal diary exhibit the difficulties of survival and the dangers of operating as underground fighters under the constant watch of the Nazi occupiers and their collaborators. Komkov wrote that already in December 1942 there was an attempt to connect with a partisan detachment in the countryside, but at that time it was evident that there were no partisans operating nearby.[134] During the meeting of the underground group in March 1943, it was decided to send an expedition to the wooded area of the countryside in search of partisans and to join a detachment, if there was one, or to establish an encampment if there were no partisans there.[135] Komkov's entries from March 1943 stated that due to constant searches and raids, and the discovery of conspiratorial apartments by the occupiers and the local police, it became too dangerous to carry out further underground activity.[136] Due to the persistent efforts of the occupational authorities, housing was a constant problem for the members of the underground, as many of the available apartments were taken by the German soldiers

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[132] Ibid., 18.
[133] V. Baraniuk, *Pidpil'na Organizatsiya "Tsentr" (Shchodennyky P. A. Komkova)*, (Kherson: PP Khatskevych K. V., 2010), 4.
[134] Ibid., 28.
[135] Ibid., 25.
[136] Ibid., 16.

retreating west already in the Spring of 1943, and many of the apartments used as hideouts did not last long as such.[137] The key tactic for the survival of an underground group and their cause was to move out of sight of the German authorities.

Because of the constant raids, the equipment used for printing leaflets had to be on the move continuously, and often as the group finished printing hundreds of leaflets and was ready to distribute those, an increased patrolling of the city streets by Germans and their auxiliaries hindered such action.[138] Perhaps the greatest obstacles in the way of the success of "Tsentr" were not logistical and technical problems, but the unreliability of members of the group. Their irresponsible, and often selfish actions, not only compromised Komkov's plans of action, but betrayed other members of the underground formation. A certain guerrilla by the nickname of Kikot' stole a large diamond worth 20,000 rubles, 70 kilograms of flour and 12 kilograms of macaroni, given to him to sell so he could use the money for the organization's purposes. He also pocketed 5,000 rubles from the organization's budget.[139] In addition to thievery, Kikot' and his comrade Panchenko were accused by Komkov in living a lifestyle that went against the group's code of ethics, as they were constantly drinking and participating in debauchery. They also betrayed other members of the underground when they occasionally drank with the criminal investigators.[140] Other guerrillas such as Chan-kai-shi and Sova were warned against frequently walking about the city together, or going to the theater and cinema.

[137] Ibid., 19.
[138] Ibid., 17.
[139] Ibid., 9.
[140] Ibid., 10-11.

According to Komkov, such behavior was not worthy of members of the underground whose purpose in living in occupation was to commit illegal acts.[141] One member of the underground nicknamed Zayats was suspected to be a provocateur and an informer on the activities of "Tsentr" and its members, and was selected by Komkov to be assassinated, although it is unclear whether or not this individual was killed. The records show that there was an attempt to invite him outside of his house and strike him with an axe, but Zayats never came out, and instead escaped through the back door.[142]

In June 1943 "Tsentr" was betrayed to the Germans, and many of the members were arrested.[143] Komkov and eight of his comrades attempted to escape north, but were encircled near the city of Mykolaiv, where the wounded leader of the underground cell was taken, then later tortured, and shot.[144] The tight control of the city by the occupational authorities and their collaborators, the lack of support of underground groups from Moscow and other large partisan bases, logistical and financial difficulties, and the lack of training and discipline by the personnel, greatly undermined the possibility of effective underground resistance within the city of Kherson. The effectiveness of the acts of sabotage and the rate of survival of its members would have been much greater if the group had an adequate training and support, like many of the partisan detachments and underground cells in northern Ukraine and Belarus'.

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[141] Ibid., 18.
[142] Ibid., 26.
[143] Ibid., 4.
[144] Ibid.

The heavy concentration of German military and paramilitary personnel, civil authorities and their auxiliaries in Kherson ensured the strict enforcement of the law, making it difficult for the urban population to resist the occupiers' rule, conduct pro-Soviet propaganda, and help those Germans deemed "undesirables." The majority of the population did not actively support either the Germans or the Soviets, but because of that they enjoyed no material benefits. But they also had a greater chance to avoid persecution by either regime. Those who belonged to ethnic, political, or armed minorities either benefited more than the majority or were severely disadvantaged. While the German collaborators and *Volksdeutsche* enjoyed decent treatment and material benefits from the occupational authorities, Jews, communists, prisoners of war and members of the underground were persecuted and had a lesser chance of survival than the pro-German elements, or the majority of the population who remained politically passive. An ability to blend into a crowd and remain undisturbed by the governing authorities was one of the key advantages of living in an urban center, unlike living in small communities in the countryside, where it was much more difficult to conceal one's past. However, surviving total war in villages had its own advantages, as is shown in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Surviving the German Occupation in the Countryside

Living conditions and day-to-day survival in the countryside varied from those in larger cities like Kherson and Mykolaiv. Some of the key differences in how people survived in the cities, as opposed to the villages of the region, were a result of the different methods of governance by locally appointed natives, the varying levels of control on settlements by the occupational authorities, the varying geographic factors, labor functions of local populations, and means for food production. Local officials appointed by the Germans oversaw the smaller territories with populations significantly smaller than in cities, and experienced less intervention from the occupying forces, resulting in the ability to craft local laws that to some extent varied from settlement to settlement. Villagers, mostly peasants, who worked at the collective farms managed by Germans, also produced their own food from private plots of land, and were allowed to own livestock, such as cows, goats, chickens, and other domestic animals. Because of the vast territories, the abundance of water sources, wooded areas and the weak presence of the German military and SS units, the countryside around the city of Kherson served as a favorable setting for partisan activity. While generally the settlements in the countryside lacked strategic importance and avoided serious destruction due to bombing, villages could be burned to the ground by Germans as an act of retribution for any alleged support of the partisans in the area. Data gathered through interviews and local history sources indicate some correlation between people's chances of survival in the countryside according to the size and location of their settlement. In this way those who lived in

larger towns experienced stricter German control and a heavier presence of the occupying forces than residents of smaller villages, while those living in villages struggled more with control imposed by the local authorities, than those living in remote farmsteads, which often amounted to one or several families living in wooded areas at least several kilometers away from the nearest village.

Illustration 6: View of a village in Kherson region.[1]

It would be incorrect to state that it was easier to survive in the countryside than in the city, as life under German occupation in settlements of the region entailed their own dangers. While smaller communities could protect their locals, they could just as easily betray people to authorities in power either due to a disagreement or for material gain. Peasants in the countryside were heavily exploited by the Germans who were in

[1] Photograph by the author, 2012.

dire need of food supplies, and because of the shortage of workers in the Reich, many young villagers were rounded up and shipped to Germany as forced labor.

PEASANTS

Many peasants who in the early 1930s were forced to join collective farms, and surrender all their livestock and farming equipment, greeted German soldiers with bread and salt, hoping that they would be able to return to family-run farms.[2] While in 1942 the occupational authorities introduced a few agricultural cooperatives, they largely maintained the collective farms, as they saw it as the most effective means of food procurement.[3] Workers on collective farms under German rule throughout the Reichskommissariat worked an average of fifty four hours per week, received between 200 and 750 grams of leftover grain, paid heavy taxes on their land, withstood harsh demands on their labor, and physical and emotional harassment by the new authorities. Therefore, by the time the Red Army returned, many peasants wholeheartedly welcomed the Soviet troops.[4]

Under certain circumstances peasants were allowed to own more land, as per the ordinance issued in August 1941 by the authorities of Mykolaiv region:

"Anyone who actively fought or fights against partisans, or Bolsheviks, will receive from a respective military unit a certificate of proof."[5]

Such certificates could later be exchanged for a parcel of land, 1,000 rubles, or foodstuffs.[6]

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[2] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 117.
[3] Ibid., 124.
[4] Ibid., 121-122.
[5] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 202.

Illustration 7: Sunflowers in Kherson countryside.[7]

Much of the grain and meat produced by agricultural cooperatives were shipped to Germany and Romania, and distributed to the German military, as the supply lines stretched across the long eastern front.[8] Peasants were required to meet the food production quota set by the German and the Romanian armies, and the most important tasks were sowing and harvesting. The Germans also frequently requisitioned food and cattle.[9] In March 1942 the general commissar of the Mykolaiv region issued an order that stated:

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[6] Ibid.
[7] Photograph by the author, 2012. Sunflowers were, and still are, one of the key crops cultivated by the peasants of the region.
[8] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 201.
[9] Ibid.

"All thrashed grain stored at *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes*, and all the sunflower, leguminous, and other seeds are to be confiscated. Any unlawful action will lead to the most severe punishment."[10]

Among all the other similar orders concerning the confiscation of food from peasants, there was one that required all those who owned cows to turn in between 100 and 350 liters of milk every month. Under such harsh, strict guidelines, peasants, and all those living in the countryside, soon began to doubt not only whether the German authorities would follow up on their initial promise to de-collectivize farming, but also whether they would be able to survive the occupation. As the war progressed and the German forces were encountering fiercer resistance from the Red Army, the occupational authorities demanded more food from peasants and requisitioned more livestock and foodstuffs. Such behavior by the Germans made those living in the countryside less likely to help Germans and more likely to help, or even join the local partisan bands, and actively sabotage food production.[11]

A unique set of circumstances in regards to survival formed at small farmsteads and secluded peasant domains, which usually consisted of one or several houses built in wooded areas several kilometers away from the nearest village. Valentina Kozarezova, a resident of one such farmstead, near the village of Mala Kardashynka, across the Dnieper from Kherson, recalled that hardly any news reached her during the war due to the secluded location of their home. Still, she remembers that they often turned the lights off and sat in the dark in the evenings, as they heard German planes flying above and bombs

[10] Ibid., 202.
[11] Ibid.

exploding nearby. Because a few houses were destroyed by bombings in Mala Kardashynka, forcing many residents to evacuate, some of the villagers moved into Kozarezova's farmstead for a short period of time, where they had to sleep on the floor as there was not enough space to house all those in need of a shelter. Those living in the farmstead were able to survive by eating dairy products, because they owned a cow. Kozarezova's father was serving in the Red Army and it was nearly impossible for her mother to take care of all of the farmstead's chores alone. Those families that moved in after the bombing of the village collectively helped to take care of the livestock, and in this way produced enough food to feed all the residents of the farmstead.

On one rare occasion, as the occupational troops were retreating, the farmstead was visited by some Romanian soldiers, who asked Kozarezova's mother to feed them. The troops did not harm anyone. They instead held children on their laps and said: "All of you are ours," then ate some eggs remarking: "*Jajki kaputt*," and later sang moving songs of the loved ones they missed: "And where is my mother? Pity, pity, pity…" Kozarezova thinks of Germans as of good people who were forced by Hitler to fight in the war.[12] Such thoughts could perhaps be the result of the fact that her family did not experience direct violence from the German troops, as they lived in a secluded area.

[12] Interview with Valentina P. Kozarezova, Kherson, May 24, 2012. "Jajki kaputt" was a common expression among the German soldiers and their allies. *Jajki* is a mix of Polish word *jajko* for an egg and a Ukrainian ending "i" that signifies plurality. *Kaputt* in German means broken, ruined, done for, among quite a few meanings.

PRISONERS OF WAR

Besides the three large prisoner of war camps within the city of Kherson, there were other compounds, scattered all throughout the region's towns and villages. Living conditions at these camps were even less suitable for prisoners than the camps located in the city. In the village of Velyki Kopani the campsite consisted of nothing more than a barbed wire fence. In the dead of winter, the sick, wounded, hungry, freezing, and poorly dressed prisoners of war struggled to withstand the cruelty of the elements and the brutality of the guards. The prison guards shot those inmates who lay down and threw their bodies over the fence. While the locals were not allowed to come near the fence, women and children threw food and clothes to the prisoners over the fence from a distance. At first Germans announced that if locals could recognize their family members, those prisoners would be released. Very few of the inmates who were "recognized" and let go were actually related to those who claimed to be their "family." More often than not locals either lied to the guards about their relation to a certain prisoner, or bribed the Ukrainian guards with vodka. At Velyki Kopani local women were able to rescue only twenty men in this way; not a significant number considering the hundreds imprisoned at that camp.[13]

A prisoner of war camp located in Beryslav used the local prison to house inmates, but it was just as overcrowded as the other prison camps in Kherson, and outdoor camps elsewhere in the region. One of the inmates, a Red Army soldier Vasiliy Reshetnikov, recalled that when he, along with many other captured Soviet troops were

[13] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 215.

moved into the camp, the four-story building was already overcrowded, so the newly arrived prisoners had to sleep on concrete stairways. The only luxury inmates had was a walk around the large prison ground, surrounded by the barbed wire fence with towers in each corner with machine gunners. Escaping from camps like this was dangerous not only for the prisoners who attempted it, but also for all other inmates. If anyone escaped, or at least tried to do so, at a lineup every tenth prisoner would be called out and shot, to prevent others from future attempts.[14]

FORCED LABOR – OSTARBEITER

Just as in the city of Kherson, the Third Reich, desperate to boost its war effort conducted voluntary and involuntary recruitment drives in the countryside. A staggering 2,406,895 Soviet citizens were used as forced labor throughout the war.[15] Many young people from villages of the region were sent to Germany via railroad and river transport to work difficult, menial jobs either for very little or no pay.[16] There were 1,465 people sent to Germany from Kalinins'k district, 1,793 from the city of Kakhovka, 1,996 from Chaplyns'kyi district, 1,856 from Kalanchak district, and many more from other districts of the region.[17] In order to avoid a trip to German labor camps, many young people frequently injured themselves with caustic soda, damaged skin with acidic solutions, injected kerosene under the skin, or attempted to get pneumonia by running lightly dressed during the cold winter months. Some young couples married fictitiously at ages

[14] Ibid., 218.
[15] Davies, *No Simple Victory*, 322.
[16] "Naddniprians'ka Pravda," *Zlochynstva Nimets'ko-Fashysts'kyh Zaharbnykiv*, 27.
[17] Ibid., 29, 31, 32, 35.

16 and 17, to avoid the fate of slave labor abroad, as the German occupational authorities did not send married couples to Germany.[18] However, as the time passed and Germans desperately needed an increase in their domestic production, the selection process was simplified, and many of those exempt before, were sent to Germany anyway.

Nevertheless the opinions concerning German recruitment varied, as was explained by Valentina Kozarezova, whom the local authorities offered to send to Germany to work in good conditions. She declined the offer and Germans did not force her to go. Kozarezova explained that because the village nearby was evacuated due to bombing and there was a shortage of labor in the area, the local authorities more or less limited their recruitments to work in Germany to voluntary. They did not force youth to go abroad.[19]

ETHNIC MINORITIES

Similarly to the situation with ethnic minorities and other so-called "undesirables" in Kherson, in the towns and villages of the region German special units looked for Jews, Gypsies, communists, partisans, and the mentally ill. They were on the look out for anyone who opposed the occupational authorities. There were several formerly Pale of Settlement in Kalinins'k district that suffered a particularly harsh fate from the SS units. In the village of Shalom-Aleichem, Germans shot 193 Jews and dumped the bodies into a deserted well. In Schterendorf there were 340 murdered, in Bobrovyi Kut 917 people were shot and thrown into a well, and 996 Jews were shot near the village of

[18] Ibid., 27.
[19] Interview with Valentina P. Kozarezova, Kherson, May 24, 2012.

Kalinins'ke.[20] Nearly 4,000 Jews, including women, children, and the elderly, were murdered throughout the villages of the district during the German occupation.[21] This high death toll in the countryside signifies that villages were no safer for Jews than such cities as Kherson and Mykolaiv.

POLITICALLY ALIGNED POPULATION

In the early months of the occupation residents of small towns and villages were hopeful that their standard of living would improve. But they were also wary of the policies offered and enforced by the new authorities, and a very small percentage of the rural population actively resisted the Germans and their collaborators. But most remained neutral.[22] Those who resisted could do so only passively because active resistance was too risky, as the German troops, the Ukrainian police, and the authorities appointed to oversee the occupied settlements firmly controlled the population and its activities. In addition, those who had been upset at Soviet rule did not miss an opportunity to get even with pro-Soviet supporters by denouncing them to Germans and their allies.

Resistance in villages and towns of the region consisted of spreading the news from Sovinformburo, sheltering Red Army soldiers, recon troops, partisans, escaped prisoners of war, Jews, communists, and those who attempted to dodge forced labor in Germany, and assisting in any way possible pro-Soviet supporters.[23] In the village of

[20] "Naddniprians'ka Pravda," *Zlochynstva Nimets'ko-Fashysts'kyh Zaharbnykiv*, 28.
[21] Ibid., 29.
[22] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 226.
[23] Ibid., 226-227.

Kalinindorf a local auxiliary policeman, Mikhal'tsevich, discovered that a Ukrainian family was sheltering a Jew. As a result, the Jew and the family were shot.[24]

Village elders were required to enforce laws set by the German government. However there was no one to stop the local authorities from abusing the law or demanding even more from the local population than the Germans required, or of abusing the population with even more brutality than the Nazis demonstrated. Unlike the larger cities, where one might not meet too many people on the street one knew, in most villages everyone knew each other and were aware of everybody's business. Such an environment produced jealousy for neighbors' material possessions, and those in authority, who had been repressed or dekulakized by the Soviets, frequently sought ways to get even with those who held pro-Soviet views or were connected to Soviet-sponsored organizations.

Rural authorities under German rule consisted of *starosta*, known under the Soviet regime as the village soviet chairman, a secretary, and sometimes assistants. *Starostas* had to conduct censuses with notes on the political views of the local citizens, enforce orders issued by the district chief, a *landwirt*, and transmit information from the German authorities to the villagers. Through *starosta's* records, Germans received information about the local communists, Jews, Red Army soldiers, and other groups they deemed antagonistic.[25] Similarly, those with a family history of "repression" by the Soviet regime were perceived as reliable elements, and therefore were eligible for better

[24] Ibid., 238.
[25] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 118.

jobs and certain material benefits. In the village of Kozats'ke of Beryslav district a former *kulak*, repressed by the Soviet authorities, Os'menko, became a *starosta* during the occupation, and together with his deputy, Sidenko, turned in communists and composed a list of Soviet activists, which was passed to the commandant's office. Os'menko confiscated foodstuffs and cattle from the villagers, targeting the families of Red Army troops first. Later, he set up a pig farm that surrendered all the food produced there to the German troops. Because he enforced strict rules on workdays and the food requisition quota, villagers were fined, arrested and tortured for disobeying arbitrary local laws.[26]

Valentina Kozarezova recalls being abused by the local auxiliary policeman. As she was herding her family's only cow in a hayfield, an area with an abundance of food for cattle, but where the local authorities prohibited herding, a *schutzmann* appeared and began whipping Kozarezova across legs, he then took the cow and left.[27] Thinking that her father will kill her, the girl came home crying. Fortunately her father was able to negotiate with the local authorities and retrieve the cow. At the end of the war the policeman hung himself. Kozarezova suspects that he committed suicide because he was involved in a great deal of crime under the Nazi rule, but did not want to accept responsibility for his actions and be punished by the Soviet authorities.[28]

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[26] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 241.
[27] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 42. *Schutzmann* was a German term that referred to the non-German members of the Order Police.
[28] Interview with Valentina P. Kozarezova, Kherson, May 24, 2012.

Not all *starostas* ruled in the same fashion and not all the collaborationists were equally abusive during the occupation. A former Red Army soldier, Mikhail Poltavchenko, escaped German captivity and returned to his village, Mylove, of Beryslav district, where he was forced to become an auxiliary policeman. As he returned home, Germans already occupied the area, and when all the villagers were driven onto the street, someone volunteered Poltavchenko to become a local policeman. It was dangerous to refuse such order, because one could be shot as a suspect in an anti-German activity, and Mikhail accepted the fate of an involuntary collaborationist. Villagers remember him as a decent man who did not oppress people, but rather warned them about food requisition drives and forced labor recruitments. He escaped the fate of a collaborationist upon the return of the Soviets, as many villagers vouched for him being an involuntary policeman. But Poltavchenko was drafted into the ranks of the Red Army and was later sentenced to 25 years at Mordovia labor camp, because in the army there was no one to prove he served in the ranks of the German police involuntarily.[29] Whether collaboration was voluntary or forced, in the eyes of the Soviet authorities, helping the enemy in any way was considered a betrayal of the motherland. Those who survived the occupation by assisting the invading forces were later punished by the returning Soviet regime.

ARMED FACTIONS

The flat and predominantly treeless steppes of the southern Ukraine did not allow for much partisan activity. Instead there existed smaller partisan detachments and underground groups of Soviet saboteurs who systematically undermined the German war

[29] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 242.

effort in Kherson region.[30] It was exceptionally difficult to survive for the Soviet guerrillas, as they lived in some of the most extreme conditions with hardly any support from the Soviet government, usually dwelling in the wilderness with nothing but natural resources available. Unlike civilians, these underground fighters engaged in paramilitary acts of sabotage by blowing up important for Germans structures and by conducting ideological warfare by spreading pro-Soviet leaflets around rural settlements and the cities of Kherson and Mykolaiv.[31]

The constant threat of retaliation by the occupational authorities and their collaborators always persisted with the Soviet partisans. However the amount of support by the Soviet government and local populations changed in the course of the war. Joseph Stalin, on July 3, 1941, called for resistance against the enemy and guerrilla warfare in all regions of the occupied territory. However the government failed to provide the necessary assistance to the partisan detachments at this stage of the conflict, virtually leaving the pro-Soviet underground to its own fate.[32] Due to the military strength of the German forces in the early months of the occupation, a large portion of the civilian population was inclined to stay away from open opposition to the newly established regime.[33] In January 1942, as the Germans held a firm grip on the region, there were still cases like the one of Mikhail Medvedev, who survived a German firing squad, crawled wounded to his brother's house, and was promptly denounced to the SD by his relative;

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30 Kenneth Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas: Soviet Partisans in World War II* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 28.
31 Goloborod'ko, et al. Plamia nad Step'yu, 7.
32 Slepyan, Stalin's guerillas, 15-16.
33 Ibid., 32.

Medvedev committed suicide before being captured.[34] Brutal as it was, such instances show just how stressed the civilian population of the region was, caught as they were between the two demanding forces: the German occupational authorities and the Soviet guerrillas. Both of these forces put a great strain on civilians. Each demanded that civilians work for one against the other. Both severely punishing those who refused to cooperate.

Soviet partisans, underground guerrillas, and saboteurs lived in the most severe conditions and every day brought new challenges. Partisan detachments that operated in the countryside usually situated their hideouts in the wilderness, the lightly wooded areas of the steppes, or the sand dunes and in the Dnieper marshes.[35] Because of lack of adequate military training, provisional and military support from Moscow, and lack of popular support in the early months of the occupation, Kenneth Slepyan estimated that only 7% of all detachments formed throughout the Ukrainian steppes survived till the spring of 1942.[36]

Generally, partisans in the countryside faced somewhat different challenges than the underground groups that operated throughout Kherson. In the city, which was not densely populated, the members of the underground constantly sought to find covert apartments to live in and operate from, whereas the partisans in the countryside had to create shelters in the wilderness and establish relationships with the local population, some of whom were willing to assist, at least partially, in pro-Soviet activities and

[34] Melnyk, "Behind the Frontlines," 59-60.
[35] Goloborod'ko, et al. *Plamia nad Step'yu*, 96.
[36] Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas*, 28.

provide supplies and food for the guerrillas. The city also had a greater concentration of German troops and auxiliary police forces than the towns and villages, making it difficult for the members of the underground to operate undetected there and maintain the secrecy of apartments they used for their activities. However, if Germans suspected that partisans pose a significant threat to their rule, they did not hesitate to send SS detachments, the local police, and even military troops to the areas of known guerrilla activities. Such raids often ended with the total annihilation of partisan bands and sometimes with the beating and killing of locals who were thought to support the pro-Soviet fighters. Occasionally entire villages were burned as a lesson to other villages.

Illustration 8: Landscape of Kherson region.[37]

[37] Photograph by the author, 2012. Such wooded areas were an ideal hideout for partisan groups.

In the early months of the war there were small resistance groups in most districts of the region, usually numbering between ten and fifty guerrillas.[38] Some of the key objectives of the countryside resistance groups were to spread the "Sovinformburo" news, accounts from the front, and Soviet propaganda, collect weapons and ammunition for active resistance against the Germans and the auxiliary police, conduct acts of sabotage, help prisoners of war to escape and hide, and stage attacks on local police stations and German soldiers en route to the front.[39]

The early months of the German occupation proved to be the most dangerous period for partisan activity. In the fall of 1941 the Germans constituted a strong military force and appealed to the inhabitants of the countryside by denouncing the cruelties of the Soviet policies towards the peasants, promising de-collectivization, and allowing the practice of the local religion.[40] Some peasants, who were labeled *kulaks* under the Soviet authorities and had lost their property, land, and cattle to the collective farms, betrayed Soviet partisans to the Germans and the local police. Such cases occurred even later. In May of 1942, a resident from the village of Nova Zbur'ivka turned in a group of *chekist* operatives who were parachuted into the area to establish a connection with the local partisans in order to intensify the struggle against the Germans.[41] Operating covertly in small villages, where all residents were aware of each other's activities was difficult, because those who disagreed with the Soviet system and harbored animosity towards its

[38] Bizer, et al, eds. *Khersonskaya Oblast' v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 158-164.
[39] Ibid., 151.
[40] Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building*, 37.
[41] Bizer, et al, eds. *Khersonskaya Oblast' v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 162.

representatives could easily expose any pro-Soviet elements to the Germans. In Addition many partisan detachments were betrayed from within by their own members; the reasons behind such betrayals are often unclear.[42]

The lack of material support for guerrilla warfare from Moscow in the early period of the occupation jeopardized the progress of the Soviet war effort behind the enemy lines. However, even in the months preceding the return of the Red Army, support was not available to all resistance groups in some of the territory of the region. Such problems are evident by the struggle of the "Tsentr" in March 1943 to obtain a spare battery for their portable radio set, in order to reestablish a connection with the Soviet military.[43] At the same time in the village of Anan'ivka there existed a small partisan detachment, organized by the Soviet paratroopers, with the goal of maintaining radio communication with the Red Army headquarters and providing valuable intelligence information about activities behind the enemy lines.[44] After a while connection with the headquarters was lost, so another paratrooper was sent into the area with spare radios and batteries.[45] Some of the reasons why there were such differences in support of the partisan detachments in rural areas and the underground groups in the city were the ease of infiltration of the countryside by the Soviet scouting units and the strategic necessity of support from the rural dwellers. In the Heniches'k area there was an underground group

[42] Ibid., 159.
[43] Baraniuk, *Pidpil'na Organizatsiya "Tsentr,"* 6, 13, 27.
[44] Bizer et al, eds. *Khersonskaya Oblast' v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 158.
[45] Ibid., 159.

that among its various functions served as a guide for the Soviet intelligence scouts during the forcing of the Syvash Bay, west of the Sea of Azov.[46]

Although some rural dwellers initially showed support for German rule, hoping for de-collectivization, such support soon withered due to the unwillingness of the German authorities to institute private farming and because of the brutal treatment of the local population by the occupational forces and their auxiliaries. Still, due to their access to private plots of land, the rural population produced enough food to ensure their survival. Unlike the citizens of Kherson who experienced a number of difficulties in everyday life from the tight control of the German authorities, people living in the countryside suffered at hands of collaborators among their fellow villagers. Due to the thin presence of German troops in rural areas and favorable geographic factors, partisan activity existed in the countryside. This pro-Soviet resistance did, however, endanger villages because it provoked the Germans to exact retribution upon the rural population. As the Red Army returned to the left bank of the Dnieper in 1943, the countryside became a safe haven for the urban population of Kherson, when the Germans forcibly evacuated the city in staggering numbers.

[46] Ibid., 160.

Chapter 4: Surviving the German Withdrawal

Four months prior to the return of the Red Army the way of life under the German occupation, to which the population grew to be more or less accustomed, began to change.[1] In early 1943 the Soviet forces defeated the German Sixth Army in the Battle of Stalingrad and initiated their own offensive that was focused on recapturing the occupied territories, including Ukraine.[2] By October 24, 1943, Malinovsky's 3rd and Tolbukhin's 4th Ukrainian Fronts controlled the eastern bank of Dnieper's southern bend, from Dnipropetrovs'k to Crimea, forcing the German Sixth Army to fall back on the heavily fortified Nikopol' bridgehead, which was skillfully designed to utilize the location of the river and the marshes beside it.[3] Because it took nearly six months for the Red Army to recapture the right bank of the Kherson region, the German authorities were able to evacuate the city's population, all valuables, and implement Himmler's scorched-earth policy.[4] This period of the war was perhaps the most chaotic for local civilians, as they had to find a way to survive the rough transitional period. On the one hand, the people had to endure the open warfare, which did not bypass Kherson on the Red Army's way back, and on the other, to adjust from living under Nazi occupation to living under Soviet rule.

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[1] Bizer, et al, eds. *Khersonskaya Oblast' v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 204.
[2] Bellamy, *Absolute War*, 550.
[3] John Erickson, *The Road to Berlin: Stalin's War with Germany, Volume Two* (London, GB: Cassell Military Paperbacks, 2008), 139.
[4] Susorov, V. D. *Vyzvolennia Khersonshchyny vid Nimets'ko-Fashysts'kyh Zaharbnykiv 1943 – 1944* (Kherson: PKF "Servis-Tsentr," 1997), 11.

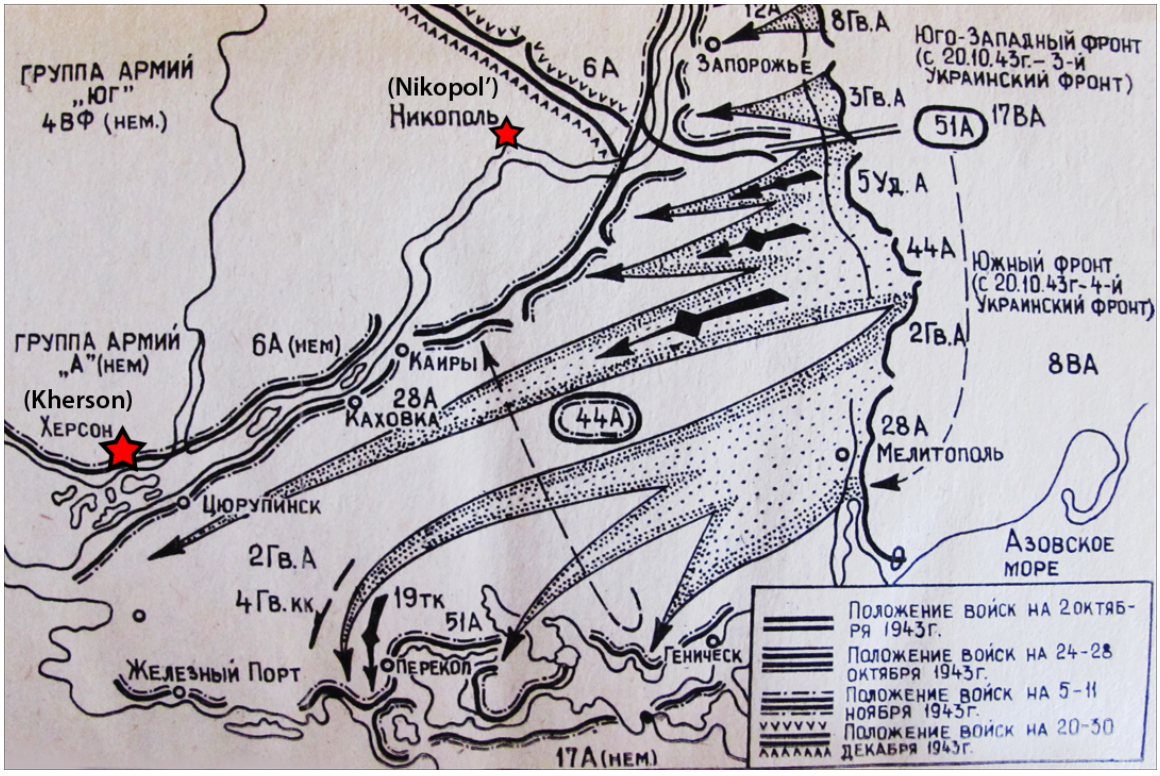

Figure 3: Schematics of the attacks of the Red Army in order to capture the left bank of the Dnieper in order to dig in for winter prior to an offensive on Kherson.[5]

With the Red Army knocking at their door, in the late fall of 1943, the German authorities posted warnings throughout the city: "It is forbidden to appear on the street from three o'clock in the afternoon until five o'clock in the morning. Those found outside their homes will be tried."[6] At first, Germans began clearing the shoreline of the Dnieper and forcing the population to move further into the city, as far from the river as possible.[7] Soon the occupational authorities started a full-fledged evacuation of the city, as the Red Army continued to bring reinforcements to the left bank of the Dnieper. On October 31 a

[5] Goloborod'ko, et al, eds. *Plamia nad Step'yu*, 234. This map is modified with the addition of English transliterations of Kherson and Nikopol', and markers for these locations.
[6] Bizer, et al, eds. *Khersonskaya Oblast' v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 204.
[7] Interview with Valentina Sergeevna Moiseenko, Kherson, July 3, 2012.

new order has been posted by Germans: "All male members of the population must abandon the city in a matter of three days – 1, 2, 3 of November, 1943." Those who would disobey this order were to be arrested and sent to German labor camps, or shot.[8] Through the silent streets of Kherson there appeared a "car with a pipe," as the witnesses called it, which announced: "All residents of this street are ordered to immediately leave their homes. Everyone. Now. Or be shot." People were forced to hastily leave the city without their possessions.[9] Although the same evacuation measures pertained to all residents of Kherson, as Germans sought to clear the entire city before the arrival of the Soviets, a resident of the outskirt district of Mel'nytsi, Vitaliy Zakharov, remembers that Germans did not force anyone from their homes who lived on the edge of the city.[10] Not everyone obeyed the German orders. Some of the residents, without a clear understanding of the conduct of warfare, unaware that the Red Army needed to rest and regroup, after seeing flairs and Soviet planes bombing one of the bridges Germans were crossing, falsely assumed a quick takeover of the city by the Red Army. They did not prepare appropriately for the final period of the occupation.[11]

There were several options for the city dwellers to choose from in order to survive the military struggle between the Germans and Soviets: flee westward, to Mykolaiv and other cities, as Germans directed them to do, escape to the countryside, attempt to cross

[8] Vadon, "Okkupatsiya Khersona, 1941 – 1944," 5.
[9] Bizer, et al, eds. *Khersonskaya Oblast' v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 204.
[10] Vadon, "Okkupatsiya Khersona, 1941 – 1944," 5, and Interview with Vitaliy Eliozarovich Zakharov, Kherson, June 11, 2012.
[11] Interview with Mikhail Fyodorovich Yagnenko, Kherson, June 6, 2012.

the Dnieper river to meet the Red Army, or hide and wait for the Soviets to retake the city. Each of these choices carried its risks and benefits.

FLEEING WESTWARD

Many of those who decided to obey the German order and leave the city headed westward, primarily towards Mykolaiv, without a clear understanding of how they would survive in an unfamiliar city. Svetlana Chernyak remembers that when Germans threatened to kill those staying in Kherson, her mother loaded on a cart whatever meager possessions their family owned and headed to the railroad station. At that time there were already gunshots heard in the city, as well as exploding bombs from air raids. However trains still ran to Mykolaiv. As a little girl, Chernyak wandered around the platform and did not notice how she wandered a long way from the rest of her family. Suddenly, there was a loud whistle, and a bomb exploded just a few feet away from where she was standing. The girl was thrown to the ground and shell-shocked, but received no bodily injuries. She was able to stand to her feet and return to her family, but she could not hear for some time. As their family arrived to Mykolaiv, Chernyak's mother found relatives in the city and was able to find housing for the family. Unfortunately, soon the relatives asked the family to leave, because they did not have any money to pay for their stay. While Chernyak's mother aimlessly wandered the streets of an unfamiliar city, a woman, who as it became known later was a Christian and attended one of the local churches, saw her crying and offered to take the family in, until Kherson was freed of Germans.[12]

[12] Interview with Svetlana Fillipovna Chernyak, Kherson, May 30, 2012.

Illustration 9: A view of the Kherson railway station today.[13]

In some instances civilians were driven westward by the German troops in stages. At each stage people would be locked up in camps before continuing their journey. When there was not enough living space in camps, the people who would not fit into the crammed space were left to try and find living space in any village or town nearby. Khersonians who had relatives in the countryside headed there, seeking safety and shelter.[14] On the one hand it was safer to leave the occupied city that would remain a frontline for four more months, under the constant threat of major Soviet offensive. On the other hand, those residents who headed towards unfamiliar cities and villages with the hope of survival, without food, money, and valuables to trade, or to pay for their stay, exposed themselves to a variety of dangers associated with an unplanned travel.

[13] Photograph by the author, 2012.
[14] Bizer, et al, eds. *Khersonskaya Oblast' v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 205.

FLEEING TO THE COUNTRYSIDE

Surviving in the countryside during the Soviet offensive on the city of Kherson carried its own risks. Not all settlements of the region were equally dangerous, or safe in the winter of 1943 – 1944. People who lived in villages and towns near the frontline, in the vicinity of German fortifications, were hurt the most during the period of transition from the Wehrmacht to the Red Army. Such was the case with the residents of Velyka Lepetykha, whom Germans drove out of the village in late October 1943. They hung 17 locals for their refusal to leave.[15] During the same time, when the villagers of Knyaze-Hryhorivka were cleared out by the Germans, they headed to Velyka Lepetykha in order to cross the marshes and reach Vysokopillya. On the way there, the column of women, children, and the elderly, along with their meager possessions and cattle, were bombed by the Luftwaffe, leaving many wounded.[16] Villagers from Sadove were evacuated to a farmstead Voronyn, where they were crammed into a one large house. Germans were going to burn the house with all the villagers in it, however an old man overheard what the Germans were planning, and everyone in the house escaped while the occupiers partied that night.[17]

Not all those evacuated in the countryside were placed in a shelter. In Ivanivka there were 1,350 evacuees, including women and children, who camped outside in bad

[15] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 284.
[16] Ibid., 285.
[17] Ibid.

weather conditions.[18] About 5,400 villagers from the area were driven out of their homes and abandoned by the Germans.[19]

In such difficult conditions, Valentina Moiseenko's family gathered their possessions and left Kherson one night to travel to the village of Zelenivka, located immediately to the north of the city. The family found shelter at the house of a villager who, as they discovered later, was the head of a three-man partisan group. While the men hid in a field in haystacks most of the time, Valentina, her mother, and the wife and child of one of the partisans lived in the house. As they were waiting for the Red Army to return, Valentina and her mother cooked and delivered food to these partisans. Women went to the field every day, under the pretext of gathering dried grass for burning, and brought with them a basket of food and left it near a particular haystack. In this way Moiseenko's family and the partisans with their relatives survived until the Soviet soldiers arrived.[20]

[18] Ibid., 286.
[19] Ibid., 284.
[20] Interview with Valentina Sergeevna Moiseenko, Kherson, July 3, 2012.

ESCAPING TO THE LEFT BANK OF THE DNIEPER

Although small in number, some people tried to swim across the Dnieper to the left bank, "that bank," which was already controlled by the Red Army.[21]

Illustration 10: The Dnieper River in the city of Kherson.[22]

Not everyone who tried to cross the river could swim well enough to make it. In addition, the right bank was guarded by Germans and the local police. Therefore it was not easy to escape from the besieged city by swimming across the river.[23] Some of those unable to swim across hid in marshes along the Dnieper, as was the case with an old man named Zalevsky and his friends. Unfortunately for this group of elderly men, the Germans discovered them and unleashed their dogs in pursuit of them. The struggle

[21] Bizer, et al, eds. *Khersonskaya Oblast' v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 205.
[22] Photograph by the author, 2012.
[23] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 284.

ended with blood all over that part of the marshes, as the dogs tore the elderly men to shreds.[24]

Illustration 11: Marshes along the Dnieper coastline in the city of Kherson.[25]

While it was extremely dangerous to cross the Dnieper to the other side and join with the Soviet forces, or even to hide in the marshes in the vicinity of the river, if successful the reward would pay off the risk. Escaping to the left bank would mean reaching for safety, away from Germans, avoiding forced migration westward to unknown cities and villages, and potential danger of being caught in the crossfire of the Soviet advance. Even when civilians successfully reached the left bank, they had nowhere to go, and were forced to seek food and shelter, sometimes for up to four months, while waiting for the Soviet troops to recapture the city. These escapees were

[24] Bizer, et al, eds. *Khersonskaya Oblast' v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 205.
[25] Photograph by the author, 2012.

tormented by the elements and hunger, lived in abandoned cellars, horse stalls, and slept in haystacks.[26]

Among those who swam across the Dnieper were a few Red Army soldiers who managed to hide in the city throughout the period of occupation, but then decided to rejoin the Soviet military once the news of the return of the Red Army reached them. Valeriy Pavlenko recalls that his father was one such man, who during the German advance in 1941, barely escaped capture and fled to Kherson, where his relatives hid him. Along with others, who narrowly escaped becoming prisoners of war, he swam across the river, where he was immediately searched by the Red Army soldiers upon arrival on the opposite bank. After examining his identification papers, Pavlenko's father was immediately reinstated into the Red Army with the rank he had before the German occupation. While he was torn from his family by the war, afterwards he was able to find his wife eventually and send her a certificate that granted her the husband's pension.[27]

Valeriy Pavlenko said that he knew about the strict policies of the Red Army concerning deserting and being taken a prisoner of war, and added that he had own theory as to why his father was reinstated in the Soviet military, rather than shot as a traitor of the motherland. His father served as a border guard, and after the invasion he and other Red Army soldiers were able to hold back Romanian troops with machine guns for twelve days. The border guards saw other Red Army units around them being encircled, due to the signal rockets, but began to retreat only after they received an official order

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[26] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 285.
[27] Interview with Valeriy Vladimirovich Pavlenko, Kherson, May 22, 2012.

from a scout. As his unit began to retreat, the Luftwaffe bombed the group, and the wounded man, walked through forests at night from Bukovyna to Kherson, where his relatives helped him to find shelter. The father was lucky he kept the documents with the order of retreat and could show it to the Soviet troops upon their meeting on the left bank of Dnieper. The fact of staying put and organized saved this man his honor and his life, allowing him to be a provider for the family.[28]

HIDING IN THE CITY

There were locals who were born and raised in the city of Kherson and did not feel inclined to go elsewhere, or perhaps they had no place to go, and no interest to try their luck by traveling to an unfamiliar place in order to survive. Upon the initial call for the male population to leave the city, some men decided to wall up in their dwellings, and only their wives knew where they hid. However, if a wife was caught disobeying the German orders to abandon Kherson, those in the hideout would perish without the food and water that had been supplied by their wives.[29] A youngster, Leonid Vinnichenko, hid with eight of his friends in an abandoned cellar for four months, and the only reason they survived was due to his sister who brought them food.[30] The German police did everything they could to prevent civilians from staying in the city in order to prevent a possible insurrection. They smoked people out of cellars and other hideouts, burned the houses of those who refused to leave, and shot those who disobeyed their orders.[31]

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[28] Ibid.
[29] Bizer, et al, eds. *Khersonskaya Oblast' v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 205.
[30] Susorov, *Khersonshchina v Period Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 283.
[31] Ibid., 284.

Indeed, it was very risky to attempt to sit for four months in the hideout, waiting for the Soviet troops to knock the Germans out of the city. While there were isolated cases of success, the extremely low number of civilians left in Kherson upon the arrival of the Red Army indicates general failure of such undertakings.

A detailed and rather compelling account of survival in hiding is told by Mikhail Yagnenko and Ol'ga Malinovskaya, a brother and a sister, who hid in two underground cellars with their brother Aleksandr and their mother, Natalia Yagnenko, as the occupational authorities announced a forced evacuation of the city's population. As the Germans compelled all men of the city to head to prisoner of war camps, the family decided to hide Mikhail and Aleksandr in one of the cellars in the yard. Mikhail recalls that they called an uncle and prepared all the supplies and foods for the hideout in one night. They slaughtered a goat, the rabbits, and the chickens they had raised throughout the months of occupation and roasted all the meat. They also managed to somehow steal two bags of macaroni from the "Voikov" factory, and brought many pumpkins into the cellar from the fields nearby. The mother made sure that their valuables: a large mirror from the wardrobe, an edition of *Brockhaus Encyclopedia* in twenty volumes, and a "Singer" sowing machine would also be placed in the cellar with the boys. Mikhail and Aleksandr installed a pipe for breathing, and built bellows for pumping air, which they learned to make at a technical school where they studied throughout the period of occupation. Before the mother and the sister shut the passageway into the boys' cellar and masked it with dirt, the family dug out another cellar across the yard, in case the mother and Ol'ga would need to hide as well.

Illustration 12: Location of Mikhail and Aleksandr's cellar.[32]

Altogether Mikhail and Aleksandr would spend nearly three months underground, surviving in rather harsh conditions. At first their mother came to the cellar every night and lowered them a bottle with some soup through the pipe for breathing, however when the authorities announced a complete evacuation of their side of the street, Mikhail's mother and sister were forced to also enter their hideout, so the food supply for the boys was eventually interrupted. Mikhail recalls that when their mother stopped bringing them food, their own supply of meat, macaroni, pumpkins, and water began decreasing fast, so most of the time he and his brother were hungry and thirsty. When they woke up every morning it was hard to breathe, and when they struck a match, it would not light up

[32] Photograph by Tetyana Ray, 2011.

because there was insufficient oxygen. Only after they pumped up some fresh air with bellows, could they breathe freely and light the lantern.

Illustration 13: Location of Ol'ga and her mother's cellar.[33]

At first Ol'ga's aunt, who lived across the street and whose area was not evacuated yet, was able to bring them food and leave inside the outdoor stove during the day, so that the mother would climb out and take it into the cellar at night. However, as the occupational authorities cleared out that district of the city in its entirety, soon this additional supply of food ceased as well. Malinovskaya recollects the hardships they have experienced throughout the time they spent underground:

"We washed our hands and faces with the slimy liquid from inside the rotten pumpkins in order to preserve water for drinking. If we needed to use a bathroom, we would dig a hole in the floor of the cellar, go about our business, and cover it back with

[33] Photograph by Tetyana Ray, 2011.

the dirt. We were forced to lie down or sit most of the time, but if we wanted, we could stand up in the shaft of the cellar."

Illustration 14: The Yagnenko house in Kherson, right after the war.[34]

To make matters worse for the family, several of the retreating German soldiers moved into the house with their horses and a trained dog. The family in their hideouts could clearly hear the dog sniffing and digging right above their heads, so they realized that they might be discovered by the soldiers at any moment. The residents of both cellars did not communicate with each other, did not knock or address each other in any other way, because of their fear of being discovered. One day Ol'ga and her mother heard two

[34] Photograph from Yagnenko family archive. This photograph was taken in either the late 1940s, or the early 1950s, and shows the house as it looked in 1944. The house was still intact in 2013. It was built at the end of the 19th century from clay and reeds found about a kilometer away near the Dnieper.

gunshots and voices that said in German: “In the head.” The mother thought surely the Germans found and shot both of her sons. She cautiously climbed outside at night and saw two dead cats, as she later found out Germans were shooting stray animals in the city. Soon, however, someone slowly started throwing dirt into the pipe that provided a flow of fresh air into the mother and daughter’s cellar, and eventually it became hard to breathe. Ol’ga remembers telling her mother: “I am tired of breathing.” Both understood that the Germans would probably discover them because of the dog. Mikhail remarked that he was surprised the soldiers did not toss a grenade into the cellar, and added that the Germans were probably curious to see who was hiding there, and wanted to smoke them out slowly.

Natalia understood that they would need to get out of their shelters, otherwise they might suffocate to death. She noticed that the troops only returned at night, and that it was quiet throughout the day, so risking her life, she crawled onto the surface one day, heard children’s voices in the neighboring yard, and immediately headed towards them to ask about the situation in the city. The children said that their mothers worked for Germans in the company building, and took Natalia Yagnenko there. While there were no German officials present, there was a translator in the building, a Ukrainian woman, whom the mother begged to vouch for her and her family, and in order to make sure the translator would really help, she gave the woman some of the valuables she was able to save: a new dress, a fur hat, a suit, and other clothing.

Sometime later, Natalia was forced to show the Germans her sons’ hideout in the yard, and they extracted the two brothers from there. Aleksandr climbed out first, holding

a violin in his hand, and the soldiers immediately noted: "Violin… Tchaikovsky…" Mikhail thinks that the Germans wanted to hear some music and instead of shooting them on the spot, sent them to the battalion headquarters. As the family entered the headquarters compound, many of the locals who worked there for the Germans looked at them as though all of the family members were doomed. The mother suggested to her children they might want to throw themselves off the three-story building nearby because of the fear of being tortured and killed by the Nazis. But her two sons sensed that Germans were not going to kill them and talked their mother out of committing a suicide.

The two boys were beaten at first and later the entire family faced a panel of German officers who wanted to know why they were disobeying the law and hiding. As Natalia had studied German in pre-revolutionary Russia, she was able to explain to these men that her husband was murdered by the Bolsheviks in 1938, and that she and her children were not partisans, but residents of the city who were afraid to leave. The German officers were convinced the woman was telling the truth after Aleksandr played folk and classical Romanian and German songs, including a piece from "Faust," and the entire family sang "Lorelei" in German. Natalia had taught her children these songs during the occupation, perhaps for a situation just like this. The officers enjoyed the performance so much they even asked Aleksandr to play "Katyusha," which he gladly played. Members of the family were able to find a common ground with the German troops. They showed respect and understanding for their culture, and through that impacted the decision of the officers. It could be argued that in this case, cultural, linguistic, and musical literacies, made the difference between life and death.

Ol'ga remembers that after spending such a long time underground, in an uncomfortable position, her legs were hurting, so when her mother explained that to a German officer, he laconically replied: "To the doctor." When he saw Ol'ga was wearing her mother's high-heeled shoes, he pointed at those and ordered her to immediately remove them. In the hospital a German doctor treated Ol'ga humanely and was able to cure the pain in her legs. Later a German officer, one Oberleutnant Grunnet, held Ol'ga on his lap brushed her hair and repeated: "Little Ol'ga," and gave her candy.[35]

After the German officers understood that the family members were not partisans, but civilians, they provided work and housing for them at the headquarters. Mikhail and Aleksandr were forced to live separately from each other. If one of them escaped, the Germans vouched to kill the other brother. Both worked menial jobs; for example they built a bunker and cared for horses. Natalia Yagnenko and Ol'ga received a large room, and also performed a range of menial jobs, including cooking and washing dishes in the kitchen, and washing and sowing soldiers' clothes. The family remained at the headquarters until the Germans decided to fully retreat from Kherson.

Mikhail thinks that what made the greatest difference in their survival was that they were sent to the military headquarters and not to the Gestapo. While the family was able to convince the soldiers of the regular army that they were not spies or partisans, they most likely would have been unable to do so with the Gestapo staff. While the majority of the German soldiers were exhausted and upset with the developments at the

[35] In early 1944, Ol'ga was 11 years old, Mikhail was 17 years old, Aleksandr was 18 years old, and their mother Natalia was 43 years old.

front, Mikhail and Ol'ga's family were lucky to encounter officers who treated them in a humane way, even though they were technically considered enemies who broke the law.[36]

While the German troops had swiftly entered Kherson in 1941, facing little resistance from the Red Army and causing minimal deaths and devastation to the city's property, the period of withdrawal lasted for four months and caused tens of thousands of people to be displaced and much of the municipal property to be destroyed. The Germans were clearing out the city and the countryside to prevent a possible uprising by the locals. As a result, residents responded to the demands of the occupational authorities to vacate their premises in different ways, all of which were risky. This period of instability in the region also influenced people's fate in various ways. While some benefitted from their actions and alliances with the pro-Soviet elements during the occupation upon the return of Soviet rule, others were prosecuted by the returning Red Army and the NKVD due to their collaboration with the Germans, as is discussed in the following chapter.

[36] Interview with Mikhail Fyodorovich Yagnenko, Kherson, June 6, 2012, and Ol'ga Fyodorovna Malinovskaya (Yagnenko), Kherson, June 25, 2012.

Chapter 5: Surviving the Return of the Soviet Regime

On February 8, 1944 the Red Army troops overran the southern and south-eastern parts of Velyka Lepetykha, and with that annihilated the Nikopol' bridgehead.[1] The last German fortifications in the area were cleared, allowing the Soviet troops to advance on Kherson.

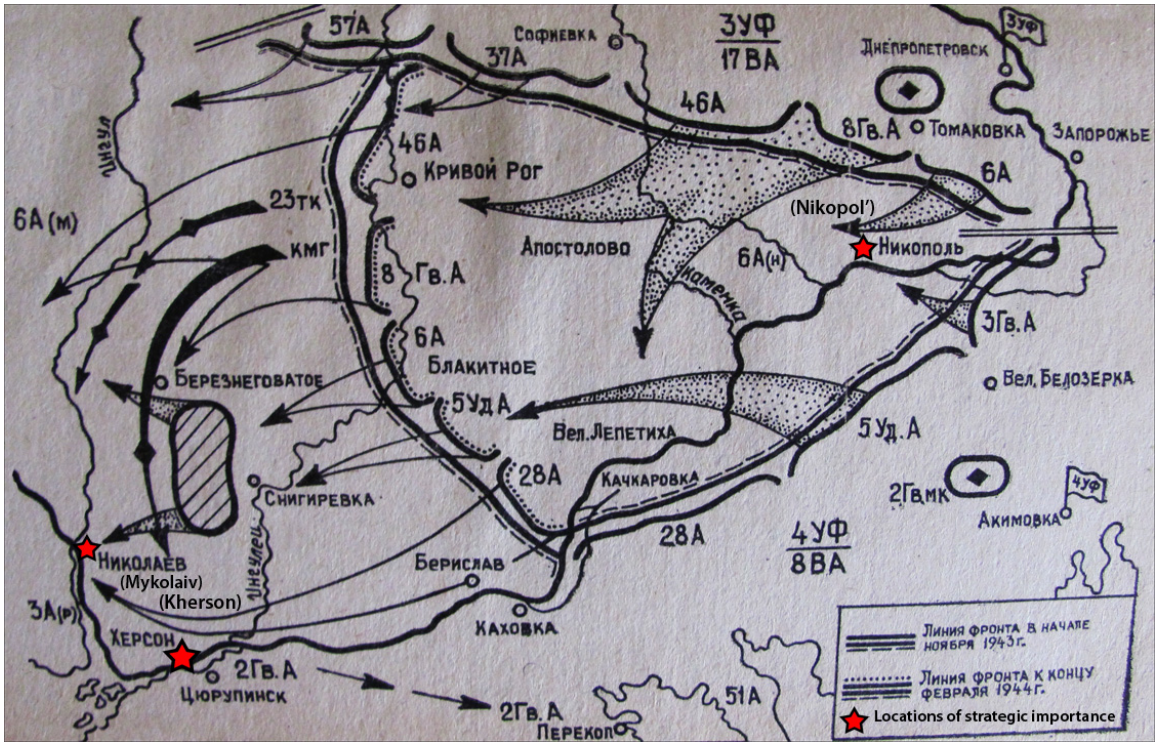

Figure 4: Schematics of the attacks of the Red Army in order to capture the right bank of the Dnieper in the Kherson region.[2]

[1] Bizer, et al, eds. *Khersonskaya Oblast' v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 189.

[2] Goloborod'ko, et al, eds. *Plamia nad Step'yu*, 235. This map is modified with the addition of the English transliterations of Kherson, Mykolaiv and Nikopol', and markers for these locations.

Finally, on March 13, 1944 Kherson was recaptured from the Germans, and the Soviet authorities, as well as the displaced residents, started pouring into an empty, destroyed city.[3]

Illustration 15: A memorial dedicated to Soviet soldiers who liberated Kherson.[4]

The Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Kherson Soviet of Worker's Deputies, who was sent to the city right after its recapture by the Soviets, later recalled:

"We drove through the streets of a dead city, as it seemed, engulfed in flames – the printing house, the clothing factory, the shoe factory, and many houses were still burning. The streets were littered with the debris of the buildings, shattered glass, torn up pieces of various documents, broken furniture, and the wires of the destroyed power lines and other lines of communication.

[3] Bizer, et al, eds. *Khersonskaya Oblast' v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 191.

[4] Photograph by the author, 2012. The plaque attached to the memorial reads: "To the valorous Soviet warriors who liberated the city of Kherson on March 13, 1944." The weapon pictured is a Soviet 122mm Howitzer.

And there were no people. As it became known later, on the day of the city's liberation, there were only fifty people there. It is in a city that before the war was populated by nearly a hundred thousand residents."[5]

Illustration 16: A memorial dedicated to the Soviet liberation of Kherson.[6]

It is unknown who gathered the statistical data on the population who were there upon the return of the Soviet authorities, and whether it is reliable. It is possible that many of those hiding did not emerge at once and could have been omitted in the initial count of the residents remaining in the city. In any case, there could have been statistical calculations of the population only in the central part of Kherson, as many of those living on the edge of the city bypassed evacuation and had remained in their homes. Regardless of the number of the citizens present in the city on the day of the return of the Soviet forces, it was evident that Kherson was mostly empty with only a handful of survivors.

[5] Goloborod'ko, et al, eds. *Plamia nad Step'yu*, 230.
[6] Photograph by the author, 2012. The weapon pictured is a Soviet T-34 tank.

Those civilians working for the Wehrmacht at the battalion headquarters were led by the Germans to a large building on Ushakov Street and abandoned there. Some of the locals, such as the Yagnenko family, were fortunate to be warned by the auxiliary troops about the German withdrawal, and were quietly let go to try and hide on the outskirts of the city. Ol'ga Malinovskaya remembers that after a Czech soldier advised her mother to hide from the Germans, they went to Zabalka district, an edge of the city at that time, and hid in one of the abandoned houses until the Red Army entered Kherson.[7]

Illustration 17: "The eternal flame."[8]

While the Germans captured Kherson nearly intact in 1941, and with only minor loss of civilian life due to the hasty retreat of the Soviet forces, in 1944 the Wehrmacht

[7] Interview with Ol'ga Fyodorovna Malinovskaya (Yagnenko), Kherson, June 25, 2012.
[8] Photograph by the author, 2012. This memorial is dedicated to the Soviet soldiers who fought and were killed in battles against the Germans in the region. It is located in Kherson's historic downtown, in the "Slava Park."

surrendered a fully destroyed and abandoned city to the Red Army. A large part of this was due to the Nikopol' bridgehead, which was heavily fortified by the German Sixth Army and held out for hundred days, buying time for the occupational authorities to drive people out of the city, evacuate all the valuable property and goods, and carry out Himmler's scorched-earth policy.[9]

Illustration 18: A view at "Slava Park."[10]

EVACUEES RETURN TO KHERSON

As the Red Army marched past Mykolaiv and headed farther west, those Khersonians who evacuated understood that it was safe to return to their homes. In fact, many hurried to come back to Kherson, hoping to recover as many valuables as possible,

[9] Susorov, *Vyzvolennia Khersonshchyny vid Nimets'ko-Fashysts'kyh Zaharbnykiv*, 14.
[10] Photograph by the author, 2012. "Slava" in Russian means "glory." The obelisk in the center of the photograph is a memorial to the fallen Soviet soldiers, with "The eternal flame," that true to its name, always burns.

if any, and to reoccupy their dwellings, if those were still intact, before other residents of the city would.[11] Svetlana Chernyak recalls that she and her family returned to Kherson on foot because there was no transport. They walked for several days, travelling approximately 45 miles, stopping in various villages for a night's stay, where the hospitable locals fed them and provided clean beds.

Illustration 19: "Monument dedicated to the 'Heroes of the Soviet Union.'"[12]

One of Chernyak's most striking memories of that time was viewing of multitudes of corpses lying in the fields between Mykolaiv and Kherson. She remembers that the majority of the corpses were Germans, however there were many Soviet troops as well.

[11] Interview with Svetlana Fillipovna Chernyak, Kherson, May 30, 2012.

[12] Photograph by the author, 2012. This monument commemorates the Soviet soldiers who fought and were killed in battles against the Germans in the region, and were posthumously honored by the highest military achievement, the "Hero of the Soviet Union" medal. The monument is located in Kherson's historic downtown, in the "Slava Park."

Luckily for Chernyak's family, their residence was empty and intact when they returned and the family was able to move in right away and start cleaning and repairing their home.[13]

Valentina Moiseenko, who with her mother escaped to the village of Zelenivka, remembers that they returned to Kherson right after March 20, 1944, and settled in an unoccupied apartment they found. Because they moved to Kherson during the occupation and were given an apartment by the German authorities, upon the withdrawal of the latter, Moiseenko's family appeared to be without a residence according to the returning Soviet authorities. Soon the woman who owned the apartment returned and agreed to let Moiseenko and her mother stay, while she decided to leave the city.[14] Under such fortunate circumstances both families, Moiseenko and Chernyak's, returned to Kherson and instantly found housing. Not all citizens, however, returned to, or found, housing that was left intact and with appropriate living conditions, as many of the state and residential buildings in the city were destroyed by the retreating German army.

THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RECOVERY OF THE REGION'S POPULATION

Some of the key issues that the Soviet authorities faced upon their return to the region were a restoration of the pre-war economy and industry, normalization of the everyday life of the population, and an organization of effective aid to the advancing Red Army.[15] While most sources of local history discuss the contributions of the Communist Party to the restoration of the way of life of the Kherson region at great lengths, it is

[13] Interview with Svetlana Fillipovna Chernyak, Kherson, May 30, 2012.
[14] Interview with Valentina Sergeevna Moiseenko, Kherson, July 3, 2012.
[15] Bizer, M. I., Kaminskaya, E. S., and Kovalyova, D. T. *Bor'ba Trudiashchikhsya Khersonshchiny Protiv Nemetsko-Fashistskih Zahvatchikov v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny* (Kherson, 1974).

important to compare those accounts to the accounts of witnesses, in order to assess the transition from German to Soviet rule. Bizer, Kaminskaya, and Kovalyova in *Bor'ba Trudiashchikhsya Khersonshchiny Protiv Nemetsko-Fashistskih Zahvatchikov v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny* claims that soon after the return of the Soviets there were 908 restored *kolkhozes* and 42 restored *sovkhozes*, which harvested in 1945 only 30 per cent of grain produced in 1940. The authors of the book state that such a decrease in grain production occurred due to a severe drought, and while weather conditions did contribute to a shortfall of the harvest, not much is said about post-war material hardships, the lack of human resources, and the possible mismanagement of state food production by the Soviet authorities.[16]

Urban and rural residents both remember the famine that followed the return of the Soviets into the region. Svetlana Chernyak, a resident of Kherson, says that her family ate *makukha*, a by-product of pressed seeds after the production of oil.[17] Valentina Kozarezova, who lived at a farmstead near the village of Mala Kardashynka with her family, remembers that they survived post-war famine because they had cows. Kozarezova remembers they were extremely tired of milk and dairy products and really wanted to eat bread. Her mother would take two large cans of milk to the market by foot, sell the milk, and purchase a half-liter jar of grain. The family also included in their ration "Meadow salsify," a particular type of grass that they used to make *borscht* with instead of beets. They also made cakes from the soaked ground seeds of mustard. Kozarezova

[16] Ibid.
[17] Interview with Svetlana Fillipovna Chernyak, Kherson, May 30, 2012.

remembers that unlike their farmstead, in the village nearby many residents were dying from starvation because they did not even have grass to eat. At some point she went to Kherson to buy bread, but after spending an entire day in line was able to purchase only one small roll. Later, when bread became more available to the general population, Kozarezova's parents went and bought a half of a sack of 1.6kg loafs. The children were so eager to finally eat bread that they stuffed themselves until all became sick to the stomach.[18]

Valentina Kozarezova's father returned to their farmstead from the front without a leg, and along with his wife attempted to restore the property damaged by the war. He built a mill and sown grain in order to feed a family of six, but the returning Soviet authorities were already forcing the rural population to join collective farms, therefore hampering the family's independent food production in various ways. At first Soviets imposed quotas for the independent peasants to meet, such as 300 eggs and 200 liters of milk to a local *kolkhoz* per month. Next, those peasants who already signed up for *kolkhoz* came at night and dug out plants and crops that families had sown and confiscated tools and cattle. After a while, Soviet authorities took over the mill Kozarezova's father built, with no regard for the family's need for food. Such was the nature of the return of Soviet power into the region and which was accompanied by restoration of the pre-war system of collective farms.[19]

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[18] Interview with Valentina P. Kozarezova, Kherson, May 24, 2012.
[19] Ibid.

It is understandable why Kozarezova's family did not experience much happiness upon the return of the Soviet regime to the region, and could think of Germans as good people, just forced by Hitler to fight in the war.[20] A resident of Kherson, Vitaliy Zakharov, on the other hand, remembers that no one expressed any remorse that the Germans were leaving.[21] The variation in the opinions is perhaps a result of the difference between the living conditions in the city and living conditions in the villages of the region. Similarly to the collectivization of the peasantry in the countryside during the 1930s, the restoration of the collective farms after the return of Soviet rule negatively affected families who attempted to avoid re-joining *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes*. Because the residents of Kherson worked primarily in the industrial sector and not agricultural, they were more inclined to welcome back the Soviets, as the returning authorities rushed to restore factories and plants, which provided jobs for the majority of the urban population.

Those who survived the German occupation were under constant watch by the Soviet government, which meant that the survivors had to mention on job applications and other official forms, well into the 1980s, whether they lived "in occupied territory," with positive answers resulting in discrimination.[22] Valentina Sergeevna Moiseenko remembers that at the end of the war she and her mother briefly helped the Soviet partisans by bringing food to their hideout. As the Red Army re-entered the territory, Moiseenko's mother was offered a document that proved her cooperation with the partisans. The mother responded: "Was that even help?" and was ashamed to accept such

[20] Ibid.
[21] Interview with Vitaliy Eliozarovich Zakharov, Kherson, June 11, 2012.
[22] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 305.

document, as she thought that bringing these men food a few times did not qualify her as an assistant to the Soviet partisans. Valentina Moiseenko says that her mother and the entire family regretted the decision to not take the document for the rest of their lives. Had her mother taken the document, the family would have been treated much differently by the authorities. The question on all official documents: "What did you do during the occupation?" hung above their heads for many years. Moiseenko recalls that those who stayed in the occupied territories, and had no proof of active resistance against the German rule, did not receive a medal commemorating "Victory over Germany" at the end of the war. As a child, Valentina did not receive any gifts at school for holidays, and was not treated as nicely as children whose family members had proof of active resistance against the enemy. Worst of all, while many people received new apartments from the government, the Moiseenko family was given housing in a semi-basement.[23]

CHILDREN OF THE WAR

Children of the Kherson region returned to schools while the war was still under way. There were no books or notebooks, so they wrote on pieces of newspapers. Besides the importance of education, schools were also feeding children one meal per day, and that was a great help to struggling families during the famine that followed the German withdrawal.

Some of the priceless treasures preserved since the end of the war are children's memories from the years of occupation and the end of the war. Svetlana Chernyak remembers that children generally avoided any contact with the German and the auxiliary

[23] Interview with Valentina Sergeevna Moiseenko, Kherson, July 3, 2012.

police because they were frightened. Children were often afraid and hiding during bombings and raids. But afterwards, they were quick to forget about the warfare and rush to play. One of Chernyak's sharpest memories from the war years was that of constant hunger.[24] Valeriy Pavlenko also remembers hunger as one of the most striking discomforts, and adds that if anyone was sick, there was no medicine; however, everywhere there were stockpiles of weapons. In Pavlenko's opinion, children did not always understand what was going on during the war, and because of that, often were fearless. Even after the war such fearlessness was translated into many injuries sustained by children who found munitions and played with bullets, shells, grenades, mines, and other weapons.[25] Ol'ga Malinovskaya says that the wartime memories of her childhood never went away. Every time an airplane flies above the city, she immediately remembers the Luftwaffe planes circling above Kherson, occasionally dropping bombs. As she walks down Perekopskaya Street, where she grew up and lived most of her life, she is constantly reminded of the body of a dead man she saw lying there, as she and her mother walked home immediately after the return of the Soviet army.[26]

THE RETURN OF NKVD

While most of the people living in the occupied territory of Ukraine saw the Wehrmacht's retreat as positive in regards to their personal well-being and the future of the country, those who welcomed the Germans and collaborated with them did not see

[24] Interview with Svetlana Fillipovna Chernyak, Kherson, May 30, 2012.
[25] Interview with Valeriy Vladimirovich Pavlenko, Kherson, May 22, 2012.
[26] Interview with Ol'ga Fyodorovna Malinovskaya (Yagnenko), Kherson, June 25, 2012.

the return of the Red Army as "liberation."[27] The departure of the German forces did not stop the violence in the former Reichskommissariat, as the newly arrived Soviet authorities began their own violent campaign to suppress Ukrainian nationalist groups, former collaborators and beneficiaries of the German rule, and any anti-Soviet elements remaining on the liberated territory.[28] There were no significant proponents of independent Ukraine in Kherson region throughout the war, however the large population of *Volksdeutsche* who benefitted from the German occupational authorities, and a large number of collaborators, many of whom were formerly suppressed *kulaks*, triggered a number of NKVD investigations in the area.

Following the advancing Red Army, a group of operatives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine in the Mykolaiv region, as well as police units, immediately entered the cleared territory in order to restore order and Soviet authority as quickly as possible.[29] Although many of the sources on local history primarily discuss the rebuilding of housing and industrial complexes, and restoring the Soviet way of life after the liberation, it is important to understand that the war did not end for some with the return of the Soviet forces. Some of the NKVD records in the archive in Kherson reveal the grim reality that accompanied the Soviet return, which blemishes the image of peaceful recovery created by many Soviet historians. It is necessary to add that some of the civilians persecuted by the NKVD upon the return of the Soviets did participate in crimes against the citizens of Ukraine, however many of

[27] Bellamy, *Absolute War,* 596.
[28] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 305.
[29] Goloborod'ko, et al, eds. *Plamia nad Step'yu*, 229-231.

those who perished from the hands of NKVD henchmen were either falsely accused or were denounced by the fellow countrymen as happened during the 1930s.

Many of the criminal cases initiated by the NKVD against "traitors of the motherland" began to be reviewed by the local authorities after Stalin's death, in the late 1960s, and many of the verdicts were overturned in the early 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Often, the former traitors were rehabilitated by a military prosecutor on the premise that there was not enough evidence to find an individual guilty of war crimes.[30] While it is easy to claim that the NKVD followed their pattern of work that begun before the war and prosecuted and convicted people for treason and other serious offences against the country without sufficient evidence, it is also clear that the Soviet police had to take seriously potential war criminals in the best interest of national security. As the war continued in 1944 and 1945, it was better for the NKVD to overreact concerning the cases of collaboration and treason, than to not do enough, because as the German army retreated they recruited spies from the local population and left them in enemy's rear to scout and transmit intelligence reports about the strength and positioning of the Soviet forces. In light of the necessary precautions during the war, many innocent civilians were harshly punished by the Soviet police forces, however at the time, such acts were perhaps more justifiable than the needless purges of the 1930s. The culture of denunciation was still alive after the return of the Soviet authorities, as evidenced by archival documents, and played a significant role in the NKVD's decisions concerning

[30] DAKhO, f. r-4033, Shurov Grigoryi Leontievich, 46.

the prosecution of civilians suspected of collaborating with the enemy.[31] Many trials of civilians took place with little or no publicity, and while many Red Army veterans, former partisans, Soviet ideologists and historians developed a mythical interpretation of the massive heroic struggle of the people in occupied territories, a large number of unjustly convicted civilians would serve sentences in prison camps around the Soviet Union, where many of them would perish.[32]

THE NKVD TRIALS – PRISONERS OF WAR

A criminal case against Grigoriy Leontievich Shurov, opened on January 6, 1945, and later reviewed on July 15, 1993, serves as an example of the arbitrary sentences of the prisoners of war by the NKVD after the return of Soviet rule to Ukraine. Shurov, a former private in the 592nd rifle regiment of the 203rd infantry division, was arrested on April 30, 1944, about six weeks after the return of the Red Army to the Kherson region, on charges of treason against the Soviet Union and sentenced to ten years of imprisonment. A preliminary investigation found that Shurov surrendered voluntarily to the German army during combat and while imprisoned at a POW camp promised a German officer to denounce communists, commissars, and commanding officers. While he managed to escape from the camp in three days, Shurov was arrested a month later and returned to the camp, where he again agreed to collaborate with the camp's administration.[33] The military prosecutor who reviewed Shurov's case in 1993, observed:

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[31] DAKhO, f. r-4033, Zapara Nikolai Konstantinovich, 17.
[32] Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 305.
[33] DAKhO, f. r-4033, Shurov Grigoryi Leontievich, 46.

"Based upon the evidence presented in the case, [I] find Shurov's criminal prosecution upon the verdict of treason of the motherland unfounded.

During the interrogation, while talking about the circumstances of his imprisonment, he explained that during combat he was part of a machine-gun crew that lost a sense of direction and came to the line of defense of the Germans, who encircled them and forced them to surrender.

His collaboration with the camp's administration is based solely upon his testimony, that during interrogations [at the camp] he 'only agreed' to denounce communists and the commanding officers, however practically he did not help Germans in any way.

The evidence presented in the case did not refute Shurov's statements.

Under such circumstances, there is no criminal behavior in his actions, in accordance with Article 58-1 'b' of the Criminal Code of RSFSR."[34]

The military prosecutor proceeds to rehabilitate Shurov as a victim of political repressions in accordance with Article 3, Paragraph 'a' of the Law of the RSFSR, signed on October 18, 1991. The case file ends with a note that there is no information concerning his fate and the residence of his immediate relatives. Shurov became one of the victims of post-liberation repressions in Ukraine, vanishing into one of the Soviet labor camps.[35] The historian Amir Weiner connects such repressions, on the grounds of supposed collaboration, with Stalin's election speech, in which he stated that "the Second World War was the inevitable result of the development of world economic and political forces on the basis of modern monopoly capitalism."[36] Weiner concludes that in the eyes of Stalin those who collaborated "were not the by-products of the war, but the enemies who already existed within the country, and whom the war and occupation helped to uncover."[37] In this light it is clear that Stalin's rhetoric justified the persecution of

[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, 136.
[37] Ibid.

collaborators beyond national security concerns, and triggered purges similar to those of the 1930s in order to eradicate the supposed internal enemies of the people.

THE NKVD TRIALS – COLLABORATORS (REHABILITATED)

A case similar to Shurov's was opened on March 23, 1944 against Akim Grigorievich Pererva on the grounds of treason. The article of indictment claims that Pererva worked as the *starosta* in the village of Muzykivka and oppressed the population with unbearable taxes, arrests, and searches of people's homes. He was found guilty and sentenced to a prison term at the special camp in the city of Stalino, but the investigation was unable to produce any hard evidence of his crime.[38] Many *starostas* did abuse the population during the German occupation, however basing a verdict on such an assumption or generalization, without any evidence of a crime, constitutes a crime in itself by the Soviet authorities.

A rather curious criminal case was opened against Nikolai Konstantinovich Zapara, against whom the NKVD began prosecution on March 27, 1944 on charges of collaboration with the German occupational authorities. Zapara's indictment reads:

"[He] is exposed in that in 1941 he stayed on the German-occupied territory in the city of Kherson, and from the very first days [of the occupation] voluntarily joined the German police. Embarking on the path of betrayal [he] took an oath committing himself to fight against communists and the Soviet activists. Zapara, who served at the second precinct, stole the property of executed Jews… [He] confiscated lard, butter, and other foodstuffs from the peasants at the market, and took part in convoying Jews to the shooting sites."[39]

[38] DAKhO, f. r-4033, Pererva Akim Grigorievich, 23.
[39] DAKhO, f. r-4033, Zapara Nikolai Konstantinovich, 26.

An addendum to the indictment states that all the facts concerning the case were proven, therefore the above mentioned Zapara was to be prosecuted in accordance with the Articles 126 and 127 of the Criminal Law of Ukrainian SSR.[40] During an interrogation, Zapara agreed that he did take an oath to work for the Germans, however only as a guard of a warehouse.[41] A neighbor, one Lebedeva, testified against Zapara, and added that he stole the property of the Jews.[42] The suspect himself claimed that he and Lebedeva had a good relationship, and that he didn't know why she testified against him.[43] On April 24, 1944 Zapara was interrogated again and again denied the charges brought against him, and on May 28 his case was dismissed.[44] It is certainly strange that the case was dropped abruptly and Zapara was released. While the document clearly states: "all the facts were proven," the jury's conclusion asserts:

"During his career as a policeman, he only worked as a guard. As to his active duty for the benefit of the fascist German authorities, and his disloyal behavior towards the Soviet authorities and the motherland, such information has not been found by the investigation…"[45]

This case is a complete reversal of the trials of Shurov and Pererva. While these men were accused of treason and imprisoned despite the lack of any evidence of their crimes, Zapara's crimes were initially proven, even supported by the statements of an eyewitness, however later the facts connected to the case were dismissed, and he was released. All three men could be classified as collaborators and traitors in accordance

[40] Ibid., 26.
[41] Ibid., 17.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 20.
[45] Ibid.

with the Soviet policy of the time: Shurov – a prisoner of war, Pererva – a village *starosta*, and Zapara – an auxiliary policeman. However, Zapara, who belonged to a dangerous category of collaborators, was not sentenced for his collaboration with the enemy. It is impossible to know the NKVD's reasoning concerning Zapara's case, nevertheless this example supports the notion of the arbitrariness of the Soviet court system after the return of the Red Army.

THE NKVD TRIALS – COLLABORATORS (NON-REHABILITATED)

While many of the cases of former collaborators and politically repressed Soviet citizens have been reviewed and many received rehabilitations, some of the locals who actively helped the Nazis and took part in their crimes directly or indirectly, did not receive pardons even after the fall of the Soviet Union. The differences between those who were rehabilitated, and those who were not, can be explained by the nature of their relationship with the occupying forces. Those who registered with the commandant's office as *Volksdeutsche* and worked in civilian jobs such as a translator, machinist at a factory, or a doctor, and had no record of committing a war crime were pardoned after Stalin's death. Ethnic Ukrainians and Russians who were mistakenly thought to be collaborators by the NKVD were rehabilitated as well, if there was no direct connection between their personal records and those of the Nazi war crimes.

Not only men were stigmatized for their cooperation with the Germans and for such crimes as murder, robbery, and treason, but also women who had relationships with the occupiers during the war. Boris Vadon states in his diary that there were many women in Kherson during the occupation who knew little material hardship due to their

close relationships with the German troops.[46] One of the local singers, Sophia Chernyak, publicly displayed her affection for the occupying forces by riding in the cabriolet cars with high-ranking officers of the Wehrmacht.[47] While Chernyak's fate is unknown, that of Nionila Aleksandrovna Litvinova serves as an example of how some women survived through their close partnership with the enemy forces.[48]

Litvinova's case, opened on March 20, 1945, serves as an example of the struggle for survival of people trapped between the two opposing regimes. Nionila Aleksandrovna was sentenced to deportation to the north Kazakhstan region to a correctional labor camp for her collaboration with the German military during the occupation, specifically for the intimate relationship she had with the head of a counter-intelligence unit, one Mel'nik, also known as doctor Ernst. She was also accused of helping him to recruit personnel.[49] Litvinova's direct contact with German counter-intelligence was rightly perceived as highly dangerous for Soviet security by the NKVD, as this enemy unit specialized in active intelligence and counter-intelligence work, the recruitment and transfer of spies behind the Soviet lines of defense, and the search for Soviet activists in the enemy's rear.[50] She pleaded guilty to the charges of cooperation with the enemy's intelligence unit. However said she did not know the full extent of German operations, and denied any direct involvement with the enemy's intelligence work.[51]

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[46] Vadon, "Okkupatsiya Khersona, 1941 – 1944," 5.
[47] Ibid.
[48] DAKhO, f. r-4033, Litvinova Nionila Aleksandrovna, 56.
[49] Ibid., 59.
[50] Ibid., 56.
[51] Ibid.

While it is easy to dismiss a person like Litvinova as an obvious collaborator, and condemn her treacherous behavior, a closer analysis of her point of view is required in order to understand the person's circumstances, and determine whether her actions could be justifiable as means of survival. The initial verdict, pronounced at the time when hatred toward the enemy was at its peak and national security was of the utmost importance, found Litvinova guilty. However, the review of her case after the fall of the Soviet Union, nearly fifty years after the war, did not change the court's decision.[52] The records of Litvinova's interrogation provide her reasons for collaboration with the occupational forces as means of survival during the transitional period between the Nazis and the Soviets.

During the occupation Litvinova worked as a dancer at the city theater, but eventually was fired and employed by the river port as an unskilled laborer to sort potatoes.[53] It is not surprising that when one day a car with the German personnel and a translator arrived at the port, and one German offered her a job at the theater that day, Litvinova readily agreed.[54] But she received more than she bargained for. When Nionila Aleksandrovna arrived to commandant's office, instead of the theater job offer, she was introduced to the head of the German counter-intelligence.[55] During an interrogation Litvinova summarized her first encounter with the leader of the unit:

"… He introduced himself as the head of the German counter-intelligence, 'Baron von-doctor Ernst,' and said that everyone in the city obeys his orders. He offered me his

[52] Ibid., 56, 59.
[53] Ibid., 10.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid., 34.

hand in honor of our meeting. Then he said that he wants female affection, and that a woman would make his room cozy and would live with him, and asked if I would agree to that. I responded that I needed to warn my mother about this, so she would not worry, and also collect some of my personal belongings, including sheet music for piano playing. Ernst promised to pay for my services one Reichsmark per day and provide free meals."[56]

It is unclear whether Litvinova agreed to Ernst's offer due to her wish to work in a clean environment, rather than sorting potatoes at the river port, because of a better pay and free food, or due to particular subtleties of the offer, perhaps because of Ernst's subtle hints of her fate in case of a refusal. Litvinova's actual justification for accepting the job offer is as follows:

"I was afraid to refuse working for the counter-intelligence because he, Ernst, knew that I did not work anywhere [since she quit her job at the port] and lived in Kherson, which was prohibited."[57]

Litvinova further rationalizes her decision:

"Of course people traveled back and forth between the city and the countryside, but they risked their lives by doing so. I did not dare to do so, and stayed with doctor Ernst. Indeed, in a few days I received a pass that allowed me to walk across the city, in which there was indicated the identification number of the military unit, the 'company,' and my last name, first name, and patronymic. This pass was reissued approximately every five days. I could have used this opportunity to leave the city, but when I received the pass and was connected with the counter-intelligence, I decided not to abuse such a privilege, and was afraid that my disappearance would arouse Ernst's suspicion, who would initiate a search for me and would accuse me of cheating him and his counter-intelligence unit. I was afraid of these consequences and kept working with the counter-intelligence."[58]

Litvinova's concerns about her safety in case of her disappearance are logical, as she understood that once she agreed to the terms of the work for Ernst and his unit, she

[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 27.
[58] Ibid.

would be under strict surveillance by the Germans. In order to avoid facing such complicated choices she should have kept her job at the river port, however the prospect of better quality of work, higher pay, and a good food ration drove her to compromise with her own conscience. Regardless of Litvinova's afterthoughts of escaping from the grasp of the German counter-intelligence unit, she did not agree to a job of a clerk or a translator, but to a fairly indecent cohabitation with an officer of the enemy forces. Ernst did not trick this woman, but described what the job would entail in detail beforehand and offered her a choice. Litvinova made a conscious decision to sleep with him and assist in the operations of his unit. The working environment was difficult and required her to deal with particular indecencies:

> "Ernst said that it was my own fault that I enter his office at any time, and that I have to wait at times. Then he said that I should not be surprised, because in his office there occasionally one may even encounter nude women, because his job is of that nature."[59]

Through Litvinova's confession it is evident that Ernst disregarded her interests, and even though she lived with him, he could openly display his interest for other women, treating her no better than a servant. What initially appeared to her as a comfortable work with benefits, turned into a trap, as she found herself unable to escape from the grasp of the German counter-intelligence while she anxiously awaited the arrival of the Soviets, whom she probably expected to punish her. In early March 1944, as the German forces began withdrawing from the city, Litvinova was promised by Ernst that

[59] Ibid., 25.

she would be able to join the retreating party.[60] But no one came to pick her up and no one announced the departure of the counter-intelligence unit, and Nionila Aleksandrovna was left in the city to await the arrival of the Red Army.[61]

THE NKVD TRIALS – VOLKSDEUTSCHE

Along with the persecution of collaborators, the liberation was followed by the persecution of ethnic minorities, including ethnic Germans. The massive propaganda of hatred for the German "fascists," and Germans in general, was developed during the bleakest point for the Red Army by such prominent authors as Ilya Ehrenburg. This propaganda blatantly urged Soviets to hate and kill the enemy.[62] In early 1944, as the German army still exhibited stiff resistance and the Soviet forces were struggling to recapture the territory lost after Operation Barbarossa, the NKVD had no reason to not prosecute the *Volksdeutsche* to the full extent. Ethnic Germans were also generally disliked by the population because of the much better treatment they received from the Nazis in occupied Ukraine, due to Himmler's policies of trying to strengthen Germandom in the east. During the occupation *Volksdeutsche* shopped at special stores, enjoyed extra rations. Their better jobs often involved collaboration with the Nazis. Therefore, they were perceived by the Soviet police as internal enemies worthy of prosecution. While many ethnic Germans registered with the occupational authorities in order to survive the war with greater material means, not all actively collaborated with the enemy, or

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[60] Ibid., 34.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Nina Tumarkin, *The Living & the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 74.

participated in war crimes. Several of the criminal cases opened by the NKVD against the ethnic Germans serve as proof of the subjective nature of the sentencing by the Soviet authorities.

The NKVD opened Friedrich Friedrichovich Moos's case on April 29, 1944, and officially charged him as a collaborator and a German sympathizer on January 27, 1945. He was sentenced to eight years of imprisonment at Chernogor special correctional labor camp with the confiscation of all his property. During the interrogation Moos stated that he worked as a miller at the Petrovsky factory before the occupation, and was sent to that factory as a translator upon the Germans' arrival. His job was to translate the workers' notices from Russian into German. He was registered as a *Volksdeutsche* and received, appropriate for his ethnic background, better food rations. Several of the witnesses confirmed such information about Moos during the interrogation, however they did not identify whether there was any criminal activity on his part.[63] After the review on August 25, 1989 by the Kherson Regional Court, the verdict was reversed and the case dismissed:

"The case file does not contain any concrete information about Moos's criminal activity against USSR in order to benefit the fascist regime.

Under these circumstances, and also taking into consideration that being sympathetic towards the German authorities, working as a translator, registering as *Volksdeutsche*, and the reception of food rations, does not contain a legally defined crime – treason, therefore the ruling of the special council cannot be recognized as legal and reasonable.

In accordance with Articles 393 – 394 of Criminal Law of the Ukrainian SSR it is determined that:

The objection filed by the Kherson regional prosecutor's office is to be fulfilled. The resolution signed on 01.27.45 by the Special Council of the People's Commissars of

[63] DAKhO, f. r-4033, Moos Friedrich Friedrichovich, 39.

the Internal Affairs of the USSR regarding Moos F. F. is to be cancelled due to the absence of criminal activity in his actions, and in accordance with Paragraph 2, Article 6 of the Criminal Law of Ukrainian SSR the case must be terminated."[64]

Moos was sentenced on the basis of his status as *Volksdeutsche*, rather than because of any solid evidence of his war crimes as a Nazi collaborator. Perhaps the NKVD decided upon the verdict for Moos based on the assumption that if an individual worked for the Germans, he or she may have been participating in criminal activities during the occupation, or could have been recruited by the Nazis to spy behind the Soviet lines. Ethnic Germans were also perceived by the Soviet police as politically dangerous elements, internal enemies of the people who could potentially spread fascist, capitalist, and other anti-Soviet ideology. The NKVD's decision to imprison the potentially dangerous elements to the Soviet internal security and society could be perceived either as a wartime pre-caution, or a ruthless strategy to eradicate the remnants of the enemies of the people who were supposedly undercover since the 1930s.

A similar criminal case was filed by the NKVD against Aleksandr Ivanovich Traxel on June 5, 1944 on the charges of staying in the occupied territory, registering as *Volksdeutsche*, and developing a close relationship with the occupying authorities.[65] During the occupation Traxel worked in the town of Kakhovka at an incubator plant as a mechanic, and from 1943 was transferred to the factory number 22, in the same town, as a translator.[66] The conclusion of the NKVD's investigation of the case, which is infused

[64] Ibid.
[65] DAKhO, f. r-4033, Traxel Aleksandr Ivanovich, 5, 22.
[66] Ibid., 26.

with strong anti-fascist sentiments and the Bolshevik ideology, is phrased in the spirit of the time:

"The trial concluded that the defendant, Traxel, shared sympathy with the fascist order and the German plans to establish the so called 'new order in Europe,' subjugating and enslaving the nations occupied by the Germans, calling for establishing by the Germans the racial theory, during the period of unbelievable German terror, inflicted upon the Soviet citizens. He personally chose the path of treason of his Soviet motherland, filing a request to change his Soviet citizenship and join a category of the so called '*Volksdeutsche*'."[67]

The language used in the document is harsh, yet the statements composed by the Soviet authorities concerning German plans for the captured territories are truthful, as the Nazis did plan to enslave the Soviet *untermenschen*, the sub-humans, according to the Nazi racial theory.[68] The Soviet officials did not exaggerate in their description of the German plans for Eastern Europe, and provided evidence of Traxel's change of citizenship from Soviet to *Volksdeutsche*, which resulted in him being found guilty as a collaborator in accordance with Soviet law.[69] While the document made no mention of any criminal activity and provided no hard evidence of Traxel's supposed war crimes, the NKVD took the liberty of connecting his work for the Germans with Nazi ideology in order to accuse Traxel of treason. The following entry in the case file seals this man's fate:

"The individual interrogated on the basis of the charges brought against him according to Article 54-1 'a' of the Criminal Law of Ukrainian SSR, Traxel, recognized himself fully guilty on the basis of the outlined charges – and is found guilty as charged."[70]

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[67] Ibid.
[68] Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Picador, 2006), 12.
[69] DAKhO, f. r-4033, Traxel Aleksandr Ivanovich, 26.
[70] Ibid., 17-21.

Perhaps Traxel could not deny his registration with the occupational authorities as *Volksdeutsche*, due to the fact that he had German stamps in his Soviet documents, as the Germans let people keep their passports and added their own information to them, and because of the eyewitnesses who testified against him during the NKVD's interrogation. If an individual had any connection with the Germans during the occupation, it was easy for the Soviet authorities to find him or her guilty of collaboration and treason, by declaring that the individual sympathized with the Nazis and their ideology. In this way, Traxel's ethnic background and his association with the occupying forces sealed his fate. Traxel was sentenced to five years of imprisonment at Chernogor special correctional labor camp with the confiscation of all his property.[71]

Traxel's case file resembles that of Moos's, given the similar charges, the lack of concrete evidence, and the sentence. There is no clear data on the number of prosecuted *Volksdeutsche* in Kherson region, however the similarities between the two cases constitute the pattern in the NKVD's post war repressions of ethnic Germans. Traxel's criminal case was reviewed by the authorities of the Kherson region in the same fashion as Moos's, only later, on April 18, 1996. His certificate of rehabilitation states:

"[He was] repressed on December 11, 1944 by the Special Council of the NKVD of the USSR under Article 54-1 'a' (Treason of the motherland) and sentenced to 5 years at the special correctional labor camp with the confiscation of all property…

Released – no data.

Based on Article 1 of the Law of Ukrainian SSR on 'rehabilitation of victims of the political repressions in Ukraine' signed on April 17, 1991, Aleksandr Ivanovich Traxel is rehabilitated."[72]

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[71] Ibid., 28.

[72] Ibid., 41.

Traxel's rehabilitation by the authorities of the independent Ukraine is significant, however what is even more important is the recognition of his repression as political.[73] The document contains no information about Traxel's release, therefore it could be concluded that either such data was not collected, or he perished in the prison camp while serving his sentence, or perhaps was shot before even making it to the camp. Had he survive the prison camp and lived long enough to witness the pardon issued to him by the Ukrainian authorities, Traxel would be an eighty-year-old man who already served his sentence, and for whom such rehabilitation would have had only a symbolic meaning.[74] The same is true for Moos, who was rehabilitated in 1989, right before the collapse of the Soviet Union, and to whom, if he was still alive, the government-issued pardon would provide no substantial material benefits or compensation for the damage to his life.[75]

Unlike Moos and Traxel, Ivan Ivanovich Yust did not only register with the occupational authorities as *Volksdeutsche* and obtain work with benefits, but used his position of the head doctor of Kakhovka hospital to save the lives of Nazi victims, on and off the operating table. Yust was careful and sensitive towards the patients he treated, among whom were many citizens of the town. He also helped locals to dodge German recruitment as forced labor, arranged for prisoners of war, sick with typhus, to be transferred to the hospital to avoid certain death in camp, helped former prisoners of war to escape, and hired Jewish doctors to work with him. While Yust certainly helped the

[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 5.
[75] DAKhO, f. r-4033, Moos Friedrich Friedrichovich, 39.

Soviet cause more than he did the German one, the details of his humane deeds only emerged in 1965, when the case was reviewed and the witnesses interrogated again. In the revision of his case, the prosecutor references Yust's unsubstantiated prosecution and requests to terminate the decision of the special committee and to close the case. The NKVD initially prosecuted Yust according to the same Article 54-1 'a' of the Criminal Law of the Ukrainian SSR, as it did Moos and Traxel, only adding that he participated in the recruitment of Soviet citizens as German forced laborers. It is no surprise that in June, 1944 Yust was found guilty on ambiguous charges composed by the police, and in 1965, after Stalin's death, perhaps the same witnesses testified that he served the Soviet cause during the occupation. Just as the NKVD manipulated the information collected from Yust and the witnesses in order to implicate him, and imprison him as a "German sympathizer", the authorities that reviewed his case later referred to the fact that during the initial trial Yust denied the charges against him and that the witnesses did not provide any concrete evidence of his anti-Soviet activities. While in 1944 such information would not be enough to lift the criminal charges, in the 1960s, as it turns out, the same case could be reviewed with less prejudice than it was in the heat of the war. Yet again, by 1965 Yust would have already finished serving his eight-year sentence at the same special correctional labor camp. But unlike his fellow *Volksdeutsche*, Moos and Traxel, the rehabilitation during the 1960s would be more beneficial to an individual than in the 1990s, because well into the 1980s there was still an on-the-job discrimination present towards those who stayed in occupied territory during the war.[76]

[76] DAKhO, f. r-4033, Yust Ivan Ivanovich, 94-95, and Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 306.

The return of Soviet rule to the Kherson region did not immediately bring social and economic stability to the local population. People slowly began to move back to their dwellings and work to restore the war-torn infrastructure and economy, while also participating in the Soviet war effort. At the same time, the NKVD hunted for German collaborators, sympathizers, and spies, often arbitrarily deciding the cases of their suspects due to Stalin's policies concerning "enemies of the people" and national security. The consequences of people's actions during the occupation, whether collaboration with the enemy, maintenance of neutrality, or resistance to German rule followed them for many years to come, and in some cases until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Conclusion

The conditions for the civilian population of Ukraine in World War II, the total war, were extreme countrywide. However, the southern Ukraine region, with its key cities of Kherson and Mykolaiv, had more favorable conditions for survival than most other areas of the country. The history, politics, culture and geography of the region all played a part in creating a unique area, where the majority of the population was safer than elsewhere in either the Reichskommissariat or the current territory of Ukraine.

Chapter 1 looked at the historic development of the Kherson region, and showed that the geographic intricacies of the area, the established ethnic diversity, and the political influences of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union prior to the German invasion, played important role in the ways in which the local population could survive during the occupation and upon the return of the Red Army. Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated the differences and similarities between the various gender, age, professional, political, paramilitary, and ethnic groups in the city of Kherson and villages and towns of the countryside. Chapter 4 described the difficult situation that formed in the region due to the return of the Soviet forces, and explained the displacement of thousands of people and the destruction of the city by the retreating Germans. Finally, Chapter 5 investigates the return of the Soviet rule to the region and the part it played in the restoration of the local infrastructure, economy, and way of life, while also prosecuting elements it deemed undesirable, for their collaboration with the Nazis, and

how this was coupled with Stalin's policies calling for the eradication of enemies of the people.

Most local sources maintain the hard-line Soviet rhetoric concerning the German occupation of the Kherson region, and most western sources ignore the region of southern Ukraine, because of the lack of any great battles there and an assumption that the area's survival conditions were similar to those elsewhere in Ukraine. This research fuses stories of human survival from the local sources, the western World War II scholarship, archival materials and the testimonies of survivors, thereby exploring the unique situation that formed in Kherson region during the war. The thesis attempts to bridge the gap between the scholars of Ukraine and the west, and the accounts of the eyewitnesses, in order to produce a comprehensive study of survival of total war in the southern Ukraine.

It is important to note that there was no clear-cut strategy for survival in conditions of total war, as there are a number of factors that influenced one's chances of staying alive. Each individual had at his or her disposal a set of unique attributes, some of which were controllable and some were not. Moreover, each individual had a set of personal wants and needs, which may or may not have matched those of other citizens, or the ruling party. For instance, many Jews of the region were killed by the Nazis. Obviously ethnicity is not chosen at birth and cannot be changed, however some Jews were able to appeal to ethnic Ukrainians and Russians, and receive help. Above all, fortune, and sadly misfortune, often also heavily dictated people's fate. Such was the case of a Jewish mother and daughter, whom a German soldier decided to ignore after their discovery in a basement, and the case of the Yagnenko family, who were lucky to be

taken to the German military compound, rather than the Gestapo, where they would have faced certain death for hiding in the city. Although the vast majority of the civilian population attempted to stay neutral in their political alliances, those who chose to actively support either the Soviets or the Germans faced many daily hardships and greatly decreased their chances of survival. The pro-Soviet partisans and the members of the underground were constantly targeted by the Nazis during the occupation, while those who collaborated with the Germans in order to survive the occupation were persecuted by the communist forces after their return to the region.

Some differences were also discovered between the survival of the urban and the rural populations of the region. While many of the city's residents endured hardships in their attempts to obtain food during the occupation, peasants, for the most part, had the means to produce food to support their families. After the return of the Soviet regime, the situation changed, as the peasants were forced to once again concentrate their food production on feeding the advancing Red Army and the urban population, who were rebuilding the devastated city and industrial complex.

Minorities too were persecuted throughout the war for either ethnic or political reasons. Jews, Gypsies, *Volksdeutsche*, pro-Soviet supporters and the German collaborators all were hurt at some point during the war. For instance, while *Volksdeutsche* enjoyed some benefits under the German rule, they were punished for their collaboration with the enemy when the Soviets retook the power in the region. At the same, time Soviet partisans and saboteurs were risking their lives under the German rule, but received recognition for their patriotic actions at the end of the war. Minorities, quite

often in the course of the war, were subject to complete role reversals, from allies on the one end of spectrum to undesirable elements on the other.

It is easy to assume that the local population of the region was happy to be liberated by the Red Army from the brutal Nazi regime, however the situation was not that simple. Generally, the people welcomed the German withdrawal, as the Nazis' presence in the region produced a nightmarish way of life, however many witnesses observed that the common German soldiers were decent people, forced to fight in the war. The rural population was more reluctant to celebrate the return of the Soviets than the population of Kherson, due to earlier history of ruthless collectivization. True to the fears of the peasants, a famine proceeded liberation, coupled with more arrests of saboteurs, enemies of the people, collaborators and spies.

While this thesis researches in detail survival in total war in the microcosm of the southern Ukraine of the 1940s, it also provides a range of factors, which are applicable to understanding war survival in general, even in other eras and settings. Of course, the invention of nuclear weapons forever changed the conduct of total warfare, nevertheless, regional peculiarities, such as history, culture, politics, and geography still matter. One's location, alliances, and skills are also important in the context of the modern warfare. Above all, a special providence may ultimately become the most significant determinant of one's possible survival in extreme conditions.

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