



WER IST WALTER?

International Perspectives on
Resistance in Europe during
World War II

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Soviet Prisoners of War Between Collaboration and Resistance: Stalag III D Berlin as a Case Study of the “Grey Zone”

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Stalag III D Berlin was established in August 1940 as the only prisoner of war (POW) camp in the German capital. Initially, mainly French, but also Polish and Yugoslav POWs were interned there. However, from autumn 1941 on, tens of thousands of Soviet POWs were transported to Berlin.¹ The reason for this was the extreme labour shortage in the German economy, especially in the armaments industry. In Berlin, the largest armament production site in the Reich, the POWs were mainly used in large factories, often for private companies such as Siemens, Bergmann or AEG. The imprisonment and forced labour deployment of Soviet soldiers in German custody have already been studied in detail.² However, less research has been done on the individual and collective experiences of the POWs, some of whom spent several years in an existential predicament. How did these people experience their captivity? What strategies did they pursue to improve their situation? What room for action did they have? Through a systematic evaluation of personal cards (*Personalkarten*) issued for every single POW in the German Reich by the Wehrmacht, it is possible to re-

- 1 Cf. Marc Buggeln, “Stalag III D”, in *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1933-1945, Volume IV: Camps and Other Detention Facilities under the German Armed Forces*, ed. Geoffrey Megargee, Rüdiger Overmans and Wolfgang Vogt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022), 410-412. See also Christine Glauning and Roland Borchers, eds., *Past and Forgotten? The Lichterfelde Camp and the French Prisoners of War* (Berlin: Nazi Forced Labour Documentation Center of the Topography of Terror Foundation, 2022).
- 2 See Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden. Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangene 1941-1945* (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 1991); Reinhard Otto, *Wehrmacht, Gestapo und sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im deutschen Reichsgebiet 1941/42* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1998); Rolf Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im Deutschen Reich 1941/42. Behandlung und Arbeitseinsatz zwischen Vernichtungspolitik und kriegswirtschaftlichen Zwängen*, (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2011); Margot Blank and Barbettes Quinkert, eds., *Dimensions of a Crime. Soviet Prisoners of War in the Second World War* (Berlin: Metropol, 2021).

construct both various forms of resistant behaviour and collaboration.³ The spectrum ranges from escapes and sabotage on the one hand to propaganda activities and combat operations in German service on the other. By consulting additional sources such as Wehrmacht and police files as well as memoirs, a fragmentary but diverse picture of types of actions and motives emerges. In my case study, I would like to trace these types of actions and motives, considering the questions raised above. After introductory remarks on the history and special features of Stalag III D and the labour deployment of Soviet POWs in Berlin, my paper will explore the prisoners' scope for action based on various file studies.

Forced labour of Soviet POWs in Berlin

While Soviet POWs were used for forced labour in the occupied territories of the Eastern Front from the very beginning of World War II, the use of Soviet POWs in the German economy, and thus also in Berlin, was not initially planned. Hitler made it clear in several meetings with representatives of the Office of Defence Economics and Armament (*Wehrwirtschafts- und Rüstungsamt*) and the Labour Ministry (*Reichsarbeitsministerium*) in July 1941 that he did not want any Soviet prisoners in the Reich.⁴ The order of the High Command of the Wehrmacht (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht – OKW*) on the “Registration and Treatment of Russian Prisoners of War” of 26 June 1941 also stated clearly: “No employment of Kr.Gef. [POWs] within the economy.”⁵ Soviet soldiers were seen as a potential security risk. Additionally, Hitler and Wehrmacht leadership expected a quick victory over the Soviet Union through the “Blitzkrieg” strategy. The expectation of an early military victory made the use of labour seem secondary, as it was hoped that reducing the eastern army to occupation troops would bring workers back to the armaments industry.⁶

3 Cf. Reinhard Otto, Rolf Keller and Jens Nagel, “Sowjetischer Kriegsgefangene im Deutschen Reich. Zahlen und Dimensionen”, *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 56, no. 4 (2008): 565.

4 Cf. Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene*, 152.

5 *Order of the High Command of the Wehrmacht (OKW) on the Registration and Treatment of Russian Prisoners of War, 26 June 1941*, Federal Archives/*Bundesarchiv*: BArch, RW 59/142.

6 Cf. Walter Naasner, *Neue Machtzentren in der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft 1942-1945* (München: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 1994), 28; Cf. Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, 192.

But these objections were clearly contradicted by the economic reality in the Reich, namely the shortage of manpower. An initial ban by Hitler on the transport of Soviet POWs into the Reich was therefore gradually softened in the course of the second half of 1941 and finally dropped.⁷ However, the use of Soviet POWs remained bound to specific guidelines, such as the exclusive use of closed columns and strict isolation from other prisoner groups and the civilian population.⁸ The first transport of Soviet POWs to the Reich arrived in July 1941. By the end of the month, 65.000 prisoners were in the Reich. By 10 August, their number rose to 171.000.⁹ These prisoners were initially housed in particular Stalags,¹⁰ so-called "Russian camps" (*Russenlager*), specifically and exclusively set up for Soviet prisoners.¹¹ However, prisoners were also transferred to regular Stalags in military districts of the Reich without "Russian camps" as early as August 1941.¹² This also included *Wehrkreis III*, one of the military districts within the Reich.¹³ In one of the camps located there, Stalag III D Berlin, 14 Soviet POWs were already registered in August 1941.¹⁴ By the beginning of 1942, their number rose significantly, to 3.703.¹⁵ In the neighbouring Stalag III B

7 Cf. Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, 193; Keller, *Ein notwendiges Übel*, 198.

8 Cf. *Guidelines for the Use of Russian Prisoners of War*, BArch, R 41/168.

9 Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im Deutschen Reich*, 465.

10 The structure of the German Camp System for POWs was the following: After their capture, prisoners were first gathered and then assembled in transit camps in the rear army areas, the *Durchgangslager*, or Dulags (transit camps). After long marches and train rides, they reached the *Kriegsgefangenen-Mannschaftsstammlager*, or Stalags (enlisted men's camps), the main camps for enlisted men, or the *Offizierslager*, or Oflags (officers' camps), the camps for officers. Furthermore, each Stalag had several, sometimes hundreds of external labour detachments, so called *Arbeitskommandos* (labour units). For an overview on the camp system for Soviet POWs in English see Andreas Hilger and Esther Meier "Forced Labor of Soviet Prisoners of War during the Second World War", in *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, Issue 72, Fall 2023 (Washington D.C.: German Historical Institute, 2023), 69-90.

11 *Decree of the OKW*, 26 June 1941, BArch, RW 59/142, 34. On the "Russian camps" see Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im Deutschen Reich*.

12 Cf. Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im Deutschen Reich*, 76.

13 The German Army divided German territory in territorial administration units, so called "Wehrkreise" (military districts). At the beginning of WWII there were 15 Wehrkreise numbered I to XV. Wehrkreis III included the territory of Brandenburg and Berlin and contained four Stalags, numbered III A to D and three Oflags numbered III A to C (Stalag III A Luckenwalde, Stalag III B Fürstenberg/Oder, Stalag III C Alt Drewitz, Stalag III D Berlin, Oflag III A Luckenwalde, Oflag III B Tiborlager and Oflag III C Lübben/Spree).

14 *Numerical Lists of the OKW*, BArch, RW 6/784. These lists, in which the number of prisoners for each POW camp is broken down by nation, were compiled monthly by the OKW and have largely been preserved.

15 *Numerical Lists of the OKW*, BArch, RW 6/450.

in Fürstenberg/Oder, 1.999 Soviet prisoners arrived on 10 November, and ten days later they were supplemented by another 1.000.¹⁶ In December 1941 there were already 222.000 Soviet POWs deployed for work across the Reich. The number continued to rise as the war progressed, reaching 631.559 in August 1944.¹⁷ In Stalag III D itself, the peak was reached in October 1944 with 11.536 Soviet prisoners.¹⁸

The special treatment of Soviet POWs

It has already been mentioned that the use of Soviet POWs in the German war economy was subject to certain restrictions and conditions. These restrictions aimed at isolating this prisoner group, which was perceived as a security threat.

To meet the special treatment guidelines and security needs for the Soviet POWs, the Wehrmacht resorted to a system of independent “Russian camps”. In other regular Stalags such as Stalag III A Luckenwalde, spatial separation was achieved by segregating Soviet soldiers in their own camp sections.¹⁹ Unlike other Wehrmacht POW camps in the Reich, Stalag III D did not have a large main camp to house tens of thousands of prisoners, but was rather a network of camps.²⁰ Although there were also larger camp complexes with their own infrastructure, for example in Lichterfelde, the majority of the prisoners were distributed directly to the hundreds of labour units scattered throughout the city.²¹ Accordingly, a different solution for isolating Soviet prisoners had to be found in these.²² There are many indications that separate labour units for Soviet POWs were set up in the area of Stalag III

16 Cf. *Numerical Lists of the OKW*, BArch, RW 6/784.

17 Der Beauftragte für den Vierjahresplan/Der Generalbevollmächtigte für den Arbeitseinsatz, eds., *Der Arbeitseinsatz im Großdeutschen Reich*, No. 10 of 31 (October 1944).

18 Cf. *Numerical Lists of the OKW*, BArch, RW 6/452.

19 Cf. Dallas Michelbacher, Meyer Schwarz, and Patrik Tobin, “Stalag III A”, in Megargee et al., *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, 410-412, here 402. Cf. Uwe Mai, *Kriegsgefangene in Brandenburg. Stalag III A in Luckenwalde 1939-1945* (Berlin: Metropol, 1999), 32.

20 Thomas Irmer, “Französische Kriegsgefangene in Berlin. Zur Geschichte des Kriegsgefangenenlagers Lichterfelde”, in Glauning and Borchers, *Past and Forgotten?*, 32-41, here 33.

21 Buggeln speaks of at least 120 labour units. Irmer speaks of 200 labour units for French POWs alone. Cf. Buggeln, *Stalag III D*, 410; Irmer, *Französische Kriegsgefangene*, 36.

22 Cf. *Meeting at the Reich Chamber of Commerce on 5.9.1943 in the large meeting room*, 5 September 1943, BArch, RW 21-4/15, 81.

D in order to comply with the guidelines of the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht (OKW), which demanded segregation of Soviet POWs from all other groups of prisoners. An OKW list from April 1942 shows that only Soviet prisoners were deployed in Kommando 103, which was located in Berlin Staaken in the western outskirts of Berlin and housed up to 1.700 Soviet POWs.²³ Kommando 600 Zehlendorf also consisted of Soviet POWs only.²⁴ In June 1942 a separate camp for 3.000 Soviet prisoners was built at Adlergestell in northern Berlin. In December 1942, 2.300 POWs to be used in the nearby Reichsbahn repair works were already imprisoned there.²⁵ Isolation from other prisoner groups could thus be guaranteed, at least in the verifiable cases. This spatial separation went hand in hand with a distinct, significantly worse treatment of the prisoners, which already began in the Stalags before the transfer to Berlin. Continuous malnutrition since their capture, miserable conditions in camps and poor or completely absent medical treatment led to rapid exhaustion.²⁶ Prisoners were often already so physically weakened that a work deployment was doomed to fail. For example, when the first Soviet POWs were transferred to a Siemens factory at the beginning of 1942, 200 of the 400 prisoners were not able to work at all because of their poor health.²⁷ Five percent of the remaining prisoners died during transport to the accommodation camp.²⁸ And the Siemens camp was not an isolated case. Of the 300.000 Soviet POWs who were in Stalags in the Reich in December 1941, only a small proportion were fit for work at all.²⁹ Werner Mansfeld, Ministerial Director and head of the Labour Deployment Business Group of the Four-Year Plan himself unsparingly summed up the disaster of the labour deployment on 20 February

23 *Numerical List of the OKW*, German docs in Russia, Fond 500 Findingbook 12450 Folder 41, 110. Available online at: <https://wwii.germandocsinrussia.org/de/nodes/2179-akte-41-zahlenm-ige-nach-weiselisten-der-sowjetischen-franz-sischen-belgischen-holl-ndischen#page/1/mode/grid/zoom/1>.

24 *Numerical List of the OKW*, BArch, R 4606/4613.

25 Cf. Memorial Plaque "Forced Labour Camp at Adlergestell", photo available online at: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/16/Gedenktafel_Neltestr_1_%28Adler%29_Zwangsarbeitslager_am_Adlergestell.jpg.

26 On the conditions in the camps, see Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene*; Streit, *Keine Kameraden*.

27 Cf. *Quarterly Report on the Employment of Soviet Prisoners of War in the Small Construction Plant of Siemens-Schuckert A.G. in Berlin-Siemensstadt*, 29 August 1942, available online at: <https://wwii.germandocsinrussia.org>.

28 Cf. *ibid.*

29 Cf. Mai, *Kriegsgefangene in Brandenburg*, 92.

1942: “There were 3.9 million Russians available, of which only 1.1 million remain. From November 41 – January 1942 alone, 500.000 Russians died.”³⁰

Scope for action and the “grey zone”

Up to this point, the internment and forced labour of Soviet POWs in Berlin have been briefly described. In the following chapter, I would like to focus on prisoners as actors themselves. How did they deal with these harsh conditions and what room for action did they have? Such research questions are much more difficult to answer. There are hardly any first-person documents available that allow access to the history of experience. Rather, most surviving documents, such as the personal cards by the Wehrmacht, are bureaucratic perpetrator sources that can reveal little about both the individual and collective experience of the prisoners. Nevertheless, even based on these documents, it is possible to trace diverse forms of action with which prisoners attempted to improve their situation. These actions moved between two extremes: cooperation with the enemy on the one hand and resistance on the other.

Cooperation with Nazi institutions is generally subsumed under the term collaboration, which is controversial in research. I use the term here not in a moral sense, but to categorise, following Mark Edele, all actions that support the enemy’s war effort through service in the military, police, or other agencies of the enemy.³¹ This also includes activities not obviously related to combat, such as working as a translator. I argue that one must understand the transition between these forms of action and seemingly opposing resistant behaviour as fluid, occasionally contradictory and full of grey zones.

Training and use of Soviet POWs as propagandists

The largest group of potential collaborators registered in Stalag III D were the so-called “propagandists” of the Wehrmacht. The “Wehrmacht

30 Quoted from Ulrich Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik in Deutschland. Saisonarbeiter, Zwangsarbeiter, Gastarbeiter, Flüchtlinge* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2001), 138. Mansfeld refers to the total number of Soviet POWs in German custody.

31 See Mark Edele, *Stalin’s Defectors. How Red Army Soldiers Became Hitler’s Collaborators, 1941-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 125.

Propaganda Department at the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht" (OKW/WPr.) was responsible for agitation during the war and thus also for propaganda among Soviet POWs.³² A letter from the OKW dated 23 March 1944 summarises the tasks of propaganda among Soviet POWs in retrospect: "1) Increasing labour productivity 2) Promoting anti-Bolshevik attitudes 3) Combating Soviet agitation [...] 4) Restricting escapes and preventing sabotage 5) Eliminating shortcomings and abuses in the treatment and management of POWs."³³ The enumeration and further writing make the motivation of the propaganda efforts very clear; it was primarily about achieving the "best possible work performance".³⁴ The last point should therefore not be misunderstood as a plea for humane treatment. The author pointed out that these were not "sentimental motives" but purely "sober considerations"³⁵ for the sake of increasing productivity. In addition to this central motive, the suppression of resistance also played a central role.³⁶ Beyond sending propaganda agents to Stalags, the Wehrmacht recruited "voluntary Propagandists" (*Freiwillige Propagandisten*) among the Soviet POWs.³⁷ These POWs were to be deployed in Stalags themselves to motivate their fellow prisoners to work and cooperate.³⁸ In exchange they enjoyed considerable privileges. They were not assigned to forced labour, could receive German newspapers such as the *Völkischer Beobachter* and the *Illustrierte Zeitung* and listen to the radio.³⁹ The OKW set up so-called training camps (*Ausbildungslager*), namely Wuhlheide and Dabendorf for training these persons.⁴⁰

32 *Transcript of the OKW on the Tasks and Aims of Propaganda among Soviet POWs*, 23 March 1944, BAArch, RH 49/35, 138.

33 *On the Tasks and Goals of Propaganda among Soviet POWs*, 23 March 1944, BAArch, 58/9015.

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Cf. ibid.*

37 *Cf. ibid.*

38 *Letter from the Bremen Labour Office on the use of Soviet POWs as "Voluntary Propagandists"*, Bremen State Archives, 4, 29/1-1293, reprinted in *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im Arbeitseinsatz 1941-1945. Dokumente zu den Lebens- und Arbeitsbedingungen in Norddeutschland*, ed. Rolf Keller and Frauke Petry (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2013), 346.

39 *Cf. Propaganda among Soviet Prisoners of War*, 28 January 1943, BAArch, 58/9016, 139.

40 There is little knowledge about these training camps to date. A brief overview can be found in Keller, *Wehrkreis III*, 34. Short sections on the individual camps can also be found in the *USHMM Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos Volume IV*. On the "Voluntary Propagandists", see also Reinhardt Otto and Rolf Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im System der Konzentrationslager* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2019), 275-293.

Under which criteria were these propagandists selected? According to the OKW, persons were to have an “anti-Soviet attitude” and “appear to be propagandistically capable”.⁴¹ Personal cards of Stalag III D indicate that, from the Wehrmacht’s point of view, the possible qualification was linked to the prisoner’s education and rank. Of the 34 persons recorded in Stalag III D who were verifiably recruited as propagandists for the Wehrmacht, 20 held above-average ranks. This corresponds to almost 60 percent of entries and is thus a significantly higher proportion than among all recorded prisoners of Stalag III D (24 percent higher ranks, 70 percent ordinary soldiers). Even more striking are the propagandists’ occupations. While, with 35 percent, the proportion of peasants among the entire sample is clearly the highest, there is not a single peasant among the propagandists. Instead, teachers and engineers make up the largest share.

The conclusion is obvious that the Wehrmacht selected particularly educated Red Army soldiers to be active in propaganda. Internal reports from Wuhlheide training camp confirm this. Instructor Georg von der Ropp made written suggestions for prisoner selection on 20 March 1942.⁴² According to these, if possible, “people from ‘intellectual’ professions [...] especially teachers” should be selected.⁴³ In principle, he only recommended candidates who had at least seven years of Soviet secondary school education.⁴⁴ The second criterion for recruitment seems to be more difficult to determine: the “anti-Soviet attitude”. The Wehrmacht presumably resorted primarily to interrogations to determine the suitable attitude of the candidates. There is evidence of numerous interrogations.⁴⁵ Mark Edele also proves that so-called “defectors”, i.e. Red Army soldiers who voluntarily surrendered to the Wehrmacht, were systematically interrogated.⁴⁶ Here, too, there was the possibility of recruitment for propaganda purposes.

On 9 July 1942, Alexej S. was taken prisoner near Yelnya in Smolensk Oblast. The addition “defector” is noted on his personnel card.⁴⁷ He was

41 *Tasks and Goals of Propaganda among Soviet POWs.*

42 *Proposal Concerning the Principles for the Selection of Prisoners for the Special Camp Wuhlheide*, 20 March 1942, BArch, MSG 2/3089.

43 *Ibid.*

44 *Cf. ibid.*

45 *Cf. for example in activity reports of Wehrmacht units. Cf. a survey cited by Christian Hartmann in Christian Hartmann, “Massensterben oder Massenvernichtung? Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im Unternehmen Barbarossa”, Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte 49 (2001): 97-158.*

46 *Cf. Edele, Stalin’s Defectors*, 11.

47 *Cf. Personal Card Alexei S.*

initially registered in Lamsdorf camp and transferred to III D Berlin on 24 January 1943. On the same day, he was registered in Wuhlheide training camp and finally transferred to Dabendorf camp on 29 March.⁴⁸ A CV on Georgij P's personnel card also suggests detailed interrogation. The officer, assigned as an engineer, was transferred to Stalag III D on 9 April and came to Wuhlheide a month later.⁴⁹

In some cases, POWs might also have volunteered for such purposes on their own initiative. There is a case from Oflag (officers' camp) XIII D Hammelburg in which several officers expressed their wish "to be united in volunteer formations for the fight against Bolshevism".⁵⁰ Overall, there are only a few sources available that provide insight into training camps and the course of the training itself. Since existing sources again only refer to Wuhlheide camp, I will limit myself to it here. The lawyer and university lecturer Tarmurbek Dawletschin from Kazan came to the Wuhlheide camp in May 1942. He had been called up to the front from the Tatar Soviet Republic shortly after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, became a POW and, after a long march, was interned in Bergen-Belsen camp. There, as a clerk in the military hospital, he survived the winter of 1941-1942, which was fatal for most of his fellow prisoners.⁵¹ In his memoirs, translated and published in German in 2005, he reports: "From Bergen-Belsen we were taken by train to the Wuhlheide camp near Berlin. [...] Most of the prisoners received political training, others went to work outside the camp every day."⁵² According to his recollections, the food was hardly any different from other POW camps, and he, who had already received privileged treatment in Bergen-Belsen, did not consider accommodation in rooms of 12 persons each to be particularly good.⁵³ For prisoners who had previously been housed in Stalags under ordinary conditions of extreme confinement and the constant threat of hunger and disease, Wuhlheide camp may well have made a good impression.

48 Cf. *ibid.*

49 Cf. Personal Card Georgij P.

50 *Note for the Führer of 23 January 1942*, Political Archive of the Foreign Office (PAAA) R 105184, quoted from: Otto/Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene*, 276.

51 Tamurbek Dawletschin, *Von Kazan bis Bergen-Belsen. Erinnerungen eines sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941/1942* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005), 206.

52 *Ibid.*, 206-207.

53 *Ibid.*, 208.

Starting in the training camps itself, the propagandists were promptly involved in the Wehrmacht's work. Some wrote articles for the prisoner newspaper *Klitsch*, a propaganda newspaper distributed in POW camps and which had already reached a circulation of 100.000 copies in 1941.⁵⁴ But the real work began when they were transferred to regular labour units. Peter K., for example, remained in Stalag III D after his stay in Wuhlheide training camp, but in May 1943, he was transferred to unit 261 Friedrichsfelde-Ost and then to unit 766 Berlin-Staaken, where he worked as a "propagandist".⁵⁵ The 34-year-old accountant was then sent to Stalag Luckenwalde in the summer of 1944. His further life is unknown. The Russian student Sergej K. was also initially in Wuhlheide training camp in autumn 1942, before he was assigned as an "active propagandist"⁵⁶ in Greifswald camp from February 1943. He was then transferred again to a Stalag III D training camp and finally released from captivity in January 1945.⁵⁷ Others also became active in the occupied territories. For example, Alexander I.'s personnel card shows that after a three-month stay in Wuhlheide training camp, he was transferred to the propaganda department of the German military administration in Smolensk's security force in June 1943.⁵⁸

The camps of the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories

The second large group of Soviet POWs used in German service entered the service of the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories (*Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete* – RMfdbO). The RMfdbO, established in 1941 for the civil administration of the occupied eastern territories under the leadership of Alfred Rosenberg, was not formally responsible for POWs.⁵⁹ However, it was involved in propaganda activities in the

54 Cf. Letter from the RMfdbO on Propagandistic Processing of All Soviet Prisoners of War, 24 November 1941, BAArch, RW 6/276, 4.

55 Cf. Personal Card Peter K.

56 Personal Card Sergei K.

57 Cf. *ibid.*

58 Cf. Personal Card Alexander I.

59 Cf. Andreas Zellhuber, "Unsere Verwaltung treibt einer Katastrophe zu...". *Das Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete und die deutsche Besatzungsherrschaft in der Sowjetunion 1941-1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2006); Ernst Piper, *Alfred Rosenberg. Hitlers Chefideologe* (Munich: Karl Blessing Verlag, 2005).

war against the Soviet Union and thus was interested in staff for the administration of the occupied territories.⁶⁰ Shortly after the invasion of the Soviet Union, the RMfdbO began inspecting POW camps and selecting suitable candidates.⁶¹ These candidates were then transferred to the RMfdbO's own special camps (*Sonderlager*) for training, namely the camps Wustrau, Wall, Wutzetz and Ziethenhorst, which were all located in the Rhinluch region in northern Brandenburg.⁶²

As early as August 1941, several selection committees visited POW camps in Nesterow, Pagegiai, Cholm, Lviv and Bergen-Belsen.⁶³ Afterwards, the selected prisoners were gathered in Stalag III A Luckenwalde and then transferred to special camps. The training sessions here were very similar to these in Wuhlheide camp. A special feature of training in the Rhinluch, however, was the specific preparation of prisoners for deployment in their countries of origin. In particular, the Ukrainians, Russians and Belarusians were to be deployed in the administration of the already occupied territories. Accordingly, they were prepared for the situation on the ground with a focus on the respective "national concerns" and with specialised instructions. On 20 July, the first 40 Belarusian collaborators were released into "home service". Those designated for release were first transported to the commandant's office of Stalag III D in Berlin, where the deputy commandant handed them their release certificates. They were then taken to Minsk and assigned to German service posts. Another transport with Ukrainians left for Kyiv on 6 November 1942, where some of them were deployed to "fight partisans" in Ukrainian police formations. Others worked in police formations and the administration in Kyiv itself. In contrast to the primarily propagandistic deployment for the Wehrmacht, these former Red Army soldiers were thus directly involved in the German occupation regime, including the participation in war crimes that went along with it. Beyond deployment in the "fight against partisans", this was particularly true of some candidates from Wustrau who were drafted into the "Kurt Eggers" SS-Division in October 1943.⁶⁴

60 Cf. *Propagandistic Processing of All Soviet Prisoners of War*, 4.

61 Sebastian Cwiklinski, "Die Panturkismus-Politik der SS", in *Fremdeinsatz. Afrikaner und Asiaten in europäischen Kriegen 1914-1945*, eds. Gerhard Höpp and Brigitte Reinwald (Berlin: Das arabische Buch, 1999), 149-166, here 150.

62 *Ibid.*, 151.

63 Cf. *Three Years of Work in Wustrau*, 1944, BArch, R 6/592, 3. I thank Rolf Keller for pointing out this source to me.

64 Cf. *ibid.*, 22. For this propaganda unit, see BArch, RS 16/30.

Motivations

As has been shown, Stalag III D, being the administrative headquarters for several Wehrmacht and RMfdbO training camps, occupied a prominent position in the system of POW camps. German authorities' motivation for recruiting collaborators has been demonstrated. They expected the prisoners to be useful in the proclaimed *Weltanschauungskrieg*. That Soviet POWs, otherwise stigmatised and treated as "subhumans" and "enemies", once selected according to questionable criteria, suddenly enjoyed such astonishing privileges, is remarkable. But what were the motivations to collaborate from a prisoner's point of view?

First, one should not be deceived by the Nazi term "volunteer Propagandists". In the reality of the POW camps, which were characterised by hunger, physical and psychological violence and bad medical treatment, it is fundamentally questionable whether one can consider the recruitment process voluntarily at all. Many prisoners saw cooperation with the Germans as the only way out of the life-threatening situation in the camps. Nevertheless, the anti-Soviet attitudes that Nazi leadership hoped for did exist within the Red Army. In her comprehensive study of the Red Army in World War II, Catherine Merridale shows that the Soviet military was deeply divided in its political attitudes.⁶⁵ In his study on defectors, Mark Edele also convincingly demonstrates that anti-Soviet attitudes were a significant factor in the decision to defect to the Germans for some of the Red Army soldiers. However, he also concedes that assessment of survival chances played an equally important role.⁶⁶ In the specific case of the collaborators recorded, it can be assumed that their motivation for cooperating with the Germans ranged somewhere between the poles of "survival" and "political conviction". Due to the lack of ego-documents and information about their lives before and after imprisonment, more precise statements are only possible to a limited extent. However, it is possible to prove that not all the recruited Red Army soldiers identified with their new task. On the contrary, there are several references to resistance and escapes from Stalag III D on the part of propagandists.

Alexej L., for example, came to Wuhlheide training camp in June 1942. He was then assigned to labour unit 261 in Berlin-Zehlendorf, from which

65 Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War. The Red Army 1939-1945* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005).

66 Cf. Edele, *Stalin's Defectors*, 94-119.

he escaped on 20 January 1944.⁶⁷ The Lithuanian car mechanic Wasilij S. even fled from Wuhlheide training camp itself. Only six weeks after his transfer to Wuhlheide, the escape was recorded on his personal card.⁶⁸

Furthermore, there are indications that recruited POWs used their special position to resist. A report by the SS Security Service on the mood and attitude among Soviet POWs dated 2 September 1943 quotes a report from Blankenburg. A prisoner who had obviously been used as a voluntary propagandist spoke to his comrades in Neumühle camp. He was supposed to advertise here for joining volunteer associations. However, his speech turned out to be more pro-Soviet agitation, as he was later quoted as saying: "I know you are being beaten by the Germans but let yourselves be beaten. In four weeks, we will beat them again."⁶⁹

The responsible authorities were well aware of this danger. Thus, in March 1942, Rupp, the instructor of Wuhlheide camp, explicitly pointed out the "internal danger of infection"⁷⁰ among prisoners and suggested that only those prisoners be assigned for training who had already "passed through the lock of the SD with results that were not doubtful."⁷¹ In other words, the commissioner feared infiltration, and apparently not entirely without reason.⁷² There were also cases of resistance among Red Army soldiers recruited by the RMfdbO. Some prisoners temporarily assigned to work for local winegrowers in southern Styria joined the partisans based there in the Croatian border region.⁷³ And in Commissariat White Ruthenia there were also reported defections of Red Army prisoners deployed there.⁷⁴

Finally, the hoped-for improvement in the situation for Red Army collaborators by no means always materialised. The return of unsuitable candidates to regular POW Camps and punishment for alleged offences make

67 Cf. Personal Card Alexei L.

68 Cf. Personal Card Wasilij S.

69 *Extract from the reports of the SS Security Service, 2 September 1943, quoted from: Meldungen aus dem Reich. Die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS 1938-1945*, ed. Heinz Boberach, Vol. 14 (Herrsching: Pawlak 1984), 5702-5704.

70 *Proposal Concerning the Principles of Prisoner Selection for the Special Camp Wuhlheide*, 20 March 1942, BArch, MSG 2/3089.

71 *Ibid.*

72 Otto and Keller also refer to examples that suggest a targeted infiltration of resistance fighters into training camps. Cf. Otto/Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene*, 293.

73 Cf. *Three Years of Work in Wustrau*, 14.

74 Cf. *ibid.*, 21.

it clear that the relationship between German authorities and prisoners was purely instrumental.

Consequently, it is too simple to one-dimensionally label the recorded cases as collaboration. The examples described above already make it clear that many POWs chose both collaborative and resistant behaviours. For selected POWs, the obligation to serve in Germany represented one possible option for improving their situation. The patterns of behaviour oscillated between cooperation and refusal. If we look at the reconstructable spectrum of acts of resistance, however, it becomes clear that in most cases it was primarily a matter of improving one's own living situation.

Forms of resistance

The most frequently documented form of resistance by Soviet POWs in Stalag III D was self-help.⁷⁵ Hunger forced the prisoners to resist the conditions imposed by the Stalag's administration. Sergej W., who was assigned to the railroad repair works in Berlin-Wilhelmsruhe, vividly recalls the prisoners' efforts to find additional food in a letter from 2013: "Sometimes we ran through the entire compound to the rubbish bin at the works canteen, where we hoped to get hold of potato peels or an infusion of substitute coffee. [...] Once I too ventured out to the dustbin."⁷⁶ In addition to food, prisoners also tried to make or steal tools to improve their supply situation. For example, a German engineer from the Siemens-Schuckert factory reported that prisoners tried to make knives to cut their bread.⁷⁷ A surviving letter from the management office of the AEG turbine factory in northern Berlin from May 1944 documents that prisoners repeatedly stole factory property such as yarns and fabrics to improve their clothing.⁷⁸

All this happened under the threat of harsh punishment. The management of the AEG works pointed out in the same letter that thieves would be

75 Here I follow the four-stage model of resistance established by Detlef Garbe. Cf. Detlef Garbe "Selbstbehauptung und Widerstand in den Konzentrationslagern", in *Neuengamme im System der Konzentrationslager. Studien zur Ereignis- und Rezeptionsgeschichte*, ed. Detlef Garbe (Berlin: Metropol, 2015), 237-264.

76 *Letter from Sergej W.*, 17 December 2013, Archiv Kontakt-Kontakty e.V.

77 *Quarterly Report on the Labour Deployment of Soviet Prisoners of War in the Siemens-Schuckert A.G. in Berlin-Siemensstadt*, 32.

78 *Letter from the AEG Management*, Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB) A Rep. 227-05 AEG, 137.

"brought to the Gestapo for punishment in any case" if they were discovered.⁷⁹ Sergej W. reports abuse after he was caught by a guard with coffee he had previously snatched:

When I came back to the factory hall, I saw that we were being checked: the prisoners had to line up for roll call. The guard, an older, well-fed corporal, waved me over. I went up to him, he yelled: "Russian pig!" and hit me in the face with the hand on which he was wearing a heavy ring.⁸⁰

The examples clearly show that self-help by prisoners in Stalag III D was certainly possible, but that prisoners' room for action depended on the strictness of guards in individual labour units and ultimately on the favour of guards and foremen.

Another form of self-help was escape. Escape attempts by Soviet POWs in German custody were a "mass phenomenon".⁸¹ It is estimated that tens of thousands of prisoners attempted to escape.⁸² There is also evidence of escapes in various Stalag III D labour units, even multiple times, in some cases. The Russian agronomist and first lieutenant in the Red Army Pavel G. fell into German captivity in July 1942 at the age of 28.⁸³ Initially registered in Stalag Alt-Drewitz, he was assigned to a labour unit in Berlin. He escaped from there on 17 July 1943. 11 days later he was captured again in Buckow, 50 kilometres east of Berlin, and brought back to Stalag III C. On 23 February 1944, however, he managed to escape again. The OKW recorded the escape as successful on 15 May.⁸⁴ But not all escape attempts were so successful. The Ukrainian First Lieutenant Mefodij D., for example, was punished on 28 July 1942 with 14 days of closed arrest "for escape".⁸⁵ Afterwards he was able to return to work.⁸⁶ In other cases, the recaptured were

79 Cf. *ibid.*

80 Cf. *Letter Sergej V.*

81 Quinkert and Blank, *Dimensions of a Crime*, 64.

82 Cf. Daria Koslova "Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene in den Konzentrationslagern", in Quinkert and Blank, *Dimensionen eines Verbrechens*, 221. Keller and Otto cite a list from the OKW according to which 66.694 Soviet soldiers were considered to have successfully escaped as of May 1944. Cf. Otto and Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene*, 176.

83 Personal Card Pawel G.

84 Cf. *ibid.*

85 Personal Card Mefodij D.

86 Cf. *ibid.*

handed over to the Gestapo.⁸⁷ The carpenter Alexej L. escaped from unit 261 in Friedrichsfelde-Ost on 20 January 1944.⁸⁸ He was only recaptured more than half a year later and was handed over to the Gestapo in August 1944. His further fate is unknown. Vasily S. escaped from Wuhlheide camp on 12 June 1943.⁸⁹ In September, however, he was recaptured and “released to the Gestapo Potsdam”.⁹⁰ It is also not possible to reconstruct his further fate. In the case of some of these prisoners, however, it can be proven with the help of documents from the administration of the concentration camps that their handover to the security authorities meant imprisonment in a concentration camp. This was the case with Fedor E.. After his escape in October 1942, he was recaptured in Brandenburg on 13 November and finally handed over to the Gestapo in December.⁹¹ The Gestapo arranged for him to be sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp. There he was registered with the prisoner number 53116 and worked in Klinkerwerk sub-camp, infamous for its hardship. He died there on 29 December 1942, only a few days after his arrival.⁹²

The forms of self-help described above are by no means to be considered in isolation, but were often starting points for solidarity and mutual help.⁹³ However, mutual aid was only possible if resources and room for actions were available. The surviving cases suggest that medical staff in particular had such possibilities. Ilya E. was forced to work in the quarry in Rüdersdorf from 1943. He reports that work standards were almost impossible to meet and that he had to do hard physical labour while working with stone.⁹⁴ In the end, he could only survive with the help of the staff in the camp hospital.⁹⁵

87 Cf. Otto/Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene*, 175-181.

88 Cf. Personnel Card Alexej L.

89 Cf. Personnel Card Wasilij S.

90 Ibid.

91 Cf. Personnel Card Fedor E.

92 Cf. Book of the Dead KZ Sachsenhausen, available online at: <https://www.stiftung-bg.de/totenbuch/main.php>.

93 Cf. Garbe, “Selbstbehauptung und Widerstand”, 238.

94 Cf. Letter from Ilya E., 26. March 2006, Archive Kontakte-Kontakty e.V.

95 On camp hospitals as “resistance hotbeds” see the chapter “Camps as Crucibles of Transnational Resistance”, in *Fighters across frontiers. Transnational Resistance in Europe 1936-48*, ed. Robert Gildea and Ismee Tames (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 49-69, 64.

At the end of November 1944, I was completely exhausted and had to die. But two people saved me. They were the Russian prisoner of war Dr. Georgij S., who worked in the military hospital, and the German translator, Corporal Helmut T.. Thanks to them I came back to the camp. They put me in a room for tuberculosis patients, which the German staff avoided entering.⁹⁶

Another impressive case of assistance by medical staff is that of Doctor Boris S., who was a medical officer in the Red Army captured in Kharkiv in May 1942. His personal card shows that he was transferred from Kielce special camp to Stalag III D the same year, where he was deployed as a camp doctor. Boris S. was sentenced to imprisonment at least three times before 1944, at least once because he had kept three fellow prisoners from going to work against the orders of his German superiors, presumably in order not to endanger their health. Boris S. disobeyed orders and therefore had to spend 14 days in closed detention. This form of resistance also took place under the threat of punishment, including transfer to a concentration camp. Boris S. paid a heavy price for his solidarity. On 9 January 1945 he was handed over to the Gestapo and was then transferred to Neuengamme concentration camp.⁹⁷ Boris S.'s case shows the fluid transition between different forms of collaboration and resistance. It was his privileged position as a doctor that initially enabled him to resist. However, his solidarity with his fellow prisoners led to his eventual refusal to obey orders.

The available sources reveal other forms of refusal. The personal card of Fjodor W., who was deployed in labour unit 261 in Friedrichsfelde-Ost, shows that he stayed away from his workplace several times.⁹⁸ Aleksandr A., who worked in the Meltow factories in Weidmannslust, reports that he hid in the changing room with fellow prisoners to avoid work.⁹⁹ Another form of refusal was self-mutilation. Sergej W., who also worked in Friedrichsfelde-Ost, reports such a case: "Once G. asked me to cut the skin between his index finger and thumb with the chisel on his left hand. After that, he no longer came to the factory."¹⁰⁰

96 Ibid.

97 Personal Card Boris S.; Individual Prisoner Records – KL Neuengamme, Arolsen Archives (ITS), 11002 os.

98 Cf. Personal Card Fjodor W.

99 Cf. Letter from Aleksandr A., 4 February 2006, Archive Kontakte-Kontakty e.V.

100 Cf. Letter from Sergei W.

When refusal was organised and carried out collectively, it took the form of political resistance. Leonid T., who remembers his time in a camp on the outskirts of Berlin that unfortunately can no longer be determined, tells of such a case: “There were small, prefabricated houses where we lived. The rations were very poor, for lunch we got three potatoes. We went on hunger strike.”¹⁰¹ This astonishing example of collective refusal, however, was to no avail. In response, Wehrmacht units stormed the camp with machine guns and beat the prisoners to get them to return to work.¹⁰²

Conclusion

As this brief case study was able to show, despite strict isolation and guarding, Soviet soldiers chose a broad spectrum of behaviours when trying to improve their situation in German custody. Particularly noteworthy in the Berlin area were the numerous forms of collaboration that began in training camps administered by Stalag III D. To this point, these have been sparsely addressed by historical research. Red Army soldiers committed themselves to propaganda activities among their comrades, worked in the German administrative structure or served in German armed units. However, research should not stop at this insight but explore the grey areas of these activities and the contradictions and fluid transitions between collaborative and resistant behaviours. As demonstrated, what first appears as collaboration was not necessarily always ideologically motivated but even linked to resistance in many instances. Of course, individual actions can only be understood in a spatial and temporal context. A completely “free” decision was not possible in German custody. Rather, as the escape attempts studied clearly demonstrate, the limited room for action had to be used according to the situation. Particularly when it comes to individual and generalisable motives behind the actions depicted, research reaches its limits, not least due to the fragmentary nature of the sources.

101 *Letter from Leonid T.*, 12 February 2005, Archive Kontakte-Kontakty e.V.

102 Cf. *ibid.*

WER IST WALTER?

Resistance against Nazism, fascism, occupation and collaboration occurred throughout Europe during World War II. But how much do we know about this history in other European countries? Gathering 32 contributions and case studies on the history of this resistance, as well as on its transmission after 1945, especially in museums, the present book is an invitation to look at resistance in Europe in an interdisciplinary, international, transnational and comparative perspective. It is the result of the international research project “Wer ist Walter? Resistance against Nazism in Europe” which gathered historians, curators and other researchers mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, France and Germany.



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