

The Deportation and Destruction of the German Minority in the USSR

by

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The once large and culturally vibrant German minorities of the former USSR are today rapidly disappearing. In 1897 the Russian Empire had 1,791,000 ethnic German subjects.¹ The German population of the USSR numbered 1,621,000 in 1918, 1,238,000 in 1926, 1,152,000 in 1937, 1,620,000 in 1959, 1,846,000 in 1970, 1,936,000 in 1979 and 2,038,000 in 1989.² Descendants of German immigrants to the Russian Empire during the 18th and 19th centuries, the ethnic Germans of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia have lost much of their cultural vitality in the second half of the 20th century. In 1926, 94.9% of the Germans in the USSR spoke German as a native language.³ By 1989, this percentage had been reduced to a mere 48.7%.⁴ The elimination of Germans as viable cultural minorities in the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) has been exacerbated in recent years by massive emigration to the Federal Republic of Germany. Between 1987 and 1997, 1,584,566 ethnic Germans from the former USSR emigrated to Germany.⁵ The 1989, Soviet census counted 2,038,341 ethnic Germans in the USSR.⁶ The recent emigration to Germany thus represents a significant majority of the German population of the former USSR. The Germans remaining in the former USSR will undoubtedly continue to assimilate into Russian culture at an even more rapid rate as the number of ethnically conscious individuals steadily decreases through emigration, natural attrition, and assimilation of newer generations. In a few generations the ethnic German population of the former Soviet Union will be negligible due to the combined forces of assimilation and emigration.

The destruction of the various German communities of the USSR as viable cultural units has its origins in World War II. The Stalin regime used the cover of the war to solve the long-standing perceived problem of German minorities in the USSR. During the 1940s and early 50s, the Stalin regime sought to destroy these Germans as culturally distinct groups of people. The Soviet government employed a combination of physical liquidation and forced assimilation into the dominant Russian culture to accomplish this goal. The motivations behind these genocidal policies have their roots in the long-standing anti-German prejudice of extreme Russian nationalism. The Nazi invasion of the USSR provided Moscow with the pretext to finally

¹Number from the Imperial census. Cited in Samuel Sinner, *The Open Wound: The Genocide of German Ethnic Minorities in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1915-1949 - and Beyond*. (Fargo ND, Germans from Russia Heritage Collection North Dakota State University Libraries, 2000), p. 1.

²Numbers rounded off and taken from Soviet census data. Cited in Sinner, p. 1 and Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and Policy toward the Nationalities of the Soviet Union: From Totalitarian Dictatorship to Post-Stalinist Society*, Karen Forster and Oswald Forster, trans. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991), table A.1, p. 372.

³Simon, table A.8, p. 396.

⁴Alfred Eisfeld, "Germans," in Paul Friedrich and Norma Diamond, eds, *Encyclopedia of World Cultures*, vol. VI, *Russia and Eurasia/China* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1994), p. 138.

⁵<http://www.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/gerrus/general/develop.html>

⁶Alfred Eisfeld, *Die Russlanddeutschen* (Muenchen: F.A. Harbig Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1992), p. 158.

eliminate its perceived German problem. Between 3 September 1941 and 1 January 1942, the NKVD (Peoples Commissariat of Internal Affairs) forcibly deported 799,459 ethnic Germans to confined areas of internal exile called special settlements.⁷ Before the end of 1945, the Stalin regime had interned 1,209,430 *Russlanddeutschen* in special settlements including 203,796 repatriated from Germany.⁸ Dispersed throughout Kazakhstan, Central Asia, Siberia, and the Urals, many of these special settlements lacked sufficient housing, food, clothing and medicine for basic survival. Exposure, disease, and malnutrition exacted a heavy death toll among the German exiles during their first years in the special settlements.

After the deportations, the Stalin regime subjected many of the German exiles to forced labor under inhumane conditions in the labor army. Beginning in January 1942, the NKVD forcibly mobilized hundreds of thousands of German special settlers into labor battalions and colonies collectively known as the *trudarmia* (labor army). These forced labor units worked under NKVD discipline in physical conditions similar to those of Gulag prisoners. Indeed, they often worked in corrective labor camps (ITLs) alongside Gulag prisoners. The poor material conditions, hard work, and meager rations prevalent in the labor army led to tens of thousands of uncounted deaths during World War II. After World War II, the Soviet government dissolved the units of the labor army from 1945 to 1947 and sent its members to special settlements. The *Russlanddeutschen* remained confined to the special settlements under MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs) surveillance and restrictions until 1955.⁹ Even after their release from the special settlements, the Soviet government prohibited the Germans from returning to the areas from which they had been exiled.

The permanent physical dispersal of the German minorities of the USSR ultimately led to their current dissolution. Traumatized by massive mortality, separated from their traditional homelands, dispersed among Slavic and Turkic populations, and deprived of German language education and publications, they have undergone considerable assimilation into the dominant Russian culture. This fate has largely been shared with other extra-territorial minorities deported by Stalin such as the Koreans, Greeks, and Finns. In contrast deported nationalities native to the USSR such as the Karachays, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Crimean Tatars, Kalmyks, and Ahiska (Meskhetian) Turks have remained remarkably resistant to cultural assimilation. The difference between these sets of groups lies in their historical development in the Russian Empire and the USSR prior to the deportations. The German minorities did not develop a national identity strong enough to allow them to maintain their distinct culture in the wake of extreme persecution during the 1940s. Hence unlike the North Caucasians, Crimean Tatars, Ahiska (Meskhetian) Turks and others, Stalin's deportation of the ethnic Germans in the USSR resulted in their destruction as viable cultural minorities.

This paper will examine the 1941 deportations of the ethnic German communities of the USSR to special settlements and their aftermath. This paper is divided into three main sections.

⁷N.F. Bugai, ed. *Iosif Stalin-Lavrentiiu Berii: "Ikh nado deportirovat'": dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii* (Moscow: Druzhba narodov, 1992), doc. no. 6, pp. 39-40 and doc. no. 44, p. 75.

⁸Bugai, doc. no. 50, pp. 75-76.

⁹The Soviet government officially released all Germans from the special settlement regime on 13 December 1955 with a decree from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet entitled, "On Lifting the Restrictions on the Rights of Germans and Members of their Families, Found in Special Settlements." The document is reproduced in V.A. Auman and V.G. Chebotareva, eds, *Istoriia rossiskikh nemstev v dokumentakh 1763-1992* (Moscow: International Institute for Humanitarian Programs, 1993), p. 180.

The first part analyzes the motivations behind the mass deportations of the German communities of the USSR. The second section examines the intentions and goals of the deportations and subsequent Soviet policies of repression aimed at the ethnic Germans. Finally, this paper looks at the results of the deportations and other repressive policies upon the Germans of the former USSR.

Motivation

The official Soviet explanation for the mass expulsion of the ethnic Germans of the Volga and elsewhere in the USSR to special settlements is that they represented a potential fifth column of spies and saboteurs waiting to assist the invading Nazi forces. The Stalin regime justified the deportation of more than half a million (511,600) ethnic Germans from the Volga region (Volga German ASSR, Stalingrad Oblast, and Saratov Oblast) by claiming that they actively harbored tens of thousands of spies and diversionists loyal to the Third Reich.¹⁰

According to reliable reports received from military authorities among the German population living in the region of the Volga exist thousands and tens of thousands of diversionists and spies which are now awaiting a signal from Germany that they should conduct sabotage in the region settled by Volga Germans.¹¹

The Stalin regime, however, had no evidence to support the charge that here were thousands of potential spies and diversionists among the Volga Germans. In the months previous to the deportations, the NKVD had unearthed very few people suspected of political disloyalty among the Volga Germans. After the Nazi invasion of the USSR, the NKVD greatly increased its surveillance of the ethnic German population of the USSR. This was especially true in the Volga German ASSR (Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic) where more than 400,000 Volga Germans lived.¹² Between 22 June and 10 August 1941, the NKVD only arrested 145 Germans in the Volga German republic for reasons related to state security.¹³ Out of these 145 political arrests, the NKVD only accused two of them of being German spies. The remaining 143 arrests consisted of 97 for “spreading defeatist and insurrectionist statements,” six for membership in “anti-soviet and counterrevolutionary groups,” four for having “subversive intentions,” and three for having “terrorist intentions.”¹⁴ Despite the heightened vigilance of the NKVD, they found almost no Nazi spies or saboteurs among the Volga Germans even under the Stalin regime’s elastic definition of these terms in the two months between the Nazi invasion of the USSR and the deportation of the Volga Germans. Nor do the German archives make mention of any large scale use of ethnic Germans in the USSR as spies.¹⁵ The Stalinist claims of widespread disloyalty and treasonous attitudes by the ethnic Germans in the USSR thus has little basis in fact.

In contrast to the NKVD’s meager findings regarding politically unreliable Volga Germans after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union, thousands of Volga Germans openly rallied to support

¹⁰N.F. Bugai, *L. Beria -I Stalinu: “Soglasno vashemu ukazaniiu...”* (Moscow: “AIRO XX,” 1995), table no. 2, pp. 44-45.

¹¹Document reproduced in Auman and Chebortareva, pp. 159-160.

¹²An NKVD report from 28 October 1941 lists the number of ethnic Germans deported from the territory as 438,280. Bugai, *Ikh nado deportirovat’*”, doc. no. 33. pp. 65-66.

¹³Konstanin Isakov, “1941-Other Germans,” *New Times*, no. 17, 1990 , p. 38.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Isakov, p. 37.

the defense of the USSR. Tens of thousands of ethnic Germans in the USSR fought against the Nazis during June, July, and August 1941. From the outbreak of the war until mid July 1941, over 2,500 Volga Germans voluntarily enlisted in the Red Army and another 8,000 joined militia units.¹⁶ A story in *Pravda* on 15 July 1941, praised the heroic contributions of thousands of ethnic Germans to the Soviet war effort.¹⁷ Germans in the Red Army played an important role in the defense of Brest and other key battles in first months after the Nazi assault upon the USSR.¹⁸ Another story noting the role of ethnic Germans in the defense of the USSR appeared on 24 August 1941 in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*.¹⁹ This article highlighted the loyalty and bravery of German soldiers in the Red Army. The focus of the article was a *komsomol* member named Heinrich Hoffmann who died under extreme torture rather than provide information to his Nazi captors. It was only after the Soviet government promulgated the order to deport the Volga Germans on 28 September 1941, that the Soviet press ceased to note the positive contributions of ethnic Germans to the anti-Nazi resistance in the USSR.

Thus the Stalin regime's claims of endemic treasonous mentalities among the Soviet Union's German minorities is not supported by the available evidence. Instead the only real connections between the ethnic Germans of the USSR and Nazi Germany was their shared language and culture. Prior to the deportations, concrete acts by ethnic Germans in the USSR supporting the Nazi war effort were extremely rare. Indeed almost all of the limited collaboration between ethnic Germans in Ukraine and Crimea with the Nazi regime came after the NKVD began to systematically deport the German population of these areas on 15 August 1941.²⁰ The Soviet decision to exile its German population to special settlements relied upon long-standing Russian and Soviet perceptions of these minorities. These perceptions had been shaped by decades of portraying the ethnic Germans as a stereotyped enemy of Russia. The deportations were not a reaction to any concrete anti-soviet acts by members of the German minorities in the USSR.

The German minorities of the Russian Empire and USSR have experienced a wide variety of treatment at the hands of their host government. The initial settlement of German colonists in the Russian Empire took place under very favorable terms for the new immigrants. On 22 July 1763, Empress Catherine II issued a manifesto entitled, "On Permitting All Foreigners Moving into Russia to Take up Residence in Several Gubernias of their Choice and Granting Them Rights".²¹ This manifesto granted specific legal rights and privileges to all Christian foreigners settling in the Russian Empire. Among the rights and privileges afforded to foreign colonists under the manifesto were freedom of religion, internal self government, temporary tax exemption, interest free loans, and eternal immunity from military conscription. The onerous conditions caused in the German speaking states by the seven years war from 1756 to 1763 convinced many to take advantage of Empress Catherine II's offer and emigrate to the Russian Empire. Between 1764 and 1863, hundreds of thousands of German immigrants settled in the lower Volga, Ukraine, the

¹⁶N.F. Bugai, "Avtonomiiu nemtsev Povolzh'ia likidirovat' ...*Istoriia SSSR*, no. 2, 1991, p. 172.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸Helsinki Watch, "Punished Peoples' of the Soviet Union: The Continuing Legacy of Stalin's Deportations," (Washington, D.C.: Human Rights Watch, September, 1991), p. 12.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Following the Nazi invasion of the USSR, the first deportations of ethnic Germans by the Soviet authorities began in Crimea on 15 August 1941. Ingeborg Fleischauer and Benajmin Pinkus, *The Soviet Germans Past and Present* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), p. 76.

²¹Document reproduced in Auman and Chebotareva, pp. 18-20.

Black Sea Coast, Caucasus, and other regions of the Russian Empire.²² These colonists and their descendants enjoyed all the rights and privileges of the 1763 manifesto until 1871. The Russian government pursued a benevolent policy towards the German colonists during their first century of settlement.

Prejudice against the German colonists, however, began to grow among segments of Russia's population during the second half of the 19th century. The German agricultural settlements were often more prosperous than their Russian and Ukrainian neighbors. This economic success combined with special privileges such as exemption from the draft created envy and resentment among some Slavs. The rise of Russian nationalism in the late 19th century intensified these anti-German sentiments. During this time the Slavophile movement in Russia cast all ethnic Germans as their mortal enemy and the Volga Germans as a serious threat to the security of the empire. The Slavophile press consistently scapegoated the Volga Germans and other German communities in the Russian Empire.²³ The consistent demonization of the Germans by the Slavophile press influenced even the highest levels of the Russian government. During the 1870s, Tsar Alexander II began to revoke the rights of the German communities in the Russian Empire. In 1871 they lost the right of self government.²⁴ Three years later, Tsar Alexander II rescinded the immunity from military conscription granted to ethnic Germans by Catherine II.²⁵ The loss of these rights inspired many ethnic Germans to emigrate from the Russian Empire to the US, Canada, and Argentina during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Large German communities, however, still remained in the Volga, Ukraine, Black Sea region, Crimea, Caucasus and other areas of the Russian Empire.

Russian chauvinism and anti-German prejudice reached its peak in Tsarist Russia during World War One. Involved in a large scale war with Germany and Austria-Hungary, the Russian government under Tsar Nicholas II turned against its own ethnic German subjects. The German population of the Russian Empire made convenient scapegoats for the military failures of the Russian army. Germans living near the front were especially vulnerable to punishment.

During 1915 and 1916, the Russian government deported close to 200,000 ethnic Germans from Volhynia, Poland and Bessarabia to eastern regions of the Russian Empire.²⁶ The Russian government made few provisions for feeding and housing the deportees in their new locations. The lack of proper food and shelter resulted in tens of thousands of deaths from hunger and exposure. Estimates of the number of deportees to perish range from 25,000 to 145,000.²⁷ In the most recent study to deal with the subject, Samuel Sinner puts the most probable number of deaths from these deportations at between 63,000 and 100,000.²⁸ The majority of the ethnic German population of the Russian Empire avoided the fate of their Volhynian kinsmen only due to the overthrow of the Tsarist regime in February 1917. The demonization of Germans in the Russian Empire for decades culminated in a ruthless government policy of ethnic cleansing and mass murder.

²²Sinner, p. 1.

²³Sinner, pp. 1-2.

²⁴Eisfeld, "Germans," p. 138.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Cited by Sinner in note 23, p. 12.

²⁸Sinner, p. 6.

The new Soviet government that came to power in November 1917 at first rejected the Russian chauvinism, xenophobia, and persecution of minorities that characterized the previous Tsarist regime. During the 1920s and early 1930s, the Soviet regime pursued a benign cultural policy towards non-Russian nationalities called *korenzatsiia* (nativization). The Soviet government officially adopted this policy at the 13th Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1923.²⁹ The core of the *korenzatsiia* program consisted of creating national territorial units to support the cultural development of non-Russian nationalities. These territorial units possessed real cultural autonomy until the mid 1930s and supported non-Russian schools, newspapers, journals, book publishers, libraries, museums, and theaters. Ranging in size from village Soviets to Union republics, these autonomous territorial units allowed many non-Russian nationalities to experience a cultural renaissance. The ethnic Germans of the USSR were no exception.

The Volga Germans received the first autonomous national territory in the USSR. On 19 October 1918, the Bolshevik government created the Volga German Workers' Commune.³⁰ The Soviet regime upgraded this territory to the ASSRWD (*Autonomen Sozialistischen Sowjetrepublik der Wolgadeutschen*) on 20 February 1924.³¹ The Volga German Republic had considerable administrative and cultural autonomy. This autonomy allowed it to support numerous German language institutions. Among these institutions were schools, teacher training colleges, medical schools, agricultural schools, radio broadcasts, and even a music academy and a professional theater.³² The ASSRWD fostered a great flowering of German language culture.

German communities outside the Volga also received autonomous national units under *korenzatsiia*. The Soviet Union possessed 11 German national autonomous raions in 1929.³³ All but three of these autonomous districts were in Ukraine.³⁴ These raion administrations supported German language schools, newspapers, and other institutions vital to the cultural infrastructure of these ethnic communities. For the *Russlanddeutschen* the era of *korenzatsiia* contrasted favorably with the last three decades of Tsarist rule.

The golden age of *korenzatsiia* was relatively short lived. German cultural autonomy came under increasing restrictions already in 1934. The Russian prejudices against Germans and other minorities did not disappear overnight in 1917. Decades of anti-German propaganda continued to have a residual effect on the views of many Russians. Anti-German sentiments remained strong among many ethnic Russians and others even within the Communist Party. Russian nationalists were particularly prominent in the faction of the party that supported Stalin's consolidation of power in 1928. Despite his Georgian origins, Stalin often behaved as a Russian chauvinist and viewed many small nationalities as being inherently "anti-soviet." During the 1930s, Russian nationalism became increasingly manifest in the policies of the Stalin regime. The Germans and several other ethnic groups in the USSR became victims of growing national repression as the decade progressed. The prejudices that informed these policies had roots that stretched back to the reactionary Slavophile movement during the 19th century.

²⁹Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 387.

³⁰Document reproduced in Auman and Chebotareva, p. 75.

³¹Document reproduced in Auman and Chebotareva, pp. 80-82.

³²Fleischauer and Pinkus, p. 54 and pp. 58-59.

³³Fleischauer and Pinkus, p. 39.

³⁴Fleischauer and Pinkus, p. 28.

The centralization of power in the USSR under Stalin during the 1930s witnessed growing physical and cultural repression against certain small nationalities. In particular Stalin and his regime greatly distrusted those ethnic groups descended of immigrants to the Russian Empire from abroad. The Stalin regime viewed extra-territorial national minorities in the USSR as nests of potential spies and saboteurs awaiting orders from their ancestral homelands. Merely on the basis of their ethnicity Moscow came to think of the ethnic Poles, Koreans, Germans, Greeks, Finns, and Ahiska (Meskhetian) Turks of the USSR as guilty of harboring widespread treasonous attitudes during the 1930s and 1940s. These suspicions relied not upon empirical evidence, but nationalist prejudice and paranoid xenophobia. The Soviet government came to view its extra-territorial minorities as foreigners that could never be regarded as loyal citizens of the USSR as long as they held to their traditional ethnic cultures.

The ethnic Germans represented the largest extra-territorial nationality in the USSR by a large margin. They also shared a culture and language with the Soviet Union's most powerful adversary in Europe, Nazi Germany. Hence the Soviet leadership began to view its German population as a security threat. In the event of a military conflict with Berlin, the Stalin regime believed that its ethnic German citizens would side with Germany. This view had little basis in reality, but had been formed by decades of national demonization under the late Tsars. In order to neutralize the perceived threat posed to the USSR by its German minorities, the Stalin regime began to take increasingly repressive measures against them during the middle and late 1930s. Between 1934 and the outbreak of World War Two, the German minorities of the USSR progressively suffered a series of physical and cultural repressions. Eerily the 1930s had some ominous parallels with the last three decades of Tsarist anti-German policies which cumulated in the World War I deportations.

The appointment of Adolph Hitler as Chancellor of Germany in 1933 solidified the anti-German views of the Stalin regime. The anti-communist, anti-Slav, and pan-German policies espoused by Hitler played directly into the increasingly Russian nationalist prejudices of the Stalin regime. The Soviet government came to fear that the USSR's German minorities would form a strategic asset for the Nazis in the event of a Soviet-German conflict. The NKVD thus compiled lists of all ethnic Germans in the USSR in 1934 for the specific purpose of facilitating their relocation in the event of a war with Germany.³⁵ During the next several years, the Stalin regime engaged in a number of anti-German policies before deporting virtually the entire population in 1941. But, the early compilation of the deportation lists demonstrates that the Stalin regime viewed the existence of ethnic German minorities in the USSR as a problem to be dealt with by force years before the Nazi invasion.

During the second half of the 1930s, the Stalin regime greatly curtailed the cultural autonomy of many non-Russian nationalities. It eliminated numerous native language schools, newspapers, and national raions. German language institutions in Ukraine in particular suffered from these closures. In 1933, Ukraine possessed 451 German language schools with 55,623 students.³⁶ Between 1934 and 1938, the Soviet government forcibly merged all of these schools with Russian and Ukrainian institutions and eliminated German language education in Ukraine.³⁷ By 1939, German ceased to be a primary language of education in any school in Ukraine. The

³⁵Fleischauer and Pinkus, p. 88.

³⁶Fleischauer and Pinkus, p. 55.

³⁷Ibid.

German language press also came under attack. In 1935, the Stalin regime closed eight of the 14 German language newspapers in Ukraine.³⁸ During the next four years it closed the remaining six.³⁹ By mid-1939, Ukraine had no German language press. Indeed by that time the only place in the USSR with German language institutions was the ASSRWD. The Stalin regime eliminated all other official expressions of German culture in the USSR more than two years before *Operation Barbarossa*.

The Stalin regime also began to deport extra-territorial minorities along its borders to Kazakhstan and other remote regions of the USSR during the 1930s. From 1935 to 1939, the NKVD systematically deported Finns, Germans, Poles, Koreans, and Iranians, from along its borders to the interior of the USSR. In 1935 and 1936, the Stalin regime forcibly deported the German population living along the Polish border in Ukraine. The first mass Soviet deportation of Germans based upon ethnicity rather than justified in terms of politics or class occurred in early 1935. The Stalin regime dissolved the Pulin German national raion near the Polish border and deported the 8,300 ethnic German families of the territory to Murmansk Oblast in the Far North.⁴⁰ This arbitrary and non-judicial exile of men, women, and children from their historical villages marked a clear shift by the Stalin regime towards targeting specific ethnic populations for repression. The next year, the NKVD undertook the deportation of more Germans from Ukraine. On 26 April 1936, the SNK (Council of Peoples Commissariats) passed resolution no. 776-120ss “On Resettling from the Ukrainian SSR for Economic Construction in Karaganda Oblast Kazakh SSR 15,000 Polish and German households.”⁴¹ This resolution authorized the deportation of 45,000 Germans and Poles from Ukraine to Kazakhstan. These deportations took place in two waves. The first wave was in June 1936 and the second in September.⁴² In total the NKVD exiled 63,976 Germans and Poles to Kazakhstan under the terms of SNK resolution 776-120ss.⁴³ Ethnic Germans constituted over 14,000 of these exiles (23%).⁴⁴ The Stalin regime engaged in these partial deportations under the pretext that ethnic Germans and Poles were inherently politically unreliable.

Physical repression against ethnic Germans in the USSR prior to World War Two peaked during the Great Purges of 1937-1938. The Stalin regime’s paranoia over foreign spies made extra-territorial minorities primary targets of the purges. The NKVD launched a series of national operations aimed at finding and punishing spies from various foreign powers. The regime carried out a “Polish Operation,” a “Finnish Operation,” a “Latvian Operation,” and of course a “German Operation.” Ethnic Germans formed the majority of those arrested and convicted during the German operation. The German operation took its direction from NKVD prikaz 00439 of 25 July 1937 issued by NKVD chief Nikolai Yezhov in response to a politburo decision of 20 July 1937.⁴⁵ Originally, the German operation targeted primarily German passport

³⁸Fleischauer and Pinkus, p. 57.

³⁹Andreas Kappler, Boris Meissner, and Gerhard Simon, ed., *Die Deutschen in Russischen Reich und in Sowjet Stat* (Koln: Markus, 1987), p. 85.

⁴⁰V. Brule, “Deportirovannye narody v Sibiri (1936-1965 gg.). Spravitel’nyi analiz,” found at <<http://www.memo.ru/history/nem/Chapter20.htm>> p. 3 and Simon p. 199.

⁴¹N.F. Bugai, *Soglasno*, p. 9.

⁴²Alfred Eisfeld and Victor Herdt, *Deportation, Sondersiedlung, Arbeitsarmee: Deutsche in der Sowjetunion 1931 bis 1956* (Koln, Germany: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1996), doc. no. 5, p. 30.

⁴³Brule, p. 3.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵N. Okhotin and A Roginskii, “Iz istorii ‘Nemtskoi operatsii’ NKVD 1937-1938 gg.,” found at

holders, but it soon expanded to focus on Germans with Soviet citizenship.⁴⁶ One of the specific targets of the German operation were “counterrevolutionary activists” in German national raions.⁴⁷ The Soviet archives show a total of 55,005 convictions related to the German operation with 41,898 death sentences up until 15 November 1938.⁴⁸ Special troikas accounted for 24,471 of the convictions and ethnic Germans formed a significant majority of those sentenced.⁴⁹ The troikas convicted 16,316 ethnic Germans, 66.67% of all their sentences during the German operation.⁵⁰ In total ethnic Germans most likely accounted for 37,700 to 38,300 (68.5%-69.6%) of the 55,005 convictions handed down during the German operation.⁵¹ If the same percentage holds for death sentences then the German operation resulted in between 28,700 and 29,160 pronouncements of death upon ethnic Germans in the USSR in a mere two years. During 1937 and 1938, the number of ethnic Germans convicted during various NKVD mass operations totaled between 69,000 and 73,000.⁵² These numbers represent between 5.99% and 6.34% of the total German population of the USSR at the time.⁵³ In contrast convictions of NKVD cases for the Soviet population as a whole during this time were only 0.8% of the population.⁵⁴ Thus ethnic German convictions during the purges exceeded the rate for the Soviet Union as a whole by a factor of more than five. Death sentences had an equally disproportionate impact upon ethnic Germans. During 1937 and 1938, the Stalin regime sentenced 2.5% of its ethnic German population to death during the German operation alone. The percentage of the total Soviet population sentenced to death in all NKVD operations during 1937 and 1938 came to only 0.4%.⁵⁵ Much of the *Russlanddeutsche* intelligentsia were among those executed or incarcerated in 1937 and 1938. Stalin’s ruthless mass physical destruction of ethnic German writers, scholars and other cultural figures represented a clear escalation in dealing with the German problem by eliminating the ethnic German communities. Deprived of their cultural elite and institutions these communities were less likely to assert their German ethnic identity and became more amenable to assimilation.

During the 1930s, the Stalin regime progressively adopted more repressive policies towards the ethnic Germans of the USSR. These policies sought to deal with the perceived problem of ethnically conscious German communities in the USSR. Stalin’s solution was to weaken these ethnic communities. To this end the regime eliminated German cultural institutions in Ukraine, forcibly deported German communities near the Polish border, and executed much of the German intelligentsia. These acts all formed part of an assault on the German minorities of the USSR. The Stalin regime had already begun pursuing the long term goal of eliminating the *Russlanddeutschen* as a distinct cultural grouping in the USSR before 1941. The Nazi invasion of the USSR merely provided the catalyst and cover to enact the physical destruction of all the

<<http://www.memo.ru/history/nem/Chapter2.htm>>, p. 1.

⁴⁶Okhotin and Roginskii, p.14.

⁴⁷Okhotin and Roginskii, p. 16.

⁴⁸Okhotin and Roginskii, table 2, pp. 22-25.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Okhotin and Roginskii, p. 28.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Percentage based upon the German population of the USSR according to the 1937 census, 1,151,602.

⁵⁴Percentage based upon 1,344,926 convictions on cases of the NKVD in the USSR during 1937 and 1938 out of a 1937 population of 162 million. A. Popov, “Gosudarstvennyi Terror v Sovetskoi Rossi 1923-1953 gg. (Istochniki i ikh interpretatsiia,” *Otechestvennye Arkhivy*, no. 2, 1992, table no. 3, p. 28.

⁵⁵Percentage based upon 681,692 death sentences upon NKVD cases during 1937 to 1938. Ibid.

German communities in the Soviet Union. The underlying reason for the deportations was the Stalin regime's ethnically based paranoia regarding the existence of German communities in the USSR.

The Stalin regime targeted the entire ethnic German population of the USSR for deportation. In the words of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "the determining factor here was *blood*, and even heroes of the Civil War and old members of the Party who were German were sent off into exile."⁵⁶ The Soviet government made no exceptions based upon past political loyalty. Communist Party members, *komsomolists*, and Red Army veterans all became victims of the deportations. In March 1949 there were 2,869 ethnic German Communist Party members and 5,800 *komsomolists* in special settlements.⁵⁷ The NKVD also counted 64,435 former soldiers from the Red Army including 3,083 officers and 8,318 sergeants among the German special settlers at this time.⁵⁸ Ethnicity rather than political loyalty determined who the NKVD deported. The regime targeted all ethnic Germans for deportation regardless of their political loyalty and past service to the Soviet state.

The Stalin regime also considered all Germans potential saboteurs, spies, and diversionists regardless of physical capability. The delusional nature of this belief is readily apparent. Children under 16 constituted almost forty percent of the ethnic Germans sent to special settlements. Out of 1,209,430 Germans confined to special settlements, children under 16 numbered 479,479 (39.67%).⁵⁹ Adult men comprised a minority of the the Germans deported to special settlements. The NKVD figures for the deportations from the ASSRWD show out of a total population of 376,717 exiles that 178,694 (47%) were children under 16, 116,917 (31%) women, and only 81,106 (22%) were adult men.⁶⁰ The large imbalance between Volga German men and women is partially explained by the presence of large numbers of men in the Red Army. The Stalin regime demobilized 33,625 ethnic Germans from the Red Army during World War II.⁶¹ Another explanatory factor is the large number of German men incarcerated in the Gulag. On 1 January 1941, Soviet ITLs (corrective labor camps) held 19,120 ethnic German inmates.⁶² At this time males formed 92.4% of all prisoners in ITLs.⁶³ The Stalinist claims that it was necessary to deport the entire German population of the USSR to special settlements for security reasons does not stand up to scrutiny. Most of the ethnic German population of the USSR consisted of women, children, old men, and invalids in 1941. The majority of able bodied young men rather than pose a threat to the USSR were either in the Red Army fighting against Nazi Germany or languishing in corrective labor camps. The ethnic Germans of the USSR posed no more of a real threat to Stalin's regime than Jews did to the Third Reich.

The only exemptions from deportation granted to the Germans were in fact ethnically based

⁵⁶Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago, 1918- 1956* trans. Thomas Whitney, (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), vol. I, p. 78.

⁵⁷V.N. Zemskov, "Spetsposelentsy (po dokumentatsii NKVD-MVD SSSR)," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, no. 11, 1990, pp. 15-16.

⁵⁸N.F. Bugai, *Ikh nado deportirovat'*, doc. no. 31, pp. 250-251.

⁵⁹N.F. Bugai, *Ikh nado deportirovat'*, doc. no. 45, pp. 75-76.

⁶⁰Eisfeld and Herdt, doc. no. 131, pp. 132-133.

⁶¹Bugai, *Soglasno*, p. 39.

⁶²J. Arch Getty, Gabor T. Rittersporn, and V.N. Zemskov, "Victims of the Soviet Penal System in Pre-War Years," *American Historical Review*, vol. 98, no. 4, table no. 4, p. 1028.

⁶³V.N. Zemskov, "Gulag (Istoriko-sotsiologicheskii aspekt)," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* no. 6 1991, tables no. 9 and 10, p. 23.

rather than political or pragmatic. German women married to non-Germans received immunity from deportation.⁶⁴ The Soviet government granted this exemption only to German women living in the ASSRWD, Saratov Oblast, and Stalingrad Oblast.⁶⁵ The number of German women spared deportation under this exemption was quite small. In 1926, only 8.44% of all ethnic German women in the USSR had non-German husbands.⁶⁶ The highest rate of such intermarriage occurred in the large Russian cities such as Moscow and Leningrad. The predominantly rural communities of the Volga had comparatively lower rates of intermarriage. Out of 46,706 Germans in Saratov Oblast only 1,000 women received exemptions from deportation by virtue of having a non-German husband.⁶⁷ The Stalin regime allowed a handful of German women to escape deportation in exchange for bearing and raising culturally Russian children. The goal of destroying the various ethnic German communities in the USSR through deportation, however remained unchanged by these few token exemptions.

Intention

The intent of Stalin's mass deportation of the ethnic Germans of the USSR was to destroy them as viable ethnic communities. The Stalin regime sought to eliminate the various *Russlanddeutsche* minorities as culturally distinct groups. It sought to do this through a combination of physical extermination and forced assimilation. The Stalin regime carried out the physical extermination of a large percentage of the ethnic Germans of the USSR through the means of deportations and forced labor. The Soviet government deliberately deported the ethnic Germans in their entirety to areas known to have deadly living conditions. It then mobilized hundreds of thousands of these exiles into forced labor battalions and colonies collectively known as the labor army (*trudarmiia*). The poor material conditions in exile and the labor army inevitably led to massive mortality among the Germans. The Stalin regime intentionally inflicted conditions upon the ethnic German population of the USSR it knew would lead to its partial physical destruction. The deportations thus clearly fall under Article II C of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, "Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part."⁶⁸ In 1991, the Russian government publicly admitted that the deportation of the *Russlanddeutschen* and other peoples did indeed constitute genocide.⁶⁹

The Stalin regime had previously deported millions of peasants branded as "kulaks" to the exact same areas and conditions with the result that hundreds of thousands of them perished from malnutrition, disease, exposure, and other causes stemming directly from the poor living conditions in the special settlements. Between 1930 and 1940, the OGPU (Unified State Political Administration) and NKVD exiled 3,979,992 kulaks to special settlements in the Urals, Siberia, the Far North, Kazakhstan, and Central Asia.⁷⁰ From 1932 to 1940, the OGPU and NKVD recorded 389,521 deaths among these exiles (9.79% of those deported).⁷¹ This massive mortality

⁶⁴N.F. Bugai, *Ikh nado deportirovat*, doc. no. 10, pp. 43-47.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Fleischauer and Pinkus, p. 61.

⁶⁷N.F. Bugai, *Ikh nado deportirovat*, doc. no. 20, pp. 165-169 and doc. no. 33, pp. 65-66.

⁶⁸*Yearbook of the United Nations* (New York: United Nations, 1948-1949), p. 959.

⁶⁹Documents reproduced in Svetlana Alieva, ed., *Tak eto bylo: Natsional'nye repressii v SSSR, 1919-1952 gody*, (Moscow: Russian International Cultural Fund, 1993), vol. III, p. 257 and pp. 263-265.

⁷⁰V.N. Zemskov, "Kulatskaia sсыlka v 30-e gody," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, no. 10, 1991, p. 3 and "Spetsposelentsy," table no. 2, p. 6.

⁷¹Zemskov, "Spetsposelentsy," table no. 2, p. 6.

resulted primarily from malnutrition and famine related diseases. Those areas with the greatest mortality rates for exiled kulaks were also the areas that received the most German exiles.⁷² In between the two waves of exiles, the Soviet government did nothing to substantially improve the material conditions of the special settlements. The Soviet government thus had full knowledge of the lethal nature of the special settlements in Kazakhstan, Siberia, the Urals, and Central Asia. Despite this knowledge it deported the *Russlanddeutschen* to these settlements and failed to make any provisions to ensure they received sufficient housing, clothing, food, and medical care in exile. Thus one can only conclude that the Stalin regime fully intended for a large number of ethnic Germans to perish from the hardships of exile in the special settlements.

The NKVD systematically carried out the deportation of the *Russlanddeutschen* in a brutal manner. They rounded up the inhabitants of the various German communities in the USSR and loaded them onto cattle cars bound for special settlements in Kazakhstan, Central Asia, the Urals, and Siberia. Special settlements consisted of restricted areas of internal exile supervised by the NKVD. The Stalin regime greatly limited the mobility of the special settlers and took draconian measures to prevent escapes. After 1948, exiles attempting to flee from the special settlements became subject to a sentence of 20 years of hard labor in the strictest of the Soviet ITLs, the “kartorga” camps.⁷³ The Stalin regime exiled 799,459 ethnic Germans between 3 September 1941 and 1 January 1942 on 344 train echelons.⁷⁴ The NKVD dispersed the largest portion of the German deportees across the steppes of Kazakhstan. By the end of 1945, the Soviet government had sent 444,005 ethnic Germans to special settlements in Kazakhstan.⁷⁵ The next largest recipients of German deportees were the Siberian regions of Krasnoyarsk Kray, Altai Kray, Omsk Oblast, and Novosibirsk Oblast.⁷⁶ The harsh climates of these regions combined with inadequate housing, food, clothing, and medical care made life in the special settlements difficult for the German exiles.

Table no. 1⁷⁷

Exile of Ethnic Germans September 1941 to 1 January 1942

Moscow.....	8,640
Tula.....	2,702
Rostov.....	38,742
Krasnodar.....	37,733
Ordzhonikidze.....	99,900
Karbarino-Balkar ASSR.....	5,803
North Ossetia ASSR.....	5,843
Voronezh.....	5,125
Kubishev.....	8,782
Zaporozhia.....	31,320
Voroshilov.....	12,488
Stalin Oblast, Ukraine.....	85,925

⁷²Zemskov, “Kulatskaia,” tables no. 1 and no. 2, p. 5 and Bugai, *Soglasno*, tables nos. 7-9, pp. 246-248.

⁷³Documents reproduced in Alieva, vol. I, pp. 294-297.

⁷⁴Bugai, *Ikh nado deportirovat’*, doc. no. 44, p. 45.

⁷⁵Bugai, *Ikh nado deportirovat’*, doc. no. 45, pp. 75-76.

⁷⁶Bugai, *Ikh nado deportirovat’*, doc. no. 32, p. 65.

⁷⁷Bugai, *Ikh nado deportirovat’*, doc. no. 44, p. 75.

Dnepropetrovsk.....	3,250
Crimea ASSR.....	1,900
Georgia.....	20,423
Armenia.....	212
Azerbaijan.....	23,593
Stalingrad.....	26,245
Saratov.....	46,706
Volga German ASSR.....	371,164
Total.....	799,459

Table no. 2⁷⁸

Exile of Germans to Kazakhstan 25 November 1941

Oblast	Planned Number	Actual Number
South Kazakhstan.....	48,000.....	23,832
Zhambul.....	41,000.....	20,994
North Kazakhstan.....	60,000.....	48,303
Alma-Ata.....	30,000.....	8,761
Aktiubinsk.....	15,000.....	5,554
Pavlodar.....	45,000.....	43,202
Kustan.....	60,000.....	30,010
Akmolinsk.....	60,000.....	56,753
East Kazakhstan.....	32,000.....	28,136
Karaganda.....	29,000.....	8,304
Semipaltinsk.....	50,000.....	38,170
Kzyl-Orda.....	15,000.....	3,608
Total.....	485,000.....	315,627

The lack of proper housing proved to be a major problem for the deportees. Already by January 1942, German exiles had already exhausted the housing stocks available to them in some regions. In Altai Kray, for instance, the local NKVD authorities reported on 5 October 1941 that they could house 100,000 German special settlers⁷⁹. By January 1942, however, over 110,000 German exiles had arrived in Altai Kray.⁸⁰ The buildings that did exist often had no roofs or windows. Frequently the exiles had to construct crude shelters out of earth and straw for protection from the elements. In Altai Kray as late as 1950, 46% of the German special settlers still lived in these primitive huts.⁸¹ The extremely harsh material conditions of the special settlements contributed to a massive increase in mortality among the *Russlanddeutschen* during the 1940s.

Material deprivations in the special settlements, however, were not the main cause of death among the *Russlanddeutschen* during World War Two. The forced labor battalions and colonies

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Isakov, "1941-Other Germans," p. 39.

⁸⁰N.F. Bugai, "K voprosu o deportatsii narodov SSSR v 30-40kh godakh," *Istoriia SSSR*, no. 6, 1989, p.137.

⁸¹Brule, p. 10.

of the labor army accounted for the majority of deaths among this group during that time. Soon after the deportation of the ethnic Germans, the Stalin regime created the labor army. This institution had its origins in NKVD *prikaz* 35105 on 8 September 1941.⁸² This order removed all ethnic Germans from the Red Army and military academies of the USSR. The order then organized these demobilized soldiers into construction battalions and sent them into the interior of the USSR. These labor battalions formed the original core of the labor army.

The labor army underwent great expansion in early 1942 when the Stalin regime conscripted hundreds of thousands of civilian German special settlers into these labor battalions. The GKO (State Defense Committee) issued GKO order 1123ss under Stalin's signature on 10 January 1942.⁸³ This decree subjected all able bodied ethnic German men between 17 and 50 in Kazakhstan, Novosibirsk Oblast, Omsk Oblast, Krasnoyarsk Kray, and Altai Kray to mobilization in labor battalions and colonies. The first mass induction of civilians into the labor army involved 120,000 German special settlers sent to work in lumber camps, industrial construction projects, and railroad building in early 1942. These forced labor units worked under NKVD discipline. The NKVD severely punished escape attempts and refusals to work, often through execution. Communist Party members and *komsomolists* among the mobilized Germans served as a special auxiliary called VOXR (Paramilitary Watch Service) which helped the NKVD ensure worker discipline in the labor army.⁸⁴ The NKVD also maintained a network of intelligence operatives among members of the labor army. The main purpose of this network was to prevent escapes and uprisings. By 1 July 1944, this network numbered 6,240 agents.⁸⁵ The Stalin regime again greatly increased the pool of available recruits to the labor army on 14 February 1942. On this date Stalin issued GKO order 1281ss which expanded the provisions of GKO order 1123ss to all German men in the USSR between 17 and 50 capable of physical labor.⁸⁶ Finally, on 7 October 1942, Stalin made all German men between 15 and 55 and all German women between 16 and 45 subject to induction into the labor army with GKO resolution 2383ss.⁸⁷ The decree exempted only invalids, pregnant women, and women with children under three from labor mobilization.

The NKVD organized the labor battalions of the labor army into two main groups. The first group of mobilized Germans worked alongside Gulag prisoners in ITLs (Corrective Labor Camps), despite being counted as a separate contingent from the convicts.⁸⁸ The second group lived in special industrial enterprise zones and worked in the adjacent factories under VOXR supervision.⁸⁹ These two groups both lived under conditions almost identical to Gulag prisoners. The Soviet government utilized the labor of these mobilized Germans in lumber preparation, coal mining, oil extraction, and industrial and rail construction. By 1 January 1944, the number of mobilized Germans in the labor army exceeded 350,000.⁹⁰ Almost 30% of this number worked

⁸²Document reproduced in Alieva, vol. I, p. 148.

⁸³Document reproduced in Auman and Chebotareva, pp. 168-169.

⁸⁴G. Malamud, "Mobilizovannye sovetskie nemtsy na Urale v 1942-1948," found at <<http://www.memo.ru/history/nem/Chapter14.htm>>, pp. 18-19.

⁸⁵Malamud, p. 20.

⁸⁶Document reproduced in Auman and Chebotareva, p. 170.

⁸⁷Document reproduced in Auman and Chebotareva, pp. 172-173.

⁸⁸Malamud, pp. 10-14.

⁸⁹Malamud, p. 10.

⁹⁰Malamud, p. 12.

in the Urals.⁹¹ Bashkir ASSR, Udmurt ASSR, Molotov Oblast, Sverdlovsk Oblast, Chelyabinsk Oblast, and Chkalov Oblast had 119,358 Germans working in the labor army on this date.⁹² This number was divided between 68,713 working in ITLs and 50,645 in special industrial enterprise zones.⁹³ The Stalin regime created a huge army of forced laborers from among the deported Germans. During World War II, more than a quarter of the total ethnic German population of the USSR toiled in the labor army.

Table no. 3

Number of Ethnic Germans in the Labor Army in Nizhne-Tagil'stoi (ITL), Sverdlovsk Oblast⁹⁴

1 April 1942	3,366
31 December 1942	3,717
1 May 1943	3,312
1 January 1944	4,825
31 December 1945	4,500

Table no. 4

Number of Ethnic Germans in the Labor Army in Bogoslav (ITL), Sverdlovsk Oblast⁹⁵

16 January 1942	6,018
31 December 1942	12,683
16 January 1944	8,921
31 December 1944	8,635

Table no. 5

Number of Ethnic Germans in the Labor Army in Vostural'sk (ITL), Sverdlovsk Oblast⁹⁶

1 July 1942	4,447
31 December 1942	5,738
1 January 1944	5,232
31 December 1944	4,767

Table no. 6

Number of Germans in the Labor Army in Severoural'sk (ITL), Sverdlovsk Oblast⁹⁷

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Malamud, table no. 1, p. 12.

⁹⁴Malamud, p. 10.

⁹⁵Malamud, pp. 10-11.

⁹⁶Malamud, p. 11.

⁹⁷Ibid.

11 April 1942	9,221
31 December 1942	4,262
1 January 1944	4,008
31 December 1944	3,354

Table no. 7

Number of Ethnic Germans in the Labor Army in Tavdinlag (ITL), Sverdlovsk Oblast⁹⁸

1 March 1942	1,986
31 December 1942	464
1 January 1944	448
31 December 1944	274

Table no. 8

Number of Ethnic Germans in the Labor Army in Solikamburstroi (ITL), Molotov Oblast⁹⁹

1 January 1942	10,102
31 December 1942	9,089
1 January 1944	6,245
31 December 1944	4,168

Table no. 9

Number of Ethnic Germans in Usol'e (ITL), Molotov Oblast¹⁰⁰

1 April 1942	4,945
31 December 1942	5,967
1 January 1944	8,896
31 December 1944	7,930

Table no. 10

Number of Ethnic Germans in the Labor Army in Chelyabmetallurgstroi (ITL), Chelyabinsk Oblast¹⁰¹

1 March 1942	11,708
31 December 1942	27,703
1 January 1944	20,648

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

31 December 194422,509

Physical conditions in the labor army proved to be deadly. The Germans in the labor army worked long hours with meager rations under dangerous conditions. Frequently they worked 14 hours a day felling trees, mining coal, extracting oil, building industrial complexes, and other physically demanding tasks.¹⁰² Often this work took place in frigid temperatures. In Chelyabinsk the temperature frequently dropped to -40 C and lower.¹⁰³ Lacking proper winter clothing, many Germans in the labor army froze to death.¹⁰⁴ Insufficient food also burdened the labor army. Gulag set the rations for the labor army according to a differentiated system. This system linked the food rations of members of the labor army to their fulfillment of fixed work quotas. During 1942 and 1943, bread rations ranged from 300 to 800 grams a day depending on how well they fulfilled these quotas.¹⁰⁵ Often Germans in the labor army received little else other than bread. In April 1942, the labor army contingent in Tagillage received only 3% of their normal rations of vegetables and potatoes.¹⁰⁶ This lack of vitamin rich foods resulted in a mass outbreak of pellagra and scurvy.¹⁰⁷ Exhaustion, hunger, and malnutrition constantly plagued the Germans in the labor army. During 1942 and 1943, these conditions defined and frequently ended the lives of the Germans conscripted into the labor army.

Table no. 11

Differentiated Ration Chart for Basic Labor in the Labor Army in 1942¹⁰⁸

Percentage of Assigned Work Quota Fulfilled	Grams of Bread per Day
Below 50%.....	400
Between 50% and 80%.....	500
Between 80% and 90%.....	600
Between 100% and 125%.....	700
125% and above.....	800
Punishment Ration.....	300
Sick Ration.....	550

Table no. 12

Differentiated Ration Chart for Auxiliary Labor in the Labor Army in 1942¹⁰⁹

Percentage of Assigned Work Quota Fulfilled	Grams of Bread per Day
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¹⁰²Fleischauer and Pinkus, p. 118.

¹⁰³Malamud, p. 15.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Ibid

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

Below 50%.....	300
Between 50% and 99%.....	500
Between 99% and 125%.....	600
125% and above.....	700

The material conditions of the labor army often lacked even the most basic standards of hygiene. Mobilized Germans in the Bakalstroi camp and the Chkalov oil fields lived in earth huts.¹¹⁰ Others lived in unheated and unsanitary barracks. This was the most common form of housing for the labor army. Often these barracks lacked ventilation, boiling water, and wooden floors.¹¹¹ Overcrowding and the lack of clean linen and other basic sanitary measures led to repeated outbreaks of typhus, tuberculosis, and other infectious diseases.¹¹² The lack of proper medical care made these diseases particularly deadly.

The poor sanitary conditions, lack of food, and exhausting physical labor the Stalin regime intentionally imposed upon the hundreds of thousands of ethnic Germans in the labor army killed a large portion of them. Labor army battalions in some camps had mortality rates exceeding 50% a year.¹¹³ At the Bogoslav labor camp, more than 12,000 out of 15,000 (80%) Germans in labor army battalions sent there in February 1942 perished before 1943.¹¹⁴ This level of mortality is comparable to the death rate for Jews at Auschwitz.

The intent of the Stalin regime to partially physically destroy the *Russlanddeutschen* through deportation and toil in the labor army can be inferred from the deliberate imposition of deadly conditions upon them. The Soviet government consciously engaged in acts that it knew would inevitably result in mass mortality among its German minorities. The deportations to deadly conditions and mobilizations under starvation rations were not accidental. The deaths that inevitably occurred as a result of these actions must thus also be regarded as having been intentionally inflicted.

The intent of the Stalin regime to assimilate the surviving *Russlanddeutschen* into Russian culture is also clear from its actions. The physical destruction of the traditional communities of the ethnic Germans and their dispersal across the USSR made them extremely vulnerable to cultural assimilation. The ethnic Germans of the USSR no longer lived in compact traditional all German rural settlements. Instead they lived scattered among a variety of peoples across a vast state whose common language of communication as well as the language of prestige and advancement was Russian. The Stalin regime actively sought to further the natural Russification inherent in such conditions by banning the German language from public expression in the USSR. The Soviet government eliminated all German language education and publications in the USSR after the deportations. Russian-Germans could not even speak German in public for fear of persecution during the 1940s and early 50s.¹¹⁵ The loss of German language education and media greatly promoted the loss of German language competency among the descendants of those who survived the special settlements and labor army. The loss of these institutions ensured

¹¹⁰Ibid and Eisfeld and Herdt, doc. 204, p. 250.

¹¹¹Malamud, p. 15.

¹¹²Malamud, pp. 16-17.

¹¹³Sinner, p. 87.

¹¹⁴Bugai, "Avtonomiiu", p. 173.

¹¹⁵Brule, p. 13.

that the assimilationist trends set in motion by the deportation remained unimpeded. The lack of sufficient German language media and educational programs continued throughout the Soviet era. The Soviet government never reinstated schools using German as the primary language of instruction. Instead they only allowed a few token German language newspapers and German as a foreign language classes. Moscow never contemplated a program to rescue the ethnic Germans of the USSR from cultural dissolution by reintroducing real cultural autonomy for the *Russlanddeutschen*. Both the Soviet government and many ordinary Russians viewed the disappearance of the ethnic German minorities in the USSR as a desirable outcome.

Results

The deportations, special settlements, and labor army succeeded in fulfilling Stalin's goal of physically eliminating a large percentage of the Soviet Union's ethnic Germans and traumatizing the surviving remainder. The total excess mortality among the ethnic Germans during the 1940s is difficult to determine exactly. NKVD data on the group's population is incomplete, contradictory, and may in some cases be inaccurate. NKVD data on the population dynamics of the ethnic Germans is extremely sparse for the years 1942 through 1944. Hence those years with the highest mortality rates for the Germans also have the least available statistical information from the Soviet archives.

One clue to the scale of the demographic loss of the Germans is a report on the 1948-1949 reregistration of all special settlers. The report is titled, "On the Number of Exiles and Special Settlers, Initially Resettled in Special Settlements and the Number of Exiles and Special Settlers, in the Last Recount in 1948-1949."¹¹⁶ This report gives the number of each nationality originally counted at the time of the deportation, the number discovered living in special settlements at the time of the recount, and a column of notes. In this third column most of the deported nationalities have a notation on the number of deaths recorded among them in the special settlements up until 1 July 1948. For most of the nationalities the number of recorded deaths is close to the difference between the number originally deported and those found in the recount. The NKVD recorded deporting 608,749 Karachays, Chechens, Ingush, and Balkars in winter of 1943-1944. In 1948, there were 450,034 North Caucasians in special settlements, a difference of 158,715. During this time the NKVD recorded 144,704 deaths among this group in special settlements. The NKVD initially deported 228,392 Crimean Tatars, Bulgarians, Armenians, and Greeks and recounted 185,707 in 1948 for a loss of 42,685. Recorded deaths in the special settlements among this contingent number 44,125. Similar figures are noted in this report for the Kalmyks and Ahiska (Meskhetian) Turks.

The Germans, however, do not have a number of recorded deaths listed in the third column. Instead they have a notation that the number of German special settlers increased by 210,600 in 1945 due to the forced repatriation of many of those who had earlier escaped to Germany. The total number of Germans originally deported plus those later repatriated to special settlements is 1,235,322. Only 1,063,041 German special settlers, however, appear in the 1948 recount. Thus 172,281 ethnic Germans disappeared between 1941 and 1948. This number, however, is incomplete. It only counts ethnic Germans either deported or repatriated to special settlements. The figure does not include the approximately 226,000 Germans already living in the Urals, Siberia, Kazakhstan, and Central Asia in 1941.¹¹⁷ The NKVD also confined these Germans to

¹¹⁶Document reproduced in Bugai, "Deportatsiia: Beriia dokladyvaet Stalinu," *Kommunist*, no. 2, 1991, p. 111.

¹¹⁷Eisfeld and Herdt, doc. no. 24, pp. 45-46.

special settlements, but they are not counted among those “deported” in the document under scrutiny. The actual number of special settlers missing from the NKVD figures is thus nearly 400,000. Not all of this loss, however, can be attributed to deaths due to the deportations and labor army. The NKVD recorded the release and escape of over 50,000 Germans from the special settlements during this time.¹¹⁸ This leaves 350,000 ethnic Germans missing from the statistics of the special settler count in 1948. The problematic issue of natural deaths that would have occurred absent the deportations further reduces the number of deaths directly attributable to Stalin. Samuel Sinner concludes on the basis of much statistical work on this question that the excess unnatural mortality of the group for the years 1941 to 1949 is between 200,000 and 300,000 (14%-21%).¹¹⁹ This figure is less than the losses suffered by some of the other deported groups. The NKVD recorded 23.7% of the exiled North Caucasians perishing in special settlements between 1944 and 1948.¹²⁰ In Kazakhstan between 1944 and 1949, the NKVD recorded 101,036 North Caucasian deaths in special settlements (23.3% of the total for the republic) and 19,501 German deaths (8.9% of the total for the republic).¹²¹ Nevertheless, the huge loss of life suffered by the ethnic Germans certainly serves to categorize the deportations, special settlements, and labor army as crimes against humanity.

Despite the mass mortality resulting from the deportations, conditions in exile, and the labor army, most deportees physically survived these travails. This, however, did not ensure the cultural survival of the group. The dispersal entailed in the deportations permanently destroyed the traditional communities of the *Russlanddeutschen* and their ability to maintain their culture and ethnic identity. Even today the ethnic Germans of the former Soviet Union have been unable to return to the areas from which Stalin deported them, primarily the Volga and Ukraine. Instead they remain dispersed throughout Siberia, Kazakhstan, and Central Asia. Only a little over 1,500 Germans have returned to Ukraine since the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹²² In 1939, there were nearly 400,000 ethnic Germans in Ukraine.¹²³ The figures for the Volga region are even worse. A briefly lived movement to reestablish German autonomy in the Volga led by *Wiedergeburt* (Rebirth) from 1989 to 1993 was unsuccessful and largely collapsed due to internal strife.¹²⁴ One of the fundamental weaknesses of the recent ethnic German political movements in the former Soviet Union is their lack of an ethnically conscious mass base. The descendants of those who survived Stalin’s deportation have lost much of their German culture as a direct result of government policies aimed at eliminating a German ethnic presence in the USSR. Most ethnic Germans in the former USSR speak Russian better than German and many

¹¹⁸N.F. Bugai, “40-50-e gody: Posledstviia deportatsii narodov (Svidetel’stviut arkhivy NKVD-MVD SSSR,” *Istoriia SSSR*, no. 1, 1992, doc. no. 20, p. 132 and doc. no. 23, pp. 133-134. According to the NKVD and MVD documents the Soviets released 37,784 Germans from special settlements and recorded the successful escape of another 15,992 for a total of 53,776 Germans removed from the special settler counts.

¹¹⁹Sinner, p. 85.

¹²⁰Bugai, *Ikh nado deportirovat’*, doc. no. 48, pp. 264-265.

¹²¹Figures cited in Michaela Pohl, “‘It Cannot be that our Graves will be Here:’ Chechen and Ingush Deportees in Kazakhstan, 1944-1957,” p. 9. Unpublished manuscript of an article scheduled to be published in the *Journal of Genocide Research* in 2002.

¹²²<http://www.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/gerrus/hilkes.html>

¹²³The 1939 Soviet census counted 392,458 Germans living in the Ukrainian SSR. Bugai, *Ikh nado deportirovat’*, doc. 1, p. 36.

¹²⁴For a detailed analysis of *Wiedergeburt* during this time see Eric J. Schmaltz, “Reform, ‘Rebirth’ and Regret: The Rise and Decline of the Ethnic German Nationalist *Wiedergeburt* Movement in the USSR and CIS, 1987-1993,” *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 26, no. 2 (June, 1998).

know very little or no German at all. The damage caused to the *Russlanddeutschen* (Russian-Germans) as a distinct and viable cultural group by Stalin and his successors appears at this point to be irreparable.

Dispersed amongst much larger Slavic and Turkic populations and deprived of even the right to publish and receive education in German for decades, the ethnic Germans of the former Soviet Union have undergone considerable assimilation into the larger Russian culture. A large factor in this assimilation is the high rate of intermarriage between ethnic Germans and Russians in the last fifty years. By 1979, 47.5% of all married ethnic Germans in the USSR had non-German spouses, mostly Russians and Russified Ukrainians.¹²⁵ Removed from the all German rural communities of their ancestors, the increasingly urban and industrialized Germans found themselves a small minority in a Russian dominated society. Ethnic Germans were thus far more likely to seek mates outside their nationality after the deportations than they were before the dispersal. Children of such mixed marriages usually ended up being raised in households more Russian than German.

The rapid assimilation of the *Russlanddeutschen* into Russian culture is most evident in Soviet census data regarding language ability. In 1926, 94.9% of all Germans in the USSR spoke German as their native language.¹²⁶ By 1989, only 48.7% of Germans in the USSR reported German as their native language.¹²⁷ The actual situation is even worse than the numbers indicate. The percentage of native speakers refers to those Soviet citizens who identified German as both their nationality and native language. It does not indicate any degree of fluency. Many *Russlanddeutschen* with poor German language skills may have identified German as their native language out of a sense of ethnic solidarity. The failure of *Wiedergeburt* and other ethnic German organizations in advancing the goal of political and cultural autonomy for the *Russlanddeutschen* has prompted most ethnically conscious Germans in the USSR to emigrate to Germany. Even among this contingent, German language ability is quite often poor. From July 1990 to December 1997, 65,000 *Aussiedler* (literally settlers from abroad, the term refers to ethnic Germans from the former USSR and Eastern Europe) took the federal German language test.¹²⁸ Only 60% of them, however, knew German well enough to pass the test.¹²⁹ A 1995-1996 survey by Barbara Dietz and Heike Roll of *Aussiedler* arriving in Germany from the former Soviet Union from 1990 to 1994 clearly showed the effects of Russification on this group. According to the survey, only 8% of the Germans from the former USSR in Germany lived in exclusively German language households.¹³⁰ In contrast, 45.6% lived in exclusively Russian language households.¹³¹ The remaining 46.4% lived in bilingual German and Russian households.¹³² Another survey concluded that only 57% of the *Aussiedler* from the former USSR

¹²⁵Eisfeld, "Germans," p. 139.

¹²⁶Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and Policy Toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union: From Totalitarian Dictatorship to Post-Stalinist Society* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991), table A.8, p. 396.

¹²⁷Alfred Eisfeld, "Germans," in Paul Friedrich and Norma Diamond, eds., *Encyclopedia of World Cultures*, vol. VI, *Russia and Eurasia/China* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1994), p. 138.

¹²⁸Anne de Tinguy, "Ethnic Migrations from and to the New Independent States Following Political Changes in Eastern and Central Europe: 'Repatriation' or Privileged Immigration?," found at <www.demographie.de/ethnic/papers/tinguy.pdf>, p. 15.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*

¹³⁰*Ibid.*

¹³¹*Ibid.*

¹³²*Ibid.*

spoke fluent German.¹³³ The more heavily Russified Germans remaining in the USSR have even worse German language skills. In many cases, the only thing that identifies them as being of German rather than Russian descent is their surname.

Between 1987 and the end of 1997, more than a million and a half Germans from the former Soviet Union emigrated to the Federal Republic of Germany.¹³⁴ In 1989, the German population of the Soviet Union was a little over two million. This recent emigration thus represents a significant majority of the German population of the former Soviet Union.¹³⁵ These emigrants are immersed in a German culture very different from the one that existed in the Russian Empire and USSR for more than 200 years. The assimilation of these *Spaetaussiedler* (late settlers from abroad) into modern German culture is an official policy of Berlin. This policy combined with the assimilationist pressures inherent in a modern capitalist society are already having an effect. It is doubtful that the unique cultural characteristics of the *Spaetassiedler* acquired from life in the Russian Empire and USSR will survive more than a few generations.¹³⁶ The Germans remaining in the former USSR will undoubtedly continue to assimilate into Russian culture at an even more rapid rate as the number of ethnically conscious individuals continues to decrease through emigration, natural attrition, and assimilation of newer generations. In several years the ethnic German population of the former Soviet Union which once numbered more than two million people will be negligible due to the combined forces of emigration and assimilation. Unlike Hitler's attempt to eliminate the Jews as a people which failed, Stalin and his successors' policy of eliminating the *Russlanddeutschen* as a people has been largely successful.

The success of the Soviet regime in destroying the *Russlanddeutschen* as viable national minorities is not unique. Other extra-territorial national minorities in the USSR subjected to similar patterns of repression have also lost much of their cultural vitality as a result. Ethnic Koreans, Greeks, and Finns have all experienced rates of linguistic assimilation into Russian similar to that of the Germans. The deportations, experiences in exile, loss of native language media and education, Russification, and persistent discrimination all contributed to the disintegration of these ethnic groups and the absorption of their members into the dominant Russian culture of the USSR. This result is perhaps not surprising given the extreme nature and lengthy duration of national repression these groups experienced. But, there is a reason these groups proved so susceptible to assimilation in the wake of the deportations and others did not.

The Stalin regime subjected eleven national groups to deportation in their entirety with the result that large numbers of them died from the deadly conditions in their places of exile.¹³⁷ It then sought to dissolve the cultural identity of the surviving portions of these groups. The destruction of the cultural identity of the deported peoples was very successful in the case of extra-territorial minorities. In contrast it was a resounding failure in regards to ethnic groups native to the USSR. The North Caucasians, Kalmyks, Crimean Tatars, and Ahiska (Meskhetian) Turks retained their native languages and cultures despite the traumas of exile and subsequent

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴The exact number of emigrants during this time was 1,584,566.
<<http://www.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/gerrus/general/develop.html>>

¹³⁵The 1989 Soviet census counted 2,038,341 ethnic Germans. Alfred Eisfeld, *Die Russlanddeutschen* (Muenchen: F.A. Harbig Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1992), p. 158.

¹³⁶Sinner, p. 90.

¹³⁷These groups were the Koreans in 1937, the Finns and Germans in 1941, the Karachays and Kalmyks in 1943, the Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Crimean Tatars, and AhiskaTurks in 1944, and Greeks in 1944, 1949, and 1951.

Russification. Despite remaining dispersed in exile without full rehabilitation for a period of time equal to that of the Germans, both the Crimean Tatars and Ahiska Turks underwent very little assimilation into other cultures. Despite never possessing a national territory and remaining scattered across the former USSR, in the 1989 Soviet census 91% of the Ahiska Turks listed Turkish as their native language.¹³⁸ The dividing line between those deported nationalities that experienced high levels of assimilation and those that did not is between extra-territorial minorities and nationalities native to the USSR.

Table no. 13

Titular Language as Native Language for Deported Peoples (in percent)¹³⁹

Nationality	1926	1959	1979
Koreans	98.90%	79.30%	55.40%
Germans	94.90%	75%	57.70%
Kalmyks	99.30%	91%	91.30%
Chechens and Ingush	99.70%	98.70%	98.40%
Greeks	73%	41.50%	38%

The reason for this difference lies in the comparatively weaker national cohesion of the extra-territorial minorities prior to their deportation. The various German settlements that established themselves in the Russian Empire from 1763 to 1861 did not think of themselves as part of a single *Russlanddeutsche* identity. Indeed, they did not think of themselves as being part of a greater German identity prior to settling in the Russian Empire. They emigrated to different regions of the Russian Empire at different times from different German states. They spoke different dialects of German and had different religious denominations. Various German settlements in the Russian Empire were Lutheran, Catholic, or Mennonite. Germany did not yet exist as a national state during the founding of the German colonies in the Russian Empire. German nationalism did not even exist for most of this period. The immigrants from the various German states to the Russian Empire left Germany during a pre-national era. They preserved this pre-national mentality along with their traditional culture in their isolated settlements. The various colonies had little contact with each other or with Germany. German life and culture in the colonies remained frozen in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This is reflected, for instance, in the German dialects spoken by the *Russlanddeutschen*. The various German settlements possessed different local identities based upon the local culture of the region of Germany they came from at the time they emigrated to the Russian Empire. The preservation of this culture depended largely upon the compact and isolated nature of the settlements. The fairly recently arrived pre-national Germans generally had no deep ties to the land itself. The creation myths linking the origins of a particular people to the particular piece of territory they inhabited common among many cultures obviously had no counterparts among the German settlements in the Russian Empire. Nor did the settlers think of themselves as part of a greater cultural entity beyond their local villages. Rather they viewed themselves first as part of their local

¹³⁸ Arif Yunusov, *Meskhetian Turks: Twice Deported Peoples* (Baku, Azerbaijan: Institute of Peace and Democracy, 2000), p. 44.

¹³⁹ Simon, table A.8, pp. 395-396.

communities with their distinct cultures and folkways. Secondly they viewed themselves as loyal citizens of the Russian Empire. The German colonists received their various rights and privileges from the Russian government beginning under Catherine II. This dependence upon the Russian government greatly shaped *Russlanddeutschen* attitudes to the central authorities. Under the Soviet regime this pattern continued. German cultural autonomy in the USSR during *korenzatsiia* depended upon the Soviet authorities. Hence individual ethnic Germans in the USSR often had no ties beyond their own immediate communities and a misplaced sense of loyalty towards the Soviet government. These attitudes were still prevalent at the time of the deportations. The lack of a single historical national territory inside the USSR with a compact homogenous population meant that the various German minorities of the Soviet Union had a considerably weaker ethnic identity than the Karachays, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Crimean Tatars, Kalmyks, and Ahiska (Meskhetian) Turks. This much weaker ethnic identity was for less able to successfully resist the assimilationist pressures of dispersal, Russification, and modernization.

There have been few successful attempts at genocide in modern times. Usually the victimized group manages to outsurvive the perpetrator regime and reconstitute its national existence. Both the Armenian genocide (*Aghed*) and Holocaust (*Shoa*) failed to eradicate the victimized peoples. Despite the massive destruction of human life and cultural artifacts involved in both these events, neither the Armenians or Jews are in danger of cultural extinction today. They have both reconstituted strong and culturally vibrant nation-states in the territory of their ancient homelands. The same can not be said of the German minorities in the former USSR. The *Russlanddeutschen* are currently on the brink of cultural extinction. They unfortunately share this fate with several other extra-territorial minorities in the former Soviet Union. The Russian-Greeks, Russian-Koreans, and Russian-Finns as well as the Russian-Germans are all in danger of disappearing as distinct cultural groups. Not since the 19th century elimination of the Tasmanian aboriginal peoples and several native groups in California have whole ethnic groups been successfully destroyed. Stalin's legacy in this matter has left both the former USSR and world much poorer. The destruction of the *Russlanddeutschen* and their unique culture can not be reversed. It can only be memorialized.