



The Persecution of Ethnic Germans in the USSR during World War II

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This article will explore the Soviet treatment of its ethnic German citizens during World War II using archival documents from GARF and RGASPI in Moscow. It will cover the deportees' initial removal, their arrival in Kazakhstan and Siberia, their legal status as special settlers, their material conditions, and their subsequent mobilization into the labor army. It will also deal with the forced repatriation of ethnic German citizens of the USSR and, finally, the placement of local ethnic Germans in Kazakhstan and Central Asia under special settlement restrictions. The focus will be on how the Soviet government utilized the ethnic Germans as a menial workforce with restricted legal rights on the basis of their *natsional'nost'* in distant areas of the USSR.

During World War II, the Stalin regime deliberately conflated all ethnic Germans with the Nazi regime in Berlin. This refusal to distinguish between the Nazis as a political and military enemy based in Berlin, on the one hand, and ethnic Germans everywhere (including the USSR) as a racial enemy, on the other, is clear not only in their treatment, but also in Soviet propaganda during the war. Soviet war propaganda including poems, posters, and films emphasized the need to kill "Germans," not "Nazis" or "Fascists," or "the enemy." The Soviet government changed the slogan printed on every issue of the Red Army's newspaper, *Krasnaia zvezda*, as well as all other military publications, from "Proletariat of all Countries Unite" to "Death to the German Occupiers." Other injunctions to kill Germans rather than Nazis could be found in the propaganda posters of Maria Nesterova, the poems of Konstantin Simonov, and the writings of Ilya Ehrenburg.¹ Ethnic hatred against Germans in the USSR was nothing new, of course. Numerous recorded examples of Russian chauvinism, in the form of both mistreatment and racial insults against ethnic Germans, by Soviet officials occurred during the collectivization of agriculture in 1930, marking the start of an official shift from attacking class enemies to attacking ethnic enemies.²

¹V. Krieger, *Bundesbürger russlanddeutscher Herkunft: Historische Schlüsselerfahrungen und kollektives Gedächtnis* (Muenster, 2013), 36, 152–55.

²Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. 3316. op. 64, d. 760, ll. 77–78.



The origins of Russian Gemanophobia of course have much deeper roots and can be traced at least back to the 1860s and 1870s.³ World War II, like World War I before it, provided a very strong catalyst for the development of anti-German sentiments and policies among officials in the USSR.

The ethnic Germans in the USSR were not the only nationality targeted for mass deportation and persecution in the USSR. From 1937 to 1944 the Stalin regime forcibly resettled a number of national groups internally within the USSR. The first such entire nationality removed from its traditional place of settlement in the USSR were the ethnic Koreans in the Soviet Far East, who were sent to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in 1937. The official justification for the deportation of the Koreans was “suppressing the penetration of Japanese espionage in the Far Eastern Krai.”⁴ The Soviet government thus justified this action along prophylactic lines, just as it would the deportation of the Volga Germans in 1941. At the same time, the Soviet government also deported the Finns living in the Leningrad area eastward.⁵ Later during World War II, the NKVD deported a number of indigenous nationalities in their virtual entirety to eastern regions of the USSR: the Karachais, Kalmyks, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Crimean Tatars, and Meskhetian Turks all deported in 1943 and 1944. The Soviet government accused all of these groups except the Meskhetian Turks of collaborating with the Nazis during the war.⁶ The deportation of the North Caucasian nationalities, Kalmyks, and Crimean Tatars were thus justified as acts of collective punishment, rather than as the sort of preventive measures taken against the Koreans, Germans, and Turks. The Stalin regime framed the deportation of diaspora nationalities as a way to prevent them from assisting foreign powers. In contrast, the deportation of indigenous nationalities was framed as a punitive act taken after these groups allegedly aided Nazi Germany against the USSR.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sparse prior to 1989, the literature on the Soviet deportation of the ethnic Germans and other nationalities during World War II is now extremely voluminous, the vast majority of it written in Russian, and in the Russian Federation and other former Soviet republics. Many of the most important publications to appear in the last twenty-five years on the subject have been collections of official government decrees ordering the deportations and mobilizations, and reports on conditions in the special settlements and labor army.⁷ Because

³Krieger, *Bundesbuerger russlanddeutscher Herkunft*, 141–42.

⁴Li U Khe and Kim En Un, *Belaia kniga: O deportatsii koreiskogo naseleniia Rossii v 30–40kh godakh* (Moscow, 1992), 64–65.

⁵N. F. Bugai, ed., *Iosif Stalin – Lavrentiiu Berii: “Ikh nado deportirovat”*: *Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, (Moscow, 1992), 47–48.

⁶S. U. Alieva, ed., *Tak eto bylo: Natsional'nye repressii v SSSR, 1919–1953 gody*, 3 vols. (Moscow, 1993). See *ibid.* 1:258–59 (for the Karachais), 2:39 (Kalmyks), 2:87 (Chechens and Ingush), 2:266 (Balkars), and 3:62–64 (Crimean Tatars).

⁷Bugai, ed., *Iosif Stalin – Lavrentiiu Berii*; N. F. Bugai, ed., “Mobilizovat' nemtsev v rabochie kolonny ... *I. Stalin*”: *Sbornik Dokumentov (1940-e gody)* (Moscow, 1998); O. L. Milova, ed., *Deportatsii narodov SSSR (1930-e–1950-e gody)*, pt. 2, *Deportatsiia nemtsev (sentiaabr' 1941–fevral' 1942 gg.)* (Moscow, 1995); N. L. Pobol and P. M. Polian, eds., *Staliniskie deportatsii 1928–1953: Dokumenty* (Moscow, 2005); T. V. Tsarevskaiia-Diakina, ed., *Spetsposelentsy v SSSR* (Moscow, 2004).



it was the destination for nearly half the deported Germans, research in Kazakhstan has been particularly robust.⁸ Important monographs on the subject have been rarer.⁹ There have also been some unusual works coming out of the Russian Federation that straddle the line between traditional archival document collections and other forms of publication. These hybrid works include not only narrative text, but also official government documents and more eclectic pieces such as memoirs, letters, poetry, songs, and drawings.¹⁰ Finally, one last important source of Russian-language scholarship on the deportation, special settlement restrictions, and mobilization into the labor army during World War II has been published: collections of edited conference papers.¹¹ Russia, and to a lesser extent other former Soviet republics, still remains the center of research on the ethnic Germans' recent history.

Outside the former Soviet Union, the subject has not received as much attention. Important publications, however, have appeared in Germany, many of them by ethnic Germans born in the USSR.¹² Compared to the Russian- and German-language materials, English-language scholarly work on the subject is limited, the only notable recent monograph being Irina Mukhina's *The Germans of the Soviet Union* (2007), along with several of my own articles, one co-authored.¹³ The future of research on the deportation of the Russian Germans is likely to evolve toward a greater emphasis on the experiences of the deportees themselves and away from the current Moscow-centered and top-down approach.

PROBLEMS WITH USING STATISTICAL DATA FROM THE SOVIET ARCHIVES

The basis of much of the previously published literature on the deportation and subsequent persecution of ethnic Germans and other nationalities sent to special settlements, as well as this article, are NKVD reports from the State Archives of the Russian Federation (GARF) and other Soviet archives. Much of the data contained in these archives is statistical in nature; that is, reports on the numbers of various deportees, their locations, their work assignments, and their demographic changes. The numbers contained in these reports are

⁸G. A. Karpukova, *Iz Istorii Kazakhstana (1921–1975 gg.): Sbornik dokumentov: Arkhiv Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan* (Almaty, 1997).

⁹L. P. Belkovets, *Administrativno-pravovoe polezhenie rossiiskikh nemtsev na spetsposelenii 1941–1955 gg.: Istoriko-pravovoe issledovanie* (Moscow, 2008); V. Bruhl, *Nemtsy v zapadnoi Sibiri*, 2 vols. (Topchikha, 1995); N. F. Bugai, *L. Beria – I. Stalinu: "Soglasno vashemu ukazaniu ..."* (Moscow, 1995); A. A. German and A. N. Korochkin, *Nemtsty SSSR v trudovoi armii (1941–1945)* (Moscow, 1998); V. N. Zemskov, *Spetsposelentsy, 1930–1960* (Moscow, 2005).

¹⁰Alieva, ed., *Tak eto bylo*; V. A. Berdinskikh, *Spetsposelentsy: Politicheskaya ssylka narodov sovetskoi Rossii* (Moscow, 2005).

¹¹A. A. German, ed., *Nachal'nyi period Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny i deportatsiia rossiiskikh nemtsev: Vzglady i otsenki cherez 70 let* (Moscow, 2011).

¹²A. Eisfeld and V. Herdt, eds., *Deportation, Sondersiedlung, Arbeitsarmee: Deutsche in der Sowjetunion 1941 bis 1956* (Cologne, 1996); Krieger, *Bundesbürger russlanddeutscher Herkunft*.

¹³See Irina Mukhina, *The Germans of the Soviet Union* (New York, 2007); and, for a representative but not exhaustive sampling of my own work, J. Otto Pohl, Eric J. Schmaltz, and Ron J. Vossler, "In our Hearts we Felt the Sentence of Death": Ethnic German Recollections of Mass Violence in the USSR, 1928–1948," *Journal of Genocide Research* 11 (June–September 2009); J. Otto Pohl, "Volk auf dem Weg: Transnational Migration of the Russian-Germans from 1763 to Present Day," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 9:2 (2009); and idem, "Soviet Apartheid: Stalin's Ethnic Deportations, Special Settlement Restrictions, and the Labor Army: The Case of the Ethnic Germans in the USSR," *Human Rights Review* 13:2 (2012).



all given down to the last digit, providing a superficial appearance of extreme accuracy. In reality, many of the reports give contradictory numbers for the same categories due to errors in counting, copying, and adding, as well as omission.

The NKVD itself was well aware of this problem. A report from November 28, 1941, by NKVD Special Settlements Section Chief Ivanov went into great detail about the problems of counting the deported Germans. It stated that an earlier report by NKVD Deputy Chief Merkulov had incorrectly claimed that 749,613 Germans had been deported from a number of areas by October 15, 1941, when in fact that total reflected simply the number of Germans who were *supposed to be* deported. Among these areas were the Volga German Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), Saratov Oblast, Rostov Oblast, Stalingrad Oblast, Moscow Oblast, Tula Oblast, the Karbadino-Balkar ASSR, and the North Ossetian ASSR. According to Ivanov, the actual number of Germans that had been deported and arrived in their new places of settlement was 698,774, or 50,839 less than the figure from Merkulov.¹⁴ While in this report Ivanov critically examined the figures given for the number of Germans deported, he accepted at face value those for arrival and resettlement, even though those numbers also had problems related to accurate counting. The NKVD's awareness of the problem led to constant recounts and calculations. The later reports tend to have a higher total number, but they all hover around 800,000 deportees arriving in Siberia and Kazakhstan.

Another problem was the lack of reported and recorded data. Ivanov's report noted that Merkulov's report did not include the figures for ethnic Germans deported from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, and ironically mistyped the number 749,613 as 719,613 in the process.¹⁵ Lack of recorded data was especially a problem regarding the issue of deaths in the special settlements and the labor army. Here there are a number of unaccounted-for gaps in the statistical record. Again, the NKVD was aware of this problem. An August 31, 1942, report on labor army deaths among ethnic Germans in NKVD camps noted that the authorities had received only partial reports on mortality. The central gulag authorities had received proper statistical data regarding deaths from January to July 1942 from five camps with 43,856 mobilized Germans, a distinct minority of the ethnic Germans in the labor army.¹⁶ As of April 11, 1942, the Soviet government had mobilized 108,825 ethnic Germans in twelve NKVD camps and one rail construction project under State Defense Committee (GKO) Orders 1123ss and 1281ss.¹⁷ Another 22,000 mobilized Germans were in transit to these camps. In the five camps for which there is data, 5,181 (11.8 percent) had died during the seven months between January and August 1942. Strangely, however, the report does not even provide full information on these five, providing mortality figures for only three of the camps: Solikamsk, with 1,687 deaths (17.6 percent); Bogoslov, with 1,494 deaths (12.6 percent); and Sevzheldoroglag, for which the data is only for three months, not seven—677 deaths (13.9 percent). A fourth camp, Ivdel, is noted as having released 175 ethnic Germans in June and July 1942, and having lost 1,446 settlers to death or demobilization in the past year, but there are no specific data given for the number of

¹⁴Bugai, *Iosif Stalin – Lavrentiiu Berii*, 71–72.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1157, ll. 149–50.

¹⁷GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 112, l. 65.



deaths.¹⁸ This report typifies many of the problems regarding statistical data on deaths among labor army conscripts.

The general problems of using government statistical data, especially from the USSR, have long been known. The specific cases of NKVD data regarding prisoners and deportees has been commented on by a number of scholars. Among the first was Edwin Bacon in 1992.¹⁹ J. Arch Getty, Gábor Rittersporn, and Viktor Zemskov were also early commentators on this question in 1993.²⁰ Norman Naimark has noted specifically with regards to the figures for national deportations that “NKVD reports use ridiculously precise statistics to describe the number who were deported and who died.” He calls this a “false precision” that “consistently misrepresented reality.”²¹ Nevertheless, the scholarly consensus is that the statistical data appears to be roughly accurate in the cases where data have been reported and recorded. The differences between the contradictory numbers are generally not great. Thus the statistical data from the NKVD and MVD appear to be for the most part accurate enough to provide historians with a good idea of the general numbers involved.

THE ETHNIC GERMANS IN THE CONTEXT OF OTHER DEPORTED PEOPLES

The ethnic Germans in the USSR were one of eight Soviet nationalities subjected to almost complete removal from the territory west of the Urals and confinement to Soviet Asia during World War II. Nevertheless, some peculiarities distinguish the deportation of the Germans from other groups during the 1940s. First, ethnic Germans were numerically the largest deported nationality, by a significant margin, with around 800,000 removed by the NKVD from west of the Urals and sent to Kazakhstan and Siberia in the fall of 1941.²² To this must be added those repatriated, local Germans placed under special settlement restrictions, and those born in exile. In contrast, the next largest group was the Chechens, with only 387,229 deportees (in other words, less than half the number of Germans).²³ All the other deported nationalities numbered fewer than 200,000 people each at the time of their forced resettlement.²⁴ Ethnic Germans made up 1,235,322 of the 3,332,589 people who lived under special settlement restrictions between 1941 and 1948 (37 percent). The 1949 recount showed 1,069,041 still alive out of 2,245,900 special settlers (almost 48 percent). By 1953 there were 1,224,058 ethnic Germans listed as special settlers, comprising over 44 percent of the 2,753,356 people with this stigmatizing designation.²⁵

¹⁸GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1157, ll. 149–50.

¹⁹Edwin Bacon, “Glasnost’ and the Gulag: New Information on Soviet Forced Labour around World War II,” *Soviet Studies* 44:6 (1992): 1069–86.

²⁰J. Arch Getty, Gábor T. Rittersporn, and Viktor N. Zemskov, “Victims of the Soviet Penal System in the Pre-war Years: A First Approach on the Basis of Archival Evidence,” *American Historical Review* 98 (October 1993): 1017–49.

²¹Norman Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (London, 2001), 220n.63.

²²GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 83, l. 134.

²³Pobol and Polian, eds., *Staliniskie deportatsii 1928–1953*, 455.

²⁴J. Otto Pohl, *Ethnic Cleansing in the USSR, 1937–1949* (Westport, CT, 1999), 5.

²⁵N. F. Bugai and A. N. Kotsonis, eds., “Obiazat’ NKVD SSSR ... vyselit’ grekov” (*O deportatsiia grekov 1930–1950 gody*) (Moscow, 1999), 108, 118–19.



The fact that Germans comprised such a huge percentage of the special settler population makes them of particular interest when studying Soviet national deportation policies.

The ethnic Germans in the USSR, unlike the other nationalities deported during World War II, did not occupy a single compact territory prior to their removal. Only about a third lived in the Volga German ASSR; the rest were spread across other regions of European Russia, Ukraine, Crimea, the Caucasus, Siberia, Kazakhstan, and Central Asia.²⁶ This necessitated a number of separate NKVD operations to forcibly remove them, involving separate decrees and corresponding mass removals from Crimea, the Volga region, Leningrad, Moscow, the North Caucasus, the Transcaucasus, and Kuibyshev.

In addition to the nearly 800,000 ethnic Germans deported from western regions of the USSR to Kazakhstan and Siberia in 1941, two other large categories of Germans with Soviet citizenship were subjected to mass repression during this era: the 210,600 ethnic Germans forcibly repatriated to the USSR from beyond its borders in 1945 and 1946, and 121,576 Germans already living east of the Urals, mostly in Kazakhstan and Central Asia, before the war.²⁷ Both groups were subjected to special settlement restrictions after the end of the war. While some members of other deported groups were forcibly repatriated to the USSR, their numbers were limited compared to the sizable number of ethnic Germans. No other group suffering a deportation of a majority of its population had any significant preexisting presence in the designated areas of exile.

Another major difference between the Germans and other deported groups was that most able-bodied German adults were mobilized into labor columns and forced to relocate a second time, to the Urals and other areas. Only a small minority of Finnish, Crimean Tatar, Kalmyk, and Korean men (but not women) were conscripted into labor army detachments.²⁸ Mobilization and relocation for a second time as special settlers to fishing camps in the far northern regions of Siberia, however, did affect a significant number of Finns, and especially Kalmyks. A recorded 14,174 Kalmyks, or over 15 percent of the total number deported, ended up working in the fishing industry in Omsk Oblast alone.²⁹ With the exception of the Kalmyks, mobilization into the fishing industry did not touch other indigenous nationalities deported in their virtual entirety.

Finally, the ethnic Germans of the USSR, along with the Crimean Tatars and Meskhetian Turks, were the only deported nationalities not allowed to return to their previous homelands after the war. The Soviet government never restored the Volga German ASSR or Crimean ASSR, even though it recreated autonomous territories for the deported North Caucasians and Kalmyks.³⁰ The rehabilitation of the ethnic Germans thus remained incomplete, and they continued to be deprived of all those rights and privileges other ethnic groups enjoyed as citizens of the USSR (and later the Russian Federation) with their own national territorial formations.

²⁶GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 372, l. 269; Berdinskikh, *Spetsposelentsy*, 14.

²⁷GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 372, l. 269; Berdinskikh, *Spetsposelentsy*, 338.

²⁸J. Otto Pohl, "Hewers of Wood and Drawers of Water," *Eurasia Studies Society Journal* 2 (February 2013): 12–13.

²⁹Bugai, *Iosif Stalin – Lavrentiiu Berii*, 85; idem, *L. Beria – I. Stalinu*, 81.

³⁰Pavel Polian, *Against their Will: The History and Geography of Forced Migration in the USSR* (Budapest, 2004), 194–201.



THE EVOLUTION OF THE SPECIAL SETTLEMENT REGIME FOR ETHNIC GERMANS

The Soviet government designated the deported Germans and other nationalities “special settlers,” the same legal status assigned to deported kulaks in the early 1930s.³¹ The ethnic Germans were the first national contingent classified as special settlers (the ethnic Koreans deported in 1937 were labeled “administrative exiles”).³² Special settlers lived in areas of confined internal exile with severe restrictions on their freedom to choose their place of residency and movement. The ethnic Germans placed under special settlement restrictions were divided into five separate contingents: deported, repatriated, local, mobilized, and other.³³ Deported referred to those forcibly relocated in 1941 within the USSR by Soviet government decree. Repatriated designated those ethnic German citizens found in territory formerly occupied by the Nazis or outside the borders of the USSR after 1945 and then sent as special settlers to the Far North, Siberia, Kazakhstan, and Central Asia. Local Germans were those who lived in Siberia, Kazakhstan, Central Asia, and the Urals before 1941 and became special settlers in 1945–46 by Soviet government decree without being relocated. Mobilized Germans were ethnic Germans from these regions conscripted into the labor army in 1942 and 1943 and receiving the designation of special settlers after their demobilization. Finally, other refers to people with a *natsional'nost'* other than German who accompanied German spouses and other family members into exile and received the designation special settler. The varying sub-contingents all suffered under the same legal restrictions as special settlers. The differing subdivisions, however, did distinguish how various German groups became special settlers.

The ethnic German special settlers went through four stages regarding their legal status between their initial deportation in 1941 and their complete release from the special settlement restrictions in 1955. The first stage took place between 1941 and 1943. During this stage the legal status of the deported Germans remained ambiguous and largely governed by ad hoc measures. The second stage, from 1944 to 1945, involved the Soviet government codifying and clarifying the legal status of the special settlers and strictly defining the restrictions imposed upon them. Correspondingly, this period saw the Soviet government also clearly delineate the powers and obligations of the special commandants. The third stage, between 1948 and 1949, saw the strengthening of both the juridical and administrative structures of the special settlement regime, the imposition of harsher restrictions and punishments upon the special settlers, and the development of the system as a uniform legal and economic sphere. In the final stage between 1950 and 1955, the Soviet government progressively weakened the restrictions on the German special settlers and eventually lifted the regime from them entirely.³⁴ This removed many, but not all, of the legal disabilities imposed upon them.

³¹See L. Viola, *The Unknown Gulag: The Lost World of Stalin's Special Settlements* (Oxford, 2007).

³²B. Pak and N. Bugai, *140 let v Rossii: Ocherk istorii rossiiskikh koreitsev* (Moscow, 2001), 249.

³³Berdinskikh, *Spetsposelentsy*, 339–40.

³⁴Belkovets, *Administrativno-pravovoe polozhenie rossiiskikh nemtsev*, 190.



THE DEPORTATIONS

The single largest compact settlement of ethnic Germans in the USSR lived along the Volga River and had been granted an official autonomous region, the Volga German ASSR. The Stalin regime ethnically cleansed this territory of its titular nationality a little more than two months after the Nazi invasion. The order for their deportation was issued in secret by the Central Committee (TsK) of the Communist party and the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) on August 26, 1941.³⁵ The official "legal" and publicized decree ordering the deportation of the Volga Germans came from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet on August 28, 1941. This decree falsely accused the Volga Germans of harboring tens of thousands of spies and saboteurs loyal to the German Reich and ordered their total deportation to Siberia and Kazakhstan as a preventive security measure. The decree specifically noted that all Germans in the Volga were to be deported on this basis.³⁶ These accusations remained the official justification of the Soviet government for the deportation of the Volga Germans from their homeland until 1964, when the Soviet government officially annulled the accusations of treason.³⁷

Following the deportation of the Volga Germans, the NKVD rounded up and forcibly resettled the remaining German communities in western regions of the USSR to Kazakhstan and Siberia. While the Soviet government deported most Volga Germans to Siberia, it sent most other ethnic Germans to Kazakhstan. Among those regions ethnically cleansed of ethnic Germans were Moscow, the North Caucasus, eastern Ukraine, and the Transcaucasus. A five-page summary of the deportation of the Russian-Germans and their subsequent mobilization into the labor army, which Internal Affairs Minister (MVD) Kruglov sent to Beria on December 12, 1948, noted that during 1941–42 the Soviet government had internally resettled 806,533 ethnic Germans from central to peripheral areas of the USSR.³⁸

From these results it seems highly likely that many of the 37,402 losses during loading were in fact deaths during transit. The primitive sanitary conditions, overcrowded train cars, failure of the staff to provide food to the deportees, and the fact that many deportees such as those from Crimea were able to bring almost no food with them are all well attested even in official Soviet sources.³⁹ These factors contributed to significant malnutrition and epidemics of disease, which in turn resulted in high morbidity and mortality rates. A death rate between 3–4 percent, with many of the deaths listed as losses at loading, seems for more compatible with other sources than a mere 1,490 out of over 800,000.

ARRIVAL IN SIBERIA AND KAZAKHSTAN

The NKVD immediately began to deal with the problem of documenting and surveilling the large number of deported Germans in Siberia and Kazakhstan. Since the special settlement regime and its attendant documentation had not yet been codified, the NKVD

³⁵GARF, f. 9479, op. 124, d. 85, ll. 1–17.

³⁶Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 17, op. 3, d. 1042, l. 112.

³⁷Alieva, ed., *Tak eto bylo* 1:246–47.

³⁸GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 372, l. 266.

³⁹Milova, ed., *Deportatsii narodov SSSR* 2:218–19, 231–36.



Table 1

Region Departed From	Resolution	Number	Regions Departed To
Volga German ASSR, Saratov Oblast, Stalingrad Oblast	TsK VKP(b) and Sovnarkom (SNK) Resolution, August 26, 1941	447,168	Kazakhstan, Altai, Krasnoïarsk, Omsk, Novosibirsk
Moscow, Moscow and Rostov Oblasts	GKO Order № 636ss September 1941	44,692	Kazakhstan, Altai, Novosibirsk
Tula Oblast, Krasnodar and Ordzhonikidze Krai, North Ossetian and Karabardino-Balkar ASSRs	GKO Order № 698ss, September 1941	149,206	Kazakhstan, Krasnoïarsk, Novosibirsk
Zaporozhia, Stalin, and Voroshilov Oblasts [Ukraine]	GKO Order № 702ss, September 22, 1941	79,569	Kazakhstan, Novosibirsk
Voronezh Oblast	GKO Order № 743ss, October 8, 1941	5,308	Novosibirsk, Omsk
Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia	GKO Order № 744ss, October 8, 1941	46,356	Kazakhstan, Novosibirsk
Daghestan, Chechen-Ingush ASSR	GKO Order № 827ss, October 22, 1941	7,306	Kazakhstan
Kalmyk ASSR	SNK Res. № 84-KS, November 1941	5,965	Kazakhstan
Kuibyshev Oblast	SNK Res. № 280-KS, November 21, 1941	8,665	Kazakhstan
Sub-Total I		831,637	
Minus Losses during loading due to enemy bombing, flight, etc.		37,402	
Sub-Total II		794,235	
Kharkov Oblast	Soviet Military	851	Kazakhstan
Crimean ASSR	Soviet Military October 1941	2,233	Kazakhstan, Omsk
Kalinin Oblast	Soviet Military June 1942	267	Omsk
Gorky Oblast	Soviet Military October 1941	3,162	Omsk
Leningrad, Leningrad Oblast	Soviet Military Aug.–Nov. 1941	10,000	Omsk, Irkutsk, Krasnoïarsk, Yakutsk
Sub-Total III		806,533	
Minus Recorded Deaths in Transit		1,490	
Total		805,043	

GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 372, ll. 266–69.



sought to issue all deportees passports with special stamps confining them to specific raions or towns and restricting their movement. Here the lack of a clearly defined legal status and centralized regulatory administration for the special settlers became apparent, as their accommodation and supervision fell to ad hoc arrangements between the NKVD and local authorities.

Following their deportation the Germans became an administrative and logistical problem for the NKVD, which was now tasked with supervising this population. The archives contain numerous examples of the initial arrival and registration of the ethnic German deportees in Siberia and Kazakhstan. On September 18, 1941, a steamship carrying 2,337 deported Germans from Engels, the capital of the Volga German ASSR, arrived in Minusinske raion and city, Krasnoiarsk Krai. Upon the deportees' settlement in the various villages of the raion, representatives from the NKVD and the District Soviet Executive Committee conducted a full registration of the deportees and made four copies of these lists. One copy went to the local Soviet, another to the special settler section of the Krasnoiarsk Krai's local NKVD directorate (UNKVD) in the city of Krasnoiarsk, while the section of the NKVD responsible for taking the count, and the District Soviet Executive Committee, each retained a copy. A complete passportization of the resettled Germans took place in October 1941. A similar process of registering the 1,837 German deportees arriving on September 16, 1941, took place in Pankrushinskii Raion, Altai Krai. The lists were then verified in a check in November 1941, which caught two families moving from their assigned kolkhoz to another one. This was followed by issuing 248 passports to the deportees. Another 740 resettled Germans in the raion could not be issued passports at this time due to a lack of photographic equipment and film.⁴⁰ The responsibility for the settlement, registration, and supervision of the deportees fell upon the local NKVD and UNKVD officers in the areas of resettlement.

The conditions that greeted the deported Germans in Siberia and Kazakhstan were extremely difficult: the insufficient provision of food, proper housing, appropriate clothing, and other material deficiencies almost immediately began to take a serious toll on their health. In Minusk city and raion in Krasnoiarsk Krai, for example, the influx of 620 ethnic German families (2,337 souls) from the city of Engels on September 18, 1941, merely exacerbated an already severe housing shortage caused by the earlier deportation of 200 Polish families to the district. Exacerbating the problem was the fact that 533 of these families were headed by urban workers, yet only 121 were settled in the city. Of the remaining families, the Soviet government settled 400 on kolkhozes, 50 on sovkhozes, and 49 on Machine Tractor Stations. Their urban background prevented many of the adult deportees, especially women, from being employed in the kolkhozes and sovkhozes, and thus left them unable to earn a living. This problem elicited official concern from NKVD Special Settler Section Chief Ivanov on December 30, 1941. The NKVD believed that unemployment among former urban ethnic German special settlers presented a security problem and therefore ordered greater vigilance in unmasking "fascist agents" and stopping escapes among the group. Two days earlier Ivanov had expressed similar concerns regarding

⁴⁰GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 85, ll. 228, 232–33.



the ethnic German deportees in Presnogor'kovka, Kustannai Oblast, Kazakhstan.⁴¹ The economic problems caused by unemployment and poverty among the German special settlers would contribute to the decision to mobilize them for more coercive forms of forced labor starting in 1942.

Similar problems were encountered by the 1,500 ethnic Germans from Engels deported to Kansk Raion, Krasnoiarsk Krai. All of these deportees were initially resettled on kolkhozes, even though the vast majority of them had never had any experience with agricultural labor. Indeed, only two of them had ever lived in rural areas. The NKVD moved some of the most highly skilled workers, such as doctors and accountants, to the city of Kansk. A large number, however, remained in the rural areas of the district. By the middle of December the resettled Germans in Kansk kolkhozes were desperately short of food, having no bread, vegetables, milk, or meat.⁴² Such problems were more pronounced in Krasnoiarsk Krai, where most of the ethnic Germans deported from urban areas ended up.⁴³ But they were not unique to the region.

THE FISHING INDUSTRY IN THE FAR NORTH

A significant proportion of the ethnic Germans deported to Siberia in the fall of 1941 was subsequently deported again further north to work in the fishing industry in early 1942. On January 6, 1942, the TsK and Sovnarkom issued resolution N^o 19ss "On the Growth of the Fishing Industry in the River Basins of Siberia and the Far East." This twenty-eight-page document presented a detailed plan for exploiting the region's many fishing resources. It explicitly called upon the NKVD to provide special settlers, including deported ethnic Germans, for work in both catching and processing the fish.⁴⁴ This included 13,000 special settlers in Omsk, 4,000 in Novosibirsk, 25,000 in Krasnoiarsk Krai, and 11,000 in the Yakut ASSR, for a total of 53,000 special settlers mobilized to work in the fishing industry in the Far North during 1942 and 1943.⁴⁵

The NKVD came close to fulfilling its quota for transferring special settlers to the Far North to work in the fishing industry. It had been assigned a quota of 35,000 for 1942 and 19,500 for 1943 (Sovnarkom and the TsK had increased the original quota in their resolution N^o 1732ss). During 1942 the NKVD transferred 50,441 special settlers to the northern regions of Siberia, of which 15,760 were dependents, so a total of 34,681 special settlers were actually put to work catching and preparing fish. The report noting this accomplishment, however, did not specify the national breakdown of the special settlers in question, mentioning simply "former kulaks, Germans, and others." Another document gives slightly different figures, again with no breakdown by nationality: 57,195 special settlers sent to work in the fishing industry in Omsk Oblast, Novosibirsk Oblast, Krasnoiarsk Krai, and the Yakut ASSR, of which 32,172 were capable of working.⁴⁶ Other sources, however, indicate

⁴¹Ibid., ll. 228, 229, and d. 86, l. 283.

⁴²Ibid., d. 85, l. 230.

⁴³Tsarevskaja-Diakina, ed., *Spetsposelentsy v SSSR*, 326.

⁴⁴RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3. d. 1042, ll. 259–86.

⁴⁵Ibid., ll. 264, 267, 270, 273.

⁴⁶Ibid., op. 121, d. 241, ll. 60, 59.



that ethnic Germans constituted the majority of those special settlers re-deported to the far north to work in the fishing industry. In 1942 the NKVD relocated 22,939 German special settlers to northern Krasnoiarsk Krai.⁴⁷ Out of 15,043 special settlers sent to work in Khanti-Mantsi and Yamlo Nenski okrugs in Omsk Oblast, a full 9,260 of them were Germans.⁴⁸ In Narym Okrug of Novosibirsk Oblast, 10,678 of the 20,482 special settlers sent to work in the fishing industry were Germans, including 3,430 children under 14.⁴⁹ Finally, in the Yakut ASSR, 617 of the 9,080 deportees were Germans.⁵⁰ In total, during 1942–43 the NKVD recorded the resettlement of 66,763 special settlers to work in the fishing industry of the Far North.⁵¹ Over 65 percent of this contingent consisted of ethnic Germans, the remainder including Finns, Russians, Lithuanians, Jews, and others.⁵² Many of these other deportees were also diaspora nationalities, most notably Finns from Leningrad Oblast and Lithuanian Jews.

THE LABOR ARMY

The disproportionate reliance upon the forced labor of Soviet citizens of German *natsional'nost'* was even greater in the labor army than among special settlers in the fishing industry. Following the mass deportation of ethnic Germans, the Soviet government began to conscript them wholesale into forced labor columns known as the labor army. In total the Soviet government mobilized over 316,000 ethnic Germans into the labor army during 1941–44.⁵³ This mass induction began on January 10, 1942, with the GKO's resolution № 1123ss "On the Orderly Use of German-Resettlers between the Ages of 17 to 50 Years Old," which proposed mobilizing 120,000 deported ethnic Germans from Novosibirsk Oblast, Omsk Oblast, Krasnoiarsk Krai, Altai Krai, and Kazakhstan to work felling trees, building factories, and laying rail lines. The Commissariat of Defense was to conscript these men in the same manner as induction into the military and then turn them over to the NKVD and Commissariat of Transportation, which would form labor columns. Initially, 45,000 men were to work in lumber camps, 35,000 constructing the Bakal and Bogoslov metallurgical complexes, and 40,000 building railroads. Those sent to fell trees and build factories were to be handed over to the NKVD, while those sent to lay rail lines were to come under the administration of the NKPS. The decree ordered the mobilization of 120,000 ethnic Germans for forced labor without any charge or trial other than their German nationality. A full 80,000 of these men in fact were to serve their undefined terms of forced labor in the same corrective labor camps where convicted felons served under nearly identical legal and material conditions. The decree specifically mentions that the supply of food and other goods to mobilized Germans was to be identical to that provided to gulag prisoners.⁵⁴

⁴⁷Belkovets, *Administrativno-pravovoe polezhenie rossiiskikh nemtsev*, 123.

⁴⁸Ibid., 124, 147; Bruhl, *Nemtsy v zapadnoi Sibiri* 2:106.

⁴⁹Belkovets, *Administrativno-pravovoe polezhenie rossiiskikh nemtsev*, 124, 131.

⁵⁰Tsarevskaiia-Diakina, *Spetsposelentsy v SSSR*, 361.

⁵¹N. F. Bugai, ed., "Mobilizovat' nemtsev v rabochie kolonny," 269.

⁵²Tsarevskaiia-Diakina, *Spetsposelentsy v SSSR*, 361.

⁵³Bugai, ed., "Mobilizovat' nemtsev v rabochie kolonny," 11.

⁵⁴RGASPI, f. 644, op. 1, d. 19, ll. 49–50.



Indeed, the conscription of ethnic Germans into the labor army represented an ethnically targeted use of forced labor rather than an alternative to military service.

The Commissariat of Defense quickly inducted tens of thousands of ethnic Germans deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan into labor columns. They then transferred most of these men to the NKVD, which employed them as forced laborers in gulag camps in the Urals. These men, who had been charged with no crimes and received no trials, nonetheless received treatment very similar to that meted out to convicted criminals. In particular, the NKVD used the mobilized Germans to work in Sverdlovsk and Cheliabinsk oblasts. Bakallag, which was located in the city of Cheliabinsk, initially received 11,722 German labor army conscripts.⁵⁵ Both capital cities were declared first-category regime cities on January 10, 1942, by a Commissariat of Defense order signed by Stalin. This decree gave the NKVD fifteen days to clear out any unauthorized inhabitants in anticipation of the arrival of a large number of German conscripts.⁵⁶

The first mobilization failed to reach its goal of 120,000. By April 1942 it managed to conscript only 67,961 of the intended 80,000 for work in eleven labor camps, and only 25,000 of the planned 40,000 for constructing rail lines.⁵⁷ The Soviet government thus found it necessary to expand the pool of ethnic Germans eligible for conscription into the labor army, which it accomplished by including those already living east of the Urals prior to August 1941. On February 14, 1942, the State Defense Committee issued Resolution N^o 1281ss "On Mobilizing German Men between the Ages of 17 and 50, Permanently Living in Oblasts, Krai, Autonomous and Union Republics."⁵⁸ This decree successfully mobilized an additional 40,864 German men into the labor army by April.⁵⁹ The labor force recruited into the camps, however, significantly declined during 1942 due to large numbers of deaths and the release of invalids. During the summer these losses had reduced the number of labor army conscripts in the camps to low enough levels to trigger another Soviet mobilization.

By fall 1942 the Soviet labor shortage had grown even more acute. A large number of mobilized Germans either died or suffered such severe health problems that they became incapable of work. On July 1, 1942, fully 11.5 percent of mobilized Germans were classified as invalids unable to work. By January 1, 1943, it had risen to 25.9 percent.⁶⁰ Malnutrition, contagious diseases, exhaustion, and exposure all contributed to this loss of labor. Vitamin deficiency in particular was a major cause of illness and death among the mobilized Germans in the camps.⁶¹ In Bogoslov camp alone, out of 19,494 German labor army conscripts inducted in 1942 the NKVD recorded 2,187 deaths (11.2 percent) and 4,140 releases (21.2 percent) that year, for a combined loss of almost one third. In 1942, Ivdel recorded 1,796 deaths (11.4 percent) and 565 releases (3.6 percent) out of its 15,723 German labor army conscripts. Sevzheldoroglag (or Sevzhellag), the camp devoted to the construction of the

⁵⁵GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 112, l. 65.

⁵⁶RGASPI, f. 644, op. 1, d. 19, l. 48.

⁵⁷GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 112, l. 65; *ibid.*, d. 110, l. 126.

⁵⁸RGASPI, f. 644, op. 1, d. 21, l. 51.

⁵⁹GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 112, l. 65.

⁶⁰GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1207, l. 38.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, d. 1183, l. 42.



Northern Railroad, recorded 1,185 deaths out of its contingent of 7,219 men (16.4 percent) that year, but only 53 releases (0.7 percent). Also among those camps with a high recorded death rate for German labor army conscripts in 1942 was Solikamsk: 1,727 deaths (13.3 percent) and 1,391 releases (10.75 percent) out of 12,936.⁶² These represent extremely high losses for young adult males far from the fighting on the front, and they can only be explained by the severe shortages of food, clothing, and medicine in wartime Soviet labor camps.

Due to the labor shortages created by this high mortality and morbidity rate, the Soviet government again extended the pool of ethnic Germans in the USSR subject to conscription for the labor army, this time by gender and age. On October 7, 1942, the Stalin regime issued State Defense Committee Order № 2383ss “On Supplementary Mobilization of Germans for the People’s Economy of the USSR,” which made all male ethnic German citizens of the USSR aged 15–55, and all female ethnic German citizens of the USSR aged 16–45 who were not pregnant or did not have children younger than 3 years old, subject to the labor draft. This decree differed from the earlier ones in another way as well; instead of working directly for the NKVD in its camps and construction sites, many of those conscripted after October 1942 worked for civilian commissariats.⁶³

Table 2

Camp	Number of Germans Mobilized in 1942
Bogoslov	19,494
Volga	24,738
Vyatlag	7,034
Ivdel'	15,723
Kraslag	5,937
Nizhni-Tagil'	4,253
Sevzheldoroglag	7,219
Northern Ural	9,330
Solikamsk	12,936
Tavdin	2,015
Umlutinsk	1,439
Total	110,118

GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1172, ll. 3–15.

Table 2 is incomplete, but it does show that in 1942 the Soviet government mobilized over 110,000 ethnic Germans with Soviet citizenship for forced labor in eleven corrective labor camps and NKVD construction projects. Despite heavy losses due to deaths and releases, the number of ethnic Germans working in the labor army in corrective labor camps and on NKVD controlled construction sites between July 1942 and June 1944 remained constantly above 100,000 men and women. This is due to subsequent mobilizations.⁶⁴ The mobilized Germans were assigned to industrial construction, railroad construction, the felling of trees, and other physically demanding tasks. The labor camps

⁶²Ibid., d. 1172, ll. 3, 7, 11, 13.

⁶³RGASPI, f. 644, op. 1, d. 61, ll. 138–40.

⁶⁴Bugai, ed., “Mobilizovat' nemtsev v rabochie kolonny,” 47–50.



with German labor army contingents were concentrated mainly in the Urals, but Kraslag was located in Siberia.

Table 3

Date	Number of Mobilized Germans in ITLs
January 1, 1942	20,800
July 1, 1942	120,772
January 1, 1943	122,883
July 1, 1943	104,276
January 1, 1944	106,669
June 1, 1944	107,214

GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1207, l. 38.

Outside the NKVD camps, German labor army conscripts were assigned primarily to civilian commissariats dealing with the coal, oil, and munitions sectors of the economy. By January 1, 1944, 56,551 ethnic Germans had been mobilized to work in twelve different trusts run by the People's Commissariat of Coal in the Moscow region, the Urals, Siberia, and Kazakhstan. The official recorded death rate for labor army conscripts in these trusts was 2,844 (5 percent) by this time, but Cheliabugol in the Urals had a much higher recorded mortality rate than the other trusts at 1,012 deaths out of 8,800 conscripted Germans (11.5 percent). The Commissariat of Oil, meanwhile, listed 30,250 German labor army conscripts mobilized to work in fourteen trusts in the RSFSR, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, but only 342 deaths (0.11 percent), while in the Commissariat of Munitions' sixteen factories only 88 deaths (1.1 percent) were recorded among its 8,021 German labor army conscripts.⁶⁵ A handwritten tabulation by the NKVD shows slightly different figures: 59,325 ethnic German labor army conscripts working in the coal industry, with 3,650 recorded deaths (6.15 percent). Cheliabinsk is again listed with the highest death rate at 1,220 out of 8,422 (14.5 percent). In this tabulation, the Commissariat of Oil received a total of 25,538 ethnic Germans as labor army conscripts, of which only 494 (1.9 percent) are listed as perishing; the corresponding figures for the Commissariat of Munitions being 7,094 conscripts with only 149 (2.1 percent) recorded deaths.⁶⁶ While these figures for deaths are undoubtedly understated, particularly since they do not include people who were released as invalids and then died from ailments acquired while working in the labor army, they do show that the conscripts working in civilian commissariats had relatively lower mortality rates than those working in NKVD camps.

Germans were not the only Soviet citizens of "enemy" nationality to be forced into the labor army during World War II: Romanian, Hungarian, Italian, and Finnish men between 17 and 50 also were conscripted. The government ordered their mobilization only after it had issued the decree conscripting ethnic German women and extending the ages of German men eligible for induction. On October 14, 1942, the regime issued State Defense Committee Order N^o 2049ss "On Extending Resolutions GOKO N^o 1123ss and N^o 1281ss to Citizens

⁶⁵GARF, f. 9414, op. 1, d. 1207, ll. 3–5.

⁶⁶Ibid., ll. 36–37.



of Other Nationalities at War with the USSR.”⁶⁷ However, it should be noted that this decree was far less inclusive than the mobilization orders pertaining to Germans in that it never applied to women, adolescents younger than 17, or men older than 50, whereas Order № 2383ss mobilized German women aged 16–45 and German men aged 15–55. Non-Germans made up only a small portion of the labor army, while ethnic Germans constituted over 78 percent of all conscripts.⁶⁸ This was a result of both larger numbers of ethnic Germans in the USSR and a stronger hatred for them by the Stalin regime.

Already on April 12, 1945, before the end of the war against Germany on May 9, 1945, the NKVD authorized the commanders of the Solikamsk and Bogoslov camps to allow skilled mobilized Germans to live outside the restricted zone with their families. Germans in the labor army in these two camps could now request that the NKVD send formal invitations to their family members in special settlements or other labor camps to join them.⁶⁹ The Soviet government completely dismantled the labor army and demobilized its workers after the end of the war. A report from Interior Minister Kruglov to Sovnarkom chief Beria on December 12, 1948, provides some details as to how this was done. During 1945 the Soviet government transferred all of the German labor army conscripts to the status of special settlers and officially registered and counted them as such from this point on. This included not only Germans mobilized into the labor army after being deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan, but local Germans living in Novosibirsk, Omsk, and Chkalov who were never deported.⁷⁰ In total, these surviving local mobilized Germans numbered 40,773 men and women.⁷¹ The Soviet government divided the 150,998 mobilized Germans into three groups for demobilization.⁷² The first and largest group consisted of 85,746 German men and women working in the coal, oil, fuel, and gold industries. Between April 13, 1945, and December 28, 1946, these labor conscripts were permanently attached to their places of work with the right to be reunified with their families. In accordance with a Sovnarkom resolution on February 21, 1948, a second, smaller group consisting of 26,319 mobilized Germans working in Moscow, Tula, Gorky, Vologograd, and Kuibyshev oblasts were resettled in Kazakhstan and Siberia and not allowed to reunify with their families. A final group of 39,033 German men and women were working for twenty-two different ministries, including construction, heavy industry, cellulose and paper, forestry, agricultural machinery, and ferrous metals, but were doing so while not under any legal act assigning them to work in these places.⁷³ The administrative split of the Soviet German population into the two separate categories of mobilized Germans (labor army conscripts) and special

⁶⁷RGASPI, f. 644, op. 1, d. 64, l. 24.

⁶⁸Bugai, ed., “*Mobilizovat' nemtsev v rabochie kolonny*,” 11; V. Kirillov and N. Matveeva, “*Trudomobilizovannye nemtsy na Urale: Sostoianie i novye aspekty issledovaniia problemy*,” in *Nachal'nyi period Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny i deportatsiia rossiiskikh nemtsev: Vzglady i otsenki cherez 70 let*, ed. A. German (Moscow, 2011), 231.

⁶⁹GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 154, l. 138.

⁷⁰Ibid., d. 372, ll. 266–71.

⁷¹Berdinskikh, *Spetsposelentsy*, 340–43.

⁷²GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 372, l. 269. This is the number the individual figures add up to. The document, however, lists the number of mobilized Germans at this time as only 124,779 (76,139 men, 18,640 women).

⁷³GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 372, ll. 269–70.



settlers largely ended by 1948, after which the vast majority of formerly mobilized Germans were classified as special settlers.⁷⁴

THE SPECIAL SETTLEMENT REGIME

Two of the most important decrees governing the special settlement regime for deported nationalities in the USSR were passed on January 8, 1945. The first one enumerated the legal restrictions upon special settlers, distinguishing them as second-class citizens in comparison to other Soviet citizens. Operative clause № 2 of this decree required that the special settlers be engaged in “socially useful labor” and granted the NKVD a key role in organizing the labor arrangements of the deportees. This is followed by an injunction noting that violations of labor discipline will be punished. While first-class citizens of the USSR also had to be employed in “socially useful labor” or face legal penalties, the NKVD did not play a role in finding and placing them in jobs. The prominent role played by the security police in the employment of special settlers made their status closer to that of prisoners than to free citizens. Operative clause № 3 banned special settlers from leaving their assigned areas of settlement without NKVD permission: violation of this ban was considered a criminal act and could be punished accordingly. This restriction on residency and movement was the key legal disability differentiating special settlers from other Soviet citizens. Operative clause № 4 required the head of all special settler families to notify their special commandant within three days of all births, deaths, escapes, and other changes pertaining to the status of members of their immediate family. The final operative clause required the special settlers to obey all orders from their special commandant, and it gave the commandants the power to institute punishments consisting of either a fine up to one hundred rubles or incarceration up to five days for violations of the special settlement regime.⁷⁵ The second decree listed the powers and responsibilities of the NKVD special commandants who supervised the special settlers.⁷⁶ These two decrees formed the legal foundation of the special settlement regime from 1945 until its elimination in the late 1960s. They clearly defined special settlers deported on the basis of their *natsional'nost'* as second-class Soviet citizens with significant restrictions on their freedom of movement.

On November 26, 1948, in response to continued escapes by special settlers from their assigned places of residence, the Soviet government decreed that their resettlement was “forever” (*navechno*), and that leaving these places of exile on their own volition carried a punishment of twenty years of hard labor. The decree specifically named Chechens, Karachais, Ingush, Balkars, Kalmyks, Germans, and Crimean Tatars as subject to these new draconian measures. Free citizens found helping fugitive special settlers faced five-year prison terms.⁷⁷ This decree condemned unborn generations to second-class citizenship and internal exile in Kazakhstan and Siberia.

⁷⁴G. Malamud, “Mobilizovannye sovetskie nemtsy na Urale v 1942–1948 gg.,” in *Nakazannyi narod: Repressii protiv rossiiskikh nemtsev*, ed. I. L. Shcherbakova (Moscow, 1999), 144.

⁷⁵Zemskov, *Spetsposelentsy, 1930–1960*, 120–21.

⁷⁶Bugai and Kotsonis, eds., “*Obiazat' NKVD SSSR ... vyselit' grekov*,” 93–95.

⁷⁷Zemskov, *Spetsposelentsy, 1930–1960*, 160.



FORCED REPATRIATION

During 1945 and 1946, Soviet citizens of German descent who had avoided deportation simply because they had the fortune to be living in territories that had fallen under the military occupation of Nazi Germany were subjected to forced repatriation to the USSR. American and British forces took part in forcibly repatriating Soviet citizens, regardless of their wishes, in accordance with the Yalta Agreement.⁷⁸ The vast majority of the documentation on the U.S. side of the repatriation, unfortunately, does not break down by nationality the Soviet citizens it sent back to the USSR.⁷⁹ At Soviet request, the U.S. military provided no option other than repatriation to Soviet citizens in its custody after February 11, 1945.⁸⁰ As the result of NKVD Directive N^o. 181 issued by Chernyshev on October 11, 1945 all repatriated Germans automatically received the legal status of special settlers and came under the jurisdiction of the special commandants.⁸¹ In addition to areas of the Soviet Union recovered from German military occupation, the NKVD also imposed a similar fate upon ethnic Germans with Soviet citizenship found in areas outside the USSR occupied by the Red Army. Between 1945 and 1948, the NKVD and Interior Ministry resettled as special settlers 210,600 ethnic Germans with Soviet citizenship repatriated from Germany.⁸² Along with other Soviet citizens who had been outside of Soviet control, the NKVD processed them through verification and filtration camps and points (PFLs and PFPs). After arriving at PFL camps and points, all ethnic Germans with Soviet citizenship were sent to remote regions of USSR without any further filtration and placed under special settlement restrictions. The Soviet government put these men and women to work in lumber preparation, industrial work, construction, coal mining, cotton cultivation, and the oil industry.⁸³

At the Rava-russkom PFL point the NKVD had received 1,583 ethnic Germans with Soviet citizenship by April 15, 1945. These men, women, and children were ordered to be moved by the NKVD to industries in the Yakut ASSR. The breakdown of this contingent consisted of 318 men capable of physical labor, 497 women capable of physical labor, 29 men incapable of physical labor, 37 women incapable of physical labor, and 709 children under the age of 15, of which 19 were orphans. Among the areas outside the USSR where the NKVD found and forcibly repatriated ethnic German Soviet citizens were the newly reoccupied Baltic States. A number of ethnic Germans from Leningrad and other areas of the USSR had been evacuated by the German authorities to Estonia during the war. On April 6, 1945, an NKVD report to Chernyshev from occupied Estonia noted that 361 ethnic Germans with Soviet citizenship had been found in the country: 77 were adult men, the remainder being 191 adult women and 93 children. In accordance with NKVD decision N^o. 1/2144 of February 7, 1945, all of these Germans were subject to resettlement in the

⁷⁸See M. Elliot, *Pawns of Yalta* (Urbana-Champaign, 1982).

⁷⁹Some of the archives concerning the U.S. side of the repatriation can be found at College Park, MD, National Archives, SHAEF, General Staff, G-5, RG 331, Box 49, 2703/3 to 2707/5.

⁸⁰Letter from SHAEF to Commander and Chief 21 Army Group, CG 12 Army Group, CG Sixth Army Group, and CG Com Zone, July 8, 1945, General Staff, G-5, RG 331, Box 49, 2707/1, file no. 46 758.

⁸¹A. German, T. Ilarionova, and I. Plevé, eds., *Istoriia nemtsev Rossii: Khrestomatiia* (Moscow, 2005), 302–3.

⁸²GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 372, l. 269.

⁸³German et al., eds., *Istoriia nemtsev Rossii*, 303–4.



Komi ASSR, despite the fact that 60 percent of the adults in this contingent were incapable of physical labor, and many of the women had large numbers of dependent children. This made their use as a work force in the Komi lumber industry impossible.⁸⁴ Obviously, then, the main reason for resettling repatriated ethnic Germans in such hostile environments as the Komi and Yakut ASSRs was not to employ them as workers, but to punish them.

LOCAL GERMANS

The final contingent of ethnic Germans placed under special settlement restrictions were those who had lived in Kazakhstan, Central Asia, Siberia, the Far East, and the Urals prior to 1941 and never had been mobilized into the labor army. These German communities were placed under special settlement restrictions after the end of the war. Between September 18, 1945, and November 6, 1946, the Soviet government placed 105,817 local Germans who had lived east of the Urals before 1941, but had not been mobilized into the labor army, under special settlement restrictions. A large number of ethnic Germans in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan came under special settlement restrictions in this manner. Over 90 percent of the local Germans in these two republics came under the special settlement regime after the end of the war, in contrast to only 2.8 percent in Omsk Oblast and 3.3 percent in Altai Krai. The postwar extension of the special settlement restrictions to ethnic Germans who had long been resident in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan clearly had very little to do with legitimate security concerns; rather, it came about as a result of pressure from the local NKVD organs in these republics.⁸⁵

RELEASE

Ethnic Germans remained under special settlement restrictions until 1954–55, when the Soviet government finally began to dismantle the entire special settlement regime. Their release from the restrictions took place in stages. On January 1, 1954, there were 1,251,803 ethnic Germans with Soviet citizenship counted as special settlers, of which 409,332 were children under 16.⁸⁶ The first massive release of Germans from the special settlement restrictions took place as a result of a Sovnarkom resolution of July 5, 1954, which released all children under 16 from special settler status, as well as a small number of adolescents over 16 for the purpose of attending institutions of higher education. This decree freed 875,795 people from the special settlement count, of which close to 400,000 were Germans. On August 13, 1954, another Sovnarkom decree released all ethnic Germans who had resided in eastern regions of the USSR before 1941, including those mobilized to work in the labor army. This led to the release of another 105,869 Germans from special settlement restrictions.⁸⁷ Finally, on December 13, 1955, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet released

⁸⁴GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 154, ll. 136, 137, 140.

⁸⁵Berdinskikh, *Spetsposelentsy*, 338–43.

⁸⁶Zemskov, *Spetsposelentsy, 1930–1960*, 226; Bugai and Kotsonis, eds., “*Obiazat’ NKVD SSSR ... vyselit’ grekov*,” 121.

⁸⁷Zemskov, *Spetsposelentsy, 1930–1960*, 232–33, 259.



the remaining German population from special settlement restrictions, but without the right to return to their former places of residence or receive compensation for property lost due to the deportations. This decree released 695,216 Germans from the special settlement restrictions.⁸⁸ The ethnic Germans in the USSR, however, still did not have formal legal equality. They remained a stigmatized group officially guilty of collective treason until August 29, 1964, when the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet annulled these charges—again without letting the exiled Germans return to their former places of residence. Their formal right to choose a place of residence on the same basis as Soviet citizens of other nationalities was restored by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet only on November 3, 1972.⁸⁹ Official restrictions on the rights of ethnic Germans in the USSR to choose their place of residence thus lasted for over thirty-one years.

CONCLUSION

Soviet citizens of German *natsional'nost'* suffered horrible persecution at the hands of the Stalin regime during the Second World War. This repression was motivated by the distant ancestral ties these people had to the people living in Germany. The Soviet government forcibly deported the ethnic Germans of the USSR to Siberia and Kazakhstan as special settlers and subsequently mobilized many of them for forced labor either in the fishing industry or as members of the labor army. Germans that initially escaped this repression by either coming under the protection of the German military or already living in eastern regions of the USSR were later also subjected to special settlement restrictions and forced labor. The Germans remained under the system of special settlement restrictions and special commandant supervision until the end of 1955, after which they were only partly rehabilitated. They were never allowed to return in large numbers to their former places of settlement, their autonomous territories were never restored, and they never received any restitution for property lost.

⁸⁸Ibid., 251, 259.

⁸⁹Alieva, ed., *Tak eto bylo* 1:246–48.