

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 347

“The Green Folder”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

Hermann Göring had in his desk a green folder. In it he kept a copy of the plan Adolf Hitler charged him to devise for the economic exploitation of the Soviet Union following its capitulation.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 347. The Green Folder.

Today I want to pause the narrative of the German military campaign against the Soviet Union in 1941 to consider German plans for their postwar administration of the Soviet Union. The German government and military initially believed the war against the USSR would be over by October, and planning was already underway for what would happen afterward. The Germans envisioned occupying the USSR as far east as the Ural Mountains and south to the Black Sea and the Caucasus region, with its all-important oil wells.

By mid-August, with the German offensive slowing down rather than accelerating, the Germans began to plan for the possibility of a longer war, and how the German-occupied portion of the Soviet Union could be used to help support a longer war effort.

First, though, let's talk about German administration of occupied Bohemia, Moravia, and Poland, which have been under German control for two years now. These lands were populated by Czechs and Poles, both Slavic peoples, and a substantial number of Jewish people. To summarize German plans, Hitler and his government intended to clear out today's inhabitants of these lands and resettle them with ethnic Germans.

Where would these displaced people go? The Germans intended to occupy the Soviet Union only as far as the Urals. Beyond the Urals lay Siberia, in which Hitler had no interest, so they could be relocated there. You can assume the mass relocation of tens of millions of people to Siberia would result in the deaths of most of them, but that didn't trouble the Nazis very much.

The Nazis figured that a certain percentage of Czechs and Poles were descended from Germans who had intermarried with Slavs. These people, who could be identified by their blond hair and blue eyes, could be Germanized; that is, taught to speak German and embrace German culture and abandon the language and culture they had been raised in. They calculated that about 50% of the Czechs and 15% of the Poles fell into this category. The rest would be relocated.

In the General Government, the German name for occupied Poland, you'll recall Poles were to be reduced to subsistence agriculture and education would be all but outlawed. If Polish children were taught to read well enough to understand road signs, to write their own names, and that it was God's will that Poles serve Germans, that was all the education they needed.

The German administration was on the lookout for that 15% of "racially valuable" children, as they put it. These children would have blond hair, blue eyes, and be no more than ten years old. Older than that and it would be too late to Germanize them. Some Nazis expressed surprise at how many blond-haired, blue-eyed children they found in Poland.

In many cases, children were taken after their parents were killed for partisan activity—and remember that the German Army regarded practically any civilian as a dangerous partisan. The children were told their parents were dead, whether this was true or not, and then they were shipped to Germany under appalling conditions. These children were then held in camps where they received physical examinations and indoctrination into German culture. Children who passed the Nazi tests for the physical characteristics of an Aryan and showed a willingness to abandon Polish language and culture and accept Germanization, these children were given German names and placed with German families and all records of their prior life destroyed.

Children who resisted speaking German or who failed the physical exam—and some failed for characteristics as minor as an unsightly birthmark—were used as test subjects in medical experiments. The main goal of these "experiments" was to identify the quickest, easiest, and most efficient ways to kill human beings in large numbers.

As for the rest of the Poles, it had become clear by now to the Nazis that the General Government was too crowded and too near to the Reich to serve as a proper reservation for Poles. The Poles had to be driven east, into Siberia, as would the peoples of the USSR. Hitler intended to relocate all the Slavs living west of the Urals, the region the Nazis intended to occupy and administer; this represented about 85% of the population of the USSR, by the way.

Göring's role in the planning was to consider the economic use to which this territory might be put. His plan saw the economic value of the region primarily in terms of oil and agriculture. That's not surprising. The Nazis also contemplated seizing Soviet stockpiles of strategic materials and transporting them to be used in Germany, and the same for any factory equipment that looked useful. Any factory equipment that did not look useful would be destroyed. As in the case of Poland, postwar Russia would not have industry; its economy would be subsistence agriculture.

Petroleum was produced in the Caucasus, so the Germans intended to seize those oil fields and divert their output to support the Wehrmacht and German industry.

And then there was the matter of food, of agricultural production.

Hitler and his people were determined not to allow Germany to be starved into submission as had happened in the last war. Securing adequate supplies of food was therefore crucial to the war effort. Let me break this down for you in simple terms. Germany proper was a net importer of food. The territories occupied by Germany—Poland, Norway, the Low Countries, and France—were also collectively a net importer of food. The demands of the war meant that millions of German and other Axis soldiers were on the Russian front instead of working on farms and in industries back home, which exacerbated the food deficit.

And then there was Ukraine, a net exporter of food, besides being the home to substantial industry in its eastern Donbas region. Hitler wanted Ukraine's surplus production to feed Germany and the Wehrmacht.

But here's the catch. Much of Ukraine's agricultural surplus had been going to feed the rest of the Soviet Union. The USSR minus Ukraine is also a net importer of food. The Soviet Union had been exporting some of Ukraine's agricultural surpluses to Germany during the period of the non-aggression pact, but the Nazis were looking to do more than merely restore the pre-war levels of food shipments from Ukraine to Germany. They meant to divert all of Ukraine's surplus to Germany.

But if that happened, what would the people living in the rest of German-occupied Russia do? The Nazi answer to that question was clear and simple: they would starve to death, in the tens of millions. Hence the name by which this plan was known in German government circles: the Hunger Plan.

Even the people living in Ukraine itself would not be spared, because Ukraine's overall agricultural surplus was not large enough to meet German needs. The surplus would therefore have to be increased, and the way it would be increased would be by denying food even to the Ukrainians, except for the farm workers who were producing the food, and even they would be put on minimal rations: just enough to keep them from dropping dead of starvation while they were working the fields.

Long-time listeners may be feeling a sense of *déjà vu* right now. If you think there's something eerily familiar about a dictator expropriating the agricultural production of Ukraine and shipping it elsewhere and leaving the Ukrainians to starve, it is not your mind playing tricks on you. I told you a very similar story back in episode 235, when the Communist government of the Soviet Union did exactly the same thing. That was in 1932-33, just eight years ago. Pity poor Ukraine, subjected twice in one decade to starvation not as the result of a natural disaster but as the result of government policies that ranged from incompetence to intentional neglect.

The Hunger Plan demands comparison to what happened in Ukraine when the Communists collectivized agriculture there in 1932. Let's begin by reviewing the earlier episode, not least because I know I have at least one listener who thinks I said Stalin did not know of the famine in Ukraine. I never said any such thing, but maybe I wasn't clear enough, so let me try this again.

The famine in 1932 was an outcome of Soviet collectivization policy. The upper echelons of the Soviet government were demanding of farmers in Ukraine—and in other parts of the Soviet Union—set quotas of their agricultural production. These quotas were unrealistically high, for a number of reasons including bad weather, poor farming practices, and political turmoil, and the Communist government was itself responsible for the latter two problems.

As a result, the government was demanding the farmers turn over so much of their harvests that it wouldn't leave enough for them to feed themselves and their families over the winter, nor provide seed for next year. Naturally, they resisted these government demands. Stalin and senior officials in Moscow refused to believe that the quotas they were demanding were as onerous as the farmers claimed. They believed, or chose to believe, that reluctance to turn over their assigned quotas was evidence of greed and selfishness on the part of the farmers and that the farmers were holding onto a portion of their surplus to sell on the black market. In short, that their behavior showed that the rural farmers will still infected with the disease of capitalism and were opposing the Revolution. This resistance had to be stamped out.

So the government confiscated the demanded quotas anyway. Even as people in Ukraine, and other regions, were starving in the millions, the Soviet leadership denied it was happening and accused the victims of faking it. Even when faced with the reality of starving people, dedicated Communists told themselves the victims were starving because they were capitalists, accustomed to living off the labor of others; people who would rather die than pick up a sickle and do honest labor.

Never underestimate the ability of an ideological zealot to reshape reality to fit their chosen ideological framework.

The mass starvation of 1932-33 was a monstrous crime. In our time, some believe mass starvation was a deliberate policy of the Soviet government and call it genocide. Personally, I am not persuaded; I think the evidence of intent is lacking. But—as I said—that's a minor point. It was still a monstrous crime, caused by the indifference, incompetence, callousness, and ideological blindness of Joseph Stalin and his government. The Soviet government, and any government, has an affirmative duty to act to prevent mass suffering and death among its own people.

I said it was a minor point, whether the death and suffering was intentional, or the result of incompetence and callousness. But this minor point becomes significant when you compare it to a government that deliberately, intentionally starves people as a matter of policy, and that's what we're looking at today, with Nazi Germany and the Hunger Plan.

When you consider that the Nazis marched their army into the Soviet Union with a pre-conceived plan to starve tens of millions of people in someone else's country for their own purposes, that puts it on a whole other level, doesn't it? And this is the reason why Adolf Hitler is the worst dictator of the twentieth century, period, end of discussion. As for Joseph Stalin, he's got to be on anyone's list of candidates for the title of second worst dictator of the twentieth century, but when the worst dictator of the twentieth century attacked the second worst dictator of the twentieth century, Western liberal democracies like the United Kingdom and the United States, rushed to assist Stalin without hesitation. It wasn't even a close call. That tells you something.

The Nazi policy of mass starvation of Slavs—ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Poles, and Czechs—along with the other indigenous peoples of Eastern Europe was driven not merely by the practical need for Germany to collect the agricultural production of the region for its own purposes. The death of these tens of millions of people was meant to depopulate these lands to make room for German colonists. The East was to be Germany's frontier, the way the West was once America's frontier, once the native people were removed. Hitler himself frequently made this analogy. He would say that the lands to the east were Germany's "Manifest Destiny," or that the Volga River would become "Germany's Mississippi." On other occasions, he said the East would become "Germany's India."

Overall responsibility for implementing the Nazi race agenda was in the hands of Heinrich Himmler and the SS. The SS was originally an organ of the NSDAP, the Nazi Party. Now it was also an arm of the German government. The overall plan for how the German government would remake Eastern Europe following the war was the responsibility of the SS. It was called Generalplan Ost, which translates to something like The Master Plan for the East.

No full copy of Generalplan Ost survived the war; the Nazis destroyed them in the final days. Turns out they weren't so proud of their work after all. But enough of the record has survived that we have a pretty good idea of what was in it.

[music: Liszt, *Elegy No. 2*]

Generalplan Ost was intended as a long-range plan for remaking the wide lands between the Vistula and the Urals after the Soviet Union was defeated. As we saw in last week's episode, though, the invasion was not going as the Germans had planned. Over the first 2-3 weeks of the war, the Wehrmacht performed according to expectations. The military had advanced swiftly into Soviet territory, shattering the Red Army, which lost millions of soldiers killed, wounded, or captured.

But the Wehrmacht expected that after they shattered the Red Army, the rest of the campaign would merely be a rapid march eastward, to capture Leningrad, Moscow, Stalingrad and beyond, through a Soviet countryside now bereft of defenders and descending into chaos. Instead, by August, the Germans had discovered that the Red Army wouldn't stay shattered. As heavy as the

casualties inflicted upon it were, the USSR was able to replace most of them. The Red Army was still fiercely defending a cohesive front line that ran all the way from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. The German advance was not accelerating; it was slowing down.

September 1, 1941 marked the second anniversary of the invasion of Poland. Germany's war would now be entering its third year. Germany was fielding an army of three million on the eastern front. They all had to be fed and supplied, and contrary to initial estimates that the Soviets would be defeated by October, no one was now willing to predict when it might be over. Ironically, this war, which began as a campaign to secure Germany's supplies of food and natural resources, was now a heavy drain on the German economy.

By September, some were raising the awful possibility that the Soviet Union would not be defeated before the coming winter. In that case, the war would drag on into 1942, or even longer, and it would no longer be a war of blitzkrieg, of rapid advances that destroyed an enemy's ability to resist in a few weeks. Now Germany was looking at a long and expensive war of attrition, a war like—dare I say it?—the last war.

Well, if that's the worst case scenario, it still isn't that bad. Germany won the First World War, at least on the Eastern Front, and was surely capable of doing it again. It should be easier this time, since France is neutralized and Germany won't have to maintain a large force in the West.

On the other hand, there were three million German mouths to feed on the Eastern Front. Also, don't forget that a lot of the work of carrying supplies to German soldiers on the front lines is still being done by horses. Germany does not have all the trucks its army needs to move all these soldiers and supplies. Nutritional requirements for horses is a complicated topic, but these horses are working hard and likely need to consume something like 5-10 times what a soldier requires, which means the 600,000 horses serving the German Army on the Eastern Front are collectively eating more than the Army itself. That food also has to come from somewhere.

If the Army were to remain there for an extended time, Germany would struggle to keep it supplied. The last war had forced a harsh regime of food rationing on German civilians, which eventually led to revolution. The Nazis didn't want that to happen again. Additionally, and not to put too fine a point on it, if the German government further restricted food allocations in Germany, that would send a clear message to German civilians that the war was not going according to plan.

Thus, for the sake of avoiding revolution and saving face, Hitler decreed that the Army would have to feed itself and its horses from the crops harvested in occupied Soviet territories. Those food surpluses the Nazis wanted to see flow back to Germany would, for now, have to be reserved for the troops at the front. Some of it might be available for German civilians back home, and the peasant farmers who raised and harvested the crops had to be fed, at least a little, but there would be no food for urban Slavs in Soviet territories. Large cities, like Leningrad,

Kiev, or Moscow, would be left to starve, as would Soviet POWs. More about them in a few minutes.

How would the Army extract all this food from Soviet farms and not even leave enough behind for the farmers? Simple: they would do it the same way Stalin had, by exploiting the collective farm system that the Bolsheviks had already imposed on Soviet agriculture, only now it would be Germans, rather than Communist Party officials, requisitioning the harvests.

When German soldiers invaded the Soviet Union, there was a good deal of culture shock on both sides. Rural peasants in Soviet lands were agog at the smart uniforms and gleaming leather of the German Army, but in the heat of summer, German soldiers, being German, quickly stripped down to their shorts, which scandalized the locals. German soldiers billeted in civilian homes had no reservations about walking around the house naked, and didn't mind who saw them. These stories have their amusing aspect, but it gets less funny when I point out that rape was common in those circumstances. The Army seldom prosecuted German soldiers who committed rape, except in the most flagrant of cases. German soldiers who were careful enough to rape their victims indoors and out of sight had little to fear. Since no one was counting, no one can say how many Soviet women were raped by German soldiers, but the number has to be at least in the hundreds of thousands.

The Army dealt with this by rounding up young Soviet women and forcing them into Army brothels. German commanders felt this was better for Army hygiene, since at least the women there could be examined regularly for signs of venereal disease.

The Germans, for their part, were shocked at the primitive conditions in the rural Soviet Union. It was even worse than it had been in Poland. Soldiers wrote home to complain there was nothing in Russia worth stealing.

German soldiers had by this time been subjected to months of propaganda, drilling into them that the Slavs were uncivilized sub-humans, barely more than animals. The Jewish Bolsheviks who led them had already colluded in the slaughter of millions of their own people; they would not hesitate to treat Germans with equal treachery and cruelty.

Most ordinary German soldiers accepted these ideas. They believed the Nazis when they said that Jewish people had started the war as a campaign to destroy Germany, and Germans were merely fighting to defend their homes and their values. Keep in mind that 18-year-old German soldiers in 1941 have been living under Nazi rule since the age of ten. They were taught in Nazi-run schools and had participated in the Hitler Youth. By this age, they had thoroughly internalized fear and loathing of Slavic people and especially Jewish people.

We've already seen the German military's tendency to regard any civilian in occupied lands as a potential partisan terrorist, just waiting for the opportunity to sneak up on German soldiers and slit their throats. After the war against Poland concluded in 1939, Hitler gave German soldiers a

blanket amnesty for all crimes committed against Polish civilians during the campaign. His rationale was that any German who shot or mistreated a Pole was likely defending himself against a deadly threat.

German soldiers in Operation Barbarossa got a blanket amnesty for any crimes committed against civilians before the invasion even began. They crossed the border already knowing they would not be prosecuted for anything they did to a Soviet civilian. Most of them fully embraced the Nazi claim that Slavs were *untermenschen*, sub-human. They could be killed without pity and without remorse. German soldiers who did show sympathy toward enemy civilians were often ridiculed by their comrades.

In the Baltic States and in Ukraine, many civilians cheered the arrival of the Germans, believing them to be liberators, overthrowing the yoke of Stalin and Communism. In Ukraine, where people well remembered the famine of eight years ago, German soldiers were greeted with offerings of bread and salt, a traditional welcome. Some saw the black crosses on German military vehicles and interpreted it to mean the Germans were fighting on behalf of Christianity against the atheism of the Communists.

The Abwehr, German military intelligence, observed the Ukrainian reaction and recommended that Germany raise a Ukrainian army to aid in the war against the Soviets. They estimated as many as a million Ukrainians would join such a force, which would assist the German Army in maintaining their long and often overstretched front line. But Hitler vetoed the idea. He opposed arming Slavs on principle. It might give them ideas about an independent Ukraine, and Hitler's vision of the future of Eastern Europe had no room for such a thing. Masters do not arm their own slaves.

You'll recall that German soldiers crossed the border with orders to kill on sight any Communist Party official. This was the so-called Commissar Order that I described back in episode 341. Hitler believed that the Communist Party was the only thing holding the Soviet Union together, and without its network of Party officials, the USSR would disintegrate.

How do you tell who is a Communist official? Well, Red Army units had commissars monitoring their own officers, so those would be easy enough to identify. Who else? Well, since soldiers were promised they would not be prosecuted for crimes committed against civilians, they had little reason to refrain from killing anyone who *might* be a Communist. More than that, in Nazi propaganda, the words Jewish and Bolshevik were spoken together so often, most soldiers took them to be synonyms. Any Jewish man they encountered was assumed to be a Communist Party official; even if he wasn't, he was likely to become a partisan and shoot at German soldiers, so killing him was the safest course.

Heinrich Himmler and the SS were in charge of Nazi racial policy, and they encouraged these killings. Just days after the invasion began, it had become standard procedure to kill all Jewish

men of military age on sight. By August, it was all Jewish men, period. By September, they were killing Jewish women and children as well.

And that brings us to the *Einsatzgruppen*. The word translates as something like *task forces*. This was a euphemistic name for what were in reality paramilitary death squads, organized by the SS under the direction of Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich. They operated behind the front lines, and were authorized to request Wehrmacht assistance as needed.

These *Einsatzgruppen* were already responsible for the murder of some 65,000 Poles, for the crimes of being educated or Jewish or Romani. Now they were operating in the Soviet Union, killing Jewish people and Communists, as well as encouraging and orchestrating pogroms in the Baltic States and Ukraine. In many cases, criminals were released from prison so they could assist in the murders.

I should mention NKVD killings as well. I told you how the NKVD would kill Soviet political prisoners as the Red Army retreated, lest the Germans free these prisoners and put them to use against the Soviet Union. Many tens of thousands of political prisoners were killed in this way. When the Germans advanced and captured the sites of these killings, where in many cases the NKVD had simply left the bodies lying on the ground, the Nazi propaganda machine trumpeted these finds as evidence of the ruthless and uncivilized nature of Bolshevism; never mind that the Germans were killing tens of thousands of people themselves.

In fact, in the logic of Nazi propaganda, these mass killings were evidence of Slavic barbarism and therefore justified German mass killings.

Meanwhile, the war went on. The German Army Group North advanced toward Leningrad, finding that Soviet resistance got tougher as they approached the city. On August 28, Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, fell to the Germans. Soviet attempts to evacuate from the city by sea ended in disaster. A combination of Finnish torpedo boats and German Stukas sank 65 ships, killing 14,000 soldiers and civilians.

By September 1, the Germans had cut the rail line from Leningrad to Moscow, and the city was within range of German artillery. Leningrad's defenses were faltering, because of traitors, Stalin suggested. The NKVD began mass arrests, but that didn't stop the Germans and their Finnish allies from surrounding the city on September 8, as I noted last week.

Half a million Red Army soldiers and 2.5 million civilians were cut off in Leningrad. Hitler ordered that the Wehrmacht neither attempt to take the city, nor accept its surrender. The Hunger Plan called for the large cities in the Soviet Union to starve anyway, so there was no point in putting it off.

I told you last time how Hitler became dissatisfied with the lack of progress by Army Group South and ordered Heinz Guderian's panzers to abandon the approach to Moscow and turn south

to assist them. August saw the Battle of Uman, in which Red Army units attempting to block this pincer movement were themselves surrounded and captured. Stalin still refused to surrender Kiev, although civilians were fleeing the city and factory equipment was being evacuated by train.

The panzers completed their encirclement of Kiev on September 16. After a further ten days of fighting, Kiev fell. The Germans captured huge numbers of equipment and as many as 600,000 Red Army soldiers, making this the largest encirclement in military history.

A few days after the Germans had secured the city, all Jewish people in Kiev were ordered to report to a certain intersection in the city and warned that anyone who failed to comply would be executed. They were to be relocated, went the official story, and the designated assembly point was near a train station, so it seemed plausible. Tens of thousands of Jewish people turned up, many carrying bags containing their possessions and food for the trip, as the Germans had advised them to do. Families turned up hours early, in the hope of snagging the best seats on the train.

There was no train. The assembled group was instead marched out of the city to a processing center, where they passed down a line of German soldiers through a series of checkpoints, where first the Germans confiscated their possessions, then their identity papers, then even the clothes on their backs. As people traversed this gauntlet, family by family, it gradually dawned on them that something terrible was happening, but by then they were surrounded by armed German soldiers. Flight was impossible.

They were sent outside the city, to a ravine called Babi Yar, where they were ordered to lie down in a neat row, and one by one they were shot in the back of the head. Then a second group was commanded to lie down on top of the bodies of the first. They were shot, too. Then another group, and so on. Afterward, bulldozers were brought in to cover the bodies. More than 33,000 people were killed, in what was just the beginning of the Nazi program of mass murder of Jewish people. Those left behind in Kiev would survive this day, but they would still be denied food, in accordance with the Hunger Plan.

And what about those prisoners? During the 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union, the Germans took about three million prisoners. They had made no provision for them.

It wasn't that the Germans were surprised by the number of prisoners they took. They had taken nearly two million French prisoners in less than two months of combat in 1940, and then the Germans had observed the requirements of the Geneva Convention. French prisoners got food, shelter, and medical attention. The Germans complied with the Geneva Convention with regard to their Western prisoners throughout the war.

In the East, it was a whole other matter. The German government's excuse was that the USSR had not ratified the Geneva Convention, which was technically true, although that did not excuse Germany, which was a signatory.

Besides treaty obligations, for any nation the basic principle of treating your POWs humanely is to encourage your enemy to treat their POWs humanely.

Hitler didn't see it that way. First of all, if Germans were cruel to Soviet prisoners, that gave German soldiers an incentive to fight to the death, rather than allow themselves to be captured by Red Army units seeking revenge. Second, there was the Hunger Plan. The food production of the occupied territories was to be used to support the Wehrmacht and supply civilians in Germany. There was no way the Nazis were going to cut food rations back home to feed Red Army prisoners.

Stalin also wanted his soldiers to fight to the death. In August, he announced that Red Army soldiers taken prisoner were to be treated as deserters and their families subject to arrest.

Once captured, Red Army soldiers were marched over long distances to internment camps, and were often subject to beatings and abuse along the way. Any soldier who stopped marching, because of sickness, injury, or weariness, was whipped by a German soldier on horseback. Soldiers who still couldn't move after the whipping were shot and killed, their bodies left by the roadside for Soviet civilians to find and bury. Sometimes German soldiers took potshots at Soviet prisoners marching past, simply for their own amusement.

When the prisoners arrived at their camp, it was often nothing more than an open field surrounded by barbed wire. There was no shelter and no toilets. Food rations were minimal, typically just a few hundred calories per day, not enough for a human being to survive.

Prisoners ate whatever they could find: grass, leaves, tree bark. They fought over the bodies of dead animals. When a prisoner was shot by the Germans, other prisoners fought over his flesh, often even before he was dead. The German soldiers guarding them found this amusing, and took it as confirmation that the Slavs were uncivilized *untermenschen*.

Prisoners were not given winter clothing, and what winter clothing they had was confiscated for the use of German soldiers. The Germans believed, or professed to believe, that Slavs had a natural resistance to cold weather. German guards inspected the penises of their prisoners, looking for circumcisions. Any circumcised prisoner was shot on the assumption he was Jewish. Many Muslim prisoners from the Central Asian Soviet republics died this way.

Some Soviet prisoners were taken to camps in Poland, where members of the Polish resistance observed the appalling treatment they were given, and reported this to British intelligence. Polish civilians, usually women, sometimes brought food to the POW camps. Sometimes this was permitted; other times they were shot at by the German guards.

Similarly, in the occupied Soviet Union, local women tried to aid the prisoners. Women would identify prisoners as relatives, even as their husbands, in order to arrange their release. Some prisoners who were sent out of the camps on labor duty found caches of food left for them by civilians.

More than two million of the three million Soviet prisoners taken in 1941 died in German custody. More Soviet POWs died every month than the total number of British plus American prisoners who died over the course of the entire war. As word of German policies toward prisoners spread, many Red Army soldiers fought more fiercely, and Soviet civilians no longer welcomed the arrival of German troops. Suddenly Stalin didn't seem so bad after all.

Back at the Wolf's Lair, the twin successes of September: the encirclements of Leningrad and Kiev, persuaded Hitler that the war could still be won in 1941, and he at last ordered that assault on Moscow his generals had begged for.

But that is a story for next week's episode. We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Timothy for his kind donation, and thank you to Garrett for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Timothy and Garrett help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. And it's that time of year again. The holidays are upon us, so let me just remind you that donations to and patronages of *The History of the Twentieth Century* make the perfect holiday gift, for me. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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Next week is a bye week for the podcast, but I hope you join me in two weeks' time, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we pick up where we left off today. It is autumn of 1941, and Adolf Hitler has decided the time is ripe for the final assault on Moscow. Operation Typhoon, in two weeks' time, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. After the war, there was a concerted effort by Wehrmacht veterans to dismiss any culpability by the German armed forces in the various German war crimes, such as what we've looked at today. They argued that it was the Nazis and the SS, the paramilitary arm of the Party that was separate from the regular military, who bore the responsibility. Involvement by the regular military was rare, and when military personnel were involved, they were unwilling, and only following orders, to coin a phrase.

During the early days of the Cold War, the Western allies also had an incentive to minimize German military culpability as they began to encourage German rearmament. Still, there can be no doubt that the German military assisted in Nazi war crimes. Those were regular Army soldiers who perpetrated the Babi Yar killings, for one. Military officers planned war crimes together with the SS and the *Einsatzgruppen*, and later helped destroy the evidence of those crimes.

This does not mean that every single veteran of the German military was fully culpable, but it seems likely that every one of them was at least aware of what was happening. How could they not be, when the military was opening hundreds of brothels for the use of its soldiers, filled with young women taken by force, as I alluded to in today's episode? Only in the late 1970s did German historians begin to grapple with the truth of Wehrmacht guilt, and this remained a controversial topic in Germany through the 1980s. After the end of the Cold War, and as more military records of the time were opened to public inspection, the evidence of the Wehrmacht's guilt became overwhelming.

[music: Closing War Theme]