

J. Otto Pohl

Russian German History and Heroic, Victim, and Redemptive Narratives

For

The 50th Jubilee of the AHSGR

Initially I was going to just present a rather standard victim narrative of the ethnic Germans in the USSR during the 1940s for the 50th Jubilee of the AHSGR. That is a heavily archive based description and chronology replete with statistics on the mass internal deportations and subsequent imposition of special settlement restrictions and mobilization into the labor army of Soviet citizens of German ancestry from the summer of 1941 until late 1955. But, the more I thought about this approach the more I realized just how unsatisfactory it has become in recent years. First, not only have I tread this historical ground many times, most recently at the 5th International Genocide Conference at Sacramento State University of California last November, but also because it is incomplete both as a narrative in itself and more importantly as having any instrumental value today. In a very real sense I am a late comer to this realization. Both my colleagues Eric Schmaltz and Brent Mai gave presentations in Sacramento that recognized the necessity of overcoming a victim narrative and building a redemptive one. Brent Mai stressed the need to move from the notion of victimhood to that of survival in the way in which the repression in the Soviet Union, especially the deportations, special settlements, and labor army are remembered. In contrast Eric Schmaltz followed in the form of historians and activists of other deported peoples in the USSR. He presented the German national movement in the USSR and its struggle first for restoring the Volga German Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and then the later activism to emigrate from the USSR and settle in the Federal Republic of Germany as a redemptive arc for the Russian German people. Such a narrative has had considerable success for peoples such as the Crimean Tatars despite their recent setbacks in their struggle to achieve full national rights in their historic homeland. Both Mai and Schmaltz are of course correct in their approach to overcome the problems of a section of Russian German history that seems at first to present a never ending victim narrative without any real redemption. But, they do not go far enough. There has to be a full development of the historical narrative of the Russian German people from their initial heroic origins, through the horrible events of the Stalin era and World War II, to a rebirth that reclaims and builds upon their initial heroism. The purpose of such a narrative is not purely academic and historical although this is important. But, it is also necessary to provide a trans-generational story providing a positive sense of cohesion, pride, and actual substance to the ethnicity now scattered across the US, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Mexico, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Germany itself. Such a narrative of course has to be based upon the historical facts at hand and thus is not an easy task. It is, however, I believe a necessary one. So I am going to make a first attempt here in the hopes that later myself and others can improve upon it.

Initially my research and writing came from an academic orientation and sought to fill in the huge lacuna presented by the Stalin era regarding the historical narrative of the Russian Germans. This de-facto required the creation of a victim narrative. While such a narrative

reconstruction advanced among scholars in the former USSR and Germany I found there was considerable resistance among many Americans and Canadians of Russian German heritage in adopting such a narrative. I now understand that this resistance was on a base level correct. A victim narrative can only really be embraced by a people if it is concluded with a redemptive one. Both the Jews and the Armenians have national narratives where their respective genocides are followed by the reemergence of their homelands as modern states Phoenix like from the ashes. The narrative for the Armenians does not end with the Ottoman physical annihilation of half their population and the dispersal of the other half across the globe in 1918. Nor does the Jewish narrative end in 1945 among the displaced survivors of death camps and death marches in Europe. Instead the narrative continues along a redemptive arc after the end of the genocide. In the case of Armenia, the Armenian SSR from 1923 on and in the case of the Jews the State of Israel after 1948. Even though some of my work followed in the vein of Eric Schmaltz and dealt with the activists of the Russian Germans in the USSR in seeking to overcome the legacy of the Stalinist deportations and forced labor it did not go far enough. Neither the failed attempt to restore the dissolved Volga German ASSR or the mass resettlement from Siberia, Kazakhstan, and Central Asia to Germany have been sufficiently developed as redemptive narratives.

It is the goal of the second and ultimately successful phase of Russian German activism that I wish to explore as a possible redemptive narrative to perhaps provide the group in its widest definition with an overarching useable past. This requires a number of preliminary steps some of which I have already undertaken. One of course is to document the earlier victim narrative from which the group needs to be redeemed. I have done extensive work on this topic and will in the course of this paper provide a brief outline of the genocide against the group as well as new information unearthed from the archives and other sources in recent years on this subject. Another is placing it in a larger historical context. The Russian Germans are not the only and indeed not even the largest group of Germans to physically return to the areas of Central Europe now constituting the Federal Republic of Germany. At the end of World War II, the victorious Allies forcibly expelled millions of Germans living in eastern regions of Germany such as East Prussia, Silesia, and Pomerania as well as groups living outside Germany such as the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland into the territory that became the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. Incorporating the history of the Russian Germans into the larger history of the in gathering of other groups of eastern Germans into modern Germany is something that was first impressed upon me by Tony Waters when I was writing the article *Volk auf dem Weg: Transnational Migration of the Russian Germans from 1763 to Present Day*. The mass migration of ethnic Germans from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Siberia to Germany in the 1990s was as Eric Schmaltz noted at a conference panel we presented at University of Ghana in September 2015 the single largest movement of the Russian Germans in their history. It exceeded the immigration of ethnic Germans into the Russian Empire, the late 19th and early 20th century emigration to the New World, and the massive internal deportations in the USSR in 1941 by significant margins. Can the massive migration of ethnic Germans from the former USSR and their integration into modern German society serve as a redemption narrative for the horrible victimization they suffered during the 1940s? Is this where what Samuel Sinner refers to as the Open Wounds of the group finally be healed? Can these wounds heal to become scars? This paper will seek to explore this possibility

with an optimism uncharacteristic of the author in hopes that those of us in the Russian German diaspora in North America can embrace an historical narrative that is complete, honest, and points to the success of the future rather than the suffering of the past.

Most people here are probably familiar with the basic outlines and details of the heroic narrative of the initial settlement of German colonies in the Russian Empire, their various successes in overcoming a host of obstacles, and the factors that spurred emigration to the Western hemisphere. You are also most likely aware of the successful repetition of this basic pattern of agricultural settlement and prosperity in the US and Canada by the various German from Russian immigrants from the 1870s up to the First World War. So I will not spend too much time on this aspect of the group's history.

Indeed the middle of the 19th Century constitutes a golden age in the general historical narrative that has been constructed by scholars and others for the Russian Germans. Likewise the brief periods of the early Soviet era in between the massive waves of violence 1918-1921, 1928-1933, 1937-1938, and 1941-1949 appear as highly tarnished silver ages in comparison to the fate of the Russian Germans during World War II. There is much that remains to be researched and written about concerning both these waves of violent state repression and the comparatively lenient periods in between during which it almost appeared as if at least the Volga Germans were on the verge of developing into a distinct splinter nation much as the Afrikaners broke away from the Dutch or the Quebecois the French. This process, however, was never completed and the violent uprooting of the population from its areas of settlement in European areas of the USSR and its dispersal across Siberia and Kazakhstan permanently precluded such a development. Rather than tracing the history of the Russian Germans during the Tsarist and early Soviet eras then I shall proceed as I initially intended with the events starting in 1941 which led to the permanent destruction of the ethnic German communities in the Volga, Black Sea, Caucasus, and other European regions of the USSR. Indeed the Second World War saw the general erasure of the 177 year presence of these German communities and their annihilation as viable collective organic units that could be reconstructed like happened with other deported nationalities such as the Chechens, Ingush, Karachais, Balkars, and Kalmyks.

The center of the Soviet deportation operations against Germans in the USSR during World War II were the Volga Germans living in the Volga German ASSR, Saratov Oblast, and Stalingrad Oblast deported 3-20 September 1941. The Supreme Soviet issued the public and official decree for the deportation of the Volga Germans on 28 August 1941. I have translated the document into English and reproduced it below.

Ukaz of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet Union SSR

On resettling Germans, living in the region of the Volga

According to reliable reports received from military authorities among the German population living in the region of the Volga exist thousands and tens of thousands of saboteurs and spies who are now awaiting a signal from Germany that they set off explosions in the region settled by Volga Germans.

On the presence of this large number of saboteurs and spies among the Germans, living in the region of the Volga, nobody informed the Soviet authorities, therefore the German population of the region of the Volga concealed amongst themselves enemies of the Soviet people and Soviet authorities.

In the case that acts of sabotage are conducted, according to orders from Germany by German saboteurs and spies in the Volga German Republic or its adjoining regions, bringing about bloodshed, the Soviet leadership would according to the laws of wartime be required to bring punitive measures against the entire German population of the Volga.

In order to avoid this undesirable occurrence and to prevent serious bloodshed the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet deemed it necessary to resettle all the German population, living in the region of the Volga, to other regions, with the provision that the resettled will be allotted land and rendered state assistance for settling in their new regions.

Those to be resettled are to be assigned to areas of abundant arable land in the regions of Novosibirsk and Omsk oblasts, Altai Krai, Kazakhstan and other neighboring localities.

In connection with this the State Defense Committee is directed to quickly undertake the resettlement of all Volga Germans and allot those resettled Volga Germans agricultural land in their new regions.

CHAIRMAN PRESIDIUUM
SUPREME SOVIET USSR M. KALININ

SECRETARY OF THE PRESIDIUUM
SUPREME SOVIET USSR A. GORKIN

Moscow, Kremlin
28 august 1941 ¹

The Soviet government recorded deporting ethnic Germans from 23 separate territories in the USSR during 1941. The NKVD used a total of 344 train echelons to internally deport 799,459 ethnic Germans from these jurisdictions to Kazakhstan, Altai Krai, Krasnoiarsk Krai, Novosibirsk Oblast, and Omsk Oblast. The single largest group came from the Volga German ASSR and numbered 371,164 people. An additional 46,706 Volga Germans from neighboring Saratov Oblast and 26,245 from Stalingrad Oblast brought the number of deported Volga Germans up to 444,715 or 56% of the total. Outside the Volga region the largest number of resettled Germans came from Ordzhnikidze Krai with 99,990 of which about 50,000 had been

¹ RGASPI (Russian State Archives of Socio-Political History) f. 17, o. 3, d. 1042, l. 112.

evacuated from Crimea several months earlier.² By 25 November 1941 a total of 693,876 of the German deportees had arrived in their new areas of settlement divided between 396,093 in Siberia and 310,195 in Kazakhstan. This represented a thorough ethnic cleansing of the European areas of the USSR still under Moscow's control of the ethnic German communities established during the 18th and 19th centuries. Even quite small German settlements such as the 212 living in Armenia found themselves forcibly resettled.³ The NKVD systematically evicted the inhabitants of the numerous German villages in the Volga, Ukraine, Crimea, Caucasus, and western Russia and very few of them would ever manage to return.

The ethnic Germans in the USSR were the single largest ethnonational group subjected to wholesale forced relocation during the Second World War, but as noted above not the only one. Their disproportionate size compared to other ethnic groups subjected to internal deportation and the special settlement regimen makes them particularly noteworthy in the study of national repression and discrimination in the USSR. Out of an initial 3,266,340 deportees from 1930 to 1948, a full 949,829 (29%) consisted of ethnic Germans forcibly resettled during World War II. In 1948 ethnic Germans comprised 1,004,398 out of 2,255,420 special settlers or 44.5% in the USSR. In contrast all of the deported North Caucasians, Chechens, Ingush, Karachais, and Balkars combined only numbered 608,749 people or 18.6% of the total.⁴ From fall 1941 until the deportation of the Kalmyks in late 1943 and North Caucasians in early 1944, the majority of special settlers in the USSR were ethnic Germans. From 1944 to 1955, the ethnic Germans in the USSR continued to form a significant plurality of the special settlers. This made the special settlement regime in many ways a system ethnic repression aimed at Germans because of their ancestral origins.

Material Conditions in Exile

It is impossible to provide more than a cursory description of the deplorable material conditions suffered by the ethnic Germans in the USSR deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan even in an above average length paper like this one. I have therefore provided just a few examples from Kazakhstan. In particular I have highlighted the experience of some of the Caucasian Germans deported from Georgia to Bayan-Aul Raion in Pavlodar Oblast. These examples should be sufficient to note the generally poor conditions the internally deported Germans in the USSR suffered during the 1940s.

The Caucasian Germans deported from Georgia to Bayan-Aul Raion, Pavlodar Oblast, Kazakhstan suffered particularly horrible material conditions initially. A special report from 7 December 1941 by the chief of the NKVD of the district detailed these deprivations.⁵ The report deals with a total of 910 German deportees in 263 households in six kolkhozes in the district. These six kolkhozes were October, 8th Party Congress, Stalin, Molotov, Kyzylasker, and Dawn. Out of these 233 households only 133 had received vouchers in the Caucasus for grain, corn, potatoes, cattle, wine, and other produce. Despite having these vouchers over 50 households

² GARF (State Archives of the Russian Federation) f. 9479, o. 1, d. 83, ll. 203-204.

³ GARF f. 9479, o. 1, d. 83, l. 203.

⁴ GARF f. R-9479, o. 1, d. 573, ll. 286-287.

⁵ Viktor Krieger, *Rein, Volga, Irtysh: Iz istorii nemtsev tsentral'noi Azii* (Almaty: Daik Press, 2006), 200.

from Kirov Kolkhoz in Luxembourg Raion in Georgia had not received anything in exchange because the vouchers remained with the kolkhoz chairman, Genrikh Reiser who had for some unknown reason been left in Kaganovich Raion. Another 130 households had no vouchers and went for more than three days without any bread. The lack of food had greatly exacerbated the spread of diseases among the deportees especially among children. Measles, influenza, and other diseases had infected around 80 children and adults by this time. Around 30 children were hospitalized due to measles. Since arriving on these kolkhozes a month earlier a full 20 German deportees, mostly children, had perished from measles and other diseases due to a lack of sufficient food and adequate medical care. The primary reason for the lack of food for these German deportees was that they were given no work on the kolkhozes to earn produce and bread. The eviction of the deportees from the kolkhozes made their conditions even worse. The chairman of the kolkhoz October evicted a total of seven German households to an old farm 7-8 kilometers away. They had no food, fuel, or work and 18 people lived in two small huts. They lived in poorly repaired apartments and they suffered from cold and starvation.⁶ Germans on the kolkhozes named after Stalin and Molotov also completely lacked food and had to sell their bedding, blankets, and pillows in order to eat. They also lacked soap and had already gone without it for two to three months including the time they had spent in the trains on the way to Kazakhstan. The local NKVD district commander recommended to the head of Pavoldar Oblast NKVD that the German deportees on these kolkhozes be immediately provided with emergency food. He estimated that many of them could otherwise be dead in two to three days.⁷ The extreme conditions in Bayan-Aul for the deported Germans were replicated throughout other settlements in Kazakhstan to a lesser extent.

The lack of planning for receiving the deported Germans became apparent everywhere in Kazakhstan and also Siberia. Even such simple tasks as keeping proper train schedules presented problems. On 14 December 1941 three train echelons carrying 2,508 German deportees from Kubyishev bound for Nurinsk Raion, Karaganda Oblast stopped in the train station of neighboring raion of Osokarovsk by mistake. The chaos of reforming the echelons and reloading the deportees resulted in the special settlers losing over 500 pieces of baggage at the station.⁸ Organizing housing and food for the deportees had no more success.

Osokarovsk Raion in Karaganda Oblast itself was a destination for ethnic Germans deported from Moscow and Baku. According to the NKVD there were no escapes or people left behind during the deportation of this contingent except for one person left in Cheliabinsk who would quickly join his family in Osokarovsk Raion. However, the loading of families onto the deportation echelons had been extremely rapid and chaotic. This led to the separation of families. Often half of a family would end up in one raion or even oblast and the other half in another one. Property also got lost in this manner. The local NKVD had already by mid-December received a large number of requests by the deportees for family reunification and searches for lost fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, and property. By 18 December 1941 a total of 6,298 deported urban Germans from Moscow and Baku arrived in Osokarovsk Raion, Karaganda Oblast. Despite a stated preference by the local NKVD authorities for placing the special settlers in appropriate work, this was not possible for a contingent consisting of doctors, actors, accountants, and other

⁶ GARF f. 9479, o. 1, d. 86, l. 284.

⁷ GARF f. 9479, o. 1, d. 86, l. 284 ob.

⁸ GARF f. 9479, o. 1, d. 86, l. 279.

white collar workers. The NKVD settled almost all of these deportees on kolkhozes where they were assigned to regular kolkhoz work and only a small number were assigned to areas of work in their specialization in Machine Tractor Stations. The authorities settled most of the deported Germans in kolkhozes under compact conditions.⁹ A number of empty buildings in the raion could not be used to house the deportees due the fact that they lacked glass for windows and heating fuel. Attempts to secure glass and fuel by the raion authorities had been unsuccessful as of this time.¹⁰ There was a severe lack of sufficient heating fuel for the deportees. Coal was rarely delivered and only in small quantities from the city of Karaganda 150 km away. Instead they mostly had to rely on manure mixed with straw to burn to keep warm. The deportees also lacked sufficient food, particularly bread, vegetables, meat, and lard. Finally, many of them lacked winter clothing and shoes and thus could not work outside in the extreme winter conditions of northern Kazakhstan.¹¹ In essence the Stalin regime had dumped thousands of urban German professionals into a sparsely inhabited rural area of Kazakhstan where the houses had no windows, where there was no heating fuel, and where very little existed in the way of food or winter clothing.

A count of those Germans resettled in Osokarovsk Raion had started using the family registration cards for the special settlers held by the district commandant. The passportization of the deportees could not be completed in four villages with some 250 people during 1941.¹² The report of this news to Major Ivanov, the head of the NKVD Section on Special Settlement resulted in a written response on 29 December 1941 demanding that the reregistration and passportization of the deported Germans be completed as well as information collected on their political outlooks. He also enjoined the head of the Osokarovsk Raion NKVD to continue to be diligent in seeking to unmask and liquidate "Fascist agents" among the German deportees as well as prevent them from fleeing their assigned places of residence.¹³ Surveillance and control of the movement of the German deportees took precedence over housing, feeding, and clothing them.

In Ayagrutz raion, Semipalatinsk Oblast, 2,834 German deportees arrived during 1941. A report from 22 December 1941 describes the difficult conditions they faced. The Soviet authorities settled them on 34 kolkhozes and two sovkhoses. They settled between 10 and 20 families in each kolkhoz. The district was very large geographically, 31,000 square kilometers and almost exclusively Kazakh in its population. The district had a total of one Russian village. The distance from the district centre to the various Kazakh auls ranged from 30 kilometers up to 180 kilometers. The raion initially was completely unprepared for housing the influx of deported Germans. It had neither spare housing stock nor construction material. In the fall of 1941 when they arrived it was not possible to organize any type of construction of dug outs or huts for them. The raion lacked wood and other construction materials except earth to make adobe. There were also no plans to ship in construction materials by rail from other oblasts. Some resettlers still could not work on the kolkhozes due to a lack of warm shoes and clothes. The majority of households were headed by women with only 190 old men and teenagers comprising the adult male population. The remainder had been taken away before the deportation, mobilized for work

⁹ GARF f. 9479, o. 1, d. 86, l. 279.

¹⁰ GARF f. 9479, o. 1, d. 86, l. 279 ob.

¹¹ GARF f. 9479, o. 1, d. 86, l. 279.

¹² GARF f. 9479, o. 1, d. 86, l. 279.

¹³ GARF f. 9479, o. 1, d. 86, l. 280.

in the rear, or arrested. There were also no highly qualified specialists among the arriving deportees, but only kolkhoz workers.¹⁴ The problem of a lack of young adult men and specialists became universal throughout the German households resettled in Kazakhstan after the forced mobilization of German men into the labor army during the course of 1942.

The German deportees arriving in Ayaguz Raion were counted at the rail station and then again when they were transferred to kolkhozes. They were then recounted when issued new passports which restricted them to only living in Ayaguz Raion. This process was to be finished before 1 January 1942. In addition the militia instituted strict controls at the train station and on passenger rail cars to prevent any deported Germans from leaving the raion by train. Finally, the NKVD imposed controls on the renting of houses and apartments in the local cities to prevent resettled Germans from moving there.¹⁵ The deported Germans were to be forcibly tied to the extremely impoverished rural areas where the NKVD had settled them.

In response to these events Major Ivanov, the chief of the special settlement section of the NKVD, replied on 31 December 1941. This letter reviewed several policies regarding the resettled Germans in Ayaguz Raion. The first was issuing them grain in exchange for the vouchers they received at the time of deportation. This would prevent them from starving to death. But, unlike the next two items dealt with was a suggestion rather than an order. The next item was to again verify the count of German special settlers and strengthen NKVD surveillance of the deportees in order to unmask and liquidate "Fascist agents" and prevent escapes. Finally, the letter ordered that exact records of the labor assignments and cases of death among the German deportees be kept and reported.¹⁶ Ivanov clearly viewed the deported Germans as a nest of potential "Fascist agents" that needed to be kept under strict surveillance and control.

This emphasis on surveillance and investigation of the German special settlers as well as strictly controlling their movement would receive strong legal enforcement in subsequent years. The Soviet government would develop the special settlement regime into a codified system to maintain such controls and surveillance over particular ethnic groups in the USSR, most notably the Germans. The legal status of the Germans and other special settlers in the USSR remained inferior to that of most Soviet citizens up until the mid -1950s.

Legal Conditions of Special Settlers

The special settlement regime imposed upon the forcibly relocated ethnic Germans and other targeted ethnonational groups in the USSR restricted their rights in comparison to other Soviet citizens, particularly in regards to freedom of movement and choosing their place of residency. The Stalin regime placed the deported Russian-Germans sent to Kazakhstan and elsewhere under the special settlement restrictions originally designed for internally exiled kulaks during the early 1930s. The special settlement system combined restricted internal exile and surveillance with forced labor. In particular the special settlements circumscribed the ability of those deported to them to freely move and choose their place of residence. This system provided the Soviet government with a means of imposing punitive disabilities upon whole groups of people without

¹⁴ GARF f. 9479, o. 1, d. 86, l. 277

¹⁵ GARF f. 9479, o. 1, d. 86, l. 277

¹⁶ GARF f. 9479, o. 1, d. 86, l. 278.

resorting to the Soviet courts. Later, the Stalin regime shifted to ethnic criteria and subjected whole nationalities such as the Russian-Germans to special settlement restrictions through administrative decrees.

The SNK passed resolution No. 35, "On the legal status of special settlers" on 8 January 1945. This document replaced the ad hoc collection of decrees by the NKVD and other organs governing the administration of the special settlers with a codified and uniform set of restrictions. This document laid out the legal disabilities suffered by special settlers. They enjoyed far fewer rights than ordinary Soviet citizens and formed a separate and unequal class of citizens subject to different laws. Foremost among the legal restrictions the Soviet government imposed upon the special settlers was their lack of rights regarding freedom of movement and choice of residency. Article three of the resolution severely limited the freedom of movement of the special settlers. They needed special permission from their assigned NKVD commandant to leave their designated areas of settlement. Leaving their assigned area of settlement without NKVD permission constituted illegal flight and was punishable as a crime. Special settlers also had to report any such flight by family members to the NKVD special commandants. Article four mandated strict reporting of all changes in family composition to the NKVD. Heads of families or their designated substitutes had to report all births, deaths, and escapes to their NKVD commandant within three days. All children of special settlers had to be registered as special settlers upon birth. Finally, article five obligated special settlers to abide by the regulations and established order of the special settlement regime and all commands from NKVD special commandants. These commandants had the power to punish all violations of article five with a fine up to 100 rubles or arrest and incarceration in jail for up to five days. The resolution reinforced clear legal distinctions between nationalities living under the special settlement regime and the majority of the Soviet population. I have reproduced an English language translation of the relevant document below.

Council of Peoples Commissariats Union of SSRs

Resolution No. 35

From 8 January 1945

Moscow, Kremlin

On the legal situation of special settlers

Council of Peoples Commissariats Union of SSRs RESOLVES:

1. Special settlers enjoy all rights of citizens of the USSR, with the exception of restrictions, provided for in the present Resolution.
2. All able bodied special settlers are obliged to be engaged in socially useful labor.

Towards this goal local Soviets of workers deputies in coordination with organs of the NKVD are to organize labor arrangements of the special settlers in agriculture, industrial enterprises, construction, and economic cooperative organizations and institutions.

The violation of labor discipline by special settlers is subject to punishment according to existing laws.

3. Special settlers do not have the right without the authorization of the NKVD special commandant to be absent from the boundaries of the region of settlement served by their special commandant.

Voluntary absence from the boundaries from the region of settlement, served by the special commandant, will be viewed as flight and treated as a criminal matter.

4. Special settlers – heads of families or people substituting for them are required within a three day period to report to the special commandant of the NKVD all events that change the composition of the family (birth of a child, death of a family member, flight, ect.).

5. Special settlers are obliged to strictly observe the established regime and social order of the places of settlement and obey all orders of the special commandant of the NKVD.

The violation of the regime and social order in the places of settlement by special settlers is subject to administrative sanction in the form of a fine up to 100 rubles or arrest up to five days.

Deputy Chairman

Council of Peoples Commissariats Union of SSRs V. Molotov

Administrative Affairs

Council of Peoples Commissariats Union of SSRs Ia. Chadaev.¹⁷

The NKVD issued instructions on the implementation on administrative punishments by special commandants against special settlers later that year. On 14 September 1945, the NKVD put out decree no. 376 on “Orderly application of administrative penalties.” The special commandants could impose penalties of up to 100 ruble fine or five days arrest on special settlers for violation of the special settlement regime, violation of the social order, failure to appear for their obligatory monthly registration with the commandant, and not reporting changes in their family composition such as births, deaths, and marriages within three days. Special settlers had ten days

¹⁷ V.N. Zemskov, *Spetsposelentsy*, (Moscow: Nauk, 2005), pp. 120-121.

to pay any administrative fines levied by the commandants.¹⁸ These punishments could not be appealed and could be imposed arbitrarily by the special commandants according to quite vague criteria.

The Stalin regime sought to restrict the deportees to tightly circumscribed areas of settlement. They could not move outside the bounds of their assigned settlements without permission from their special commandant. This permission took the form of special temporary passes issued by the special commandants. These passes specified a single destination to which the special settler could travel as well as the exact dates he could be absent from his or her assigned village. Upon return to their village of obligatory settlement the deportees had to immediately report to their special commandant.¹⁹ Despite, draconian regulations meant to prevent unauthorized movement by the special settlers, a number of deportees left their assigned settlements on their own volition in defiance of the Soviet regime. The security organs treated these departures as escapes that were punishable as a criminal matter.

The formation of the special *kommandatura* system whereby a network of NKVD commandants ruled over the lives of the special settlers had been somewhat haphazard and disorganized in practice until 1945. The legal and administrative basis of the special commandants had often remained chaotic and poorly enforced until that year. After 1945 it was a highly organized system of carefully placed police stations run by special commandants charged with supervising the life of the special settlers.²⁰ The special settlers lived under a separate legal and administrative system than the rest of the Soviet population. First the NKVD and later the MVD ran this separate system which oversaw the lives of the special settlers.

On 30 July 1946 the head of the MVD Kruglov issued Decree No. 193 “On strengthening the struggle against the flight of special settlers.” This decree specified a number of measures aimed at preventing escapes and capturing those fugitives that managed to escape. Among other measures it proposed was that each district branch of the UMVD and special commandant have a concrete plan to oppose escapes by special settlers. It also called for the strengthening of surveillance over special settlers, restricting the issuance of travel passes to special settlers, and the enforcement of criminal sanctions against escaped special settlers. Escape from areas of “obligatory settlement” violated article 82 of the RSFSR criminal code and carried a sentence up to eight years imprisonment. Kruglov used this decree to promote specific proactive prophylactic measures along these strict lines. He instructed that special settlers suspected of planning escapes be registered, be put under routine surveillance and be required to report to their special commandant twice a month. He also encouraged the creation of special regime settlements away from rail lines and water ways for special settlers prone to escape.²¹ The decree represented another escalation in the Soviet government’s increasingly draconian policies to try and control the movement of special settlers.

This decree did not end escapes by special settlers. A formal report from the head of the Section on Special Settlers of the NKVD, Maltsev to MVD head Kruglov on 25 December 1946 on the search for fugitive special settlers made this clear. By 1 December 1946 fugitive

¹⁸ V.I. Berdinskii, *Spetsposelentsy: Politicheskaia ssylka narodov sovetskoi Rossii* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2005), pp. 123-124.

¹⁹ S.U. Alieva, ed., *Take to bylo: Natsional’nye repressii v SSSR, 1919-1953 gody* (Moscow: Insan, 1993), vol.1, p. 298.

²⁰ Irina Mukhina, *Germans of the Soviet Union* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 81-82.

²¹ T.V. Tsarevskaia-Diakina, ed., *Spetspereselentsy v SSSR* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), doc. 155, pp. 517-518,

special settlers numbered 14,160 of which 5,247 consisted of Russian-Germans. According to the report this meant that 0.6% of all Russian-German special settlers had escaped from their areas of obligatory settlement. Maltsev noted that the Special Settlement Section of the MVD had undertaken concrete measures to combat escapes and capture fugitives at large. These measures included providing the local MVD-UMVD lists of special settler fugitives complete with detailed descriptions. They also included creating plans for all republic, krai and oblast special settlement sections to combat flight among special settlers and organize searches for such fugitives. Finally, the Special Settlement Section of the MVD would occasionally send out brigades of operative workers to those regions that had been most unsuccessful in stopping escapes to engage in preventative work as well as searching for fugitives.²² The MVD continued to ratchet up its measures against escapes as the special settler contingent continued to grow in size.

On 26 November 1948 in response to the 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 their own volition carried a punishment of 20 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 sentences of five years of imprisonment.²³ This decree condemned as of yet unborn generations to second class citizenship and internal exile in Kazakhstan and Siberia.

UKAZ

PRESIDIUM of the SUPREME SOVIET of the USSR

On the criminal responsibilities for flight from places of obligatory and decreed settlement of people exiled to distant regions of the Soviet Union in the period of the Fatherland War.

With the goal of strengthening the regime of settlement for those exiled by Supreme organs of the USSR in the period of the Fatherland War Chechens, Karachais, Ingush, Balkars, Kalmyks, Germans, Crimean Tatars and others, that at the time of their resettlement there was not a specified length of their exile, establishes that those resettled to distant regions of the Soviet Union by decrees of people in the high leadership are exiled forever, without the right to return to their previous places of residence.

For the voluntary leaving (flight) from places of obligatory settlement those exiles that are guilty will be subject to being prosecuted for criminal acts. It is determined that the punishment for this crime is 20 years of hard labor.

Cases related to the flight of exiles will be reviewed by Special Boards of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR.

²² Tsarevskaia-Diakina, doc. 164, pp. 529-530.

²³ Zemskov, 160.

People, guilty of harboring exiles, fleeing from places of obligatory settlement, or assisting their flight, giving permission for exiles to return to their places of previous residence, and rendering them help in accommodations in their places of previous residence, are subject to criminal penalties. It is determined that the sentence for this crime is deprivation of freedom for a period of five years

Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR
N. SHVERNIK
Secretary of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR
A. Gorkin

Moscow, Kremlin
26 November 1948²⁴

The vast majority of Russian Germans in the USSR would remain under these legal restrictions until the end of 1955. On 13 December 1955, the Supreme Soviet released the ethnic Germans from the special settlement restrictions.²⁵ Until this time they held a legal status between that of convicted prisoners and free Soviet citizens that resembled the types of second class citizenship imposed upon non-whites in societies like South Africa under apartheid. Their movement, residency, and other rights remained restricted on the basis of their ancestral origins until over two years after Stalin died. Even after this time they remained banned from returning to their original places of settlement or seeking compensation for lost property.²⁶ The formal restoration of full equality to ethnic Germans as a *natsional'nost'* in the USSR only came in 1972.²⁷ By this time the German population of the USSR had become mentally poised for seeking to emigrate out of the USSR rather than returning to the Volga.

Number of Russian-German Special Settlers

1 January 1942 to 1 January 1954

1 January 1942	799,459 (Bugai 1992, doc. 44, p. 75).
2 June 1942	807,293 (Zemskov 2005, p. 97)
6 October 1942	799,989 (Bugai 1998, doc. 173, pp. 251-253)

²⁴ Zemskov, *Spetsposelentsya*, p. 160.

²⁵ Alieva 1993, vol. 1, p. 245.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Alieva 1993, vol. 1, pp. 247-248.

19 April 1943	829,500 ²⁸ (Tsarevskaia-Diakina , doc. 106, p. 377)
5 September 1944	589,000 (Tsarevskaia-Diakina , doc. 130, p. 439)
1 January 1945	496,811 ²⁹ (Zemskov 2005, table 21, p. 119)
October 1945	687,300 (Bugai 1992, doc. 17, p. 237)
October 1946	774,178 ³⁰ (Bugai 1992, doc. 25, p. 245)
1 October 1948	1,012,754 (Berdinskikh, pp. 328-329)
1 April 1949	1,035,701 (Bugai 1992, doc. 33, pp. 251-252)
15 July 1949	1,093,490 (Zemskov 2005, table 27, p. 167)
10 October 1949	1,096,693 (Berdinskikh, doc. 7, pp. 338-339)
1 January 1950	1,099,578 (Bugai 1992, doc. 34, pp. 253-254)
1 July 1950	1,106,277 (Eisfeld and Herdt, doc. 333, pp. 341-342)
15 April 1951	1,137,513 (Tsarevskaia-Diakina, doc. 203, p. 665).

²⁸ In addition to special settlers Soviet figures recorded 141,950 Russian-Germans mobilized into the labor army on 28 July 1943 (Tsarevskaia-Diakina, doc. 110, p. 386).

²⁹ In addition to special settlers Soviet figures recorded 105,268 Russian-Germans mobilized into the labor army on this date.

³⁰ In addition to special settlers Soviet figures recorded 121,459 Russian-Germans mobilized into the labor army on this date.

1 July 1951	1,155,815 (Document in Berdinskikh, p. 306)
1 January 1952	1,178,168 (Tsarevskaia-Diakina, doc. 206, p. 676)
1 January 1953	1,224,931 (Tsarevskaia-Diakina, doc. 213, p. 714)
1 January 1954	1,251,803 (Zemskov, 2005, table 44, p. 226)

Labor Army

Shortly after the completion of the mass internal deportation of the ethnic Germans from European areas of the USSR to Siberia and Kazakhstan the NKVD forcibly mobilized most of the able bodied adult population into forced labor detachments. These detachments were collectively known as the labor army. This mobilization took place in three large waves. The first was in January 1942 and targeted deported German men ages 17-50. The second was in February 1942 and expanded the pool for mobilization to German men 17-50 already living in eastern areas of the USSR prior to 1941. Finally, the third and final large induction campaign applied to German men ages 15-55 and women 16-45 that were not pregnant and did not have children under the age of three. These mobilizations took place through the NKO (People's Commissariat of Defense) in the same manner as military conscription for the Red Army. The NKO then turned over the inducted Germans for forced labor to the NKVD or NKPS (People's Commissariat of Transportation). These men and later women labored in Soviet corrective labor camps mostly in the Urals under physical conditions almost identical to that of Gulag prisoners despite only being guilty of having German ancestry. The lack of sufficient food, shelter, and medical care led to even higher rates of premature death than existed among the areas of internal exile in Siberia and Kazakhstan. Reasonable estimates of these deaths range from 60,000 to 100,000 people including those that died after their release from the camps due to health conditions acquired in the camps.³¹ I have reproduced English translations of the mobilization orders below.

³¹ German A.A. and Silantjewa, O. Ju. (Eds), *'Vyselit' s treskom'. Ochevidsty i issledovaniia o tragedii rossiskikh nemtsev/'Fortjagen muss man sie'. Zeitungen und Forscher berichten uber die Tragodie der Russlanddeutschen*, (Moscow: MSNK Press., 2011), p. 308; Krieger, V. Einsatz im Zwangsarbeitslager (2008) in A. Eisfeld (Ed.), *Von der Autonomiegründung zur Verbannung und Entrechtung. Die Jahre 1918 und 1941 bis 1948 in der Geschichte der Deutschen in Russland* (146). Stuttgart: Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland, and Eisfeld, A. (2003). *Die Aussiedlung der Deutschen aus der Wolgarepublik 1941-1957*. Munich: Osteuropa-Institut, p. 8.

State Defense Committee

Resolution No. GKO-1123ss

From 10 January 1942 Moscow, Kremlin

ON ORDERLY USE OF GERMAN-RESETTLERS BETWEEN

THE AGES OF 17 TO 50 YEARS

With the goal of rationally using German-resettler men between the ages of 17 to 50 years, the State Defense Committee resolves:

1. All German men in the ages of 17 to 50 years, physically capable of labor, exiled to Novosibirsk and Omsk oblasts, Krasnoyarsk and Altay krays and the Kazakh SSR, are to be mobilized in numbers up to 120,000 in work columns for the entire time of the war, transfer them in the following division:

a) NKVD USSR - lumber preparation	45,000
- " - construction of Bakal and Bogoslov factories	35,000
b) NKPS USSR - construction of rail roads Stalinsk-Abakan, Stalinsk-Barnaul, Akmolinsk-Kartaly, Akmolinsk-Pavlodar Sos'va-Alapaevsk, Orsk-Kandagach Magnitagorsk-Sara	40,000

Conduct of the operation is entrusted to the NKO (c. Schadenko), together with the NKVD and NKPS.

The mobilization is to be started immediately and finished 30 January 1942.

2. Requires all mobilized Germans to appear at collection points of the Peoples Commissariat of Defense with proper winter clothing and underwear, bedding, mugs, spoons and a ten day supply of food.

3. Requires the NKPS and Administration of Military Communication NKO to provide for transporting the mobilized Germans in the course of the month of January and delivering them to places of work not later than 10 February.

4. Requires the NKVD USSR and NKPS USSR to establish in the work columns and detachments of mobilized Germans strict order and discipline, providing the highest conduct of labor and fulfillment of productive norms.

5. Assigns to the NKVD USSR the task in relationship to failure of mobilized Germans to show up to induction points or collection points for transfer, and also in

relationship to being found in the work columns to be in violation of discipline and refusal to work, failure to appear for mobilization, desertion from work columns, to examine these cases by Special Tribunals of the NKVD and apply punishments up to and including the death penalty in the most egregious cases.

6. Establish norms of food and manufactured goods supplied to the mobilized Germans the same as the norm established by GULAG NKVD USSR.

Requires the Peoples Commissariat of Trade USSR to give the NKVD USSR and NKPS USSR for all members of the mobilized Germans stocks of food and industrial goods for this norm in its totality.

7. Peoples Commissariat of Agriculture is to give in the course of the months January-February to the NKVD USSR for lumber preparation 3,500 horses.

Peoples Commissariat of Procurement USSR is to give additional stocks of fodder for the 3,500 horses.

8. Peoples Commissariat of Finance USSR together with the NKVD USSR is to provide in the finance plan of the NKVD necessary funds to pay for transferring the Germans and other expenses for their economic provision.

CHAIRMAN STATE
DEFENSE COMMITTEE
I. STALIN³²

The NKVD allocated 80,000 of these initial proposed mobilized Germans to work in eight labor camps. They assigned the single largest contingent, 30,000 men, to work in the camp devoted to the construction of the Bakal Steel complex in the Urals.³³ This grandiose plan fell short of its goals. The Soviet government was only able to mobilize 67,961 German men initially of which 11,722 were to work on the construction of Bakal.³⁴ One of the reasons for this shortfall was the demands by local authorities for German special settler labor. The mass military conscription of men to fight in the Red Army followed by mobilization of agricultural workers to work in industrial factories had greatly depleted the labor force in rural areas of Kazakhstan and Siberia. The German deportees were considered to be a vital replacement for this lost labor. This was especially true regarding Kazakhstan which had always had a sparse population and suffered catastrophic demographic losses in the 1930s due to famine. The Kazakh SSR thus sought to keep many of the deported Germans from being mobilized. For instance the Kazakh authorities managed to exempt 9,494 German deportees working in agriculture from call up under GKO Order 1123ss.³⁵ The Soviet government thus thought it was necessary to quickly expand the pool of possible conscripts already in February 1942.

State Defense Committee

³² RGASPI f. 644, o. 1, d. 19, ll. 49-50.

³³ GARF f. 9401, o. 1a, d. 110, l. 10.

³⁴ GARF f. 9479, o. 1, d. 112, l. 65.

³⁵ GARF, f. 9479, o. 1, d. 112, l. 64.

Resolution No. GKO-1281ss

From 14 February 1942 Moscow, Kremlin

On mobilizing German men ages 17 to 50
years, permanently living in oblasts, krays, autonomous and
union republics

State Defense Committee Resolves:

1. All German men of the ages 17 to 50 years, capable of physical labor, permanently living in Arkhangelsk, Vologda, Ivanova, Molotov, Penza, Riazan, Sverdlovsk, Tambov, Chita, Cheliabinsk, Chkalov, Yaroslav, Kirov, Novosibirsk, Omsk, Kubyshev and Irkutsk oblasts, Primore, Khabarovsk, Altay and Krasnoyarsk krays, Bashkir, Mordvin, Mari, Tatar, Udmurt, Chuvash, Buriat-Mongol and Komi ASSRs, Kazakh, Turkmen, Tajik, Kyrgyz and Uzbek SSRs - are to be mobilized into work columns for the entire time of the war and handed over to the NKVD for use in the construction of railroads.

Conduct of the mobilization is entrusted to the NKO (c. Shchadenko) together with the NKVD USSR. The mobilization is to be completed by 25 March 1942.

2. Requires the NKPS and Administration of Military Communication of the NKO to provide transport to the mobilized Germans with delivery to their places of work on the request of the NKVD no later than 30 March 1942.

3. Enforce order during the mobilization and uphold the upkeep of the mobilized Germans as established by resolution of the GKO from 10 January 1942 No. 1123ss points 2,3,4 for all those newly mobilized.

4. Requires the Peoples Commissariat of Food, Peoples Commissariat of Meat, Peoples Commissariat of Procurement, and Peoples Commissariat of Fisheries to provide for the month of March and the second quarter to GULAG NKVD on account the transfer of the remaining food rations according to schedule. Forward to the Peoples Commissariat of Trade USSR provisions of food and manufactured supplies for the mobilized on the basis point 6 of resolution GKO 1123ss from 10.1.42.

5. Peoples Commissariat of Finance of the USSR, together with the NKVD USSR is to provide in the finance plan of the NKVD USSR the funds to pay for the transport of the Germans and other expenses for their economic provision.

CHAIRMAN STATE
DEFENSE COMMITTEE I. STALIN ³⁶

This second mobilization order proved much more successful and the Soviet government was able to exceed its original goal of 120,000 mobilized Germans for the labor army. By March

³⁶ RGASPI f. 644, o. 1, d. 21, l. 51.

1942 this second wave of labor conscription had already inducted 40,864 German men living in eastern regions of the USSR before 1941 including another 14,752 to work on the construction of the Bakal metallurgy complex.³⁷ High mortality and morbidity rates during the summer of 1942, however, would force the Soviet government to again expand the pool of potential labor conscripts in the fall of 1942.³⁸ The largest mobilization of Soviet citizens of German *natsional'nost'* into the labor army started in October 1942.

State Defense Committee
Resolution GOKO No. 2383
From 7 October 1942 Moscow Kremlin

On supplementary mobilization of Germans
for the peoples economy of the USSR

To supplement resolutions GOKO No. 1123ss from 10 January 1942 and No. 1281ss from 14 February 1942 the State Defense Committee RESOLVES:

1. Additionally mobilize in work columns for the whole time of the war all German men ages 15-16 years and 51-55 years inclusively, capable of physical labor, that were resettled from central oblasts of the USSR and the Republic of the Volga Germans to the confines of the Kazakh SSR and eastern oblasts of the RSFSR, also those living in other oblasts, krais, and republics of the Soviet Union.

2. At the same time undertake the mobilization into work columns for the whole time of the war German women between the ages of 16 to 45.

Free from mobilization German women who are pregnant and have children of the ages less than three years old.

3. Those having children older than three years of age are to give them over for rearing to remaining members of the family. Those lacking other family members, except those mobilized, are to give over their children to be reared by close relatives or German kolkhoz workers.

Requires the local Soviet of workers' deputies to implement measures to accommodate children of mobilized Germans left without parents.

4. The conduct of the mobilization of the Germans is to be entrusted to the NKO and NKVD with the involvement of local organs of Soviet power.

The mobilization is to start immediately and finish within a month.

5. Obligates all Germans to appear at collection points with proper winter clothing, a supply of linen, bedding, a cup, a spoon, and a 10 day supply of food.

6. Establishes criminal accountability for conscripted Germans who do not show up to the collection points for mobilization and willfully leave work or desert the work column - by decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR from 26. XII - 1941. "On the accountability of workers and employees in military industrial enterprises for willfully leaving these enterprises."

³⁷ GARF f. 9479, o. 1, d. 112, l. 65.

³⁸ See for instance the report on the labor army in Viatlag during 1942. GARF f. 9413, o. 1, d. 1183, ll. 35-43.

7. German men mobilized by order of this present are to be transferred to work in enterprises of the trusts "Cheliabugol'" and Karagandaugol'" in the People's Commissariat of Coal.

Mobilized German women are to be transferred to enterprises in the People's Commissariat of Oil.

8. Requires the NKPS (Comrade Khulev) and the administration of military communications of the NKO (Comrade Kovalev) to supply transport for the mobilized Germans according to the orders of the NKO and NKVD.

9. Requires the People's Commissariat of Oil USSR and People's Commissariat of Coal USSR to provide for the reception, distribution and rational use of the transferred workforce of mobilized Germans.

Expenses in relationship to the mobilization and transport of the mobilized to places of designation are to be taken from calculated estimates of the People's Commissariat of Coal and People's Commissariat of Oil.

10. Requires the Peoples Commissariat of Trade USSR (Comrade Liubimov) to supply food to the mobilized in transit.

11. The NKVD USSR and NKO are to report to the State Defense Committee about the results of the mobilization of the Germans and the number of Germans transferred to enterprises of the People's Commissariat of Coal and the People's Commissariat of Oil.

Chairman of the State
Defense Committee

I. Stalin³⁹

This third and final large wave of labor conscription of ethnic Germans into the labor army accounted for almost as many people as the first two waves combined. It accounted for 70,780 men and 52,742 women or a total of 123,522 people. The two earlier conscription orders accounted for 115,660 men to work for the NKVD and 25,000 for the NKPS or a total of 140,660. Combined these three waves accounted for the mobilization of 264,182 ethnic Germans for forced labor in the labor army in the USSR during World War II.⁴⁰ Thus these three separate orders and mobilizations accounted for the vast majority of 316,000 ethnic Germans with Soviet citizenship conscripted into the labor army during the war.⁴¹ This figure represents a huge percentage of the ethnic German population of the USSR. On 1 November 1948, the total count of German special settlers in the USSR was 1,012,754. In 1945 all Germans in the labor army had been assigned the status of special settlers.⁴² An actual gradual release of mobilized Germans from the camps took place in the post-war years. This was largely completed by 1948,

³⁹ RGASPI f. 644, o. 1, d. 61, ll. 138-140.

⁴⁰ GARF f. 9479, o. 1, d. 110, l. 126.

⁴¹ N.F. Bugai, ed., *'Mobilizovat' nemtsev v rabochie kolonny...I. Stalin': Sbornik dokumentov (1940-e gody)* (Moscow: Gotika, 1998), p. 11.

⁴² GARF, f. 9479, o. 1, d. 372, l. 270.

but some remained in the camps until 1957.⁴³ By 1958, the labor army, an institution in which hundreds of thousands of ethnic Germans had been condemned to forced labor in GULag camps without individual charge or trial on the basis of their ethnic origins had been dismantled. This was part of a larger liberalization in the USSR under Khrushchev that led to significant German activism to first try and restore the Volga German ASSR and then emigrate from the USSR to West Germany.

Number of German Labor Army Conscripts Currently Mobilized⁴⁴

1 January 1942	20,800
1 July 1942	120,772
1 January 1943	122,883
1 January 1944	106,669
1 June 1944	107,214

Post World War II Activism and Migration

Despite the end of the labor army and special settlement regime, ethnic Germans in the USSR continued to suffer from significant discrimination after World War in addition to being banned from returning to their former homelands or have access to German language institutions. The dual problems of continued discrimination on the basis of being German by *natsional'nost'* and the lack of a German territory to support German language and culture continued to plague the ethnic Germans in the USSR for the rest of the state's existence. At first they sought to overcome these obstacles by pressuring the Soviet government to restore the Volga German ASSR. This attempt from 1965 to 1967 failed.⁴⁵ They then sought to emigrate from the USSR to West Germany.⁴⁶ This strategy ultimately succeeded in the 1990s.

Lack of higher education remained pronounced among the Russian-Germans in Kazakhstan. In 1979 only 2.4% of Russian-Germans in Kazakhstan over the age of ten had received higher education in contrast to 5.6% of Kazakhs and 6.9% of Russians in the republic.⁴⁷ A decade later in 1989 the figures had hardly improved. By this time 5.7% of Germans in Kazakhstan and 5.5% in Omsk Oblast had higher education versus 12.5% for the Soviet population as a whole.⁴⁸ They thus remained significantly undereducated in comparison to other nationalities in Kazakhstan

⁴³ G. Malamud, "Mobilizovannye sovetskie nemtsy na Urale v 1942-1948 gg," in I.L. Shcherbakova, I.L., (ed.), *Nakazannyi narod: Repressii protiv nemtsev*, (Moscow: "Zvei'ia," 1999), p. 144 and Alfred Eisfeld, *Die Aussiedlung der Deutschen aus der Wolgarepublik 1941-1957* (Munchen: Ost-Europa Institut, 2003), p. 8.

⁴⁴ GARF f. 9414, o. 1, d. 1207, l. 38.

⁴⁵ Eric Schmaltz, 'Rebirth' and Regret: The Early Autonomy Movement of Ethnic Germans in the USSR, 1959-1989. PhD Thesis, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE, 2002, pp. 113-186.

⁴⁶ J. Otto Pohl, "Soviet Apartheid: Stalin's Ethnic Deportations, Special Settlement Restrictions, and the Labor Army: A Case Study of the Ethnic Germans in the USSR," *Human Rights Review*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2012, pp. 220-222.

⁴⁷ Viktor Krieger, *Rein, Volga, Irtysh: Iz istorii nemtsev tsentral'noi Azii* (Almaty: Daik-press, 2006), table 3, p. 124.

⁴⁸ Krieger 2006, *Rein, Volga, Irtysh*, pp. 257-262.

and Siberia. This had a huge negative impact on their ability to get desirable white collar jobs as opposed to being confined to largely work on farms, in factories, and in mines.

In addition to being refused admittance to universities, other more violent forms of persecution also appeared. In the late 1970s, Russian-German *Aussiedler* arriving in Germany reported frequent racist attacks against them by local Kyrgyz armed with knives.⁴⁹ Hostile attitudes towards Russian-Germans also persisted in Kazakhstan. In response to a plan to create a German autonomous oblast in northern Kazakhstan, Kazakh youth staged angry anti-German demonstrations in Tselinograd (Astana) and Atsabar in June 1979.⁵⁰ These racist attitudes added to the already numerous push factors pressuring Russian-Germans to emigrate from the USSR and settle in West Germany.

These anti-German riots resulted from one of the stranger events in the history of Soviet nationality policies. In 1979 the Soviet government made preparations to establish a German Autonomous Oblast in Kazakhstan. The Brezhnev regime sought to deflect both external criticism of its policies towards Russian-Germans and deflate the emigration movement by providing an alternative homeland in the USSR. To achieve these goals the Politburo authorized the formation of a token German autonomous oblast in northern Kazakhstan on 31 May 1979. This resolution was never carried out. Kunaev, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan from 1964-1986 approved the organization of mass demonstrations by Kazakh university students against the plan on 16 June 1979. These demonstrators carried openly racist signs protesting the granting of any national rights to Kazakhstan's German minority.⁵¹ The plans to create a German autonomous oblast ultimately failed due to the racist anti-German demonstrations engineered by Kunaev. The Kazakhization campaigns that have characterized independent Kazakhstan under Nazerbaev have their origins in his predecessor. The creation of a Kazakhstan where all land, jobs and positions are considered the exclusive property of ethnic Kazakhs started under Kunaev. The Russian-Germans became early victims in this process of consolidating this ethnocratic rule even while still part of the USSR.

The Distribution of Russian-Germans throughout Kazakhstan and Central Asia 1959-1989⁵²

Year	USSR	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Uzbekistan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan
1959	1,619,655	658,698	39,915	17,958	32,588	3,647

⁴⁹Rasma Karklins, *Ethnic Relations in the USSR: The Perspective from Below* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), p. 54.

⁵⁰ Pavel Polian, *Against their Will: The History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), p. 203.

⁵¹ Mukhina, pp. 155-159.

⁵² Kerstin Armborst, *Ablosung von der Sowjetunion: Die Emigrationsbewegung der Juden und Deutschen vor 1987*. (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2001), table 4, p. 47.

1970	1,846,317	858,077	89,834	33,991	37,712	4,298
1979	1,936,000	900,207	101,057	39,517	38,853	4,561
1989	2,038,603	957,518	101,309	39,809	32,671	4,434

While the emigration movement for Russian-Germans in Russia, Kazakhstan and Central Asia originated in the 1970s, it only took on a truly mass character after the collapse of the USSR. The scale of emigration increased substantially after 1 January 1987. On this date the Soviet government lifted its many arbitrary restrictions on Soviet citizens emigrating.⁵³ During the last years of the USSR about a fifth of the Russian-German population left Kazakhstan and Central Asia for Germany.⁵⁴ After the transformation of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan from Soviet republics to independent states this trend greatly accelerated. Between 1990 and 1999 over 1.6 million Russian-Germans and their non-German family members arrived in Germany.⁵⁵ The majority of these *Aussiedler* came from Kazakhstan and Central Asia. Kazakhstan alone constituted over half of all new arrivals in Germany during 1992 to 1996 with 558,460 people. Another 52,163 new *Aussiedler* during these years came from Kyrgyzstan. The remaining Central Asian states of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan accounted for 33,650 people.⁵⁶ By 1997 two thirds of the Russian-Germans in Kazakhstan, five sixths of those in Kyrgyzstan and almost all of those in Tajikistan had emigrated.⁵⁷ The civil war in Tajikistan following the disintegration of the USSR led to the almost total evacuation of all Russian-Germans. But, even absent violence, the increased discrimination against non-titular nationalities led most Russian-Germans to take advantage of their ability to settle in Germany. Ultimately, all but a small number of the ethnic Germans from southern Central Asia left for Germany. In the Asian republics of the former USSR, only Kazakhstan retains a substantial Russian-German population. According to the German government there were some 230,000 Russian-Germans still remaining in Kazakhstan in 2006.⁵⁸ The Kazakh census of 2009, however, gives a figure of less than 180,000. Over three quarters of the Russian-German population of Kazakhstan and Central Asia had thus emigrated from 1987 to 2006. The decline in Siberia was considerably less. From 1989 to 1999 the German population of the Russian Federation only declined from 850,000 to 600,000.⁵⁹ The 2010 Russian census placed the number at a little less than 400,000. Thus about 700,000 ethnic Germans remain in the former USSR, most of them in Russia, especially western Siberia. In contrast over 2.3 million have migrated to Germany.⁶⁰

⁵³ Eric Schmaltz, *An Expanded Bibliography and Reference Guide for the Former Soviet Union's Ethnic Germans* (Fargo, ND: Germans from Russia Heritage Collections, NDSU Libraries, 2003), xxii.

⁵⁴ Polian, p. 208.

⁵⁵ Vladimir Kabuzan, *Nemetskoiazychnoe Naslenie v Rossijskoi Imperii i SSSR v xviii-xx Vekakh (1719-1989 gg) istoriko-staticheskoe Issledovanie* (Moscow: RAN, 2003), p. 89.

⁵⁶ Polian, table 13, p. 210.

⁵⁷ Polian, pp. 208-209.

⁵⁸ Viktor Krieger *et al*, *Deutsche aus Russland Gestern und Heute: Volk auf dem Weg* (Stuttgart: Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland, 2006), p. 33.

⁵⁹ Polian, pp. 208-209.

⁶⁰ Krieger *et al.*, p. 32.

This means that today only about 20% of ethnic Germans born in the USSR remain in Russia, Kazakhstan, and other former Soviet states and over 80% have resettled in Germany.

The result is that the once large and at times prosperous Russian-German communities in Kazakhstan and Central Asia have largely disappeared. This is especially true in southern Central Asia. There are almost no Russian-Germans left in Tajikistan. In Kyrgyzstan where they once numbered over 100,000 there are only a little over 11,000 remaining. The ethnic diversity that formerly marked this region is rapidly disappearing. European diaspora groups such as the Russian-Germans, Jews, Greeks, and Poles that once had a significant presence in the region have largely ceased to exist as a result of mass emigration. Only some areas of Kazakhstan such as Akmola Oblast still retain significant Russian-German populations. For the region as a whole and particularly the four countries of Central Asia proper, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan the era when they had notable German minorities is almost over. Siberia still has a substantial minority of several hundred thousand ethnic Germans. But, this is a steep decline from the nearly one million that lived there in 1989.

A Comparison with other Ostdeutschen

The mass migration of ethnic Germans from the former Soviet Union to Germany represented the single largest such migration of the group in its more than 250 years of existence. But, this migration was small compared to the much larger flow of expellees and refugees forced into the Allied Occupation zones of what remained of Germany at the end of World War II. Between 1944 and 1949, the Soviet zone received 4.3 million such Germans, 24.2% of its population and what became West Germany 8 million eastern Germans or 17% of its total population.⁶¹ Both in raw numbers and in percentage terms this is a much greater number than the *Aussiedler* and *Spaetaussiedler* that have settled in Germany from the former Soviet states. The expelled Germans from eastern Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and other areas of Central and Eastern Europe in 1945 resembled the deported Germans in the USSR in 1941 in terms of being completely stripped of their property and frequently suffering from malnutrition, disease, and other physical ailments as a result of their ethnic cleansing.⁶² At a very minimum some 600,000 or about 5% of the expellees perished from these causes as well as massacres before arriving in what would become the two new German states.⁶³ Furthermore, they came at a time when Germany had been devastated by the loss of World War II rather than at the end of a long economic boom like the Russian Germans. Yet, the Federal Republic of Germany (I do not have room to comment on the integration policies of the GDR here) managed to integrate some eight million impoverished Germans expelled from their homes. In particular the 1952, *Lastenausgleichsgesetz* proved crucial in providing both financial and psychological support to the expellees to help them integrate.⁶⁴ The successful economic, social, and even political integration of the expellees in West Germany can serve as a model redemption narrative for the

⁶¹ Philip Ther, "The Integration of Expellees in Germany in Poland after World War II: A Historical Reassessment," *Slavic Review*, vol. 55, no. 4 (Winter 1996), p. 779.

⁶² Ther, pp. 785-787.

⁶³ Ther, fn. 30, p. 785.

⁶⁴ Ther, p. 791.

Russian Germans. In both cases the redemption narrative is not perfect in that it largely requires abandoning their ancestral lands in East Central Europe and the territory of the former Russian Empire and USSR. But, the Jewish redemption narrative of Israel also required the abandonment of Europe, North Africa, and Iraq as former homelands and the redemption story of the Armenians has left western Armenia still controlled by Turkey and with almost no Armenian inhabitants remaining. Yet, these models do point ways forward out of a blackpilling victim narrative into an heroic redemption narrative that can serve to provide pride, cohesion, and motivation in a whitepilling forward looking way.

Conclusion

Given the enormity of the suffering and collective destruction inflicted upon the ethnic Germans in the USSR from 1941 to 1955, not to mention earlier episodes such as 1932-1933 and 1937-1938, overcoming the victim narrative outlined briefly above is not an easy task. Here we can review the post-Stalin history of the Russian Germans in comparison to other similarly victimized groups. Unlike the Chechens, Ingush, Karachais, Balkars, and Kalmyks the Russian Germans were unable to return to the Volga or their other areas of previous settlement in European areas of the USSR in any large numbers and their autonomous territories were never restored. Nonetheless, it might be possible to valorize the short lived struggle for the restoration of autonomy as a new heroic narrative as the Crimean Tatars have done with their much longer and more intense campaign to recover their homeland. However, given that the movement really only lasted from 1964 to 1967 before collapsing without any concrete results this is probably not the most fertile ground for constructing a fully redemptive narrative for the modern history of the group. Rather the emigration movement after 1973 seems to hold much more promise as being part of a larger ingathering of various German sub-groups into the Federal Republic of Germany. This second approach bears some similarities with the highly successful redemption narratives of the Armenians and Jews where the survivors of their respective genocides have managed to physically regroup to form the modern ethno-nation states of the Armenian Republic (based on the Armenian SSR from 1922-1991) and Israel.

The mass ethnic German migration from the USSR and its successor states to Germany from 1987 to 2005 does from the point of view of the German state fit in well with the larger settlement and integration of other German sub groups from East Central Europe. In a very real sense despite historical peculiarities the ethnic Germans settling in Germany from Siberia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan have joined the same historical trajectory followed by the much larger German populations from what became modern Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Hungary after World War II. The Federal Republic of Germany was able to successfully socially and economically integrate these diverse populations of displaced German communities in the 1950s. Given their huge numbers and their complete impoverishment due to either being violently expelled or fleeing in fear of rape and murder at the hands of the Soviet Red Army and their Polish, Czech, and Yugoslav allies this was no easy task. Nonetheless, the Federal Republic of Germany did successfully integrate the German expellees and refugees from regions to the east of the rump of territory that constituted

the larger and more economically prosperous of the two new German states after World War II. A redemption narrative for the German people as a whole including those persecuted and ethnically cleansed by the allies of the Soviet Union already exists. Incorporating the ethnic Germans descended from immigrants to the Russian Empire settling in Germany from the Russian Federation and Central Asia into this pre-existing redemption narrative thus seems like an intellectually profitable path to take. Of course these are just preliminary ideas and others have already advanced along these lines to a much greater extent than outlined in this short paper. This strategy, however, does take into account the pertinent facts that the main population center of the group has shifted from Kazakhstan and Siberia to Germany and that the future of ethnic German communities in the former USSR is one of continued demographic decline. Redemption for most of the ethnic Germans from the former USSR has been found in recent decades not in Kazakhstan, Russia, or Kyrgyzstan. Rather it has been found in Germany proper just as the activists of the emigration movement of the 1970s advocated. This "Return" is the redemption of the Russian Germans from the horrors of the Stalin era. I welcome any comments, criticisms, complaints, questions, and further discussion of the ideas presented in this paper.

References

Archives

GARF (State Archives of the Russian Federation), Moscow

RGASPI (Russian State Archives of Socio-Political History), Moscow

Published Primary Sources (documentary collections)

Alieva, S.U., ed. *Tak eto bylo: Natsional'nye repressi v SSSR, 1919-1953*. Moscow: Insan, 1993.

Berdinskikh, V.A. *Spetsposelelentsy: Politcheskaia ssylka narodov Sovetskoi Rossii*. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2005.

Bugai, N.F., ed. *Iosif Stalin – Lavrentiiu Berii: “Ikh nado deportirovat’” Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*. Moscow: Druzhba narodov, 1992.

Bugai, N.F., ed. *“Mobilizovat’ nemtsev v robochie kolonny...I. Stalin”: Sbornik dokumentov (1940-e gody)*. Moscow: Gotika, 1998.

Eisfeld, Alfred and Herdt, Viktor, eds., *Deportation, Sondersiedlung, Arbeitsarmee: Deutsche in der Sowjetunion 1941 bis 1956*, Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1996.

Tsarevskaia-Diakina, T.V., ed., *Spetspereselelentsy v SSSR: vol. V of Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga: Konets 1920-kh – perviaia polvina 1950-kh godov*, Moscow: Rosspen, 2004.

Secondary Sources

Armborst, Kerstin. *Ablosung von der Sowjetunion: Die Emigrationsbewegung der Juden und Deutschen vor 1987*. Munster: Lit Verlag, 2001.

Alfred Eisfeld, ed., *Von der Autonomiegründung zur Verbannung und Entrechtung. Die Jahre 1918 und 1941 bis 1948 in der Geschichte der Deutschen in Russland*. Stuttgart: Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland, 2008.

Eisfeld, Alfred, *Die Aussiedlung der Deutschen aus der Wolgarepublik (1941–1957)*, Munich, Osteuropa –Institut, 2003.

German, A.A. and Silantjewa, O. Ju. (Eds). *‘Vyselit’ s treskom’. Ochevidsty i issledovaniia o tragedii rossisskikh nemtsev/’Fortjagen muss man sie’. Zeitungen und Forscher berichten über die Tragodie der Russlanddeutschen*. Moscow: MSNK Press, 2011.

Kabuzan, Vladimir, *Nemetskoiazychnoe Naslenie v Rossiiskoi Imperii i SSSR v xviii-xx Vekakh (1719-1989 gg) istoriko-sticheskoie Issledovanie*. Moscow: RAN, 2003.

- Karklins, Rasma. *Ethnic Relations in the USSR: The Perspective from Below*. Boston, MA: Allen & Unwin, 1986.
- Krieger, Viktor. *Rein, Volga, Irtysh: Iz istorii nemtsev Tsentral'noi Azii*. Almaty: Daik-Press, 2006.
- Krieger, Viktor, Kampen, Hans, and Paulsen, Nina. *Deutsche aus Russland gestern und heute: Volk auf dem Weg*. Stuttgart: Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland, 2006.
- Mukhina, Irina, *Germans of the Soviet Union*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Pohl, J. Otto, "Soviet Apartheid: Stalin's Ethnic Deportations, Special Settlement Restrictions, and the Labor Army: A Case Study of the Ethnic Germans in the USSR," *Human Rights Review*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2012.
- Polian, Pavel. *Against Their Will: The History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004.
- Schmaltz, Eric, *An Expanded Bibliography and Reference Guide for the Former Soviet Union's Ethnic Germans*. Fargo, ND: Germans from Russia Heritage Collections, NDSU Libraries, 2003.
- Schmaltz, Eric, 'Rebirth' and Regret: The Early Autonomy Movement of Ethnic Germans in the USSR, 1959-1989. PhD Thesis, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE, 2002.
- Shcherbakova, I.L., ed. *Nakazannyi narod: Repressii protiv nemtsev*. Moscow: "Zvei'ia," 1999.
- Ther, Philip, "The Integration of Expellees in Germany in Poland after World War II: A Historical Reassessment," *Slavic Review*, vol. 55, no. 4 (Winter 1996).
- Zemskov, V.N. *Spetsposelelentsy v SSSR, 1930-1960*. Moscow: Nauka, 2005.