Building an Ethos of Killing: Comparing and Contrasting the World War II Combat Motivations of German soldiers on the Eastern Front and American Soldiers in the Pacific

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Introduction

"I kept thinking of how awful it would be if some Marines made a landing on Dewey Boulevard on the Manila waterfront and Manila John Basilone wasn't among them." -John Basilone[1]

Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone was a true American hero in every sense of the word. The son of Italian American immigrants, Basilone was born in Buffalo, New York, before spending the majority of his civilian life in Raritan, New Jersey. At only 20 years old, Basilone enlisted in the United States Army and served a little more than two years in the Philippines. After a brief return to civilian life, Basilone enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in July of 1940. After two years of garrison duty in the United States and Cuba, Basilone found himself on a transport ship headed to the island of Guadalcanal in the South Pacific. For his "extraordinary heroism and conspicuous gallantry" during a lengthy Japanese assault on the American defensive lines on the night of October 24-25, 1942, Basilone was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.[2] Following the eventual American victory on Guadalcanal, the Marine Corps sent Basilone back to the United States for an extensive Medal of Honor tour, with the intended purpose of motivating Americans to buy war bonds and support the war effort in general. Despite enjoying all the benefits of his status as a war hero, Basilone grew restless and volunteered for active duty once again. After spending a few months training new Marines in California, Basilone shipped out to join the assault on Iwo Jima in February of 1945. Within two hours of combat on February 19th, D-Day for the Battle of Iwo Jima, Basilone personally organized a

[1] John Basilone, "I'm Glad to Get Overseas Duty," in Hugh Ambrose, *The Pacific* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 254.
[2] "John Basilone: Gunnery Sergeant, USMC, (1916-1945)," *Naval History and Heritage Command*, https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/us-people/b/basilone-john.html.

successful assault on an enemy pillbox and led three stranded American tanks through a Japanese minefield, both at great personal risk to himself. A few minutes later, as Basilone led yet another assault on the entrenched Japanese positions around Motoyama Airfield Number 1, bullets from Japanese small-arms fire struck Basilone multiple times. Moments later, he expired on the black sands of Iwo Jima, leaving his newlywed wife, Lena Riggi, a widow.[3] For his actions during the battle, Basilone was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross.

When Basilone made the decision to leave behind the accolades associated with his status as a hero of the Battle of Guadalcanal to return to active duty, he could have requested to remain in the United States. Instead, Basilone specifically requested to be attached to a unit headed overseas. On Iwo Jima, Basilone could have held back and put his personal safety above the mission at hand. Instead, he repeatedly put himself in danger in order to get as many Marines safely off the beach as possible. The question to ask about Sergeant Basilone's actions is a simple question that can and should be asked of anyone who took part in World War II: why? Why did Basilone and so many other soldiers in the Second World War risk their lives in combat? This question of combat motivation is a question that begs an answer; an answer that can be found in the diaries, memoirs, and oral accounts of countless soldiers on both sides of the Second World War. Unfortunately, while historians of World War Two, and even the historians writing in the historiographical subset of soldier studies, have discussed the war at length, few historians have researched and written works comparing the experiences of American soldiers in World War II to other groups of soldiers fighting around the world at the same time.

[3] Hugh Ambrose, *The Pacific* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 381-385. Basilone's cause of death is disputed, as some records indicate he was killed by a mortar round instead of small arms fire. However, Basilone's official medical file specifies that his wounds were caused by bullets to his groin, left arm, and neck. See: Basilone Medical File, "Abstract of Medical History," February 19, 1945, Basilone USMC Personnel File.

In fact, other than James Weingartner's excellent 1996 article "War against Subhumans: Comparisons between the German War against the Soviet Union and the American War against Japan, 1941-1945," few comparative studies between soldiers fighting on opposite sides of the war and the world during World War II have been conducted at all. For Weingartner, the similarities between the fighting experiences of German *Landser* (the colloquial term for German infantrymen, similar to the use of the term "Tommy" in reference to British soldiers or "GI" in reference to American soldiers) on the Eastern Front and American soldiers in the Pacific had little to do with the tactical aspects of each theater of war. After all, naval battles and beach landings have little in common with the massive tank battles and aggressive street fighting commonly associated with the Eastern Front. Instead, the connecting thread between German *Landser* and American GIs lies in the way each group of soldiers saw their respective opponents.[4] To build the comparison between the typical *Landser* and the typical GI, Weingartner begins by analyzing the arguments of two of the most important scholars on the issue of combat motivation in the Second World War: Omer Bartov on the Eastern Front and John Dower in the Pacific.[5] Although comparisons between German and American soldiers typically center around similar racial attitudes towards opponents, there is considerable disagreement in the historiography about whether racial attitudes played the most meaningful role in soldiers' combat motivations. Other World War II scholars of the Eastern Front and Pacific Theater argue ideology, patriotism, traumatic battlefield experiences, small unit cohesion, fear of superiors, and the desire to return home were the most important combat motivators.

[4] James Weingartner, "War against Subhumans: Comparisons between the German War against the Soviet Union and the American War against Japan, 1941-1945," *The Historian* 58, no. 3 (1996): 557-73.

[5] John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986). Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Bartov, in *Hitler's Army* and *The Eastern Front, 1941-1945, German Troops and the Barbarization of Warfare,* argues the majority of German soldiers were either believers in, or at least heavily influenced by, Nazi racial propaganda.[6] Additionally, he thinks the problem compounded upon itself in the occupied Soviet Union as partisan fighting erupted and the Wehrmacht experienced heavy losses. Bartov's work is transformational in the historiography of the German soldier experience, as he gives little weight to German soldier memoirs and post-war interviews on that basis that these sources would have been performative and lacking in candor. Instead, Bartov mostly relies on primary sources created during the war, including Wehrmacht battle records, reports, and letters written by soldiers on the front lines. Stephen G. Fritz, writing four years after the publication of *Hitler's Army*, agrees to a limited extent with Bartov that soldiers were motivated by ideology in *Frontsoldaten: The German Soldier in World War II.*[7] However, Fritz differs from Bartov by deemphasizing racialized ideology as a combat motivator and emphasizing the "less-negative" aspects of Nazism: socialism and *Volksgemeinschaft.* The appeal of socialism and *Volksgemeinschaft* are themselves simply portions of what Fritz believes were the most important motivators for German soldiers: small-unit cohesion and the discipline created through intensive Wehrmacht training regimens.

In his 2006 work *War of Annihilation: Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front, 1941,* Geoffrey P. Megargee wades into the historiographical debate between Bartov and Fritz. Megargee agrees with Bartov's approach of discounting memoir accounts and argues for understanding the Wehrmacht as a pivotal cog in the wheel of Nazi criminality.[8] The works of

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[6] Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941-1945, German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

[7] Stephen G. Fritz, *Frontsoldaten: The German Soldier in World War II* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995).

[8] Geoffrey P. Megargee, *War of Annihilation: Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front, 1941* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

Bartov and Megargee are significant because many other historians of the German soldier experience cite German conceptions of duty, following orders, and patriotism as the most important motivators. Others, such as Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer in *Soldaten on Fighting, Killing, and Dying: The Secret World War II Transcripts of German POWs,* conclude soldiers were motivated by anti-Bolshevism and, to a greater extent, by the honor associated with Wehrmacht's incentive system.[9] On a broader level, Neitzel and Welzer contend that the German high command was very ideologically minded, thereby influencing the incentive system and the lower ranks by extension. Nevertheless, the best recent addition to the study of German soldier motivations is Jeff Rutherford and Adrian Wettstein's *The German Army on the Eastern Front.*[10] Rutherford and Wettstein argue Wehrmacht soldiers were motivated to the greatest extent by anti-Bolshevism, ideological conformance to the Nazi government, and German definitions of military necessity. Rutherford and Wettstein's joint work is valuable due to their combined analysis of the prior historiography of German soldier motivations and the results of their own research. Their theories are also important in relation to the work of Ben Shepherd, "The Clean Wehrmacht, the War of Extermination, and beyond," and Waitman W. Beorn, "A Calculus of Complicity: The "Wehrmacht", the Anti-Partisan War, and the Final Solution in White Russia, 1941-42," both of whom address the Wehrmacht's involvement in crimes against Soviet civilians and the role of the Wehrmacht in the Holocaust.

In the Pacific Theater, John Dower's *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* represents the best argument for understanding the American war with Japan as a fundamentally racial conflict. Dower relies on a wide variety of speeches, memorandums, and

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[9] Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer, *Soldaten on Fighting, Killing, and Dying: The Secret World War II Transcripts of German POWs*, trans. by Jefferson Chase (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012).

[10] Jeff Rutherford and Adrian Wettstein, *The German Army on the Eastern Front*. *The German Army on the Eastern Front* (Pen & Sword, 2018).

published writings from public officials before, during, and after the war to demonstrate the racialized language common among American leaders at the time. For Dower, the differences in the tone, style, and language in American propaganda about Nazi Germany versus propaganda about Imperial Japan are indicative of strong racial feelings in the Pacific War. On the other hand, Roger W. Lotchin's 2015 research on non-Asian American views of the Japanese would indicate that soldiers were not motivated primarily by racial hatred, but instead a desire to get revenge for Japanese aggression.[11] Roger Daniels, a scholar of Japanese-American internment during the war, disagrees with Lotchin, arguing that anti-Japanese sentiment would have been wide-spread among the American population.[12] If valid, Daniels' arguments would support Dower's thesis and indicate that racial hatred could have played a key role in American soldier motivations.

Other historians of the American war experience take more traditional approaches to soldier motivations. Gerald Linderman, in *The World Within War,* argues the racial language used throughout the American armed forces increased and worsened as more Americans came into contact with the barbarism of Japanese soldiers against prisoners, civilians, and the defenseless.[13] For Linderman, the pull of comradeship and small unit cohesion were the two most important motivators for American soldiers. In his rather cynical work *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War,* Paul Fussell also rejects attempts to credit ideology or racial prejudice for motivating American soldiers.[14] He posits soldiers lived in

[11] Roger W. Lotchin, "A Research Report: The 1940s Gallup Polls, Imperial Japanese, Japanese Americans, and the Reach of American Racism." *Southern California Quarterly* 97, no. 4 (2015): 399-417.

[12] Roger Daniels, "Incarceration of the Japanese Americans: A Sixty-Year Perspective." *The History Teacher* 35, no. 3 (2002): 297-310.

[13] Gerald F. Linderman, *The World Within War: America's Combat Experience in World War II* (New York: Free Press, 1997).

[14] Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

an "ideological vacuum" and were therefore primarily motivated by small-unit cohesion and a desire to defeat the enemy and return home. Revenge for the unprovoked Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor played an important role in soldier motivations, but otherwise, the conflict was profoundly non-ideological. He cites songs, poems, and other literary sources throughout his work and eventually concludes by contending that the true experience of World War II combat is not well-documented and does not end up in popular history books.

Finally, in *"The Best War Ever,"* Michael C.C. Adams contends that the majority of American soldiers did not understand the causes for war and did not have high morale while on the front lines.[15] While low morale is not atypical among front line troops, Adams argues the specific negative sentiments American soldiers professed during the war indicate that they were mostly motivated to fight by a desire to get off the front line through achieving smaller tactical objectives or by winning the war outright. He also points to the lack of widespread support and even understanding of the greater causes or purposes of the war itself as evidence against the argument for viewing ideology as a key combat motivator. Among the historians that come to conclusions that differ the most from one another on both fronts of the war, the most common point of divergence is in their choice of source material. As discussed above, at the heart of the disagreement between Bartov and Fritz is Bartov's belief in the invalidity of many German soldiers' accounts and Fritz' persistent use of those same accounts. In his focus on individual soldiers, Fritz relies on the memoirs of Guy Sajer, a Germany-speaking Alsatian who was conscripted into the Wehrmacht, in *The Forgotten Soldier,* and Siegfried Knappe, a German Wehrmacht volunteer, in *Soldat: Reflections of a German Soldier 1936-1949.*[16]

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[15] Michael C.C. Adams, *"The Best War Ever": America and World War II* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

[16] Guy Sajer, *The Forgotten Soldier*, trans. by Lily Emmet (New York: Harper & Row, 1967). Siegfried Knappe and Ted Brusaw, *Soldat: Reflections of a German Soldier 1936-1949* (New York: Orion Books, 1992).

On the American side, it is traditional to view World War II as a righteous war fought by soldiers inspired by freedom and democracy, as Adams succinctly defines this view in *The Best War Ever.* However, this conception of the war contrasts with the recent historiography that focuses on other motivators, such as racial prejudice, revenge, small unit cohesion, and the desire to return home. This study aims to address the historiographical debates over soldier motivations on both the Eastern Front and the Pacific Theater and add to the comparative historiography across multiple fronts in the Second World War through close analysis of contemporary German and American sources and the scholarly debates over combat motivations. In order to facilitate this comparison, it is first important to briefly mention the battles around which this study will revolve. For the study of German soldiers on the Eastern Front, this work will primarily focus on members of Army Group South from their invasion of Ukraine to their eventual defeat and destruction at the Battle of Stalingrad, Wehrmacht *Landser* who took part in anti-partisan warfare, and soldiers recruited late in the war who served in the defense of Germany itself in 1944 and 1945. On the American side, the majority of the primary sources used by this study are derived from Marines who served in the Battle of Guadalcanal at the beginning of the war, men who took part in the beach landings and furious firefights in the strategically unnecessary Battle of Peleliu, and soldiers involved in the invasion and larger-scale island combat of the Battle of Okinawa. Beginning with Weingartner's connecting thread between the two fronts, this study will examine the specific historiographies of the Eastern Front and Pacific Theater through an analysis of the three main categories of soldier motivations: conceptions of the enemy, conceptions of the cause, and conceptions of comrades. By exploring these three forms of motivation among American soldiers, this study will argue against efforts to portray the War in the Pacific as either a race-based conflict or a war fought for a noble, anti-fascist, pro-freedom

cause. Instead, the evidence will demonstrate that the vast majority of American soldiers took part in the war for much simpler reasons, with a special emphasis on comradeship. On the Eastern Front, the evidence will demonstrate the important roles of racism and Nazi propagandistic language in the combat motivations of front line soldiers, in particular as German forces experienced massive amounts of casualties. Analysis of available data will demonstrate the realities of the Eastern Front, namely that high casualties meant that small unit cohesion would have broken down by the Battle of the Stalingrad, thereby diminishing the importance of comradeship in German combat motivations.

Chapter 1: Conceptions of the Enemy

"This was a brutish, primitive hatred, as characteristic of the horror of war in the Pacific as the palm trees and the islands."-E.B. Sledge

On September 15, 1944, Eugene Bondurant Sledge found himself tumbling out of a U.S. Navy LVT onto the sandy beach of the Island of Peleliu, 8500 miles away from his hometown of Mobile, Alabama. As a member of the 1st Marine Division, Sledge was sent with thousands of other Marines to complete the task of clearing the island of Japanese forces. After an initial amphibious assault on the Peleliu beachhead and nearly two weeks of intense fighting among the jagged rocks and precipitous, ridge-filled terrain of Peleliu, Sledge and the rest of the 5th Marines regiment launched another amphibious assault, this time on the smaller island of Ngesebus, located to the north of Peleliu.[17] The landing was a nearly bloodless success, as aside from a sniper and a Nambu machine gun crew, most of the Japanese forces had retreated to their pillboxes and bunkers away from the beach. The day after the landing, on the 29th of September, Sledge and his mortar section stopped their advance near a destroyed Japanese machine gun placement. The position contained the bodies of the machine gun crew, including the machine gunner himself, who had been killed while firing his weapon. He was still propped up next to the machine gun as though he would unleash a stream of bullets at any moment. The top of his skull had been blown off, "probably by one of [K Company's] automatic weapons." In a particularly gruesome anecdote, Sledge remembers a fellow soldier absentmindedly tossing coral rocks into

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[17] E.B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed* (New York: Presidio, 2010), 56, 110.

the machine gunner's open skull. Looking back on the moment, Sledge concluded that "there was nothing malicious in his action. The war had so brutalized us that it was beyond belief."[18]

No other author captures the Pacific Theater quite like E.B. Sledge does in his stirring account of his experiences on Peleliu and Okinawa. Other works, such as William Manchester's *Goodbye Darkness,* also attempt to capture the feelings and experiences of front line combat soldiers in the Pacific. But not even Manchester's beautifully written and informative work can compare to the straightforwardness, honesty, and objectivity of Sledge's memoir. Writing without attempting to sugarcoat his mistakes or boast of his achievements, Sledge offers a glimpse into the hearts and minds of U.S. Marines in the Pacific. Unlike Manchester, whose narrative likely includes anecdotes he heard from other soldiers along with his own experiences, despite his liberal usage of the first-person throughout the entirety of his work, Sledge clearly distinguishes between his own memories and the background information he gained through conversations with fellow members of the 1st Marine Division and research into published and unpublished Marine records of the battles and troop movements in which Sledge took part.[19]

The strength, depth, and importance of Sledge's work, however, comes through in the manner in which he discusses the factors which both motivated and demotivated him to stay on the front line while under fire, to advance under fire to the next coral outcropping, and to simply survive. In the same way that he does not attempt to ameliorate the horrors of the battlefield, Sledge tells multiple explicit stories, detailing the hatred Marines had towards the Japanese in general. After seeing the mutilated corpses of three Marines on Peleliu, Sledge writes: "My emotions solidified into rage and a hatred for the Japanese beyond anything I ever had

[18] Sledge, 111-113, 122-123.
[19] William Manchester, *Goodbye, Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2002).

experienced."[20] Based on his memories of conversations with his fellow Marines and his recollections of extreme actions taken by Marines against Japanese soldiers, Sledge argues a deep hatred existed against the Japanese among Marines across the board. Importantly, although Sledge's contention about the existence of a sweeping hatred of Japanese soldiers by U.S. Marines is certainly of historiographical import in and of itself, the emotions Sledge discusses in his memoir are far from being simply the isolated opinions of a single Marine.

Based on his own comparative study of the two main American theaters of war in the Second World War, Gerald Linderman, in *The World Within War,* argues for understanding the Pacific Theater as fundamentally different than the European Theater. Linderman describes the combat situation in the Pacific as "war unrestrained." Nevertheless, in defense of Sledge and the Marines who fought with Sledge, Linderman posits that the Japanese began the cycle of violence and ferocity that would soon define the Pacific War.[21] In Linderman's view, the Battle of Guadalcanal, fought from August 7, 1942 to February 9, 1943, turned early-war rumors of Japanese barbarism and cruelty into widely-held conceptions of Japanese soldiers as a whole.[22] Linderman's conclusion, that strongly-held, anti-Japanese sentiment among American soldiers originated from Japanese barbarism, is contested by other historians, however. In *War Without Mercy,* Dower argues the barbarism of the Pacific War came from the fact that both sides saw each other through fundamentally racist lenses.[23] Paul Fussell, in *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War,* suggests that American propagandists

[20] Sledge, 148.
[21] Linderman, 154.
[22] Ibid, 157.
[23] Dower, 11.

and military leaders “severely dehumanized and demeaned” the Japanese, in order to better galvanize support for the war among civilians and motivate soldiers on the front.[24]

With the cultural memory of the horrors of the Nazi regime in mind, it is not difficult for one to imagine German propagandists and military leaders providing their soldiers with a similar racial outlook on the war. Nevertheless, in similar fashion to the historiographical debates surrounding the role of racism in American combat motivations, historians have debated the role of racism as it relates to Nazi ideology among German soldiers as well. Before the publication of Manfred Messerschmidt’s 1969 work *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat. Zeit der Indokrination (The Wehrmacht in the Nazi State. Time of Indoctrination)* and Norbert Müller’s article, “Massenverbrechen von Wehrmachtorganen an der sowjetischen Zivilbevölkerung im Sommer/Herbst 1941“ (Mass crimes of Wehrmacht agents against the Soviet civilian population in the Summer/Fall of 1941), the historiography of the Wehrmacht had been largely defined by attempts to present the Wehrmacht as an apolitical force, unconnected to the Nazi Party, yet still dedicated to the defense of Europe against Communism. Efforts to whitewash the Wehrmacht began before the events of the war had even been fully prosecuted at the Nuremberg Trials. During the trial, the Allied Tribunal chose to charge any person who had been a member of the SS with culpability in Nazi crimes at large. Through this first legal decision, the SS became the scapegoat of the Nazi regime; therein freeing other powerful organizations, like the Wehrmacht, from taking appropriate responsibility for their actions during the war.[25] In the decades immediately after the war, prominent Wehrmacht veterans and apologists did their best to further

[24] Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 116.

[25] Gerald Reitlinger, *The SS: Alibi of a Nation, 1922-1945* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1981). Note: The Allied Tribunal did find certain members of the Wehrmacht High Command responsible for war crimes and prosecuted those individuals accordingly. However, such individual legal actions do not negate the fact that Wehrmacht *Landser* were treated far more leniently than low-level members of the SS.

the myth of the "Clean Wehrmacht." This historiographical trend had little to do with the realities of the war and much to do with the desires of German revisionist historians to develop positive memories of the Wehrmacht.[26] Nevertheless, the work of historians like Messerschmidt and Müller paved the way for Bartov's seminal work on German combat motivations. Using Bartov's thesis, that German soldiers were mostly motivated to fight by the Nazis' ideological messaging, as a starting point on the Eastern Front and the theses of Linderman, Dower, and Fussell as jumping off points in the Pacific, this chapter will compare the roles of conceptions of the enemy in the combat motivations of American and German soldiers. In order to analyze this comparison effectively, this chapter will begin with an analysis of the cultural backgrounds of young German and American men who would have been of military age during the war, examine the broader issue of pre-war German conceptions of both Slavic peoples and Jews and pre-war American images of Japan, and conclude with an analysis of German and American conceptions of their respective enemies during the war, based on the writings of the soldiers themselves.

To understand the racial mindsets of German soldiers, one must first begin by examining the cultural background in which young German soldiers would have grown up long before their experiences on the Eastern Front. While the Nazi Party is typically well-known for its anti-Semitic, anti-Slavic, and pro-Aryan influence on the German people of the 1930s, the history of anti-Semitism, anti-Slavism, and ethnocentrism in Germany is much older than Adolf Hitler, Josef Goebbels, and the Nazi Party itself and, importantly, is not tied to other political beliefs.[27] In the broad historical narrative of German racism, it is imperative to recognize the important roles played by German cultural icons in furthering anti-Semitism throughout German history.

[26] James A. Wood, "Captive Historians, Captivated Audience: The German Military History Program, 1945-1961," *The Journal of Military History* 69, no. 1 (2005): 125.

[27] Helmut Berding, *Moderner Antisemitismus in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1988), 11-19.

Martin Luther, the monk-turned-reformer who for all intents and purposes began the Protestant Reformation with the publication of his 95 Theses, had a hand in espousing anti-Semitic sentiments at the end of his life. Writing in 1543, Luther calls all Jews "nothing but thieves and robbers," who deserve to be thrown out of society, stripped of their possessions, and relegated to a subservient role in society.[28] Racism was also common among key German authors who were self-admittedly opposed to the on-going influence of Luther's beloved church. Less than a year after his co-publication of the Communist Manifesto in February 1848, Friedrich Engels published an article in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in which Engels discusses his views on the political struggles between the Magyars of Hungary and Slavic peoples living in Austria. At the end of his article, Engels wrote in a sweeping statement that Austrian Germans and Magyars will one day "take bloody revenge on the slavish Barbarians" and, hypothetically, destroy Slavic nations so thoroughly that even "the names of their nations will be annihilated."[29] While it is difficult to ascertain how many people read the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* on a regular basis, it is clear that even cultural influences from the left held very strong opinions about the existence of the Slavs to the east.

Along with appearing in the writings of Luther and Engels, racism became a dominant theme in the work of one of Germany's most famous, or perhaps infamous, composers, Richard Wagner. Even though Wagner died in 1883, through his embrace of the "Germanic ideal" and hatred of Jews in his writings, Wagner unknowingly positioned himself as a future Nazi cultural hero.[30] As an important figure in the German cultural center of Bayreuth, Wagner influenced

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[28] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Volume 47: The Christian in Society IV* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 268-293.
[29] Friedrich Engels, "Der magyarische Kampf," Neue Rheinische Zeitung, January 13, 1849.
[30] George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 101-103.

other anti-Semitic writers, including British-German philosopher Houston Stewart Chamberlain. Building on Wagner's German nationalist beliefs, Chamberlain embraced conceptions of the "Aryan race-soul" and believed Jews to be evil antagonists to the German ideal.[31] Between Chamberlain's philosophical arguments for anti-Semitic nationalism, Wagner's appeal as a famous composer, Engel's influence in leftist politics, and Luther's status as one of Germany's best known religious figures, young Germans would have been exposed to racism from a variety of influences. The young Adolf Hitler purportedly read Wagner and Chamberlain and studied Luther's anti-Semitic work.[32] In 1923, Hitler had the opportunity to meet Chamberlain in Bayreuth. Upon hearing his ideas, Chamberlain purportedly believed Hitler would be the next standard bearer for anti-Semitism and drew parallels between Luther's actions in the 16th century and Hitler's personality in the 1920s.[33] The extent to which Chamberlain influenced Hitler's own racial views is unclear. Nevertheless, two years after meeting Chamberlain in Bayreuth, Hitler published what would become the central text at the heart of Nazism, *Mein Kampf*.

In *Mein Kampf,* along with his more widely known anti-Semitic passages, Hitler spends a considerable amount of time discussing his anti-Slavic views.[34] As the evidence will suggest, anti-Slavism played an important role in the cultural backgrounds of the German men who would eventually fight on the front lines of the Eastern Front, even if it is difficult to distinguish the exact degrees which the anti-Slavism of Hitler and the Nazi Party and historical German anti-Slavism played in soldier combat motivations. The problem of tainted primary sources is certainly an important issue in finding this balance. As discussed in the introduction, anyone who fought for the Wehrmacht, and by extension, in the furtherance of the aims of the Third Reich,

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[31] Mosse, 105-106.
[32] Ibid, 205.
[33] Ibid, 108.
[34] Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 60, 134, 293-296.

had an incentive to de-emphasize their own personal anti-Slavic or anti-Semitic feelings. However, for the 2.7 million Germans killed on the Eastern Front from 1941-1944, no opportunity for post-war redemption, hindsight, or perspective existed.[35] One individual of the 2.7 million Germans killed on the Eastern Front was Karl Fuchs. Born in Nuremberg in 1917 to Frieda Fuchs and Hans Fuchs, a veteran of the Great War and an elementary schoolteacher, Karl grew up in a prototypical Bavarian environment. Throughout his youth, Karl was a noteworthy soccer player, had an excellent singing voice, was in excellent physical condition, and had a penchant for romanticism. Importantly, Karl grew up in a home where the Nazi Party was normal; Karl's father joined the party in 1923, at a time when very few people in Germany could have ever predicted the rise of the then-fringe right wing movement.[36] Karl's letters, which were saved and preserved by his wife and parents, are valuable examples of unvarnished and unadulterated source material, lacking in any sort of hindsight or attempts to explain away Nazi sympathies.

The preserved body of letters begin on April 6, 1937, two days after Fuchs began his required service in the National Labor Service. By reading Fuchs' letters from the very beginning of his body of work one quickly ascertains that Fuchs was in fact infatuated with the Nazi Party. Five months after his first recorded letter appears, Fuchs writes about his enthusiasm for the 1937 Nazi Party Rally in Nuremberg. Although he was not yet a member of the formal military and never served in the SS or the SA, Fuchs recognizes the imperial and expansionist overtones in the large-scale demonstration of military-style drill demonstrated by Fuchs and

[35] Stephen G. Fritz, *Ostkrieg: Hitler's War of Extermination in the East* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 2011), 496.

[36] Karl Fuchs, Horst Fuchs Richardson, and Dennis E. Showalter, *Sieg Heil! War Letters of Tank Gunner Karl Fuchs, 1937-1941* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1987), 13, 18-20.

thousands of his Labor Service comrades in front of Nazi high officials.[37] Siegfried Knappe, an artillery battery commander who joined the Wehrmacht in 1936 after serving in the National Labor Service, attended the 1936 Nuremberg rally. Knappe describes the scene as one of great patriotic fervor for National Socialism, driven by the large number of participants and the presence of Adolf Hitler, Hermann Göring, Joseph Goebbels, and other Nazi leadership in the viewing grandstands.[38] Eight months later, Fuchs goes further than simply observing Nazi principles in action and actually provides evidence for his serious involvement in the local Nazi Party. In a letter dated June 17, 1938, Fuchs mentions an award he received as a member of the Hitler youth and the fact that he was registered as a Nazi Party member.[39] While Fuchs ends each of his letters with the customary "Heil Hitler," it is in November of 1938, however, that the first indications of a deeper-held Nazi and racial ideology appear in his writings. Two weeks after the destruction of Jewish businesses, synagogues, and homes, and the murder of 91 Jews on the night of Kristallnacht, Fuchs writes: "I don't know if things were as hectic in Nuremberg, but we made a clean sweep here. I can tell you that the authorities didn't miss one of those pig Jews.You should have seen the insolent behavior of these Jews!"[40] Sadly, Fuchs' anti-Semitism is far from an outlier among Germans in the pre-war era. Albert Bastian, a Hitler Youth member and war volunteer who lost a leg during the war at only 18 years old, reported feeling a deep hatred and distaste for Jews following anti-Semitic pogroms on the night of November 9-10, 1938. Importantly, Fuchs and Bastian would have been exposed to a wide variety of anti-Semitic propaganda throughout their childhoods and into young adulthood. It would be an overstatement to solely attribute the development of Fuchs' and Bastian's anti-Semitism to the work of the Nazi

[37] Fuchs, 29-30.
[38] Knappe, 85-86.
[39] Fuchs, 33.
[40] Ibid, 37.

Propaganda Ministry in the 1930s, as anti-Semitic material much older than Goebbels' work certainly existed at the time. Nevertheless, the developers of Nazi propaganda would have provided Fuchs, Bastian, and other German young people with anti-Semitic phrases and concepts that would later appear in their letters, diaries, and memories of the war (Figure 1).[41] Admittedly, while Fuchs' letters do address his anti-Semitism, most of his writings center around his deeply-held German nationalism, as encapsulated by his enthusiasm for his time in the National Labor Service.

Figure 1. "Der ewige Jude," (the eternal Jew). Fuchs and Bastian would have been familiar with images such as this one (an advertisement for a Nazi exhibition shown from 1937-1939 throughout Germany in Munich, Berlin, Bremen, Dresden, Magdeburg, and in Vienna, Austria) due to the widely-distributed nature of the Nazi Propaganda Ministry's material.

While Fuchs does not draw a self-described ideological connection between his time in the National Labor Service and his anti-Semitism, other Germans, such as Bastian, found the National Labor Service to be a veritable laboratory of Nazi ideology. According to Bastian's account, he was most influenced to hold anti-Semitic views by his schoolteacher and the troop leaders of two nearby National Labor Service camps.[42] As an ideological vehicle for the Third Reich, the National Labor Service played a key role in the personal development of Fuchs, Knappe, Bastian, and millions of other young German men. Therefore, despite serving as just one part of larger Nazi efforts to flood every aspect of German culture

[41] *Der ewige Jude,* postcard, November 8, 1937, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection. https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn538936.

[42] Albert Bastian, "Albert Bastian," in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, ed. Johannes Steinhoff, Peter Pechel, and Dennis Showalter (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1994), 14-15.

with Nazi imagery, the National Labor Service represents one of the Nazis' most successful efforts to introduce men to a militarized Nationalist force. The Nazi emphasis on influencing young people through the National Labor Service and indoctrination in schools comes straight out of Hitler's plans for a new Germany, as laid out in his infamous work, *Mein Kampf.* According to Hitler's blueprint for a third German Reich, the education of the youth and recentering of youth maturity around nationalism lay at the heart of a rejuvenated Germany.[43] Historians generally agree the anti-Semitic and racialized bloodbath that became the systematic murder of Jews and other 'undesirables' in 1941 was not an inevitable development in German history. Nevertheless, thanks to the election of virulently anti-Semitic Nazi leaders in 1933, the Nazi Party had the opportunity to infuse anti-Semitism into young men who would eventually become soldiers in the *Wehrmacht.* After coming to power, the Nazis gained control of the German school system, replaced traditional religious clubs and boy scout troops with the Hitler Youth, and provided a remedy to unemployment and senses of worthlessness through the National Labor Service. These three factors were a perfect storm for defining the racial mindsets of Fuchs, Knappe, Bastian, and millions of other German boys.

Across the Atlantic Ocean, young American men growing up in the 1930s would not have been exposed to the same level of government-sponsored racial education as young German men would have been, but would have still been impacted by the cultural racism common at that time. The government-sanctioned racism of Jim Crow laws against African Americans is relatively familiar to 21st century Americans, but American anti-Japanese sentiment in the first half of the 20th century is relatively unknown in cultural memory. As a part of broader anti-Asian immigration efforts, anti-Japanese sentiments could arguably be said to have begun in the last

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[43] Adolf Hitler, "The State," *Mein Kampf.*

decades of the 19th century. Without question, however, the 1908 Gentleman's Agreement between Japan and the United States set the tone for anti-Japanese sentiment by severely limiting Japanese immigration. On a personal level, anti-Japanese hatred often took the form of vandalism against businesses and violence against Japanese truck drivers.[44] In 1913, Japanese Americans were barred from owning property on the basis of preventing the spread of "racial undesirability." One California farmer even went so far as to describe a baby born to a Japanese father and a white mother as the "germ of the mightiest problem that ever faced this state."[45] The children of Japanese immigrants born in the United States, who historians refer to as the "Nisei generation," often experienced blatant discrimination in ways ranging from being forced to attend segregated movie theaters to being disallowed from purchasing homes in certain neighborhoods based on their skin color. Perhaps most jarringly, Japanese-Americans remember being assaulted as children by white boys wielding stones on their way home from school.[46]

The question to examine, then, is whether the racist sentiments of Fuchs and Bastian and the racist actions of the California State government were exceptions to the rule or representative of their respective cultures on a national level in Germany and the United States; and therefore, did the majority of soldiers fighting on the Eastern Front and in the Pacific Theater enter the war with racist conceptions of their enemies? Some American historians, such as Roger Lotchin, argue that the morally reprehensible actions of Californians were not representative of average American conceptions of the Japanese prior to the war. In his analysis, Lotchin readily admits that considerable discrimination against Japanese Americans certainly existed on the West Coast in the 1930s. Using Gallup Polling data beginning in 1935, Lotchin demonstrates that American

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[44] Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989), 203.
[45] Ibid, 204.
[46] Ibid, 218.

perceptions of Japanese immigrants were not starkly different than American conceptions of Germans or Italians. For Lotchin, this lack of statistical difference demonstrates that anti-Japanese sentiment was not racially motivated, as Americans would have showed more preference towards white Germans and white Italians if race was the defining factor in anti-Japanese sentiment, instead of general xenophobic feelings. Importantly, Lotchin does not claim to address the individual beliefs of Americans, but instead intends to address general American racism in order to "speak to the issue of American collective responsibility for that deplorable incident [the eventual internment of Japanese-Americans]."[47] On the other hand, the historians behind the Congressional Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians Report and Roger Daniels argue in favor of the notion that broad American racism during the interwar years was the key factor behind the internment of Japanese Americans.[48]

In light of the lack of historiographical consensus about pre-war American racism and the historiographical consensus about widespread pre-war German anti-Slavism and anti-Semitism, it is probable that this issue serves as point of contrast between the upbringings of eventual German and American front line soldiers. That being said, such a conclusion does not automatically address the issue of racialized combat motivations among soldiers during the war, whether as a result of longstanding cultural bigotry or as a response to interactions with the enemy. Instead, three types of evidence address wartime racial combat motivations: the writings of soldiers on the front lines, the existing data on the treatment of civilians in occupied Ukraine on the Eastern Front and on the island of Okinawa in the Pacific, and the records of orders given

[47] Roger W. Lotchin, "A Research Report: The 1940s Gallup Polls, Imperial Japanese, Japanese Americans, and the Reach of American Racism," *Southern California Quarterly* 97, no. 4 (2015): 400.

[48] Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, *Personal Justice Denied*, Washington D.C: Government Printing Office, 1982), https://www.archives.gov/research/japanese-americans/justice-denied. and Roger Daniels, "Incarceration of the Japanese Americans: A Sixty-Year Perspective," The History Teacher 35, no. 3 (2002): 297-310.

by German and American military leaders. In the Pacific, the evidence from soldiers who participated in the Battles of Guadalcanal and Peleliu are of particular interest to this study. While the conclusions drawn by Dower, namely that racism fueled a war without limits, are certainly within the realm of possibility, Dower and other historians who support the hypothesis of widespread American racism against Japanese fail to adequately respond to the central argument of Linderman's hypothesis: that interactions with Japanese soldiers on the battlefield stoked the fires of racial hatred among American soldiers.

The evidence from soldiers themselves indicates that the latter hypothesis is a more accurate interpretation of what turned the Pacific War into a 'War without Mercy,' to borrow John Dower's title. For Sergeant Kerry Lane of the 1st Marine Division, personal experiences on the battlefield and accounts of atrocities in the area played an important role in the development of his conceptions of the Japanese. Lane, a North Carolina farm boy who had used trickery to join the Marine Corps at the young age of 16, contends that hearing the story of the Goettge patrol was the beginning of his hatred for the Japanese.[49] The ill-fated patrol, led by Lieutenant Colonel Frank D. Goettge, set off on August 12, 1942 to follow the report of a captured Japanese officer that a nearby Japanese garrison was ill-prepared for battle and susceptible to ambush. The captured enemy officer led the group of 25 Marines straight into a Japanese trap, resulting in the death of 23 Marines and, rather ironically, the captured Japanese officer who spearheaded the ambush. The survivors remembered "Japanese sabers flashing in the moonlight while stabbing and beheading wounded Marines as they lay dying in the sand." Word of the attack quickly spread throughout the Marine Corps that the Japanese were not to be trifled with or trusted to give accurate intelligence when captured.[50] The ambush remained so solidly in the Corps'

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[49] Kerry Lane, *Guadalcanal Marine,* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 3, 121.
[50] Lane, 120-121.

collective understandings of the Japanese that even Sledge, who first saw combat nearly two years later on Peleliu, heard about the incident prior to his first combat experience and internalized the conclusions Americans closer to the incident had previously drawn. For Sledge, those conclusions were simple: combat against Japanese soldiers did not follow traditional laws of warfare and required a special level of brutality and ruthlessness.[51] As Lane summarized warfare on Guadalcanal: "It was kill or be killed." In line with this conclusion, Sergeant Lane ordered his men to "Kill the Jap bastards. Use your bayonet" when necessary.[52] According to data collected during the war by Samuel Stouffer and his team of social scientists, "In the three combat divisions surveyed in the Pacific, 38 per cent of the enlisted infantrymen said that thoughts of hatred for the enemy helped a lot." This number is particularly interesting in comparison to the responses of American soldiers fighting in the Mediterranean, where only a little more than a 1/4 of enlisted infantrymen reported being motivated in combat by hatred of the enemy.[53]

Through an examination of the writings of German soldiers writing in the first six months of Operation Barbarossa, one sees a rather different sequence of brutality. While Lane did not begin the Guadalcanal campaign with a deep-seated desire to destroy the Japanese completely, there were certainly German soldiers who held deeply racialized views before seeing serious combat. On June 30, 1941, Manfred von Plotho wrote that he "sometimes thought the depictions of Bolshevik Russia or at that time Red Spain were exaggerated, a primitive appeal to sensationalism. Today I know better... They wanted to let these Jewish-Asiatic hordes loose on

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[51] Sledge, 33-34.
[52] Lane, 141.
[53] Samuel Stouffer, *The American Soldier: Combat and its Aftermath,* vol. 2 (Princeton, Princeton University Press: 1949), 164. Note: the survey question was "When the going was tough, how much were you helped by thoughts of hatred for the enemy?"

our old land of culture."[54] Writing a little over a week after the beginning of the campaign, von Plotho seems to have developed such sentiments as a response to observing Soviet civilian life, as he would not have seen serious combat at that point in time. In addition, while American racial language tended to center around tropes of the Japanese as "beasts" in response to the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and the intense fighting spirit of Japanese soldiers (See Figure 2), German racial and anti-Semitic references tended to refer back to prewar German propaganda.[55] In addition, references to anti-Slavism and anti-Semitism in German letters and diaries often appeared alongside references to barbaric acts.

Figure 2: This infamous Colliers cover from December 1942 captures the tone and style of American racist tropes depicting the Japanese as bestial figures.

Full-time Wehrmacht radio operator in Army Group South and part-time photographer Wilhelm Moldenhauer held anti-Semitic views, enjoyed the opportunity to witness the expulsion of Jews from the Romania port city of Constanta, and eagerly photographed German war crimes. Perhaps due to his understanding of the scope and magnitude of Nazi criminality or because of the fact that he had distant ancestors who had been converted Jews themselves, Wilhelm's enthusiastic documentation of murdered

[54] Manfred von Plotho to wife, June 30, 1941, quoted in Nicholas Stargardt, *The German Army: A Nation Under Arms, 1939-1945* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 163.
[55] Collier's, December 12, 1942, in Anthony Rhodes, *Propaganda, The Art of Persuasion: World War II* (Secaucus: Wellfleet Press, 1987), 163.

Jews ceased by the end of the 1941.[56] Regardless of the exact reason behind Wilhelm's eventual self-censorship on Nazi atrocities, it is clear that many of his comrades did not feel the need to censor themselves so early in the war. The evidence for such an assertion is found in the thousands of photographs taken by German soldiers throughout the war as souvenirs. In the 1990s, an exhibition called "*Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht, 1941-1944*" (War of Extermination: Crimes of the Wehrmacht, 1941-1944) made many of these photographs accessible to the general public; an act that shook the popular conception of the "Clean Wehrmacht" to its very core. The exhibition contained a truly remarkable series of photographs taken by German soldiers in Serbia, Ukraine, and modern-day Belarus.[57] In a series of five particularly jarring photographs, soldiers from the 707 Infantry Division can be seen taking part in the execution of three young Belarussians in Minsk.[58] The brutal killing depicted in the photographs was supposedly tied to partisan action in the Minsk-area. Nevertheless, the photographer's willingness to take pictures from the beginning of the execution to the end, along with the many calm and seemingly untroubled Wehrmacht soldiers who can be seen in the backgrounds of the photographs, demonstrate the deep lack of regard for the lives of Slavic people common among German soldiers.[59]

Other soldiers elected to write about their experiences with German atrocities against Soviet POWs and civilians. The fact that German soldiers felt emboldened and comfortable enough to even reference their own acts of brutality against Soviet men, women, and children in letters to parents, spouses, and girlfriends is demonstrative of the anti-Slavism common among

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[56] Stargardt, 168.

[57] For more on the popular response to the exhibition and the exhibition itself, see: Heribert Prantl, *Wehrmachtsverbrechen* (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe Verlag, 1997) and *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, 1997).

[58] Urteil des Landgerichts Kassel in der Strafsache gegen L. und P., 9.1.1963, in *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, 1997), 145, plates 3-7.

[59] Ibid, 144-145.

both German soldiers on the front line and German civilians back home. Many make note of their own actions quite flippantly, as if murdering hundreds of civilians at once is to be expected. Hans Albring was "fully committed to the crusade against 'Jewish Bolshevism," referred to villages with Jews living in them as "nests," believed in the justice of shooting partisans as early as August 1941, and relished the opportunity to see executions in person.[60] Interestingly enough, such references tended to decrease over time. Such a decrease can be attributed to increased feelings of remorse, understandings that the Germans would more than likely be pushed out of Soviet territory, and desires to shield the home front from stories of brutality. Nevertheless, in similar fashion to Albring, many soldiers justified their actions by referencing the need to suppress partisan fighters. In line with long-standing German military policies on irregular warfare, German troops often participated in the whole-sale destruction of villages suspected of aiding partisans in the area, or simply as a form of outsized retributive justice directed at a random village.[61] Although such barbarism would typically be discouraged by military commanders in order to maintain discipline and win over the civilian population, German military leadership sanctioned and even encouraged the brutal treatment of Soviet civilians. Less than a month after the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, Wehrmacht General Eugen Müller declared that any armed Soviets found behind German lines, regardless of affiliation, were to be executed as guerrilla fighters, along with any civilians who may have provided them protection.[62] Five days later, on July 23, 1941, the OKW *(Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, translated as "Wehrmacht High Command") declared that anti-partisan warfare would not focus

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[60] Hans Albring to Eugen Altrogge, July 5, 8, 12 and August 30-31, Museum für Kommunikation Berlin, Feldpost-Archiv, quoted in Nicholas Stargardt, *The German Army: A Nation Under Arms, 1939-1945* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 165.

[61] Slepyan, 82-83.

[62] Eugen Müller, July 18, 1941, quoted in Geoffrey P. Megargee, *War of Annihilation: Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front, 1941* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 65.

on the partisans themselves going forward, but would instead focus on "striking such terror into the population that it loses all will to resist."[63] Importantly, the OKW successfully associated anti-Bolshevism with anti-Semitism. Through this association, the OKW was able to inspire the involvement of Wehrmacht soldiers in violence against Jews living in the Soviet Union.[64]

On an individual level, Omer Bartov attributes much of the violence perpetrated by German *Wehrmacht* soldiers to Nazi racial ideology.[65] For Bartov, Nazi ideology inspired a fierce anti-Bolshevism and anti-Slavism throughout the ranks, all the way from the OKW to the common *Landser.* Heer goes a step further, arguing that Nazi leadership intentionally involved German *Landser* in atrocities against Jews in order to desensitize troops to committing atrocities in general.[66] Heer applies his understanding of the practice of Nazi desensitization of troops throughout the entire Eastern Front, as he does not draw any geographical distinctions in his work. Bartov and Heer's arguments certainly would explain why the OKW's ideologically inspired calls for brutality against the Soviet civilian population were not met with more opposition from the soldiers tasked with physically pulling the triggers of weapons in firing squads and lighting the homes of innocent women and children on fire. The importance of anti-Slavism as a motivator of aggression and violence on the part of German soldiers against Soviet civilians is of historiographical import. In the context of this study, the treatment of civilians is an important delineator between the racial mindsets of German and American soldiers.

Before diving into this final comparison within the larger topic of racism as a combat motivator, it is important to recognize that German soldiers had far more interactions with

[63] OKW Order of July 23, 1941, quoted in Megargee, 65.
[64] Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands* (New York: Basic Books, 2010) and Richard Overy, *Russia's War* (New York: Penguin, 1998).
[65] Bartov, 62.
[66] Hannes Heer, "Die Logik des Vernichtungskrieges: Wehrmacht und Partisanenkampf," in *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, 1997), 104–56.

civilians than American soldiers. In fact, the Battle of Okinawa was one of the few times in which regular American units engaged with civilians; and even then, the civilians in question were Okinawans and not Japanese civilians. After the end of the battle, Eugene Sledge, whose 5th Marine Regiment had lost around two-thirds of its strength throughout the fierce fighting on Okinawa, had plenty of opportunities to interact with Okinawan civilians. According to an interview with his wife Jeanne, Eugene was known among his comrades for bowing frequently in respect to elderly Okinawans, but could not forgive the Japanese, who he called "blackhearted."[67] In sharp contrast to evidence from the Eastern Front, where German soldiers did not tend to discriminate between different ethnic groups in their violent treatment of civilians, Sledge's careful distinction between the Japanese and Okinawans on Okinawa, along with his love for the Chinese people which he developed while serving in Beijing from October 1945 to January 1946, indicate that his combat experience is most responsible for his hatred of the Japanese, instead of an innate, anti-Asian racism.[68] As has been demonstrated already, Sledge's hatred of the Japanese during the war was a common sentiment among American soldiers. However, when it comes to the question of understanding how deep racial sentiments ran among American soldiers in comparison to German soldiers, nothing is more important than American treatment of civilians on a whole. In direct contrast to their German counterparts, the vast majority of American soldiers treated Japanese civilians well. Despite years of Imperial Japanese wartime propaganda efforts to convince the population that an American invasion would mean widescale torture, murder, and rape, the realities of 1945 told a much different story.[69]

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[67] Hugh Ambrose, *The Pacific* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 432.
[68] Ibid, 436-440.
[69] Dower, 301, and Michael Molasky and Steve Rabson, *Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature from Okinawa* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 22.

Through a comparative analysis of the cultural backgrounds, letters, and memoirs of German and American soldiers, and their respective methods of dealing with civilians, it becomes clear that negative conceptions of the enemy played much more important roles in the motivations of German soldiers than in the motivations of American soldiers. Among Americans, racialized conceptions of the enemy led to increased brutality in combat but played a much smaller role in the recruitment of new soldiers. Most importantly, the sequence of racialized dehumanization and subsequent brutalization of front line combat troops varied between the American and German militaries. On the Eastern Front, German soldiers entered the war with internalized anti-Semitic and anti-Slavic worldviews and often referenced those views in the context of violence against civilians. In the Pacific, nearly all American soldiers who saw front line combat dehumanized the enemy to some extent. However, soldiers' dehumanization process very often began in December 1941 with the bombing of Pearl Harbor, after hearing about Japanese atrocities, or after engaging the enemy in combat.

Chapter 2: Conceptions of the Cause

"I had unquestioningly accepted the brutal philosophy that might makes right; the arrogance of our national behavior had not even occurred to me at the time."-Siegfried Knappe

From the beginning of the end of the Third Reich, German soldiers and civilians alike, along with their non-German allies, began the process of coming to terms with their own individual roles played in the ideological barbarism of Adolf Hitler's Nazi Regime. In the years following the war, soldiers dealing with the short-term and long-term physical and mental consequences of their combat experiences tried to contextualize their experiences in order to justify their participation in the Second World War to their families, to *Bundesversorgungsgesetz* (Federal Supply Act) benefits administrators, and to themselves. In their attempts to contextualize their experiences, many *Landser* argued that they were simply following orders during the war, that they were committed to their comrades, or, later in the war, that they were fighting to protect their homeland against the oncoming onslaught of the Red Army. Some soldiers, such as Knappe, admitted that they had succumbed to the ideological propaganda of the Nazi regime. Due to the horrific results of Nazi ideology on Jews and broader European populations in general, it is unsurprising to see inconsistencies in the ways in which former German soldiers thought about their cause. On the American side, despite fighting for modern ideas of freedom and egalitarianism, or at least fighting for such ideals on paper, records created by American solders themselves would suggest that they were also inconsistent in their espousals of nationalist, patriotic, or ideological motivations for fighting before, during, and after the war. Without a doubt, the causes of each side were significantly different in tone and meaning.

Nevertheless, a comparison is necessary for the sake of better contextualizing conceptions of the cause into the overall discussion of German and American combat motivations. The different ways in which American and German soldiers approached their respective governments' war aims while serving in active combat scenarios on the front lines will be of particular interest to the focus of this chapter.

Before delving into the complexities of each official cause of war, it should be recognized that very few people, if any, set out to be convinced of a particular political opinion by government propaganda. Due in large part to the role played by propaganda in the build-up and prosecution of the Second World War, people living in the 21st century tend to have very negative views of propaganda. But propaganda was not always a negative concept. Until the 19th century, propaganda lacked the political connotations with which the concept is heavily associated in the 21st century. The English word itself comes from the name of a 17th Catholic missionary organization, called the *Congregatio de propaganda fide*, or the Congregation for propagating the faith. Over time, the word began to be increasingly associated with politicians spreading ideas of dubious accuracy to a wide audience.[70] By the outbreak of the Second World War, however, the goals of both the Third Reich's propaganda machine and the United States' public relations campaigns had transitioned from the simple propagation of information to the dissemination of information for ideological reasons. It is important to examine the American and German information dissemination efforts, because as John Dower argues while comparing the propaganda of the United States and Japan, "it becomes plain that both sides reveal more about themselves than about the enemy they are portraying."[71] As important institutions of their respective nations, one must seek to understand the ideologies espoused and methods used by the

[70] *Merriam-Webster,* s.v. "propaganda," accessed March 5, 2021.
[71] Dower, 27.

propaganda machines of the Third Reich and the United States in order to begin to understand the ideological background of soldiers who fought in the Pacific Theater and on the Eastern Front.

With previous discussions of the cultural influences on young men in Germany and the United States throughout the 1930s in mind, this chapter will provide a second alternative theory to explain the combat motivations of front-line soldiers: the cause. While the first chapter dealt with personal prejudices, this chapter will focus on the impact of top-down ideological messaging. The key question for both sides is the same: what role did official governmental conceptions of the German and American causes for war play in the combat motivations of the typical *Landser* or GI? To answer this question, this chapter will examine interviews conducted with American soldiers during the war, explore records of recorded conversations between German prisoners of war, and dive into the writings of soldiers during the war. Analyzing ideologically charged language, references to overall conceptions of the cause of the war, and indications of why soldiers fought will be the primary goal of this section. Unlike the previous chapter, which relied on deductive reasoning and primary sources to determine the role of racism as a combat motivator, this chapter will focus on the ways in which Americans and Germans framed their perspectives on the war, beginning with the initial popular responses to the official war aims of both governments and concluding with the evolution of ideological commitment among both militaries over time.

For the Third Reich, invading the Soviet Union was always a deeply ideological endeavor, rooted in a desire to find *Lebensraum* for the German people in Eastern Europe and destroy the Soviet state. On a fundamental level, Hitler asserted the Soviet Union was the center of what he called the worldwide Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy. According to Hitler, the Jewish

Bolsheviks of the Soviet Union were dedicated to the destruction of Western values, traditions, and culture.[72] Hitler's war aims seem prima facie to be inherently intertwined with his racial views. The important distinction to be found between the racism and anti-Semitism discussed in Chapter 1 and the war aims to be discussed here in Chapter 2 lies in the context in which anti-Semitic views are referenced. Chapter 1 explored racism and anti-Semitism as combat motivators in small-scale engagements and Chapter 2 will focus on anti-Semitism in the context of Hitler's effort to tie anti-Semitism together with anti-Bolshevism to create uniquely anti-Soviet war aims. As a proclamation about Soviet Commissars in *Mitteilung für die Truppe* (Announcements for the Troops), a widely-circulated publication among German soldiers, declared "We would be insulting the animals if we were to describe these men, who are mostly Jewish, as beasts. They are the embodiment of a satanic and insane hatred for the whole of noble humanity."[73] The only logical response, then, was to take violent action to "defend" Western values against the intersection of Jewish and Bolshevik ideas (see Figure 3).[74] It should be noted that many of the anti-Semitic, expansionist narratives crafted by Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels and other Nazi

Figure 3: "Germany's Victory, Europe's Freedom." Although the viewer could certainly interpret this poster from 1942 as anti-Semitic, the real goal is to demonstrate the Nazi's dedication to anti-Bolshevism. The lightning bolts symbolize the blitzkrieg (Lightning War) tactics that were supposed to cripple the Soviet beast in the same way as the Wehrmacht had defeated France.

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[72] Fritz, *Ostkrieg,* 35.
[73] Jonathan Bastable, *Voices from Stalingrad* (Cincinnati: David & Charles Limited, 2006), 62.
[74] "Germany's Victory, Europe's Freedom," circa 1942, in Anthony Rhodes, *Propaganda, The Art of Persuasion: World War II* (Secaucus: Wellfleet Press, 1987), 62.

propagandists during the interwar period and into the beginning of the Second World War, while certainly spelled out in detail in Hitler's *Mein Kampf,* have deeper roots in older German history. Just as the Nazis exploited old German traditions of racism against Slavic peoples, as discussed in Chapter 1, Nazi propagandists also tied present-day struggles to old stories, such as the German literary classic *Das Nibelungenlied.* As the narrative went, just as Siegfried is only defeated and murdered through the treachery of a trusted ally, so too were the great German armies of the First World War only defeated through the treachery of Jews, democrats, and pacifists on the home front.[75] For young men growing up with the cultural memory of defeat in the Great War, the ability to cast blame onto treacherous societal 'others' enabled them to envision a future with a victorious, united Germany; rid of internal conflict and free to prosper as the cultural center of Europe.

Unlike the Third Reich, the United States' war aims lacked strong expansionist overtones and relied to a much lesser extent on prewar popular sentiments. The initial American war aims can be summarized by examining President Franklin D. Roosevelt's State of the Union address in 1941 and a collection of social science studies conducted during the war. Despite speaking eleven months before the United States officially joined the war, President Roosevelt's address on January 6, 1941 is important for understanding American war aims, as it is in this speech that Roosevelt declared his support for the "Four Freedoms" for the first time. Roosevelt painted the picture of a new world, a new world based on the four fundamental human freedoms: freedom of

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[75] This narrative, known in the historiography as the stab-in-the-back legend (*Dolchstoßlegende*), originated from broad public misconceptions in Germany about the increasingly insurmountable strategic and tactical challenges that faced German military forces in the fall of 1918. Due to the lack of candid reporting about the state of the war, talk of an armistice caught the German public by surprise and gave German military leaders the opportunity to claim that they were also caught by surprise and betrayed by unpatriotic forces on the home front. For more on the *Dolchstoßlegende,* see Klaus Schwabe, "World War I and the Rise of Hitler," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 4 (2014): 864-879.

speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.[76] Although the concept of the United States becoming involved in an overseas conflict to bring freedom to a particular region is a familiar idea to members of the generations who have lived through successive American interventions in the Middle East, at the time of Roosevelt's speech, the idea of fighting for the freedoms of people in another country was a relatively new concept.[77] Before Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech, the best comparable example of American war aims centered around conceptions of freedom would be President Woodrow Wilson's call for American involvement in the First World War, in order to "make the work safe for democracy."

If President Roosevelt's call for the American people to fight for freedom around the world truly resonated with Americans in general, one would expect to see sharp changes in American public opinion in response to Roosevelt's speech and, to an even greater extent, in response to reports of international violations of human rights. Unfortunately for historians who believe in the pre-eminent importance of Roosevelt's speech, the evidence points conclusively to a stronger correlation between Japanese military aggression and changes in public opinion. In a series of 40 public surveys conducted from 1935-1941, the American Institute of Public Opinion found a direct correlation between Japanese military threats to American territories and increases in public support for stronger American responses to curb Japanese expansion. While such a conclusion is far from ground-breaking, the deeper point is important for this study, namely that the American public had no interest in intervening to protect the freedoms of Chinese people when the Second Sino-Japanese War officially began on July 7, 1937. Even after several months of war, the American Institute of Public Opinion found that 55% of Americans "were "neutral"

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[76] Franklin D. Roosevelt, "State of the Union Address, 1941," *Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library,* January 6, 1941. https://www.fdrlibrary.org/four-freedoms.

[77] Elizabeth Borgwardt, "FDR's Four Freedoms as a Human Rights Instrument," *OAH Magazine of History* 22, no. 2 (2008): 8.

or without a choice regarding the outcome of the war between China and Japan."[78] Only after the bombing and strafing of the USS Panay in December of 1937 by Japanese Naval planes, Japanese expansion in the direction of the Philippines, an American territory at the time, the Japanese invasion of French Indo-China, and the signing of the Japanese pact with Italy and Germany did Americans change their views on Japan. In 1939, a "substantial majority" of Americans supported harsh economic measures, including boycotts and trade embargos, in order to stem the rising tide of Japanese expansion.[79] Nevertheless, in the context of actual military intervention, a mere 6% of respondents supported fighting Japan in order to "protect American interests in China" in July of 1939.[80]

The evidence demonstrates that grand conceptions of fighting for freedom around the world were not the primary war aims of the American public, as Americans only considered economic sanctions after seeing the Japanese threaten American territories. In reality, the most important reason for joining and prosecuting the war against Japan is also the most obvious reason: to exact revenge for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. In a poll conducted December 12-17, 1941, 97% of Americans surveyed replied that they approved of the Congressional declaration of war against Japan.[81] The statistic is rather unsurprising considering a certain inevitability hung in the air in the days after the attack; the inevitability of an American response. For Lloyd H. Flood, a United States Navy signalman who enlisted in 1942 at only 18 years old, the possibility of letting Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor go without a serious and punitive response was out of the question. Flood would go on to serve three years in the South

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[78] George Gallup, "Public Found Taking Realistic Attitude on Japanese-American Relations," *American Institute of Public Opinion,* December 12, 1941.

[79] Ibid.

[80] "American Institute of Public Opinion-Surveys, 1938-1939," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 3, no. 4 (1939): 599.

[81] George Gallup, "Americans' Reaction to U.S. Declaration of War After Pearl Harbor," *American Institute of Public Opinion*, 1941.

Pacific and survive a kamikaze attack off the island of Okinawa in 1945. In an interview recorded over 60 years later, Flood recalled making the decision to enlist on the basis of his belief that it was his duty to serve his country to the best of his ability and get revenge on the Japanese for Pearl Harbor. Importantly, Flood still used the term "Japs" in conversation in the mid-2000's, but was not actively prejudiced against the Japanese after the war.[82]

With the respective official war aims of both governments, and the preliminary societal response to each respective war aim, established, the discussion then turns to the matter of understanding the evolving nature of ideology over time, beginning with German soldiers. Two years before Operation Barbarossa, Wehrmacht soldiers had been "ideologically primed to fight a culturally inferior and cowardly opponent" in the buildup to the invasion of Poland, a primer that resulted in widespread violence against civilians and mistreatment of prisoners of war.[83] The existence of widespread anti-Polish ideology among Wehrmacht soldiers is important, if not for the simple reason that enthusiasm for war among the German people would be much more widespread in the immediate aftermath of the invasion of the Soviet Union than in September 1939.[84] The disparity in national support for war between the invasions of 1939 and 1941 is intriguing because one would expect to see more enthusiasm at the beginning of the war than several years into the conflict, in similar fashion to the loss of enthusiasm over the course of the First World War. The importance distinction between the World Wars is that by the second year of the war, Germany was doing well. Unlike during the immediate aftermath of Germany's invasion of Poland, when much was unknown about the Allied response to the invasion, Germany had a record of military success in June 1941. France had been crushed and relegated

[82] Lloyd H. Flood, interview by Jeffrey C. Flood, Virginia Beach, Virginia, 2010.
[83] Stargardt, 37-39.
[84] Ibid, 30, 161.

to the status of an occupied territory, much of central Europe was in the hands of the Axis, and Great Britain was facing the military might of the Third Reich relatively alone. Based on his military service in Poland in 1939 and France in 1940 with the 24th Artillery Regiment, Siegfried Knappe described his mindset on the night of June 21, 1941 as one of perfect confidence: “I do not think it even occurred to me or anyone else that we would fail to defeat the Soviet Army.” Along with being confident of military success, Knappe summarized his combat motivation before the invasion by recalling that he “found the very thought of communism repulsive and honestly felt that the Russian people would be better off if we removed their communist government.”[85] For Knappe, Nazi anti-Bolshevik propaganda allowed him to justify his part in the Wehrmacht’s invasion of the Soviet Union and overcome his moral concerns about invading a country with whom Germany had previously signed an alliance.

Less than a week after the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, Fuchs used terminology straight from Hitler’s propaganda machine to describe the enemy in a letter to his wife. According to Fuchs, the Wehrmacht was going to “show those Bolshevik bums who’s who around here! They fight like hired hands–not like soldiers.” In addition, in an apparent reference to Nazi war crimes, Fuchs continued in the next line, “no matter if they are men, women, or children on the front line. They’re all no better than a bunch of scoundrels.”[86] Of course, it should be recognized that Fuchs was someone who believed deeply in the Nazi cause. After all, Fuchs had written to his mother three months before the invasion of the Soviet Union, “We can now believe that the war will be over this year. We can trust our Führer completely. You know that as well as I do. So let’s gladly make our small sacrifices now since they are made to give our

[85] Knappe, 176.
[86] Karl Fuchs to Frieda and Horst Fuchs, June 28, 1941, in *Sieg Heil! War Letters of Tank Gunner Karl Fuchs, 1937-1941.*

children and grandchildren a better life. Yes, they will live in peace and harmony in the great Fatherland. For that goal, no sacrifice is too great."[87] When reading Fuchs' letters, one quickly realizes the depth of his ideological commitment to the Nazi regime.

For other German soldiers, ideological thoughts of anti-Bolshevism played little role in their motivations. Hans von Luck, an interwar member of the secretive *Reichswehr* tank program who later saw action with the Wehrmacht in France, Russia, North Africa, Normandy, Belgium, and participated in the final defense of Germany against the Soviet advances of 1944 and 1945, preparation for Operation Barbarossa was a matter of "set[ting] our minds on the present" and preparing themselves to "do our duty."[88] Wehrmacht junior officer Hans Herwarth von Bittenfeld remembered receiving a visit from a Propaganda Ministry officer in the first few weeks of Operation Barbarossa. The officer wanted to speak to von Bittenfeld's men before they saw major combat, in order to reemphasize the ideological underpinnings of the invasion. In his speech, the Propaganda officer reportedly harkened back to the stories of the Teutonic Knights of the Middle Ages riding east towards victory in Russia, the original German invaders of the Russian heartland. According to von Bittenfeld, the men "listened silently, and there was no applause." After the Propaganda officer expressed disappointment with the men's response to his stirring speech, von Bittenfeld recalls the response of his commanding officer, a captain: "Sir, enthusiasm is not the point. But when we are ordered to fight, we do it extremely well." The

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[87] Karl Fuchs to Frieda Fuchs, March 27, 1941, in *Sieg Heil! War Letters of Tank Gunner Karl Fuchs, 1937-1941,* ed. Horst Fuchs Richardson, and Dennis E. Showalter (Hamden: Archon Books, 1987), 93.

[88] Hans von Luck, *Panzer Commander* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989), 52. Note on the distinction between the "Reichswehr" and the "Wehrmacht." The "Reichswehr" was the name of the German armed forces under the Weimar Republic and the first two years of the Nazi regime. The Nazi regime changed the name from the "Reichswehr" to the "Wehrmacht" in 1935. The Nazis introduced the name change along with a slew of decisions intended to increase the offensive capabilities of the Germany military. Most importantly, the policy changes included the reintroduction of conscription, a policy that specifically violated the stipulations governing German military capabilities in the Treaty of Versailles. See: David J. Stone, *Fighting for the Fatherland: The Story of the German Army from 1638 to the Present Day* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2006).

captain's argument struck a chord with von Bittenfeld. Building upon his captain's quote, von Bittenfeld elaborates that "We did our damned duty, but we never believed in ultimate victory over the Soviet Union."[89] For the purposes of this study, considering von Bittenfeld's unique position as an officer who opposed Nazism during the war and postwar career as a West-German diplomat, the tepid responses of von Bittenfeld's men to the Propaganda officer are of more interest than von Bittenfeld's personal political positions as representations of wartime sentiment.

Crucially, a careful comparison between letters written before the Battle of Stalingrad, the turning point on the Eastern Front, and letters written after the battle signals a clear difference in the ideological commitment of many German soldiers to the regime. After the Battle of Stalingrad, German soldiers began to increasingly refer to their desire to defend the German homeland against the Red Army and largely ceased mentioning ideologically-based notions of German supremacy in the east.[90] The reason for this shift is relatively uncomplicated. Relying on beliefs about the victory of the German fighting spirit over the weak Bolsheviks to motivate soldiers was only an effective strategy while the Germans were actually winning. A series of German defeats during the winter of 1942-1943, culminating in General Friedrich Paulus' surrender in Stalingrad on January 31, 1943, occurred ten years and a day after the Nazis came to power in Germany. Along with General Paulus and the 105,000 troops who were captured throughout the battle, the Germans also had 190,000 soldiers die in combat during the five months of the battle, an astronomical number of casualties in comparison to the losses sustained by the United States throughout the war.[91] For comparison, the United States suffered

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[89] Hans Herwarth von Bittenfeld, in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History,* ed. Johannes Steinhoff, Peter Pechel, and Dennis Showalter (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1994), 130.
[90] Stargardt, 437.
[91] Jochen Hellbeck, *Stalingrad: The City that Defeated the Third Reich* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2016), 12.

291,557 deaths in battle in every theater of conflict in slightly over three and a half years.[92] In the face of such massive casualty numbers, the majority of German soldiers had shed their formerly strong beliefs about the inevitability of German triumph in the war by the spring of 1943. Instead of their former confidence in the complete victory of the Third Reich over its foes, many German soldiers believed the war would now end inconclusively.[93]

As one would expect, some sources of evidence that purportedly support the notion of Germans leaving behind the confidence of the old cause should be questioned for validity. German soldiers writing memoirs long after the end of the war would have had serious incentives to whitewash their own experiences. However, the stress of German authors of memoirs to portray themselves as anti-Nazi cannot compare to the pressure placed on German prisoners of war captured in Stalingrad to develop explanations for their support of Nazism. In the aftermath of the battle, Soviet Political Department officers interviewed German POWs to learn about the political beliefs, morale, and combat motivations of Wehrmacht soldiers.[94] One of the prisoners of war interviewed in the process was Heinz Hühnel, a Sergeant in the 389th Infantry Division of the Sixth Army and a Nazi Party member since 1933. Despite the fact that the interrogations took place less than 10 days after General Paulus' surrender, Hühnel attempted to present himself as having "become a new man after being taken prisoner;" a new man who wanted to remain in Russia after the war and "lead people toward communist ideology."[95]

As a source of reliable information on the commitment of soldiers to the German cause during the Battle of Stalingrad, Hühnel's suggestion that he abandoned Nazi ideology in the face

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[92] Allan R. Millett, Peter Maslowski, and William B. Feis, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States from 1607-2012,* 3rd ed (New York: Free Press, 2012), Appendix A.

[93] Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer, *Soldaten on Fighting, Killing, and Dying: The Secret World War II Transcripts of German POWs*, trans. Jefferson Chase, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 197.

[94] Hellbeck, 400.

[95] Heinz Hühnel, "Report on the political interrogation of POW Sergeant Heinz Hühnel," no date, in Jochen Hellbeck, *Stalingrad: The City that Defeated the Third Reich* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2016), 411-413.

of learning more about Communism is frankly preposterous. However, Hühnel's interview is a valuable source from the perspective of understanding the types of pressure exerted upon Germans during and after the war to wash their hands of the Nazi regime. This observation does not impact the reality that ideological commitment to the Third Reich did in fact decrease after the Battle of Stalingrad. However, as mentioned above, this decrease should not be attributed to the mass conversion of German soldiers to Communist ideology or even a decrease in patriotic feeling, but instead to the spread of pessimistic pragmatism necessary for soldiers to embrace in order to prepare for the coming Soviet counter attacks across the Eastern Front. The story of Willy Reese, a Wehrmacht soldier who would eventually serve five tours on the Eastern Front, is an excellent case study on the state of German patriotism in 1943. Despite being tormented by feelings of guilt about the war, Reese volunteered for a third time in 1943 to "live and fight for Germany, for the spiritual, secret Germany, which only after defeat, after the end of the Hitler-period, can exist again…I want to sacrifice myself too for the future, free, spiritual Germany–but never for the Third Reich."[96] Reese's desire to sacrifice himself would be met in the summer of 1944, when he was killed during the Soviet offensives in the Vitebsk region. In light of Reese's consistent anti-Nazi views, it is unfortunate that one cannot compare Reese's motivational evolution to the evolution of Karl Fuchs, one of the best examples of a German soldier who fully believed in Nazi ideology at the beginning of the war. Unlike Reese, Fuchs never had the opportunity develop his motivational views as the tide of war shifted against Germany. In a skirmish near Kiln, a town located about 53 miles northwest of Moscow, on November 21, 1941, a shell from a Soviet T-34 destroyed Fuchs' 38t tank, killing Fuchs on the spot (Figure 4).[97]

[96] Willy Reese, *Mir selber seltsam fremd,* in Nicholas Stargardt, *The German Army: A Nation Under Arms, 1939-1945* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 416.

[97] Lieutenant Reinhardt to Frieda Fuchs, December 2, 1941 and Master Sergeant Förster to Frieda Fuchs, December 2, 1941, in *Sieg Heil! War Letters of Tank Gunner Karl Fuchs, 1937-1941,* ed. Horst Fuchs Richardson,

While the evidence points to a sharp decrease in the importance of the cause as a method of motivating German soldiers to fight, evidence from the Pacific indicates that the cause rarely contributed to the combat motivations of American soldiers from the beginning of the war to the end. In fact, a strong taboo against talking about the war in patriotic terms developed among American combat troops. In light of the grim realities of the front lines, many combat troops adopted a single-word response to any question regarding the importance of idealism or patriotism in their attitudes towards combat: "bullshit."[98] This simple response makes sense in light of the prewar views on the impending conflict in American society. While Roosevelt and the Office of War Information could try to stress the importance of fighting to protect freedom and make the world safe for democracy, the simple reality is that America soldiers did not fight for such abstract concepts. While Americans often reference feeling pride for having served, they very rarely have anything to say about feeling idealistic in combat. The overwhelming majority of comments on idealism among American soldiers fighting in the Pacific are starkly negative. In April 1944, Stouffer and his team asked a group of company grade infantry and field artillery officers serving in the Pacific the question: "When the going is tough for your men, what do you think are the incentives which keep them

Figure 4: Fuchs' wrecked tank after the skirmish of November 21st. Fuchs' Wehrmacht 38t tank was far from the only German tank to meet its match in Russia. Early-war tank models, such as the 38t, would prove to be quite vulnerable when in combat against Soviet tanks and infantry armed with anti-tank guns due to their relatively thin armor in comparison to their Soviet counterparts.

and Dennis E. Showalter (Hamden: Archon Books, 1987), 157-158. Photograph included on page 177 of Richardson and Showalter's publication.

[98] Stouffer, vol 2, 150.

fighting?” A mere 2% of respondents answered with “Idealistic reasons,” while 58% indicated either group solidarity, “Sense of duty and self-respect,” “Ending the task,” or “Vindictiveness.”[99] While none of the other survey answers received an overwhelming majority, one can still see that as an incentive to keep soldiers fighting, idealistic language was a failure. In addition to the low importance of idealism in motivating soldiers in 1944, over two years into the conflict, it is noteworthy that, unlike the changing nature of ideology as a combat motivator among German soldiers, beliefs about the war among American soldiers did not vary significantly as the war continued. Stouffer attributes this development to the lack of strongly-held convictions among American soldiers going into battle.[100]

Writing 12 years after the end of war, Marines Corps veteran Robert Leckie describes a conversation he once had with a woman who asked him: “What did you get out of it? What were you fighting for?” For Leckie, the truthful answer to the second question was that they fought the war “[t]o destroy the Nazi beast, to restrain imperialist Japan.”[101] Private Peter Bezich, a combat medic in the 24th Infantry Division from Chicago who received a Silver Star for gallantry in the Philippines, looked back on the war to “destroy the Nazi beast, to restrain imperialist Japan” in the name of defeating fascism with chagrin. As Bezich recalled in an interview, “Oh yeah, we were fightin’ fascism. Kids today don’t even know what fascism is. We won the war and lost the peace…Even to this day, I’m bitter about Japanese and German goods.”[102] Whereas Leckie does not come to the same disappointed conclusion that Bezich reached about the war, he does clarify that while they had completed their task, they had “done it without a song to sing, with no deep

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[99] Stouffer, vol 2, 110. Note: The remaining 40% included: 20% “Leadership and discipline,” 9% “Self-preservation,” 2% “Thoughts of home and loved ones,” and 9% “Miscellaneous.”
[100] Stouffer, vol 2, 153.
[101] Robert Leckie, *Helmet for my Pillow: From Parris Island to the Pacific* (New York: Bantam Books, 1957), 303.
[102] Peter Bezich, “Peter Bezich,” in *“The Good War”: An Oral History of World War II,* ed. Studs Terkel (New York, The New Press, 1984), 82.

sense of dedication." For himself, he gained "a memory and the strength of ordeal sustained…for my country, sacrifice."[103] Leckie's references to patriotism are of particular interest to this study because they help to answer the question of why American soldiers chose to fight in the first place. As the survey data and evidence from soldiers writing about their reasons for enlistment has made clear, the motivation of American soldiers to fight for a cause had very little to do with the official war aims of the United States and much to do with general patriotic sentiment. One American soldier summarized his position on the war simply: "I got one eye. My feet hangs down. I got a joint mashed in my back. I got a shoulder been broke. Feel that knot right there. But I'd go fight for my country right today…It it was ever to come up again and they'd need me, I'd be ready to go. I'm not a draft dodger. You're darn right. I'd go right now, boy."[104]

Despite the public relations efforts of the American Office of War Information and the German Ministry of Propaganda to galvanize ideologically-inspired enthusiasm for the war among their respective armies, the evidence indicates their efforts were largely unsuccessful by the end of the war. From a comparative perspective, the reasons for the convergence of views on idealism between Americans and Germans are quite different. Many soldiers on both sides reported strong feelings of patriotism from the time of their enlistment to the end of their war experiences. Conceptions of patriotic duty led many young Americans to enlist in 1941 and 1942. Yet the data does not indicate any sort of correlation between basic American patriotism and engagement with the official war aims of the Roosevelt administration. On the German side, the role of patriotism as a form of combat motivation evolved over time, as purportedly patriotic

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103 Leckie, 304.

104 Maurice E. Wilson, "Maurice E. (Jack) Wilson," in *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War II,* ed. Studs Terkel (New York, The New Press, 1984), 79.

beliefs about German racial supremacy changed to a combination of guilt for German crimes in the east and fear about the impending Red Army invasion of the German Fatherland. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that American and German soldiers very often fought for ideas of a cause greater than themselves. However, to the discomfiture of the American and German propaganda machines, these conceptions of cause did not always follow the dictates of the official war aims of the Roosevelt administration and Hitler's Third Reich, respectively.

Chapter 3: Conceptions of Comrades

"A lotta friends I lost…It's them I think about. Men I played ball with, men I worked with, men I associated with. I miss 'em. -Anton Bilek[105]

For battle-hardened veterans, a victorious conclusion to a long struggle would seemingly stir feelings of hope and satisfaction for a task well-completed. Yet in February 1943, after six of months of combat on the island of Guadalcanal, Marine Corps volunteer Robert Leckie felt a certain disappointment about the end of the camaraderie of the struggle. Leckie and his comrades endured six months of mass Japanese infantry attacks in the darkest hours of the South Pacific nights, Japanese naval bombardments, strafing runs from Japanese A6M Zeros, and artillery shelling, all without consistent supply lines. Nevertheless, Leckie wrote that at the conclusion of the battle, one should "say a requiem for camaraderie, mourn the departed fellowship that had bound us–officers and men–from the Carolina coastal marsh to the last panting lunge over the side of the *President Wilson*."[106] By the time their transport ship, the aforementioned *U.S.S. President Wilson,* steamed away from Guadalcanal, Leckie and his comrades in the Second Battalion of the First Marine Division had become the very last unit of the First Marines to be withdrawn from the field. They had been in nearly constant combat for well over 100 days, from August 7, 1942 until December 14, 1942.[107] The battle itself would continue to rage until February 8, 1943, when Lieutenant General Alexander Patch of the 161st Army Division

[105] Anton Bilek, "Anton Bilek," in *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War II,* ed. Studs Terkel (New York, The New Press, 1984), 85.
[106] Leckie, 139.
[107] Leckie, 135.

declared the end of organized resistance on the island.[108] It would be disingenuous to ignore the reality that Private First Class Leckie was more than happy to escape from Guadalcanal as a victorious survivor. Describing his feelings upon tumbling over the side of *President Wilson* on to the ship's warm deck, Leckie wrote: "I fell with a clatter among the others who had been so brought aboard, and I lay with my cheek pressed against the warm, grimy deck, my heart beating rapidly, not from this exertion [of climbing the cargo nets on the side of ship], but from happiness."[109] But if Leckie felt so overjoyed to reach the deck, why would he have later expressed twinges of regret for having left Guadalcanal behind?

While Leckie's sentiments seem rather disjointed, his thoughts on comradeship are far from unusual. From James A. McPherson's excellent Civil War soldier study, *For Cause and Comrade,* to Erich Remarque's unforgettable World War I classic, *All Quiet on the Western Front,* and Stephen Ambrose's epic narrative of the 101st Airborne Division in *Band of Brothers,* the importance of the bonds built between soldiers is an issue that appears in a wide variety of conflicts throughout history.[110] When discussing his experience serving on the Eastern Front in the famous Großdeutschland Division of the Wehrmacht, Guy Sajer professed that comradeship gave his war experience meaning and served as the most important part of his memory of the war.[111] This phenomenon can be understood through recognizing the incredible bond formed between men who undergo extraordinarily stressful and dangerous situations with one another. Soldiers throughout history have tended to develop similar beliefs about the importance of the bonds between one another and corresponding sets of responsibilities to their fellow soldiers in

[108] John Costello, *The Pacific War: 1941-1945* (New York: Quill, 1982), 390.
[109] Leckie, 137.
[110] James A. McPherson, *For Cause & Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front,* trans. A.W. Wheen (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982). Stephen Ambrose, *Band of Brothers* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1992).
[111] Sajer, 461-463.

the midst of the inherent breakdown of the penultimate societal norm against killing another human being. For instance, for some soldiers, the decision to return to the front line to be with their comrades instead of remaining in the relative safety of the rear camp was a relatively simple decision made on the basis of comradeship, rather than philosophical notions of nationality, political ideology, or race.

Across the Pacific Theater and the Eastern Front, American and German soldiers reported feeling strong senses of duty to return to the front lines, both out of senses of survivor's guilt and because of the deep, family-like connections to soldiers still on the front lines. Nevertheless, scholars of the German *Wehrmacht* and American military in the Pacific have debated the extent to which comradeship motivated soldiers to act in combat. This chapter will begin with an analysis of the practical impacts of German and American recruiting and training practices on small unit cohesion, before exploring the battlefields of Ukraine, Western Russia, Guadalcanal, Peleliu, and Okinawa to determine the relative importance of comradeship as a combat motivator in comparison to race and ideology. The larger discussion of comradeship in battle will include analyses of the relative importance of comradeship as a pragmatic response to the communal hardships, comradeship as a form of social pressure, and comradeship in the form of general unit pride. As leadership is a function of small unit cohesion, this chapter will conclude with an analysis of the efforts of officers to motivate soldiers to fight through the appeal of field decorations and the development of conceptions of community and brotherhood among front line troops.

Before making any sort of determination about the effects of communal training and the baptism of fire in bringing men together as singular units, one must first recognize the fundamental differences in the methods used by the Third Reich and the United States to turn

civilians into recruits, train recruits into soldiers, and assign soldiers to units. In an effort to improve unit cohesion and encourage the formation of primary groups, Wehrmacht administrators organized units ranging from regiments all the way to divisions by geographic location, meaning recruits from the same area were supposed to train and fight together throughout the conflict. As a rule, even replacement troops were supposed to train and travel with one another in coherent groups.[112] From a military philosophy perspective, this sort of decision was intended to create a strong *esprit de corps* among the men by grouping soldiers of similar cultural idiosyncrasies, religious beliefs, and regional patriotism with one another.[113] Under Nazi rule, the German tradition of regional recruiting, a tradition which itself far predated Hitler's regime, meant that a group of boys who had grown up with one another as childhood friends, participated in the Hitler Youth together, and served alongside each other in the National Labor Service would more than likely go into battle together as well. It should come as no surprise that the channel from Hitler Youth to the military was far from an accidental occurrence. As Adolf Hitler proclaimed in a speech to a gathering of the SA and SS in Nuremberg in 1935, "The boys…will join the Hitler Youth…will then report for duty in the SA, the SS, and other associations; and…one day report for duty at the Labor Service and from there proceed to the Army."[114] While organizing the army on a regional basis was not a Nazi-era reform, as the practice of constructing an army out of regional units was common throughout the history of the German military, the practice fit especially well into the Third Reich's effort to build the culture encapsulated in *Volksgemeinschaft* within the Wehrmacht. In following Nazi philosophy,

[112] Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 157.
[113] Bartov, *Hitler's Army,* 30.
[114] "Adolf Hitler's Speech before the SA and the SS," September 15, 1935, *Adolf Hitler: Collection of Speeches 1922-1945,* http://www.nommeraadio.ee/meedia/pdf/RRS/Adolf%20Hitler%20-%20Collection%20of%20Speeches%20-%201922-1945.pdf.

soldiers were encouraged to bond with other like-minded Germans and reject people who did not fit into the Nazi conceptions of the *Volksgemeinschaft,* defined simply as a "homogenous and harmonious 'national community.'" By implication, the *Volksgemeinschaft* excluded anyone that the Nazis determined to be out of line, including Jews, Slavic peoples, and political dissidents.[115]

In contrast to German military administrators, American military officials did not rely on a set of ideological reasons for their recruitment practices and did not follow a strict process of regional recruitment and assignment for professional Army units. Instead, only National Guard units formed and based within a particular state followed strict regional recruitment practices, mostly because National Guard units were originally intended to serve primarily as defensive forces in the event of a land invasion of the United States. This original purpose notwithstanding, according to the Militia Act of 1908, in the event that the U.S. military needed to rapidly expand its number of battle-worthy units during a time of war or national crisis, National Guard units could be mobilized for a short period of time and even sent abroad.[116] Despite the attempts of early-20th century American military officials to build up mobilization capabilities, in 1917, the United States could call upon a mere 335,111 officers and men, including the regular Army soldiers, National Guardsmen, and members of one of the several federal reserve forces created by the National Defense Act of 1916. Through volunteer recruiting efforts and the national draft of 1917, the U.S. military was able to reach 4.8 million men across the services by the end of World War I.[117]

Despite the American military's regional recruiting system and support for a large number of individual National Guard units across the United States, the World War I system of

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[115] David Welch, "Nazi Propaganda and the Volksgemeinschaft: Constructing a People's Community," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 2 (2004): 218.
[116] Millett, Maslowski, and Feis, 296.
[117] Ibid, 312-315.

decentralized recruiting only affected the ways in which men were first recruited, instead of impacting the units in which the men would eventually serve. During the Second World War, the United States military administration had a very similar system to the First World War at its disposal. While administrators had a similar system to use to build up the wartime American armed forces, the scale of mobilization was far greater in the Second World War; this time, the U.S. military escalated from around 450,000 service members in 1940 to over 16 million by 1946.[118] Considering the fact that the United States' massive recruitment efforts did not result in the instantaneous creation of homogenous fighting units filled with soldiers recruited and trained at the same time and in the same place, the vast majority of these recruits entered the service without ties to one another; a reality that is of particular interest to the study of the individual combat soldier experience. For American soldiers taking part in the Pacific Theater of war, their bonds of comradeship had to be built during training, in transit to the theater of operations, or even on the battlefield itself. Due in large part to the United States Marine Corps policy about sending recuperated soldiers back to their original units, the *esprit de corps* created during each of the aforementioned scenarios would continue even if a Marine had to spend a considerable amount of time recovering from a wound or illness.[119] Nevertheless, the comparison between the two mobilization systems suggests that German soldiers more than likely entered military service with stronger interpersonal connections to one another than American soldiers, with this trend decreasing once soldiers were placed in their respective units.

With the differences in the frameworks in which German and American soldiers would have developed their respective connections to their fellow soldiers established, the discussion then turns to the various ways in which comradeship motivated soldiers on the battlefield itself.

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[118] Ibid, 381 and Appendix B.
[119] Sledge, 98.

Perhaps the most important facet of comradeship, in particular on the Eastern Front with German soldiers, but in the Pacific with American soldiers as well, is the pragmatic necessity to depend on fellow soldiers. Willy Reese wrote in the winter of 1942 that he had lost all of the bravado and excitement for combat that had once inspired him to join the military. By New Year's Day 1943, Reese said he was only motivated by a "forced dependence" on his comrades.[120] To be fair, Reese would, as previously discussed in Chapter 2, later ascribe great motivational importance to patriotism. Reese's patriotism notwithstanding, the way in which he referred to his relationships with his comrades is of crucial import for this study. As Fritz would describe Reese's feelings about his comrades, "Comradeship provided a sense of affirmation of life amid the prevalence of all-consuming death and confirmation of community, even as those tight-knit groups disintegrated."[121] Importantly, Reese's method of framing his dependence on his comrades is very similar to the ways in which Manchester and Sledge describe their feelings towards their units. "And as I had pledged myself to them," Manchester writes, "so had they to me."[122] Despite experiencing feelings of disillusionment with the Marine Corps after the Battle of Okinawa, Manchester writes upon returning to Okinawa 35 years later, that "in one of those great thundering jolts in which a man's real motives are revealed to him in an electrifying vision," he realized that his actions in Okinawa were "an act of love," a dedication to supporting his comrades in battle. For Manchester, the most accurate description of his true combat motivation during the war would be comradeship, even if he did not realize it at the time.[123]

In addition to motivating soldiers through the positive qualities of friendship and devotion to fellow soldiers, comradeship also motivated soldiers to act in combat situations due

[120] Stargardt, 413-416.
[121] Fritz, 156.
[122] Manchester, 375.
[123] Ibid, 390-391.

to the social and even legal consequences of failure. For many soldiers, the prospect of facing their comrades after failing to act at a pivotal moment was worse than death. Soldiers considered a variety of different factors in the context of social pressure. During the war, many soldiers chose to send large proportions of their paychecks to their families. The decision to send their pay straight home was certainly a responsible and caring act. The problem was that by sending pay home, soldiers inadvertently connected their actions in combat directly to the home front. In the event that military authorities had to discipline a soldier by freezing his pay or stripping him of his rank, the soldier's family would have noticed the lower paycheck and known relatively quickly that something was wrong. Because of this scenario, soldiers who did elect to send their pay home feared the social ostracization that could occur if their families discovered their wrongdoing. For a soldier found guilty of breaking military rules, their experiences of social ostracization from their families and hometowns would have compounded together with the feelings of personal guilt that they doubtless experienced on their own for their actions, or lack thereof, in the context of a disobeyed order in combat.[124]

Along with dealing with the social pressure to perform well under fire, soldiers had to confront the pressure of coercive institutional authority as well. On the German side, the pre-1935 Reichswehr and the post-1935 Wehrmacht had a long tradition, as the descendent of the old Prussian military system, of strict discipline. However, under the Third Reich, coercive institutional authority in the Wehrmacht took on the brutal characteristics of Nazi-style social Darwinism. The result was the development of a widescale disciplinary system of terror in the Wehrmacht intended to inspire the unconditional obedience of every *Landser.*[125] Shockingly, German military court martials sentenced around 30,000 *Landser* to death for various forms of

[124] Stouffer, vol. 2, 113.
[125] Bartov, *Hitler's Army,* 100-101.

Wehrkraftzersetzung (the undermining of military strength), including everything from mutiny and desertion to talking about the war in pessimistic terms. Of the 30,000 *Landser* who were sentenced, about 20,000 were actually executed. In comparison, Germany only executed forty-eight servicemen during the First World War.[126]

The German experience with institutional authority could hardly have been more different than the American experience. Unlike the individual soldier experience in the Wehrmacht, American soldiers were very rarely subjected to the possibility of the death penalty and could often escape the consequences of their actions by reengaging with the positive side of social pressure and rejoining their comrades in combat.[127] Unfortunately, there is very little comparative historiography on institutional pressure in the American and German armed forces. But it is clear that the organizational goals of the two systems of institutional enforcement greatly impacted comradeship. For the Wehrmacht, the system impacted the traditional bonds of comradeship by reframing the relationships between *Landser* and their officers. By encouraging the strict enforcement of disciplinary measures on the Eastern Front, Wehrmacht leadership poisoned their own attempts to create camaraderie among enlisted men and develop the types of relationships between officers and men that Leckie remembered so fondly from his experience on Guadalcanal.

However, even with the official position of the Wehrmacht leadership on the strict enforcement of discipline established, it is important to clarify that Wehrmacht-style discipline affected comradeship between officers and men, but did not eliminate these relationships altogether. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that some officers sought to create a Nazi-style *Volksgemeinschaft* within their military units. One officer's success in creating a close-knit

[126] Fritz, *Ostkrieg,* 377.
[127] Stouffer, vol. 2, 113.

community within his unit is found in the testimony of one of his soldiers, Karl Fuchs. Fuchs wrote in a letter to his father on February 27, 1941, "I've become such an integral part of my company that I couldn't leave it ever again." Later in the letter, Fuchs writes that his "superiors seem to like" him, because Fuchs was supposed to move to a different company before his commanding officer prevented the transfer.[128] One can see the positive effects of his commanding officer's decision to keep Fuchs with his original unit in Fuchs' future letters. On March 23, he talks about the pride he feels for his unit's athletic and musical successes in recent army competitions.[129] Writing from the officer's perspective, tank officer Colonel Hans von Luck described his feelings about being transferred in 1942 from the Eastern Front to join Rommel in North Africa: "The news of my transfer came like a bombshell to my officers and men. We had, after all, fought together since the beginning of the war, shared joys and sorrows, and merged into a real team."[130] For both the enlisted soldier and the officer, the prospect of transferring out of the unit was deeply disappointing. Such feelings are understandable among German units in light of the fact that in the first year of the war, many units would have still contained the friends and close relatives of soldiers recruited through the German regional recruitment system.

The ways in which Fuchs writes about the pride he has in his unit appear in the writings of American soldiers as well. Even in the midst of experiencing intense combat fatigue, Manchester wrote that "staying on the line was a matter of pride."[131] When asked what motivated him to keep fighting, John Ciardi, a member of U.S. Army Air Corps in the Pacific, replied: "I

[128] Karl Fuchs to Hans Fuchs, February 27, 1941, in *Sieg Heil! War Letters of Tank Gunner Karl Fuchs, 1937-1941,* ed. Horst Fuchs Richardson, and Dennis E. Showalter (Hamden: Archon Books, 1987), 90.
[129] Karl Fuchs to Helene Fuchs, March 23, 1941, *Sieg Heil! War Letters of Tank Gunner Karl Fuchs, 1937-1941,* ed. Horst Fuchs Richardson, and Dennis E. Showalter (Hamden: Archon Books, 1987), 91.
[130] Von Luck, 66.
[131] Manchester 374.

don't think it was patriotism. I think it was a certain amount of pride. The unit was the crew. You belonged to eleven men. You're trained together, you're bound together."[132] Although Ciardi directly interprets his combat motivation as a "certain amount of pride," his last statement is perhaps even more informative. In the context of a combat situation, each member of a particular fire team played a pivotal role in the success and survival of the greater group. In the often close-quarters combat in the jungles of the South Pacific, one Marine's bravery could make all the difference in the survival of his comrades. With the rest of his unit pinned down on the banks of Suicide Creek during the Battle of Gloucester and the tanks who were supposed to come to the rescue stuck on the steep embankment, Sergeant Kerry Lane leapt into the seat of a Marine bulldozer to carve a path for the tanks. Despite being seriously wounded by a bullet from a Japanese 6.5mm Arisaka sniper rifle while operating the bulldozer, Sergeant Lane was successful in cutting the path in the bank. Through his self-sacrifice and dedication to his comrades, the tanks were able to cross the stream, defeat the Japanese, and rescue Lane's comrades. For his bravery in the battle, Lane was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in battle.[133] When writing about his Silver Star, Lane was quick to credit his comrades for their efforts: "I know in my heart that it's just like being on a ball team. No one man wins these things…Since Guadalcanal days, I've said that probably the greatest heroes were the ones nobody ever heard of."[134] Lane's view of his decoration is fascinating in comparison to the award system on the Eastern Front, where "accolades played an important practical role as an incentive" for soldiers.[135]

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[132] John Ciardi, "John Ciardi," in *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War II,* ed. Studs Terkel (New York, The New Press, 1984), 199.
[133] Dick Camp, "The Battle for Suicide Creek, Cape Gloucester December 1943," *Leatherneck* 102, no. 1, (2019): 32-35.
[134] Lane, 326.
[135] Neitzel and Welzer, 41.

Despite being seriously wounded during the Battle of Gloucester, Sergeant Lane insisted that he be allowed to return to his unit only two weeks after a surgeon successfully removed the bullet from Lane's shoulder. According to Lane's account, the hospital staff did not want him to leave for the front at that point in time as Lane had lost a lot of blood and had not yet regained his previous strength. After a series of vigorous debates with a nurse and the surgeon who extracted the bullet from his shoulder, Lane secured permission to return to Cape Gloucester. On his way back to the combat zone, Lane writes, "I had mixed emotions about leaving, but my desire to be with my command was overriding."[136] Although Lane and his comrades certainly benefitted from his return to the unit, Lane's story could have easily ended differently. As Lane recounts in his narrative of his time in the military hospital, if the Japanese sniper had shot Lane less than an inch in a different direction, Lane would not have survived. In the event that Lane had been killed, his unit would have become just one of hundreds of thousands of units in World War II to experience loss. This issue of loss is pivotal to understanding the evolving nature of comradeship as a source of combat motivation.

In spite of the importance of comradeship, and partially because of the importance of comradeship, in the combat motivations of German and American soldiers, the camaraderie of combat units would inevitably break down as the unit took casualties. As casualties mounted on the Eastern Front, the old German practice of regional recruitment became a double-edged sword. Successfully integrating replacement soldiers into a combat-hardened unit is always a challenging proposition, but the lack of connection to replacement troops was worsened by the fact that many German soldiers had had life-long connections to the men who the reinforcement troops were sent to replace. The same sequence of replacement troops taking the place of old

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[136] Lane, 310-312.

friends who had fallen in combat occurred across the Pacific Theater. After the heavy casualties of the Battle of Peleliu, the First Marine Division brought in replacement officers and enlisted men to fill out the ranks. The group of replacements included recently drafted Marines, non-commissioned officers who had served in training and shipyard positions, and recruits who had been too young to join before 1944. According to Sledge's account of the replacement process, some veterans of the Gloucester and Peleliu campaigns begrudgingly accepted the replacements, while other Marines were happy to receive the reinforcements.[137] The key difference between Sledge's observation in the 1st Marines and the experiences of surviving German soldiers on the Eastern Front lay in the various impacts of the sheer magnitude of casualties among German units on German conceptions of small unit cohesion. With the American conception of comradeship in mind, Sledge had very few difficulties adapting to the influx of new soldiers, because he was a part of the American system that encouraged the creation of small unit cohesion on the battlefield.

Nevertheless, despite Sledge's unit taking abnormally high casualties relative to other Marine units, American losses in the Pacific simply cannot compare to the scale of loss on the Eastern Front. Only two months into Operation Barbarossa, the Wehrmacht had already been forced to call up well over half of the reserve troops in the *Ersatzheer* (replacement army), a force that had been 400,000 strong at the outset of Operation Barbarossa. While the *Ersatzheer* attempted to maintain regional formations in June and July of 1941, the German ability to maintain these formations had completely evaporated by October of 1941. The need for massive amounts of reinforcements in a short period of time destroyed all practical hope of maintaining homogenous units.[138] By January of 1943, over 800,000 German soldiers had already been killed

[137] Sledge, 171.
[138] Bartov, *Hitler's Army,* 37.

in combat, and the worst was still to come. In the end, confirmed German deaths on the Eastern Front from 1941-1944 would equal 2,742,891.[139] It is fascinating, in light of such high casualty numbers, that German soldiers rarely spoke in detail in letters or memoirs about the friends they lost along the way; especially in comparison to American writings, which are packed with individual anecdotes and stories about fallen comrades. The theoretical explanation for this phenomenon lies in the scale of violence on the Eastern Front.

Due to the unbelievably high unit turnover rates in combat against the Soviet Red Army, German soldiers simply did not have the same opportunities that American soldiers had to develop bonds in combat. The quantitative and qualitative evidence from both fronts indicates that both the Americans and the Germans sought to capitalize on the value of comradeship as a combat motivator, with both systems resulting in very different outcomes. It is important to recognize that, while comradeship was certainly important for American and German soldiers on a personal level, the development of comradeship among soldiers is not ultimately intended to benefit soldiers personally, but is instead intended to increase success on the battlefield. After World War II, Colonel S. L. A. Marshall found that a significant percentage of soldiers do not actually fire their weapons in combat. Nevertheless, Marshall concluded that these passive observers still played an important role in the fighting prowess of the overall unit. He found that even when soldiers are not actively firing on the enemy, their presence still aided the overall group by encouraging the more active fighters to continue fighting.[140]

It was the great Prussian general and military theorist, Carl von Clausewitz, who once famously defined war as a political tool, writing: "the political intention is the purpose, the war is

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[139] Fritz, *Ostkrieg,* 495.
[140] Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 75.

the means, and the means must not be separated from the purpose."[141] While certainly true from a geopolitical perspective, Clausewitz's definition does not address the ways in which the tools of war impact the individual soldier. It must not be forgotten that on an individual level, the most basic goal of a soldier in combat is to kill the enemy before the enemy kills him. Despite soldiers looking back on comradeship as a metaphorical island in the midst of the dark sea of the horrors of combat in the Pacific against the Japanese and on the Eastern Front against the Soviets, it should be remembered that comradeship, as a means by which soldiers motivated themselves to keep fighting, is ultimately intertwined with the geopolitical causes for which soldiers were called upon to fight and the successes or failures of the military campaigns in which the soldiers took part. For Americans fighting in the Pacific, macro American military strategies allowed for the creation of small unit cohesion on a micro level. In contrast, the failures of German military strategy, and specifically the lack of recognition of the scale of potential casualties, meant that Germans very rarely had enough time to get to know the names of each other, let alone develop the deep connections with one another that are so pivotal in the creation of successful small unit cohesion.

[141] Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege,* edited by Arthur Schurig (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1917), 27. Note: Original German translated into English by the author.

Conclusion

To truly understand what it took for soldiers to risk their lives in combat in the Second World War, one must go beyond the historiographical narratives created over time to find the real soldiers themselves. Did racism play a role in the combat motivations of soldiers on both sides? Certainly, memoirs, letters, and diaries from both sides often include racialized language; ranging from violent anti-Semitism on the Eastern Front to references to the enemy as "beasts" in both theaters of war. The role of the official government version of the war was certainly very different for the average American soldier and average German soldier. Small unit-cohesion often inspired soldiers to fight for one another, particularly at the beginning of the war, before the disintegration of units on both sides of the conflict hindered reliance on comradeship as a motivator. While each of these theories appear throughout the most impactful historiographical works on combat motivation in the Second World War, each theory simply tells a portion of the larger story. To return to the story of Sergeant Basilone from the introduction, Sergeant Basilone's war was not a war fought solely over a hatred for the Japanese, although he did resent the Japanese for their treatment of Basilone's beloved Philippines.[142] Basilone certainly felt strongly about his comrades, but when he volunteered for combat on Iwo Jima, he would have known that he would be fighting with a brand new group of Marines; men with whom Basilone had not had the opportunity to bond during his previous campaigns. When Basilone met with Lieutenant General Alexander Vandegrift in December 1944 to discuss his decision to volunteer

[142] Ambrose, 11.

for the front, Basilone mentioned nothing about Roosevelt's Four Freedoms. Instead, he simply said: "There is still a big job to be done over there and I want to be in at the finish."[143]

As Stouffer found in his pivotal study of the American military experience in World War II, "the more typical frame of mind involved a tacit and fairly deep conviction that we were on the right side and that the war, once we were in it, was necessary. Leaving ultimate considerations aside, the soldier concerned himself with his job and with staying alive."[144] Beyond the larger issues discussed in this study, German soldiers who served on the Eastern Front shared such sentiments. Hans-Ulrich Greffrath, an officer in the Großdeutschland Division of the Wehrmacht who lost his leg in combat in Russia two months before his 21st birthday, originally fought for "Germany, for [his] fatherland, and for [his] homeland."[145] An important reality emerges from Basilone's statements, Stouffer's interviews with soldiers, and Greffrath's position: namely that German and American soldiers fought because they believed it was their duty to do so. As one aspect of a myriad combat motivators, fighting out of a sense of duty is certainly important. For the majority of the soldiers mentioned in this study, their racial views, their political beliefs, and their love for their fellow-soldiers led them to feel a sense of duty within themselves to serve their countries. The design to capture the motivations of German and American soldiers fighting their respective enemies on the Eastern Front and in the Pacific as accurately as possible is a truly challenging proposition. After all, it is inherently challenging to ascertain information about the thoughts and feelings of a generation that have nearly all passed away at the time this author is writing, over seventy-five years after the end of the Second World War. Even when more members of the World War II generation were still living, historians

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[143] Ibid, 227.
[144] Stouffer, vol 2, 151.
[145] Hans-Ulrich Greffrath, "Hans-Ulrich Greffrath," in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, ed. Johannes Steinhoff, Peter Pechel, and Dennis Showalter (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1994), 277-278.

found it challenging to distinguish between the true and imagined memories of soldiers, as soldiers oftentimes waited years to record their experiences. Nevertheless, these challenges should not prevent historians from digging deep into the primary source material available from the time period. It is imperative that each new generation does not forget those that have gone before. It has never been more important to understand the philosophical backgrounds of the Nazi regime and the soldiers who unwittingly and knowingly supported it. The interpersonal study of participants in the Second World War tells a crucial narrative of what it takes for a government, for a society, and for an individual to embrace an ethos of killing.

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