



THE CITY OF WAR: VENGEANCE

AND THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR



THE PITY OF WAR: VENGEANCE AND THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Is vengeance inevitable? Did the Germans ask for it? Is retribution justified? Is savagery the inevitable result of war? Are the atrocities of the aftermath of war hidden by the anodyne justifications of the victors? Is the sexual violence that characterised the vengeance wrought on East Prussia, Germany and most of the defeated territories a particular characteristic of the end of the Second World War or is it actually the unacknowledged and hidden characteristic of all wars? It was, it is now albeit belatedly understood, the biggest mass rape in history.

The film starts by visiting the haunted landscapes of the world that existed after the immediate end of the Second World War. Now often deserted, these melancholy worlds, whether in Berlin, East Prussia, Poland, the Ukraine or Yugoslavia, are the scenes of terrible acts of human violence and murderous killing. The film visits and evokes these lost worlds, haunted by a terrible past and an uncertain future.

The end of the Second World War had led to a period of lawlessness on the continent of Europe that can hardly be imagined and was not widely known or understood, especially outside the continent - and to a large extent even within Western Europe itself.

“Leaders from Roosevelt to Tito happily indulged the vengeful fantasies of their subordinates, and sought the harness the popular desire for vengeance to further their own political causes.”¹

National myths about the Second World War and its end – fuelled by images of joyful celebrations on VE Day by huge crowds in cities like London, Paris and New York – have dominated public consciousness

and hidden the history of what happened... the terrible scale of which is often conveniently forgotten - although not of course in the countries and territories that experienced the worst effects.

The Second World War in the minds of many historians has concentrated on the western front and western Europe. It is less well known that Russia lost 28 million people; 12 million Germans were ethnically cleansed between 1945-1948; 6.5 million Germans were killed; and countless people of various nations were tortured and killed throughout the continent – after 1945 and the apparent end of the war.

“In Eastern Europe, indeed, the keynote of liberation was unimaginable violence.”²

Though nothing can reduce the scale and severity of German war crimes and the Holocaust, in the desire to apportion guilt and blame, it is sometimes forgotten that only a third of the German population voted for Hitler in 1933. The major difference of course, and it is a distinction that must be acknowledged, is that in the case of Hitler and the Nazi regime many of the atrocities committed were a direct consequence of official government policy.

“All over Germany, especially in the east, the bodies of women who had been raped and butchered littered the roads like dead animals.”³

This film does not focus on the Nuremberg Trials or the Marshall plan and the remarkable process of reconstruction and rehabilitation that ultimately lead to the creation of institutions such as NATO, the EEC and the European Union and the long-term establishment of a peaceful and united Europe.



Instead if concentrates on highlighting the atrocities that occurred in the final days of the war and during the chaos that ensued in the immediate aftermath of it, whilst the Allied forces and their governments struggled to create a semblance of order and control.

Rape and destruction powered by murderous ethnic hatreds and the desire for vengeance characterised the terrible period of post-1945 lawlessness. The Russians – to whom the West and Europe's debt is still incalculable – and other eastern Europeans, who themselves had suffered terribly under German attack and domination, brutally attacked and occupied the territories they conquered or 'liberated' from German occupation.

*"In the final months of the war, as the Soviet armies pushed west into central Europe and eastern Prussia, millions of civilians—most of them German—fled before them. George Kennan, the American diplomat, described the scene in his memoirs: 'The disaster that befell this area with the entry of the Soviet forces has no parallel in modern European experience. There were considerable sections of it where, to judge by all existing evidence, scarcely a man, woman or child of the indigenous population was left alive after the initial passage of Soviet forces . . . The Russians . . . swept the native population clean in a manner that had no parallel since the days of the Asiatic hordes.'"*⁴

There is no doubt these atrocities were nowhere near the same scale of the Nazi war crimes but



nevertheless they did happen, they were barbaric, and they were perpetrated by the Allies...during the final days of the war and thereafter. Some may feel they were justifiable, at least to a certain degree, but they cannot be denied or ignored.

*"Few will be surprised that liberated concentration and slave labour camp inmates tore their guards to pieces, sometimes with the connivance of Allied soldiery. German civilians were routinely massacred by newly liberated populations, often before they were forcibly expelled to remove a minority issue the Nazis had ruthlessly exploited to justify war."*⁵

But this is to raise the question of the nature of vengeance and the moral blindness of those who justify its inevitability. Is vengeance inevitable. Was the breakdown into savagery of much of Europe and inevitable result of the desire for revenge and

the lack of institutions capable of managing a continent where much of it had been destroyed.

In Berlin and the bombed and fire-destroyed German cities there were scenes that were to last for several years – of rape, starvation, degradation and savagery. Berlin was the scene of the biggest mass rape in history – where women's backs were broken from repeated rape and children and their mothers committed suicide to prevent further horror, where husbands too committed suicide because of the vengeance wreaked upon their wives. The historian Anthony Beevor has said that he still wakes up weeping when he recalls the mass rape that accompanied the fall of Berlin.

*"More than most of Europe, East Prussia is strewn with symbols of a turbulent past – in its buildings, its ruins and its graves. For Germans, however, East Prussia is a memory."*⁶

One of the worst affected areas was the German territory of East Prussia where in October 1944, and after two years of butchery between the Germans and the Soviets, the Red Army entered the country and waged a campaign of wanton destruction murdering tens of thousands of German civilians – men, women and children. There was widespread rape of women of all ages and mutilation of dead bodies. These atrocities continued right across the region and into the other eastern German provinces of Pomerania and Silesia, right through to the end of the war and beyond.

"At Powayen near Königsberg, the bodies of dead women were strewn everywhere: they had been

*raped and then brutally killed with bayonets or rifle butt blows to the head. Four women here had been stripped naked, tied to the back of a Soviet tank and dragged to their deaths. In Gross Heydekrug a woman was crucified on the altar cross of a local church, with two German soldiers similarly strung up on either side. More crucifixions occurred at other villages, where women were raped and then nailed to barn doors. At Metgethen it was not only women but children who were killed and mutilated: according to the German captain who examined their corpses, "Most of the children had been killed by a blow to the head with a blunt instrument but some had numerous bayonet wounds in their tiny bodies.""*¹

In total over two million German women were raped during and immediately after the war and a large proportion of them (some reports suggest a majority) were the victims of multiple rape. Of this number around 1.4 million were from East Prussia, Pomerania and Silesia and estimates suggest that between 10%-30% of them ended up committing suicide as a direct result. It was widely reported that in fact most of the German women who remained in East Prussia were raped by Red Army soldiers and many were the victims of gang rape – girls under 18 and old women included. One victim stated that:

"On 3rd February front line troops of the Red Army entered the town (Schpaleiten) they came into the cellar where we were hiding and



pointed their weapons at me and the other two women and ordered us out into the yard. In the yard twelve soldiers in turn raped me. Others did the same to my two neighbours. The following night six drunken soldiers broke into our cellar and raped us in front of the children. On 5th February, three soldiers came, and on 6th February eight drunken soldiers also raped and beat us.”¹

Efforts were made to evacuate civilians but one such attempt ended in tragedy when the cruise liner *Wilhelm Gustloff*, which was only designed to take 2,000 passengers, sailed from the Baltic seaport of Gdynia with over 9,000 people crammed on board. The ship was sunk by a Soviet submarine and over 7,500 people perished as it went down in under an hour in icy cold seas with an outside air temperature of -18 Celsius. It was the worst maritime disaster in history.

Despite attempts by the family heads of the East Prussian aristocracy to lead their families, friends and staff to safety westward in defiance of their Nazi master's instructions and away from the approaching Red Army, many did not make it and those who returned were shown no mercy by the Soviets.

“I have taken revenge and will take revenge,” said a Red Army soldier whose wife and two children had been murdered by the Nazis in the Belorussian

town of Krasnopolye. “I have seen fields sown with German bodies but that is not enough. How many of them should die for every murdered child! Whether I am in the forest or in a bunker, the Krasnopolye tragedy is before my eyes...and I swear I will take revenge as long as my hand can hold a weapon.”¹

Many examples of similar vengeance also took place against German civilians in what were the previously Nazi occupied territories of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania, the Baltic states and even parts of Russia. Here many long-established German speaking communities, collectively known as the ‘*Volksdeutsche*’, were used by the Nazi regime to assist in and accelerate its push for dominance in eastern Europe during the war. Many, but by no means all, became collaborators and to varying degrees supported, or even participated in, the execution of some of Hitler's most extreme policies and war crimes.

At the end of the war, local soldiers and civilians turned on the *Volkdeutsche* – not only practicing Nazis but also ordinary men, women and children – and subjected them to horrific forms of torture and degradation, leading to extreme suffering and many deaths. If they were not killed in cold blood they were herded into camps where they were worked to death, died of starvation or from untreated illnesses like typhoid and other diseases.

In Czechoslovakia some 25,000 to 30,000 Germans are thought to have died after the war in major cities like Prague where in the last days of conflict:

“Captured German soldiers were beaten, doused in petrol and burned to death. Dozens were hung from the city's lamp posts with swastikas carved into their flesh. Guerrilla forces broke into cellars where German men, women and children were hiding and beat raped and occasionally slaughtered them.”¹

After the war many were placed in camps like Strahov on the outskirts of Prague:

“If any man tried to protect his wife, he would have risked being killed. The Russians, and the Czechs as well, often did not even trouble to take the women away – amongst the children and in view of all the inmates of the camp they behaved like animals. During the nights one could hear the moaning and whimpering of these poor women.”¹

The pattern was repeated across the country with terrible massacres in towns like Postoloprty - where 800 civilian men, women and children were killed in cold blood and buried in a mass grave – and near Prerov where a Czech officer called Karol Pazur ordered his soldiers to kill 71 men, 120 women and 74 children. Once again, they were buried in a mass grave. Pazur later justified the killing of the children by saying:





“What was I supposed to do with them once we had shot their parents?”¹

Even more widespread was the systematic killing of tens of thousands of German civilians in Poland – particularly in the ‘punishment camps’ in Zgoda (a satellite camp of Auschwitz during the war) and Lamsdorf. In these re-opened former Nazi concentration camps the conditions were very similar to those during the war and the treatment of the prisoners no better – it was suggested by some that:

“The sadistic methods used by the camp guards were every bit as bad as, and perhaps worse than, those used by the SS at Auschwitz and in some camps only about 5% of the inmates survived.”

“At Zgoda the camp was surrounded by high voltage electric fence with ominous signs on it displaying a skull-and-crossbones and the words ‘Danger of Death’ – a message reinforced by the sight of dead bodies hanging on the wire. The camp director Salomon Morel met prisoners at the gate with the taunt:

“My parents and siblings were gassed by the Germans in Auschwitz, and I will not rest until all Germans have had their rightful punishment.”¹

But it was in Berlin before the onslaught of the victorious Russian Red Army that the most terrible vengeance was exacted as, powered by a lust for vengeance and ethnic hatred, its troops committed acts of staggering depravity and barbarity, including mass rape.

During the latter stages of the Second World War, mass rapes of women took place during both combat operations to bring down the Third Reich and the subsequent occupation by Allied troops. The vast majority of victims were German – and their ages ranged from those who were little more than children to women in their 80s – but Soviet and Polish women, who had been concentration camp prisoners or forcibly deported from their homelands by the Nazi regime to serve as German slave labour, also became targets in the ensuing chaos.

British, US and French troops did commit sexual atrocities, and it’s been claimed that US soldiers raped up to 190,000 women at the end of the War. But while some Russian historians insist these crimes committed by their countrymen were not extensive, there’s a general consensus among the wider community of historians that the majority of rapes were not only committed by Soviet servicemen but that their leadership knew what was happening and did little to stop it. The books of one such noted historian, Antony Beevor, author of Berlin – *The Downfall: 1945*, have been banned in some Russian schools and colleges in recent years for positing such a view.

“The Russian soldiers were raping every German female from eight to eighty. It was an army of rapists.”⁷

Beevor describes the events that took place as the greatest phenomenon of mass rape in history. During the latter half of the 1940s, Soviets caught raping civilians were usually punished to some degree by imprisonment or even execution,

but Stalin had reportedly stated that it was understandable if “a soldier who has crossed thousands of kilometres through blood and fire and death has fun with a woman or takes some trifle.”

“The subject of the Red Army’s mass rapes in Germany has been so repressed in Russia that even today veterans refuse to acknowledge what really happened. The handful prepared to speak openly, however, are totally unrepentant. “They all lifted their skirts for us and lay on the bed,” said the leader of one tank company. He even went on to boast that “two million of our children were born” in Germany. The capacity of Soviet officers to convince themselves that most of the victims were either happy with their fate, or at least accepted that it was their turn to suffer after what the Wehrmacht had done in Russia, is striking. “Our fellows were so sex-starved,” a Soviet major told a British journalist at the time, “that they often raped old women of sixty, seventy or even eighty - much to these grandmothers’ surprise, if not downright delight.”⁸

What were the deeper motives behind such extensive Soviet rapes? Historians have singled out anti-German hate propaganda, a desire to avenge years of personal suffering, an alleged demeaning picture of German women in the Soviet press, and the widespread availability of alcohol in Germany and even intoxicating chemicals seized from laboratories and workshops as contributory factors. Most ill-educated Red Army soldiers suffered from sexual ignorance and deeply unenlightened attitudes towards women: entrenched patriarchal

Soviet attitudes regarded rape as justifiable vengeance against the women of a conquered foe. This need to restore ‘honour’ coupled with a desire for revenge may be the reason that so many women were raped in public or in front of their husbands. Women were also probably considered simply as spoils of war.

“The Soviet armies advancing into East Prussia in January 1945, in huge, long columns, were an extraordinary mixture of modern and medieval: tank troops in padded black helmets, Cossack cavalymen on shaggy mounts with loot strapped to the saddle, lend-lease Studebakers and Dodges towing light field guns, and then a second echelon in horse-drawn carts. The variety of character among the soldiers was almost as great as that of their military equipment. There were freebooters who drank and raped quite shamelessly, and there were idealistic, austere communists and members of the intelligentsia appalled by such behaviour.”⁹

It seemed that any cruelty was justified when it came to avenging Germany’s violation of the Motherland. Such cruelty prevailed despite orders issued by Soviet command that Germans should be treated in a civilised manner, and many seemed blinkered to the widespread committing of atrocities. One Russian war veteran wrote that “The Soviet soldiers’ relations with the German population where it had stayed may be called indifferent and neutral. Nobody, at least from our Regiment, harassed or touched them.”





Beevor has also identified a strong streak of Soviet self-justification and moral superiority: the Red Army had managed to convince itself that because the Soviets people had endured such horrors as Stalingrad and played such a crucial role in liberating Europe from fascism it could behave entirely as it pleased. When gang-raped women in Königsberg begged their attackers afterwards to put them out of their misery, for instance, the Red Army men appear to have felt insulted. “Russian soldiers do not shoot women,” they replied loftily. “Only German soldiers do that.”

“‘Red Army soldiers don’t believe in ‘individual liaisons’ with German women. Nine, ten, twelve men at a time - they rape them on a collective basis.’”⁹

Yet the rape of their own womenfolk seriously undermines Russian attempts to justify Red Army behaviour on the grounds of revenge for German brutality in the Soviet Union. Beevor cites an example. On March 29 1945 the central committee of the Komsomol (the youth organisation of the Soviet Union) informed Stalin’s associate Malenkov of a report from the 1st Ukrainian Front. “On the night of 24 February,” General Tsygankov recorded in the first of many examples, “a group of 35 provisional lieutenants on a course and their battalion commander entered the women’s dormitory in the village of Grutenberg and raped them.”

The Nobel Prize-winning Belarussian historian and journalist Svetlana Alexievich, author of the best-selling *War’s Unwomanly Face*, has made a speciality of crafting witness testimonies from conflict zones including the experiences of Soviets during the Allied occupation, and her writings throw further fascinating light on the psychology and motivation behind their most monstrous acts.

One former army officer recounted that “We were young, strong, and four years without women. So we tried to catch German women and...ten men raped one girl. There were not enough women; the entire population ran from the Soviet army. So we had to take young, twelve or thirteen-year-old.” To him and his comrades, such actions were “fun”. Now he could not understand how he could

have acted in such a way – him, a boy from a good family. Another witness, a female telephone operator from the Soviet Army, recalled: “When we occupied every town, we had first three days for looting... [and rapes]. This was unofficial, of course. But after three days one could be court-martialled for doing this...I remember one raped German woman laying naked, with hand grenade between her legs. Now I feel shame, but I did not feel shame back then...Do you think it was easy to forgive [the Germans]?” What she hated to see was the Germans’ “clean, undamaged white houses”. She wanted them to suffer, and decades would pass before this woman would start to feel pity for them.

“Liberated Soviet girls quite often complain that our soldiers rape them. One girl said to me in tears: ‘He was an old man, older than my father’.”¹⁰

After their initial rampage into East Prussia, the Red Army’s depravity was inflicted on the women of Berlin when their forces reached the city in spring 1945. Many women had assumed that, whatever had taken place in more obscure rural areas, mass rapes could hardly take place in the city in front of everybody. They were not prepared for the shock of Russian revenge, with Soviet soldiers still regarding German women as a casual right of conquest. Many women developed grim coping strategies. They were forced to concede to one soldier in the hope that he would protect them from others and learned to lie low during the rapists’ nocturnal forays for victims. Eventually, many turned to prostitution in order to survive starvation, selling their bodies for food.

“In Dahlem, Soviet officers visited Sister Kunigunde, the mother superior of Haus Dahlem, a maternity clinic and orphanage. The officers and their men behaved impeccably. In fact, the officers even warned Sister Kunigunde about the second-line troops following on behind. Their prediction proved entirely accurate. Nuns, young girls, old women, pregnant women and mothers who had just given birth were all raped without pity. Yet within a couple of days, a pattern emerged of soldiers flashing torches in the faces of women huddled in the bunkers to choose their victims. This process of selection, as opposed to the indiscriminate

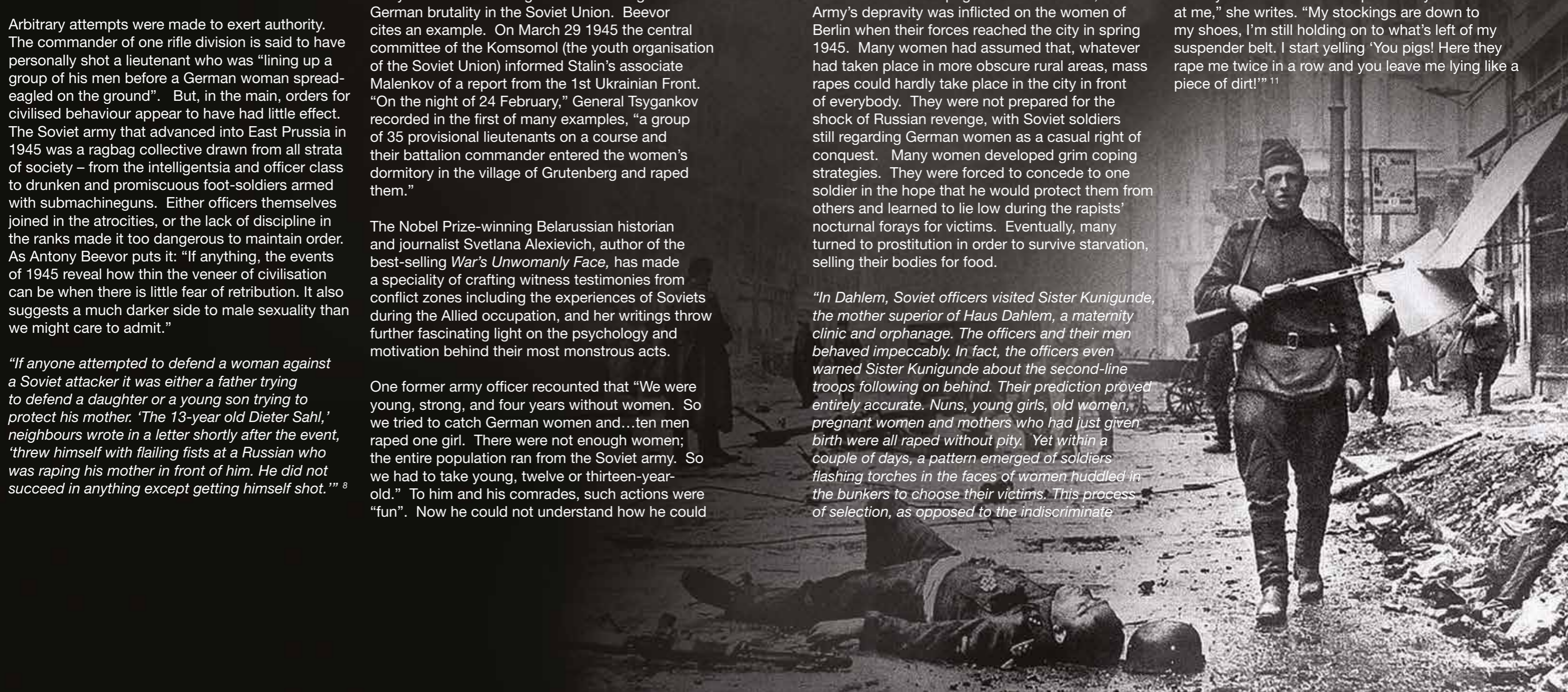
violence shown earlier, indicates a definite change. By this stage Soviet soldiers started to treat German women more as sexual spoils of war than as substitutes for the Wehrmacht on which to vent their rage.”⁸

The overall statistics regarding rape victims are horrific. Beevor states that estimates of rape victims from Berlin’s two main hospitals ranged from 95,000 to 130,000, and that one doctor deduced that out of approximately 100,000 women raped in the city, some 10,000 died as a result, mostly from suicide. The death rate was probably much higher among the 1.4 million estimated victims in East Prussia, Pomerania and Silesia. Altogether, says Beevor, at least two million German women are thought to have been raped, and a substantial minority, if not a majority, appear to have suffered multiple rape.

“Finally the two iron levers open. Everyone stares at me,” she writes. “My stockings are down to my shoes, I’m still holding on to what’s left of my suspender belt. I start yelling ‘You pigs! Here they rape me twice in a row and you leave me lying like a piece of dirt!’”¹¹

Arbitrary attempts were made to exert authority. The commander of one rifle division is said to have personally shot a lieutenant who was “lining up a group of his men before a German woman spread-eagled on the ground”. But, in the main, orders for civilised behaviour appear to have had little effect. The Soviet army that advanced into East Prussia in 1945 was a ragbag collective drawn from all strata of society – from the intelligentsia and officer class to drunken and promiscuous foot-soldiers armed with submachineguns. Either officers themselves joined in the atrocities, or the lack of discipline in the ranks made it too dangerous to maintain order. As Antony Beevor puts it: “If anything, the events of 1945 reveal how thin the veneer of civilisation can be when there is little fear of retribution. It also suggests a much darker side to male sexuality than we might care to admit.”

“If anyone attempted to defend a woman against a Soviet attacker it was either a father trying to defend a daughter or a young son trying to protect his mother. ‘The 13-year old Dieter Sahl,’ neighbours wrote in a letter shortly after the event, ‘threw himself with flailing fists at a Russian who was raping his mother in front of him. He did not succeed in anything except getting himself shot.’”⁸



*"[In Berlin] young daughters were hidden in storage lofts for days on end. Mothers emerged into the street to fetch water only in the early morning when Soviet soldiers were sleeping off the alcohol from the night before. Sometimes the greatest danger came from one mother giving away the hiding place of other girls in a desperate bid to save her own daughter. Older Berliners still remember the screams every night. It was impossible not to hear them because all the windows had been blown in."*⁸

Yet out of this hell emerged yet another strange twist of war and its aftermath. A number of Red Army officers formed relationships with German women, enraging the Soviet authorities by refusing to return to the Motherland and staying with their 'occupation wives'.

Rules on the treatment of Prisoners of War (POWs) under the 1929 Geneva Convention were widely flouted or disregarded by all sides in the Second World War. The Germans were especially guilty of this on the eastern front which may in no small way account for why the Soviets and their eastern allies so readily reacted in similar fashion both during and after the war. Some 11 million German soldiers

were taken prisoner during the war and they were captured and held mainly by the American (3.8m), British (3.7m) and Soviet (3.1) forces. Given the scale of the conflict on the eastern front it seems surprising that the Soviet figure isn't higher but the simple truth is that they were less inclined to 'take prisoners' and many German and other Axis power troops went to great lengths to flee, and/or fight their way, westward in order to give themselves up to the British and Americans rather than to the Red Army.

This decision would appear to be vindicated by the relative death rates in POW camps controlled by the Allies after the war where it was less than 1% in the case of the British and American camps but over 35% in the Soviet camps – a figure surpassed only by those in Yugoslavia where it was over 40%. The key elements of lack of shelter, clothing, food, water and basic hygiene were severe enough in the British and American camps, but they were clearly much worse in the Soviet ones, where the situation was also exacerbated by the more extreme general transport and infrastructure damage to the surrounding areas. Nevertheless, the statistics, supported by testimonies from hundreds

of surviving prisoners, also confirm that the Soviets treated their prisoners much more harshly, to the extent that they really 'didn't care if they lived or died'... save for their use of course as a forced labour service assisting with post war reparation and reconstruction.

After the war eastern Europe was also the scene of a huge act of ethnic cleansing which saw some 12 million ethnic Germans flee, or be driven out of, the area as the Allies arbitrarily moved borders to establish a new world order on the continent and nations sought to rid themselves of ethnic minorities by 'repatriating' them to the nations of their birth, or in which their language was most widely spoken.

The German provinces in the east were mainly ceded to Poland as its border was moved to the west and northwards to compensate for the loss of part of its western territory to the Ukraine. The ramifications of these changes were enormous and led to a ruthless and inhumane transfer of the resultant 'displaced people' on an unprecedented scale.

*"It was not merely the largest forced migration but probably the largest single movement of population in human history ...accomplished largely by state-sponsored violence and terror."*¹²

Mass deportations of Germans took place not just from the Eastern provinces (around seven million people) but also from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Belarus and elsewhere – and all returned to a German nation that was in no position to cope with them. Consequently, many ended up in forced labour or refugee camps – some of which were converted wartime camps with appalling living conditions and very limited food supplies. In the immediate post war period, most 'displaced people' were marched on foot in long columns to the new German border fifty or sixty kilometres away and many did not survive the journey.

"Most of the people on the trek lived solely from what they found in the fields or they ate unripe fruit on the side of the road. We had very little bread. The result was that many people got ill. Small children under one year of age almost all died on





“They had killed seven men two nights previously; that night we killed sixteen of theirs....A week later the Ukrainians responded by wiping out an entire Polish colony, setting fire to houses, killing those inhabitants unable to flee and raping the women who fell into their hands...We retaliated by attacking an even bigger Ukrainian village and this time two or three of the men in our unit killed women and children...The Ukrainians in turn took their revenge by destroying a village of 500 Poles, torturing and killing all who fell into their hands. We responded by destroying two of their larger villages...This is how the fighting escalated. Each time more people were killed, more houses burnt, more women raped” (An account of the scale and nature of the killing as reported by a Polish partisan based in the Volyhynia area at the time.)¹

In other parts of Eastern Europe similar violent acts of ethnic cleansing and ‘settling of old scores’ also occurred during this post war period, for example between the Greeks and the Bulgarians, the Romanians and the Magyars and most notably in Yugoslavia between the Serbs and Croats. Here some of the worst violence in the whole of Europe occurred both during and after the war as ethnic, religious and political hatred built up over many generations combined to see the extreme right wing, Catholic ‘Ustasha’ Croats in bitter conflict with Tito’s predominantly Serbian Communist and Orthodox Christian Partisans. The Ustashes who collaborated with and fought alongside the Germans and Italians in effect were pitched against their fellow countrymen in the main Communist Partisan resistance group which sided with the Allies.

Due to Tito’s vision of a Yugoslavian federation, it was not possible after the war to simply separate the opposing factions and return them to their respective homelands. In any case, the Partisans were hell bent on revenge for the genocide carried out during the war by the Ustashes which saw in excess of 350,000 Serbs killed in their homes or exterminated in death camps on Yugoslavian soil. Consequently, after the end of the war Ustasha forces who were either handed over to the Partisans by the western allies or were captured by the Partisans along with other Croatian collaborators were brutally and systematically murdered in a series of massacres at locations such as Maribor and Kamnik.

“Finally, the hundred prisoners were machine gunned. I watched this slaughter from a distance of one hundred yards or less. Some of the prisoners threw themselves down flat and escaped the machine gun fire. They pretended to be dead, but the Partisans went from one corpse to another and ran their bayonets through everyone whom they suspected of being alive. Screams rent the air, providing grim evidence that those who had dodged the machine gun fire had not eluded death for long. All the new victims were thrown into the hole on top of the old corpses. Then the Partisans directed several more bursts of machine gun fire into the pile of bodies, just to make sure they had not left anyone alive” (Eye-witness account of part of the massacres at Maribor.)¹

However, the group which suffered the worst in terms of persecution and ethnic cleansing both during and after the war was the Jewish population. The Holocaust saw some 6 million defenceless Jews exterminated by the Nazis and their allies – mainly in camps in Germany and Poland but also from across the whole of eastern Europe especially in the Ukraine, Romania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

Even in the dying days of the war, and as the Allied forces closed in, the SS carried out and oversaw mass killings of concentration camp prisoners and forced labourers (many but not all of whom were Jewish) in a desperate last-ditch attempt to see through to conclusion their despicable genocidal policies. Just one such example occurred in East Prussia where some 3,000 inmates from the disbanded Stutthof concentration camp had been force marched to Königsberg where their number was more than doubled by the addition of a further 4,000 Jewish prisoners. All 7,000 then continued on a 35-mile trek through snow and ice to the coastal town of Palmnicken where the plan was to execute them in a walled-up tunnel of the amber mine there. When the mine manager refused to co-operate with the plan, the SS guards accompanying the convey took the prisoners to the beach and marched them into the Baltic Sea under heavy gunfire killing all

but a handful of the 7,000 in cold blood and leaving those badly wounded to die at the hands of the elements.

Those who either survived or escaped the camps found little peace when they were liberated and/or sought to return to their homes after the war. They were not generally welcome, their property and possessions had been taken and their persecution continued, fuelled by an indigenous antisemitism which ultimately resulted in the majority of those still living being driven out of eastern Europe and fleeing to the USA, Britain and Palestine in the hope of a new life there.

“Jewish repatriates had to become accustomed to greetings such as “Ah, you survived?” or “What a pity you were not made into soap” or even “Not another Jew, they must have forgotten to gas you”. In German cities cinema newsreel reports of the death of six million Jews provoked shouts of “They didn’t kill enough of them!” followed by deafening applause. Similarly, even a less hostile reaction might be accompanied by “I don’t want to know. That’s all over now. Be glad you survived.”¹

Through the combination of interviews with leading authorities, archive footage, contemporary witness statements and present evocation of the areas described, the film builds into a haunting portrait of a world of extreme suffering, mitigated only by the courage and humanity of those who tried to help end the savagery of what amounted to a shameful chapter of brutally inflicted exterminations and hatred.

This film is preoccupied with the savagery of murderous vengeance with its accompanying sexual violence - and the collective desire to cover this up. As a post-war German president himself said there is no desire for equivalence between the Holocaust and German war crimes and the savagery that followed the end of the Second World War. But there is the need for recognition of what actually happened and what is now portrayed as having happened in an often complacent, sanitised and self-righteous historical account.

ENDS

A further consequence of these border changes in eastern Europe was the forced deportation of around 800,000 Poles from the new western Ukraine (formerly east Poland) across the border into the new Poland and 480,000 Ukrainians from Poland in the opposite direction to Ukraine. Due to their respective roles in the war, and a history of conflict between the two nations, many of these enforced transfers of unwanted ethnic neighbours was again carried out with extreme violence and widespread massacres by both parties – including at Zawadka Morochowska in Poland and Volyhynia in the Ukraine.



Sources:

- 1 From *Savage Continent* by Keith Lowe
- 2 Ian Thomson, *Daily Telegraph*
- 3 John Spain, *The Independent*
- 4 *Postwar* Tony Judt
- 5 Michael Burleigh, *Daily Telegraph*
- 6 From *Forgotten Land* Max Egremont
- 7 Natalya Gesse, Soviet war correspondent, 1945
- 8 Anthony Beevor, multiple sources including *Berlin* and newspaper articles.
- 9 Zakhar Agranenko
- 10 Vasily Grossman, War correspondent and novelist
- 11 *A Woman in Berlin* Anonymous
- 12 *Orderly and Humane* R M Thomas

ADRIAN MUNSEY, ODYSSEY TELEVISION,
PINWOOD STUDIOS, PINWOOD ROAD, IVER HEATH. BUCKINGHAMSHIRE SL0 0NH
TEL: +4479 800 11535 E-MAIL: ADRIAN@ADRIANMUNSEY.COM
WEB-STE: WWW.ADRIANMUNSEY.COM