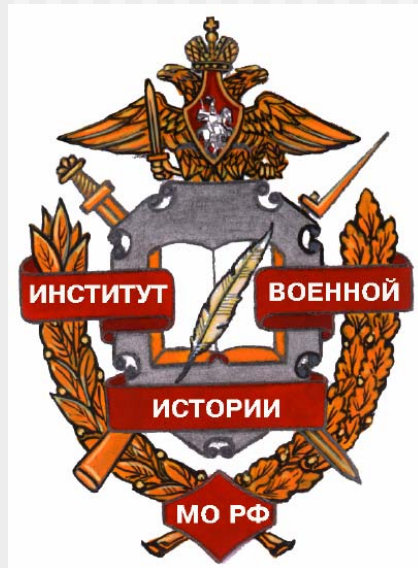


Russian Ministry of Defense
Institute of Military History

Soviet Special Propaganda to the Wehrmacht



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Presentation:

The Issues to Discuss

- What is Special Propaganda?
- What was the Object of Soviet Special propaganda?
- Soviet Special Propaganda experience in WW II.
- Conclusion

What Is Special Propaganda?



Soviet Special Propaganda

- ***Special Propaganda*** is the political, administrative and ideological activity of the political bodies of the Soviet military command aimed at the hostile foreign audience during the war.
- The hostile foreign audience incorporates three main segments:
 - ✓ The enemy troops at the battlefield;
 - ✓ The enemy POWs;
 - ✓ The civilian population of the enemy.

6W of Special Propaganda

- What? – A complex of activities (not “pure” propaganda).
- Who (Subject)? – Soviet Military Command.
- Who (Object)? – Enemy troops and population.
- When? – During war.
- Where? – At the battlefield and in the rear.
- What for? – To influence the behavior of the enemy.

Three Forms of Special Propaganda

■ Printed propaganda

- ✓ Leaflets
- ✓ Newspapers, books, pamphlets
- ✓ Slogans, posters

■ Radio propaganda

■ Oral propaganda

- ✓ Loudspeaking transmissions
- ✓ Meetings, face-to-face conversations, lectures

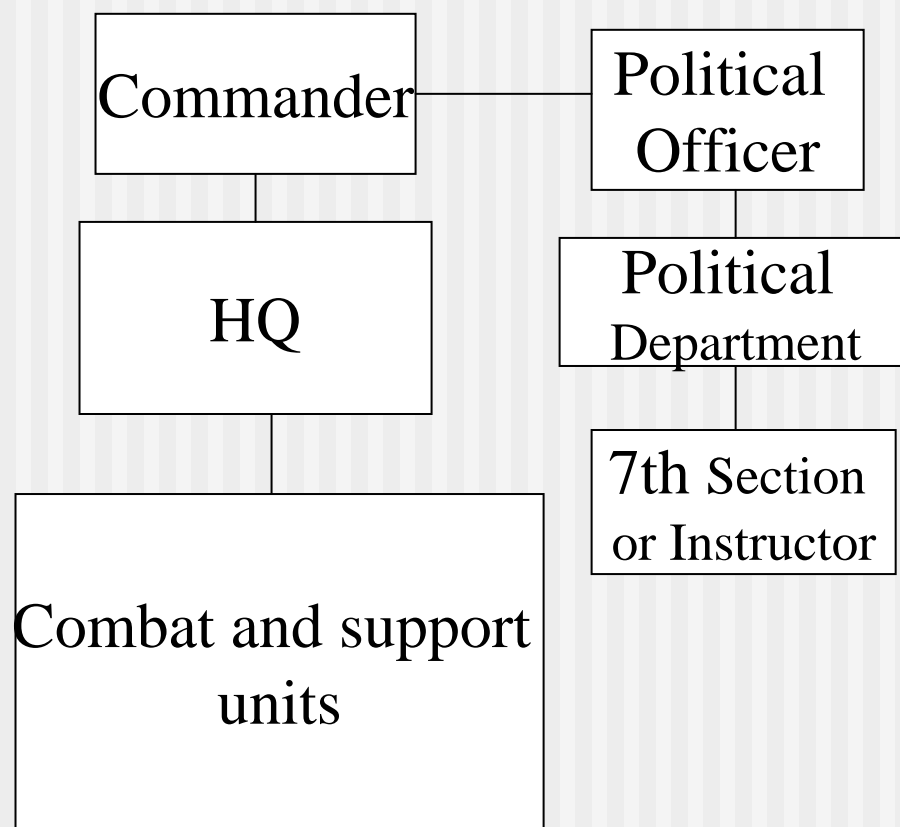


The 7-th Department Structure

- Main Political Department of the Red Army: the Special Propaganda Department (the 7-th Department) was organized in 1940.
- Its mission: to ensure readiness of the Red Army to conduct political activity among the enemy troops and civilian population in case of war.

The 7-th Department Structure-1

- 7-th Sections were organized in all Political Departments of the Military Districts and Armies.
- The rifle (infantry) divisions: the instructors for political activity among the enemy troops and civilian population were appointed



Special Propaganda Apparatus

- Political officers, propagandists
- Professional writers, poets, journalists, artists
- Linguists, translators and interpreters
- Country study experts, historians
- Psychologists
- Technical personnel (printing, radio, etc.)
- Foreigners with strong pro-Soviet sentiments; Communist party members
- Enemy defectors; POWs with anti-Fascist sentiments

Two Anti-Nazi German Organizations in the USSR

The National Committee of Free Germany

- Incorporated German emigrants, German Communist party members, anti-Nazi POWs.
- Character: anti-Fascist; pro-Communist.
- Organized in July 1943.
- Chairman – a member of the German Communist party, and a poet Erich Wainert.

The Union of the German Officers

- Incorporated high-ranking German POWs with strong anti-Nazi sentiments. At the end of the war: 52 Generals and 4000 officers.
- Character: anti-Fascist; non-Communist.
- Organized in September 1943. Soon became a fraction of the National Committee of Free Germany.
- Chairman – General von Zeidlitz.

Two Spheres of Propaganda Efforts

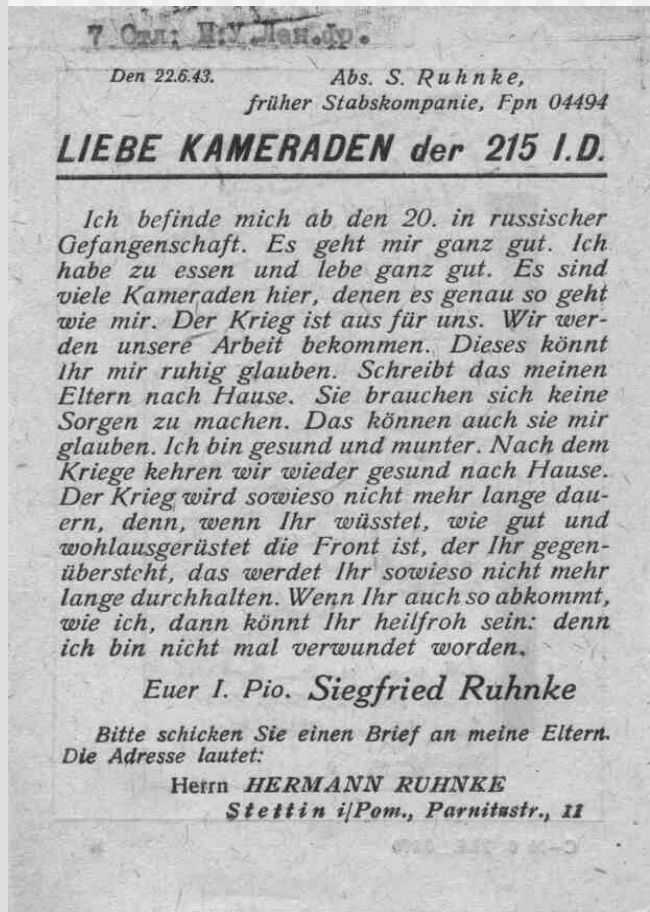
- Rational Sphere = BRAINS (MIND)
- The method: ideological and political indoctrination
- The goal: to change enemy mentality
- Emotional Sphere = FEELINGS
- The method: to scare, to terrify, to sow panic and confusion, etc.
- The goal: to influence enemy behavior

Two Main Themes of Special Propaganda



- **The General themes:**
 - ✓ The truth about the war
 - ✓ Aggressive nature of the Fascist ideology
 - ✓ Information about the USSR
 - ✓ The social situation in Germany, suffering of the German people
- **The goal: to influence the BRAINS of the enemy troops and population**

Two Main Themes of Special Propaganda-1



- **The Combat themes:**
 - ✓ The real situation at the battlefield
 - ✓ Losses and casualties suffered by the enemy (small units level)
- The goal: to influence the enemy BEHAVIOR in a desired way – stop fighting, surrender, etc.

Three Levels of Special Propaganda

- **Strategic** (Front, Group of the Armies)

General themes of propaganda towards enemy troops and population

- **Operational** (Army – Corps)

General and combat themes of propaganda towards enemy troops (and sometimes) population

- **Tactical** (Division and below)

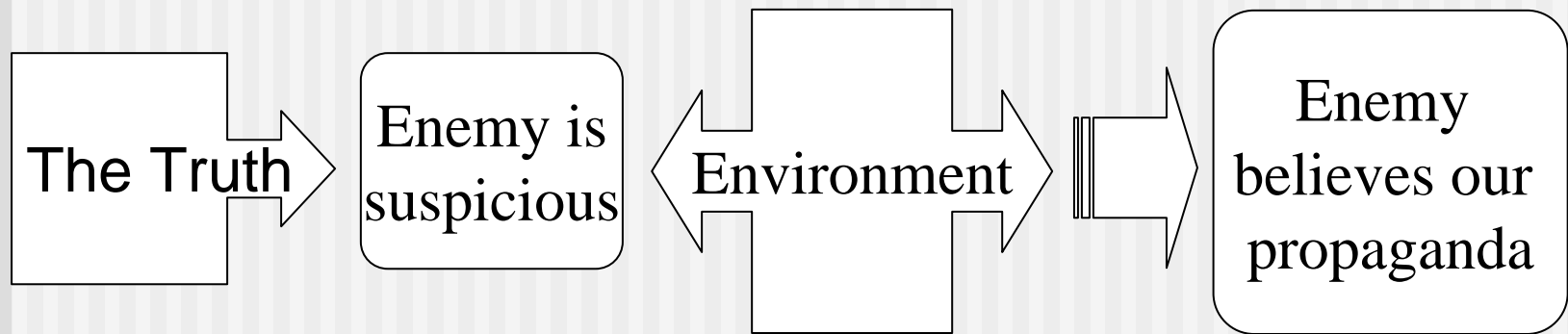
Combat themes of propaganda towards enemy troops

The Sources of Information for Special Propaganda

- Intelligence reports
- Enemy combat documents captured
- Enemy personal documents captured (letters home, diaries, etc.)
- POW interrogations
- Press releases, foreign radio broadcasts, etc.

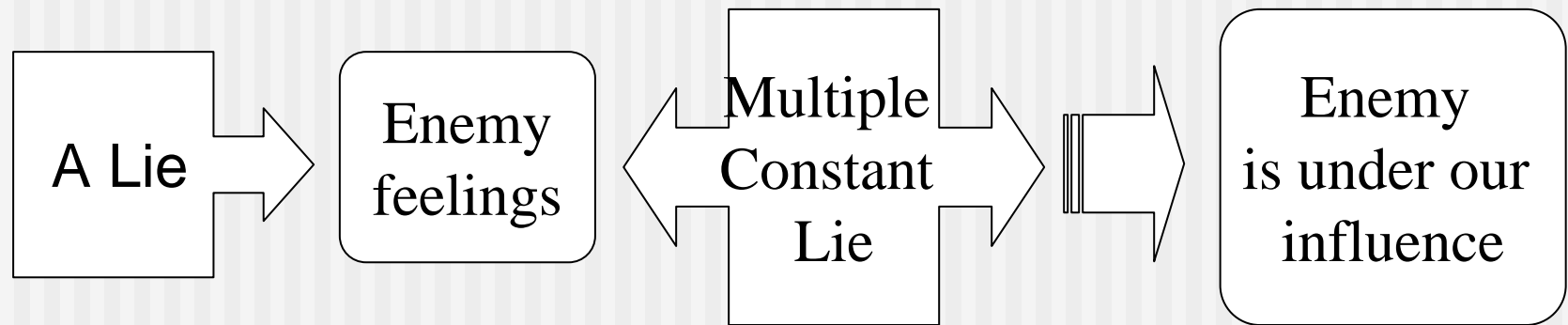


How Does the Truth Work?



- While telling the truth, we influence the enemy BRAINS.
- Initially the enemy does not believe our propaganda.
- But military (social, political) environment, the facts of the real life will support our truth.
- In the long run, the enemy will inevitably believe our words.

How Does a Lie Work?



- The idea: do not give an enemy a break – put him under our total propagandistic pressure till he loses an ability to think and to see clearly, to distinguish the truth and a lie.
- While saying a lie you may achieve your propaganda goal very quickly, but all your propaganda efforts are in danger.
- If the enemy recognize your lie, he will never ever believe you.

What Was the Object of Soviet Special Propaganda



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Nazi Attitude towards Propaganda

- “Propaganda helped us to take the power. Propaganda helps us to keep the power. Propaganda will help us to conquer the whole world”.

The Nazi party congress, 1936

The Main Principles of Nazi Propaganda

- 1. The more primitive propaganda is, the more effective it is.
- 2. Address the feelings, not the minds of the people.
- 3. Propaganda should be logically elaborated, but not necessarily logically expressed.
- 4. Repetition.

Nazi PsyWar

- “Psychological warfare” – this term was coined in Germany before WW II.
- *Adolf HITLER, September 1939:*
“Propaganda is an important instrument of the Leadership for forwarding and strengthening the will to victory and for destroying the enemies’ morale and will to victory”.

The Influence of Nazi Propaganda

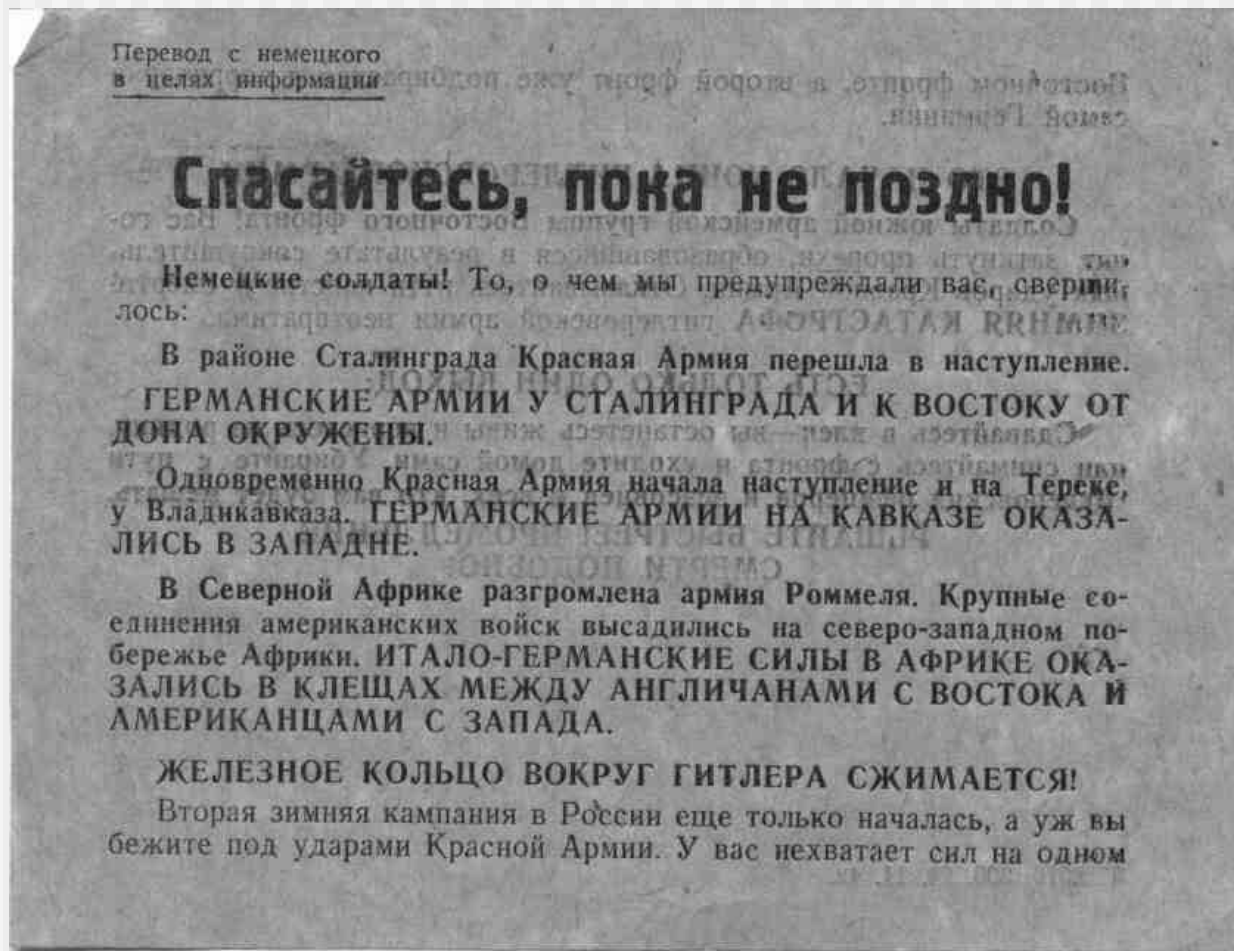
- NAZI FANATICS - 10%
- MODERATE NAZI - 25%
- APOLITICAL PEOPLE - 40%
- PASSIVE ANTI-NAZI - 15%
- ACTIVE ANTI-NAZI - 10%

The mission of Soviet Special Propaganda:
to support 25%; to fight for 40%.

Hitler's Policy towards Russia

- Hitler: "We are obliged to depopulate as part of our mission of preserving the German population. We shall have **to develop a technique of depopulation... I have the right to remove millions of an inferior race that breeds like vermin!**"
- Hitler: "**This is a war of extermination**"
- Goebbels' diary: "**The Russians are not people, but a conglomeration of animals**".

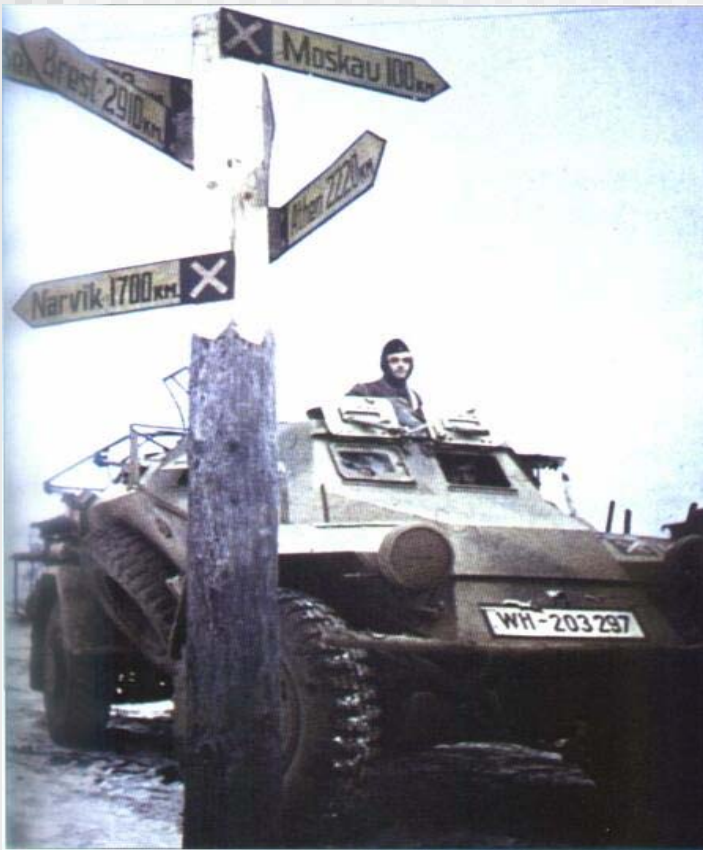
WW II: Soviet Special Propaganda Experience



The Red Army Political Directive (12 October 1940)

- “The working people of all the countries will join the forces in order to defend Socialism. That is why it is necessary and quite possible “to fight back politically” the soldiers from the Imperialists”.
- “On the eve of the coming war it is necessary:
 - ✓ to be ready to criticize the enemy for the aggressive character of the war;
 - ✓ to remove the masks from the initiators of the war – the enemy aggressive leadership;
 - ✓ to show the nonsense of the war for the working people of the enemy country;
 - ✓ to tell the enemy troops the truth about the just character of the war on the part of the USSR”.

Wehrmacht State of Morale: The Eve of Invasion



- Very strong force of 5.5 million troops. 3 million – members of Nazi party.
- Influence of Fascist ideology: the Russians are “non-human beings”; fight for “Lebensraum” – living space for the German nation.
- Deep faith in Fuehrer.
- Combat experience; training; logistics; mobility; technical superiority.
- German national character: masculine traits - bravery; strong will; toughness.

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The Red Army Political Slogans, 26 June 1941

- “The German Soldiers! Down with the predatory war unleashed by Hitler! Long live to friendship between the German and the Russian peoples!”
- “The German Soldiers! Soviet Russia has never infringed and is not going to infringe the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Germany! Just think, what do you spill you own blood for?!”
- “The German Soldiers! Remember: the only way to peace is elimination of the bloody regime of Hitler and his cronies”.

Some Faults of Special Propaganda: Initial Period

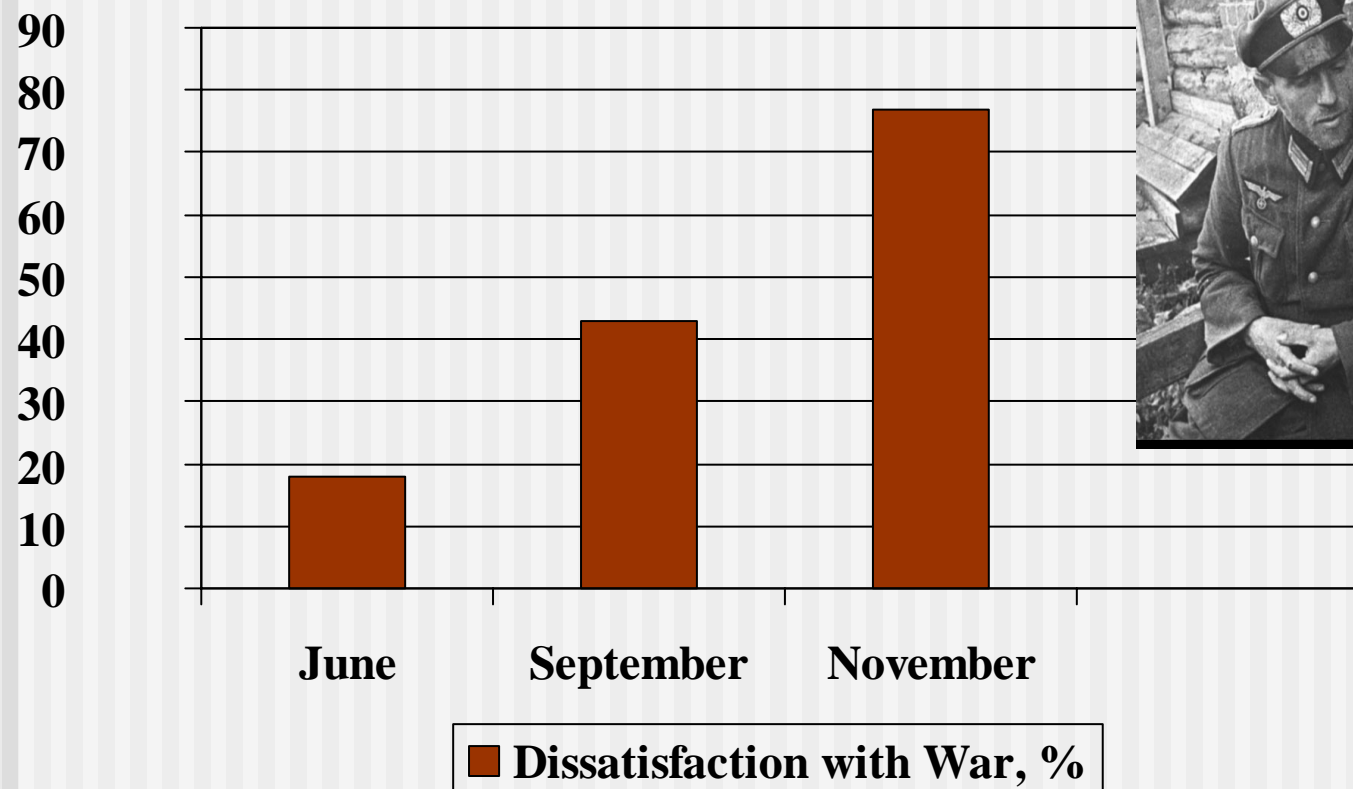
- Overestimation of the role of Marxist ideology (proletarian solidarity): “Stop! Here is a land of the workers and peasants!”; “Don’t shoot your brothers – the Russian workers and peasants!”
- Ignorance of the influence of Fascist ideology on the German soldiers.
- No reasonable ways out of the war (a call to surrender or defect when the Germans were successfully attacking).
- Oversimplification.
- Labeling the German political leadership, discreditation of Fuehrer.

Wehrmacht State of Morale: Crisis at Moscow

- The state of the Wehrmacht morale : crisis in fall-winter 1941
- A German soldier's letter home: "It's the hell over here. The Russians don't want to leave Moscow. They went to offensive... I beg you stop writing me about the silk fabric and rubber shoes I've promised to bring you from Moscow. Try to get it – I am dying, I will die, I feel it..."



The State of the German POWs Morale, 1941



Wehrmacht State of Morale: Turning Point at Stalingrad

The Stalingrad battle,
July-November 1942-
February 1943.
A German lieutenant
wrote:



“The front is a corridor between burnt-out rooms; it is the thin ceiling between two floors... The street is no longer measured by meters but by corpses...”

Stalingrad is no longer a town. By day it is an enormous cloud of burning, blinding smoke. And when night arrives, the dogs plunge into the Volga and swim desperately to gain the other bank. The nights of Stalingrad are a terror for them. Animals feel this hell; the hardest stones cannot bear it for long; only men endure”.

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Wehrmacht State of Morale: Turning Point at Stalingrad

- The Soviets took 91,000 POW, including 2,500 senior officers and generals headed by Field Marshal Paulus. 147,000 Germans – KIA.
- **The main effect of Stalingrad was psychological.** This was the first time for 130 years that a German army had surrendered in the field.
- The shock from the surrender of an entire German army in the field affected the morale of the civilian population, the High Command, and the German armed forces in the field...



Soviet Special Propaganda After Stalingrad

- More effective, more professional
- Propaganda supported the combat actions
- Closely connected with the tactical and operational situation at the battlefield
- The emphasis shifted toward an appeals to the instinct of self-preservation
- Encouragement of German desertions

Special Propaganda: Combat Episode

- **Special propaganda operation** of the Soviet North-Western Front, fall 1942, against the German 123th infantry division.
- **Situation:**
 - ✓ No active combat actions; both sides in defense. The Soviets used big agitation posters to influence the enemy.
 - ✓ The Germans shot each time they saw the posters.
 - ✓ The Soviets prepared a tricky poster: a large-scale portrait of Hitler and the wording – “He is your enemy! Kill him!”
 - ✓ The Germans were totally confused.



Special Propaganda: Combat Episode

- The Soviets published a leaflet with a photo of a Soviet camp for German POWs.
- Captured German officers were sitting in a mess and waiting for the lunch. A soldier-waiter was carrying a big pot of food and all the officers kept their eyes on him.
- The slogan was clear: surrender and you save your life in our POW camp.
- The German soldiers immediately recognized a lie: the officers never glance in the direction of a waiter.
- Lesson: know psychology and national character of your enemy.

Nazi Propaganda At the Final Stage of War

Nazi slogans:

- “Be happy with war, because peace will be terrible!”
- “Victory or Siberia!”

The German POWs in January, 1945:

- 40% believed in German victory;
- 60% believed in Hitler’s genius;
- 50% believed in German “new sophisticated weapon”.

Soviet Special Propaganda: Summary

- During the war the Soviet Special Propaganda tried to influence the German soldier's emotions and feelings.
- The most popular themes were: inevitability of death; Hitler's responsibility for war and war crimes; suffering of the German population.



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Soviet Special Propaganda: Some Statistics

- During WW II Soviet Special Propaganda published 20,000 propagandist materials in 20 foreign languages – totally 2 billion 706 million copies.
- 1.9 million leaflets daily
 - *Note: The US Armed Forces spread 8 billion leaflets in Europe during WW II*

Soviet Special Propaganda: Some Statistics-Cont.



- During WW II Soviet Special Propagandists transmitted 2 million 700 thousand programs via the loudspeakers.
 - 1,900 loudspeaking programs daily

Conclusion:

Lessons Learned

- The experience of WW II demonstrated once again that **propaganda cannot win wars**, but it can supplement military action to speed and shape the outcome.
- Propaganda as an auxiliary weapon can effectively supplement the military, economic, and diplomatic weapons of a nation. But it cannot change basic factors that speak louder than words.

Lessons Learned

- The enemy morale is closely connected to the situation at the battlefield.
- The more successful and victorious the enemy is, the less effective our Special Propaganda efforts are.
- The more successful our military efforts are, the more effective our propaganda efforts might be.

Lessons Learned

- Rational sphere of the Special Propaganda influence in a long run is much more effective and fundamental than Emotional sphere.
- But it takes rather long time to influence the brains of the enemy soldiers.
- Emotional sphere is more effective in a short run: when you need a result immediately.
- It's easier to influence the enemy feelings than the enemy brains.

Lessons Learned

- The results of Soviet Special Propaganda activities during the war have convinced the Soviet political leadership, that ideology plays the crucial role at the battlefield.
- Marxist-Leninist ideology was the basis of Special Propaganda activities of the Soviet Armed Forces after WW II.
- Overestimation of the role and importance of Communist ideology was a specific trait of Soviet Special Propaganda activities till the collapse of the USSR.