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The Effectiveness of Nazi Propaganda During World War II

by

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Thesis

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In

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Abstract

This thesis examines Nazi propaganda's overall effectiveness during Adolf Hitler's rise to power in the 1930s through the end of World War II in 1945. Historians have had mixed opinions of the overall potency of the propaganda. The questions in consideration are why Nazi propaganda received so much support from the Nazi leadership if it didn't work and whether or not it was a primary reason Germany continued to resist until the end of the war. Using the diaries of Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Propaganda Minister, soldiers' letters from the front lines, the propaganda itself, and a variety of secondary sources, this work investigated these questions and found that propaganda was indeed influential throughout the duration of the Third Reich. Three primary elements were effective: indoctrination, anti-Soviet propaganda, and the intense media deification of Hitler that came to be known as the Hitler Myth.

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Introduction

Majestic scenes of wildly cheering civilians. Spectacular architecture surrounding an army of steadfast German soldiers. A highly emotional Führer giving speech after speech, greeting civilians and children with a cheerful smile, and overseeing company after company of infantry march past. Constant celebration of the triumph of National Socialism.¹ All of these scenes are from the 1935 film *Triumph des Willens* (*Triumph of the Will*), perhaps the greatest single piece of propaganda created during the Third Reich. Directed by Leni Riefenstahl, the film portrayed Nazi leader Adolf Hitler giving powerful, emotional speeches to hundreds of thousands of people and used very effective camera angles to give him a heightened appearance of power. This powerful film was just one piece of tens of thousands of items of propaganda created by the Nazi Propaganda Ministry.

Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933, and the Nazi Party quickly rose to be the dominant force in the German government. Hitler created a government-controlled Propaganda Ministry to control the national media networks to help with his cementing of power. The ministry created films such as *Triumph of the Will*, as well as news publications, posters, radio broadcasts, children's literature, and many other types of propaganda to bring Hitler's message to his people. This was a great tool that served the Nazis well throughout the 1930s and continuing through the first years of World War II, but when the tide of battle turned against Germany, propaganda lost a great deal of its effectiveness. However, Hitler and the Nazis continued to support and finance propaganda in the belief that it still was one of their greatest weapons. So the

¹ *Triumph des Willens* (Riefenstahl 1935).

question that needs to be asked is: how effective was Nazi propaganda during the latter years of World War II?

The *Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda*² proved to be one of the most influential tools Hitler had during the height of Nazi power. The Führer explained in his book *Mein Kampf* why propaganda should be used to control the populace and how it had been a useful weapon for the Allies during World War I. Hitler berated the German leadership for failing to use propaganda in any meaningful way during the war, and described how the new regime could use it to its fullest power. Mass media conveyed simple propaganda messages that all of the masses could respond to and understand easily, demonizing Germany's enemies and fostering loyalty to Hitler.³ The Pro-Mi's primary purpose was to support the Nazis' cause, binding the people's loyalty to Hitler and make Hitler the omnipresent face of the Reich, and quietly preparing the German people for war.

To manage such an undertaking, Hitler appointed Dr. Joseph Goebbels as Propaganda Minister. Goebbels, like Hitler, was an extraordinary orator and was particularly adept at creating and utilizing various forms of propaganda for a specific purpose. With Goebbels in charge, the Propaganda Ministry achieved an astounding level of success during Hitler's rise to power in the 1930s that continued through the first years of World War II. Propaganda was delivered via printed material, radio, and film to disseminate the Nazis' message to the German people, who grew to admire and trust in the Führer above any other man. Goebbels' propaganda machine had achieved one its

² Abbreviated "Pro-Mi."

³ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), pp. 177-186.

greatest goals: a media cult surrounding Hitler.⁴ This later proved to be one of the greatest success of the propaganda ministry throughout the entire reign of the Third Reich, and one of Hitler's greatest advantages as a ruler.

When World War II began on September 1, 1939, the Pro-Mi's charge was to maintain public morale and to increase support for the war effort. Goebbels and his ministry were initially very successful at their mission, focusing intensely negative propaganda against the Allies and promising victory to the German people. The German military defeated every major power it faced between 1939 and 1940, and even though Great Britain and Russia maintained their resistance through 1941 and 1942, Germany clearly still had the upper hand. However, as the Russians counterattacked in the East and the Americans joined the British in the West in 1942, the tide began to turn and with that, propaganda gradually began to lose its effectiveness. As early as the Battle of Britain in 1940, it was obvious that information being given to the German people by the Pro-Mi was not entirely accurate, and gaps appeared in Pro-Mi reports.

Additional glaring inconsistencies appeared as the war continued, though nothing damaged the reputation of the propaganda ministry as greatly as the fall of Stalingrad and the terrible defeat for the Wehrmacht in February 1943. German propaganda had presented the campaign as though the Germans were winning, even as the German 6th Army was surrounded and slowly being destroyed. Not until a week before the actual surrender did Nazi propaganda change its tone, and when the fall of the city was reported by the Pro-Mi, the German people were in a state of shock. All of a sudden Goebbels' propaganda lost a great deal of respect and credibility and was regarded more and more as a lie by the German people.

⁴ Ian Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 48-59.

Stalingrad was only the first of many defeats to come, but Goebbels made a determined effort to revitalize his propaganda. He realized as early as mid-1942 that the unvarying message of victory in every piece of propaganda was becoming monotonous and ignored by the public, so he changed the overall message being sent. By 1944, guarantees of victory gave way to messages that promoted the idea that should Germany surrender or be defeated, it would be destroyed. The reports of the horrors on the Eastern Front and the devastation caused by Western Allied bombers corroborated that message and were among the reasons why the Germans continued fighting.

Besides maintaining public morale, there was also the matter of maintaining the morale of the troops, in particular on the Eastern Front but also on the Western Front before, during, and after the 1944 British and American invasion of Normandy. Anti-Western and anti-Soviet propaganda filled both the training of the Wehrmacht and news given to the troops on the front lines. This was especially important on the Eastern Front, where the very high casualty levels meant that soldiers often served with replacement troops rather than the men they had trained with, which caused morale to suffer. Propaganda played its role in holding the soldiers together, instilling a hatred for the Russians that fostered solidarity in the ranks.

The influence of propaganda is evident in some soldiers' letters on the Eastern Front that as they entered destroyed towns and cities, they observed the supposed brutality of the Bolshevik regime. In actuality, these towns had been destroyed by German artillery and aircraft, and these atrocities their very own comrades committed were often blamed on the Russians instead.⁵

⁵ Stephen Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), p. 196.

On the Western Front, it was a different story. Despite anti-Western propaganda, German troops generally knew that the British and Americans were more humane than the Soviets. Soldiers deserted the Wehrmacht on both fronts, but especially in the West towards the end of the war. Harsh discipline was also prevalent on the Western Front, but because of lighter casualties than in the East, the soldiers' comradeship bonded them together much more tightly.⁶

Goebbels and the Pro-Mi did the best they could, and much of the propaganda being created was ingeniously crafted to stir the emotions of the German people. Nonetheless, war propaganda never truly regained the confidence of the German people that it had enjoyed prior to World War II. As the Allies closed in around Germany, many people simply lost faith in their leaders, especially Goebbels. Again, one must ask: how effective was Nazi propaganda during the latter years of World War II? Why did Hitler and Goebbels put so much faith and resources into propaganda in the last years of the war? And was the propaganda made between 1933 and 1945 was a significant factor in keeping the Wehrmacht fighting and the German people believing in the Führer during the last hard years of the war? Given that fighting losing battles on two fronts and weathering the Allied strategic bombing at home certainly eroded public morale, it is questionable if the broadcasted propaganda had the impact that historians have generally agreed that it did.

This thesis will investigate these questions using the propaganda itself, as well as Goebbels' own diaries, reports from the front lines and within Germany on the collective morale of the people and troops, and soldiers' letters from the front lines. In addition, it will utilize secondary sources studying that studied the place of propaganda in the

⁶ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, pp. 90-93.

training and operations of the German military. The next several chapters will compare how propaganda looked and sounded before and after 1942, when the war turned against Germany, and assess the effects that propaganda may have had on German civilians as well as the military.

It does appear that certain propaganda lost some of its potency, yet although the German people came to distrust in their leaders, they never lost their faith in Hitler. The Pro-Mi had deified Hitler during his rise to power through film, radio, and printed propaganda. He had been portrayed as superhuman, and many Germans believed that with Hitler they could get through any situation. In their eyes, he was a miracle worker. Ian Kershaw referred to this Hitler media cult as the “Hitler Myth.”⁷ In addition to the Hitler Myth, the hardening of the message of the propaganda after Stalingrad had a definite effect on the German populace that stirred them to continue fighting the Russians.

Scholars have reached different conclusions about the effectiveness of Nazi propaganda. Kershaw, for one, believes that it was effective only when public support for the Nazi regime was strong. He notes that when the Wehrmacht was rolling over its enemies with ease and Germany had regained its world power, “propaganda had a relatively easy task.”⁸ But the defeats in the Battle of Britain and especially at Stalingrad in 1943 irreversibly undermined public trust in Goebbels and the propaganda ministry. By the middle of the war, Goebbels “was rapidly losing touch with reality,” and his fury at the criticism of his work was “the best testimony to the ultimate failure of his work.”⁹

⁷ Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth*, p. 2.

⁸ Ian Kershaw, *How Effective Was Nazi Propaganda?* In David Welch, *Nazi Propaganda*, (Totowa: Barnes & Noble, 1983), p. 195.

⁹ Kershaw, *How Effective Was Nazi Propaganda?*, p. 199.

Kershaw further claims that the utter failure of propaganda occurred by 1944, as the view of propaganda by the German public was already negative. With the collapse of popular support, Nazi propaganda was ultimately powerless.¹⁰ Kershaw is onto something here, but other historians have pointed out that particular elements of the propaganda succeeded, sometimes brilliantly, throughout the war. Stephen Fritz and Wolfram Wette note that the anti-Bolshevik and anti-Semitic propaganda on the Eastern Front truly did influence the soldiers fighting against the Red Army.¹¹ However, Fritz's evidence is largely from the early parts of the campaign, when morale was still high, but Wette spends several pages evaluating the effects of propaganda on the troops themselves and determined that it was not only effective, but effective throughout the war on the Eastern Front.¹² My own research tends to confirm Wette's conclusions.

It was not just the Eastern Front propaganda that maintained its potency throughout the war. Upon investigation, certain aspects of Nazi propaganda can be considered a fundamental reason the Germans continued to fight as the war encircled their nation. It is apparent that there were significant weaknesses to the propaganda that could not be overcome, the most glaring being that the trust in the propaganda that had been used since the start of the war failed once the war turned against Germany. After Stalingrad, Goebbels revamped his propaganda. This new message threatened Germany's certain destruction should the nation lose the war, and this struck home to the German people. While propaganda did fail in certain areas, three particular types of Nazi propaganda remained effective throughout the war: the Hitler Myth, the pre-war

¹⁰ Kershaw, *How Effective Was Nazi Propaganda?* p. 201.

¹¹ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten* p. 196.

¹² Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 169-175.

indoctrination that led to fanatical young soldiers fighting during the last stages of the war, and propaganda made to support the campaign on the Eastern Front. Chapter One introduces the Hitler Myth, and it will remain a prevalent topic in all of the chapters that follow. Chapter Three deals primarily with the anti-Soviet propaganda produced for the Eastern Front, and Chapter One introduces the indoctrination while Chapter Four explains how Hitler benefitted from it. These elements of propaganda were enough to keep the German populace fighting until the very end of the war.

Chapter One: The Golden Age of Nazi Propaganda: 1933-1940

Of all the new weapons and tactics employed by Nazi Germany prior and during World War II, propaganda was one of the most important, both to the war effort and maintaining the loyalty of the German people to Hitler. The Führer was obsessed with propaganda, writing two entire chapters about it in his book *Mein Kampf*. The first of these chapters, specifically titled “War Propaganda,” is a most revealing glimpse into Hitler’s mind and his ideas for controlling his own people during the coming struggle. During World War I, British and American propaganda battered Germany’s image throughout the war, virtually uncontested by German propaganda.¹ Impressed by the effectiveness of Allied propaganda, Hitler berated Germany’s leaders for their own poor performance in the propaganda battle during the last years of the war:

Did we have anything you could call propaganda? I regret that I must answer in the negative. Everything that actually was done in this field was so inadequate and wrong from the very start that it certainly did no good and sometimes did actual harm. The form was inadequate, the substance was psychologically wrong: a careful examination of German war propaganda can lead to no other diagnosis. There seems to have been no clarity on the first question: is propaganda a means to an end?²

Hitler’s answer was affirmative: Germany “was engaged in a struggle for a human existence, and the purpose of war propaganda should have been to support this struggle; its aim to help bring about victory.”³ When a nation is engaged in a struggle for its own existence, concepts of humanitarianism aesthetics “become totally irrelevant” and thus, they “were also inapplicable to propaganda.”⁴ Hitler answered the question of propaganda’s purpose by noting that its use by the British was indeed “a means to an end,

¹ Hilmar Hoffman, *The Triumph of Propaganda* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996), pp. 76-79.

² Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p. 177.

³ Ibid. p. 177.

⁴ Ibid. p. 178.

and the end was the struggle for the existence of the German people; consequently, propaganda could only be considered in accordance with the principles that were valid for this struggle. In this case the most cruel weapons were humane if they brought about a quicker victory...”⁵ Hitler was not the only one who considered Allied propaganda in World War I to be effective; former German commander Erich Ludendorff wrote in his 1919 memoirs that enemy propaganda was one of the main causes of defeatism spreading in Germany and that the halfhearted response by German propaganda could not stop the enemy words from spreading to the German population.⁶ From this outside opinion, Hitler’s observation that propaganda had been effectively used as a tool for military and political purposes certainly had credence.

The second decisive point regarding the implementation of effective war propaganda that Hitler pondered was to whom propaganda should be addressed. The target audience was either the masses or the trained intelligentsia. Hitler answered quickly and specifically stated that “it must be addressed always and exclusively to the masses.” A couple of paragraphs later, he explained with great detail about what propaganda should be and how it should be used, as well:

The function of propaganda does not lie in the scientific training of the individual, but in calling the masses’ attention to certain facts, processes, necessities, etc., whose significance is thus for the first time placed within their field of vision. The whole art consists in doing this so skillfully that everyone will be convinced that the fact is real, the process necessary, the necessity correct, etc...its effect for the most part must be aimed at the emotions and only to a very limited degree at the so-called intellect.⁷

Furthermore, Hitler stated that “all propaganda must be popular and its intellectual level must be adjusted to the most limited intelligence among those it is

⁵ Ibid. p. 178-179.

⁶ Hoffman, *The Triumph of Propaganda*, p. 78.

⁷ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p. 179-180.

addressed to...to influence a whole people, we must avoid excessive intellectual demands on our public, and too much caution cannot be exerted in this direction.” He continued by noting that the public’s receptivity “is very limited, their intelligence is small. But their power of forgetting is enormous.” Because of this, “all effective propaganda must be limited to a very few points and must harp on these slogans until the last member of the public understands what you want him to by your slogan.”⁸

Hitler’s words provided a blueprint for how the Pro-Mi created its propaganda. Simple themes and slogans repeated over and over are a striking feature of pre-war and early war Nazi propaganda, including these two pre-war posters (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2 below). German “freedom” and “victory” were two very common motifs in early Nazi propaganda, and the most prevalent theme of all was a reference to Hitler himself as a near-superhuman figure who could work miracles and restore Germany to glory. Hitler was to become the centerpiece of the Reich and the greatest symbol of German power.



Figure 1.1: Yes! Führer, we follow you!
(1930s)



Figure 1.2: Germany is free! (1938)

⁸ Ibid. pp. 180-181.

Hitler explained that the propaganda used by the British and Americans in World War I “was psychologically sound.” By representing the Germans as barbarians and Huns, they prepared their own soldiers “for the terrors of war...after this, the most terrible weapon that was used against [the soldier] seemed only to confirm what his propagandists had told him.”⁹ These experiences reinforced the troops’ belief and trust in their own government and increase their hatred against the enemy, which would make them immune to the words coming from his enemy’s own propaganda sources. Hitler particularly emphasized the importance of propaganda to drive home a few main points, no dubious half-statements that could be doubted. Figures 1.1 and 1.2 both show this. Hitler’s popularity grew immensely in the 1930s and by 1938, the notion that Germany was free of outside influence and the Treaty of Versailles was quite accurate. Only that style of propaganda would be effective.¹⁰

Hitler noted that the effectiveness of this form of propaganda “is strikingly shown by the fact that after four years of war it not only enabled the enemy to stick to their guns, but even began to nibble at our own people.”¹¹ In England during World War I, Hitler explained, the British understood “that this spiritual weapon can succeed only if it is applied on a tremendous scale, but that success amply covers all costs. There, propaganda was regarded as a weapon of the first order, while in our country it was the last resort of unemployed politicians and a comfortable haven for slackers. And, as was to be expected, its results [in Germany] all in all were zero.”¹²

⁹ Ibid. p. 181.

¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 182-183.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 184.

¹² Ibid. pp. 185-186.

It is clear from Hitler's own words written in 1923 the emphasis the Nazi Party placed on its propaganda. The Pro-Mi was created a few months after Hitler came to power in 1933, and the ministry proved to be one of his most influential tools during the height of Nazi power. It was organized to maintain control over all sources of public media and entertainment. The ministry consisted of seven departments, the first being Legislation and Legal, the second Coordination of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, Race and Travel, third Radio, fourth Journalism, National and Foreign Press, fifth Film, Film Censorship, and Newsreel, sixth Theater, and the seventh Music, Fine Arts and People's Culture.¹³

The ministry used its total control of all German media and entertainment to cement Hitler's power in Germany. The 1930s saw a Hitler media cult emerge as a result of the propaganda, and the German people became more and more supportive of and loyal to the Führer. When the German military scored their spectacular opening victories of the war between 1939 and 1942, Hitler and the Nazi Party transmitted elated words of total victory to the public via their propaganda machine.

As much as Hitler stressed propaganda in *Mein Kampf*, it took the right person to carry it out. That man was Dr. Joseph Goebbels, described by Richard Taylor as an "evil genius."¹⁴ Goebbels was a master of propaganda and immensely loyal to Hitler. He was almost as skilled as Hitler as an orator and was a very influential member of the Nazi Party, despite being at odds with many other key players, such as Hermann Göring. Goebbels skillfully organized public rallies and protests through his speeches, and gained popularity with the German people during the growth of Nazi influence in the late 1920s

¹³ Susan Tegel, *Nazis and the Cinema* (New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), p. 17.

¹⁴ Richard Taylor, *Goebbels and the Function of Propaganda*. In David Welch, *Nazi Propaganda* (Totowa: Barnes & Noble, 1983), p. 29.

and early 1930s by sympathizing with the working class. In addition to making speeches, Goebbels helped to organize Nazi propaganda before Hitler was even elected. Nazi Party members had campaigned mercilessly against their chief rivals, the Communists and Social Democrats, prior to Hitler's appointment to the position of Chancellor in 1933.



Figure 1.3: “Free Saxony from Marxist Trash!” (1927)



Figure 1.4: “Vote List 9: the National Socialist German Workers’ Party.” (September 1930)

Two examples of this early propaganda include the posters above, both created by Goebbels himself. Figure 1.3 reads “Free Saxony from Marxist Trash!” and was created around 1927 as part of a provincial election campaign in the province of Saxony. Figure 1.4 neatly sums up Nazi ideology as part of the September 1930 Reichstag election. A Nazi sword kills a snake, the blade passing through a red Star of David. The red words coming from the snake are: usury, Versailles, unemployment, war guilt, Marxism, Bolshevism, lies and betrayal, inflation, Locarno, Dawes Pact, Young Plan, corruption, Barmat, Kutistker, Sklarek (the last three Jews involved in a series of financial scandals),

prostitution, terror, civil war.¹⁵ This connection to the public and skills as a manipulator made Goebbels the perfect choice to run the Pro-Mi, and under his direction the ministry became one of Hitler's most valuable assets. Not only was Goebbels highly skilled in his field, he was in agreement with Hitler's views on Marxists, Jews, and other enemies of the Nazi Party.¹⁶

Goebbels left behind diaries designed as memoirs and learning materials for future generations of Nazis rather than as personal remarks and thoughts. The diaries themselves are works of propaganda; as Taylor puts it, they are "the Propaganda Minister's propaganda for propaganda,"¹⁷ and so readers have to question the validity of what Goebbels is saying. However, the entries reveal Goebbels' ideas for the future of the Nazi party, as well as his general mood at the time they were written. His loyalty to Hitler is obvious; on January 3, 1939, Goebbels notes that Hitler had written him a "long and very touching letter. I am very moved by it...I answer him immediately...it does me some good."¹⁸ Despite not actually stating what the letter was about, Goebbels does show his appreciation and respect for Hitler while also noting the Führer's liking for Goebbels himself. Goebbels' pre-war entries in the diaries give largely trivial information; more of a "here's what happened today" listing; however, the entries written during the war are much more complex.

Radio and film were crucial elements of the new propaganda network. German radio stations were nationalized in 1932, one year prior to Hitler's rise to power. In 1933, radio came under strict state control. A further boon for the Nazis was the mass

¹⁵ List 7 and List 9 are the Nazi ballots for these particular elections.

¹⁶ Tegel, *Nazis and the Cinema*, pp. 14-17.

¹⁷ Taylor, *Goebbels and the Function of Propaganda*, p. 31.

¹⁸ Fred Taylor, *The Goebbels Diaries 1939-1941* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 4.

production in 1933 of a cheap radio, the *Volksempfänger*, or “people’s receiver,” nicknamed the “Goebbels blaster.” Over 3.5 million were sold by 1934, and by 1936 half of all German households had a radio. Not only did this allow the mass broadcast of public ceremonies and speeches by Hitler and other Nazi leaders in their entirety, it also funded the propaganda ministry; between 1933 and 1943 the sale of radios and radio licenses covered almost ninety percent of the ministry’s expenses.¹⁹

Goebbels praised the capabilities of radio broadcasting in a speech at a radio exhibition on August 18, 1933, entitled “Radio as the Eighth Great Power.” He began by stating that “Napoleon spoke of the ‘press as the seventh great power.’ Its significance became politically visible with the beginning of the French Revolution, and maintained its position for the entirety of the nineteenth century. The century’s politics were largely determined by the press. One can hardly imagine or explain the major historical events between 1800 and 1900 without considering the powerful influence of journalism.” Goebbels continued by declaring “the radio will be for the twentieth century what the press was for the nineteenth century. With the appropriate change, one can apply Napoleon’s phrase to our age, speaking of the radio as the eighth great power.”²⁰

Goebbels berated the leaders of the Weimar Republic, the predecessors to the Nazis, for failing to understand the importance of radio and mass media. They thought that radio was “at best...an easy way to distract the masses from the difficulties of our national and social life...only reluctantly did they think of using radio for political purposes.” In contrast, “the National Socialist revolution, which is modern and intent on action...must change abstract and lifeless methods in the radio.” The Nazi Party intended

¹⁹ Tegel, *Nazis and the Cinema*, pp. 17-18.

²⁰ Joseph Goebbels, “Radio as the Eighth Great Power,” August 18, 1933.

“a principled transformation in the worldview of our entire society, a revolution of the greatest possible extent that will leave nothing out, changing the life of our nation in every regard.”²¹

Goebbels went on to say that the National Socialist revolution

is in fact a modern revolution, and it has used the most modern methods to win and use power. It therefore does not need saying that the government resulting from this revolution cannot ignore the radio and its possibilities. To the contrary, it is resolved to use them to the fullest extent in the work of national construction that is before us, and in ensuring that this revolution can stand the test of history... We live in the age of the masses; the masses rightly demand that they participate in the great events of the day. The radio is the most influential and important intermediary between a spiritual movement and the nation, between the idea and the people... that requires a clearly expressed direction. I have spoken of this often with regards to various areas of our spiritual life. There can be no lack of direction, either with people or with things. The moral value or lack thereof depends not on words, but on content. The direction and the goal always determine whether something is good, useless or even harmful for our people.²²

Goebbels also described the importance of keeping the public up to date on current events and thus involved in society, and stresses the level of organization required to make that happen. A streamlined and straightforward organization of the radio broadcasting department was essential, “for excessive organization can only get in the way of productivity. The more bureaucrats there are, the more obscure the internal structures, the easier it is for someone to hide his inability or incompetence behind some committee or board.”²³ Radio was set to become a mainstream medium through which the Pro-Mi could reach the German people.

In contrast to the private home setting of the radio, film was designed as mass entertainment. Goebbels and Hitler both loved film; Goebbels called it “one of the most

²¹ Goebbels, “Radio as the Eighth Great Power”

²² Goebbels, “Radio as the Eighth Great Power”

²³ Goebbels, “Radio as the Eighth Great Power”

modern and far-reaching media that there is for influencing the masses today.”²⁴ It certainly helped that even during the failing economy at the end of World War I, the German film industry actually expanded and flourished thanks to the support from the military in the sloppy propaganda program Hitler so berated in *Mein Kampf*.²⁵ Though the economic crises of the 1920s and 1930s badly hurt the industry, there was a strong foundation to build upon, as the German film industry was only surpassed by that of Hollywood.²⁶ Film was a means to convey a message to many people at a time, and as cinemas became popular centers of entertainment, Goebbels had a vast new propaganda tool. During the twelve years of the Reich nearly 1,100 films were made, the majority written and filmed as elements of propaganda.²⁷ Under Hitler there was no such thing as a non-political film. The Pro-Mi evaluated scripts, oversaw activities in the studios, and reviewed production carefully to ensure every film followed Nazi Party structures and strategic priorities.²⁸

The Nazis maintained a firm grip on all public media and entertainment. Even areas such as the fine arts were affected; Hitler’s taste in the arts led to the promotion of grand works by composers such as Richard Wagner, Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss, and Anton Bruckner. These spectacular musical works went along with grandiose architectural designs for Nazi rallies, such as the grandstands built in Nuremburg for the 1935 Nazi Party rally that was the backdrop for the film *Triumph of the Will*. In addition

²⁴ Tegel, *Nazis and the Cinema*, p. 18.

²⁵ Tegel, *Nazis and the Cinema*, pp. 23-24.

²⁶ Tegel, *Nazis and the Cinema*, pp. 27-29.

²⁷ Rentschler, Eric, *The Ministry of Illusion*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 2.

²⁸ Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion* p. 8.

to the grand style, the Pro-Mi promoted traditionally favorite composers such as Mozart and Beethoven for their connection to German greatness.²⁹

Just as with other “undesirable” people, the Nazis also actively suppressed artists and composers who did not conform to their ideology. They suppressed the work of jazz musicians who were becoming a hit across Europe and in particular with young Germans. Jazz to the Nazis was the music of undesirable people, that is, African Americans, but the Nazis also singled out Jewish clarinetist Benny Goodman for special criticism.³⁰ The Nazis outlawed jazz music in the mid-1930s in an attempt to eliminate American influence on young Germans. However, BBC radio broadcasts continued giving Germans a way to listen to jazz, so the Nazis created a jazz band of their own. Known as Charlie and His Orchestra, the band played propagandized spin-offs of popular jazz numbers like “Stormy Weather,” “St. Louis Blues,” “Makin’ Whoopee,” and others that had the same tune but sounded quite different:

*Another word, another prophet, another Jewish business trick,
Another season, another reason, for makin’ whoopee.
I love dough, I love gold, the British Empire’s bein’ sold,
We’re in the money, thanks to Frankie, we’re makin’ whoopee.³¹*

These were anti-Anglo-American, pro-Nazi songs, and the band was broadcast on the radio starting in the early 1940s. This gave Germans a legal way to listen to jazz which reached other parts of Europe as well.³²

Goebbels felt that the creation of a Hitler media cult was the greatest accomplishment that the Pro-Mi achieved.³³ He outdid himself in organizing events

²⁹ Horst Bergmeier and Rainer Lotz, *Hitler’s Airwaves* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 140.

³⁰ Bergmeier and Lotz, *Hitler’s Airwaves*, pp. 136-140.

³¹ “Makin’ Whoopie” by Charlie and His Orchestra, 1942.

³² Bergmeier and Lotz, *Hitler’s Airwaves*, pp. 153-158.

³³ David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 86.

following Hitler's rise to the Chancellorship in 1933 to introduce Hitler to the people. He presented Hitler as Germany's future and began the first steps towards deifying him in the eyes of the people. Goebbels' propaganda machine sent that message out, and Hitler did his own part in heightening his image, visiting city after city and becoming as visible as possible. Poetry and songs were written about him, and the propaganda tied everything that was good or improving in German society to him. Figure 1.5 below is a passage taken from a children's textbook published in 1936. A seventeen-year-old soldier in 1944 was only nine when he read this in school. This is just an example of early indoctrination for Nazi youth. The text reads:

Mein Führer! (The child speaks):

I know you well, and love you as I do my father and mother.
I will always be obedient to you as I am to my father and mother.
And when I am bigger, I will help you, as my father and mother do,
And you will be proud of me, as my father and mother are!

Listen, the Führer speaks!

"...We want to be one people, and you, my boys and girls, will become this people. We want this people to be loyal, and you must learn to be loyal. We want this people to be obedient, and you must learn obedience. We want this people to be peace-loving, but also brave, and you must therefore both love peace and be brave. We do not want this people to become weak and soft, but rather hard, and you must learn in your earliest years to be hard. We want this people to love honor, and you should seek honor. We want this people become a proud people once more, and you should learn true pride. We of the older generation will pass away, but Germany will continue to live in you. You will hold our banners firmly in your hands! Heil Germany! Heil!"

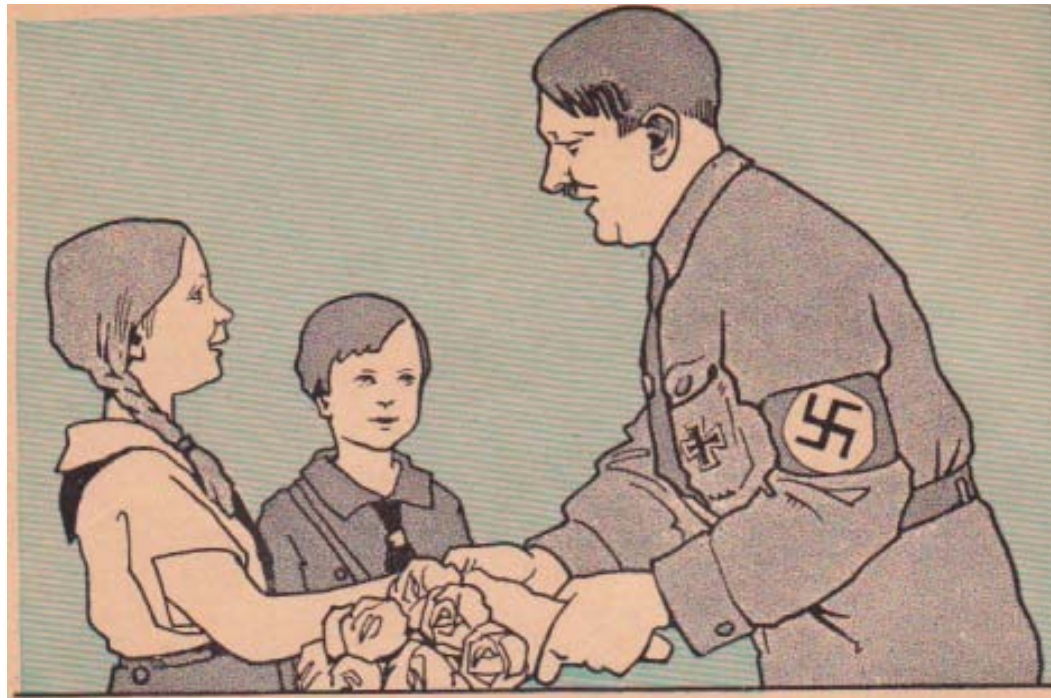


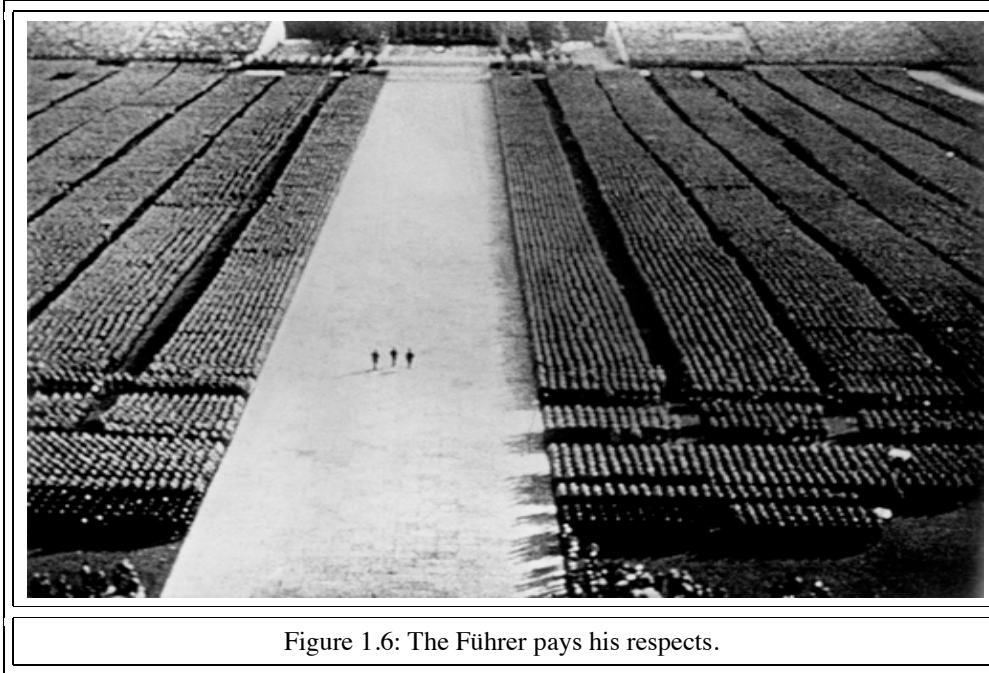
Figure 1.5: Textbook image of children promising loyalty to Hitler.

The lessons children would take from reading a book like this are exactly what Hitler and the Nazis wanted: loyalty and obedience to Hitler and the strength to do what Hitler believed needed to be done. Many young children reading this textbook in 1936 were young soldiers by 1944 and were fanatically loyal to the Führer. This structured indoctrination system allowed the Nazis to begin instilling their ideas in the German population at an early age so as to create a completely loyal and strong population that would always follow Hitler's ideals.

Hitler's name was on every German's lips.³⁴ The Nazi salute of the right arm extended outward and the words "Heil Hitler!" had not only become the official military

³⁴ Kershaw, Ian, *The Hitler Myth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 48-59.

salute, but even replaced traditional public greetings.³⁵ The film *Triumph of the Will* had deified Hitler in 1935,³⁶ and more than any other piece of propaganda, conferred a mystical quality on Hitler.



Arguably the most powerful scene in a film that has many is Hitler's speech at the memorial for the late Paul von Hindenburg, Germany's most famous World War I commander and Hitler's predecessor as the Weimar President. The Führer is surrounded by over a quarter of a million civilians and troops from the Nazi special *Schutz Staffel* ("Shield Squadron," or SS, Hitler's personal bodyguard) and *Sturm Abteilung* ("Storm Troopers," or SA, an earlier paramilitary outfit eventually superseded by the SS). Hitler, flanked by SS commander Heinrich Himmler and SA commander Viktor Lütze, slowly marches towards Hindenburg's memorial and gives the Nazi salute in absolute silence

³⁵ Bytwerk, Randall, *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), p. 79.

³⁶ Tegel, *Nazis and the Cinema*, p. 6.

(see Figure 1.6 above).³⁷ Following the salute, he returns to a pedestal and addresses the crowd.³⁸

Leni Riefenstahl's superb directing showcases this monumental ceremony from camera angles that not only show the sheer size of the crowd, but also make Hitler seem both mortal and superhuman at the same time. At one moment, he is just one tiny human among hundreds of thousands, and then, as he begins speaking, the past is released and Hitler takes the reigns of the future. He displays himself as the great centerpiece of the German identity. This scene captures the sheer unity and power of the German people in a remembrance of the catastrophes of World War I that shifts quickly towards regaining their power through their loyalty to Hitler.

This mingling of the themes of German nationalism and loyalty to Hitler fuses them into one ideology very early in the film, and they remain synonymous throughout the movie. This is summed up nicely at the very end, where Rudolf Hess addresses Hitler personally in front of the Reichstag and foreign representatives declaring "Hitler is Germany just as Germany is Hitler!"³⁹ This is the goal of the overall media cult surrounding the Führer. Goebbels himself notes in his diaries that his greatest personal accomplishment was the creation of that persona, labeled as the "Hitler Myth."⁴⁰ The Hitler Myth essentially was the superhuman image that was created for Hitler by the Pro-Mi. This mythic leader was a miracle worker who could solve any problem, could win any battle, and merit the trust of every German. Germans believed that Hitler had brought them out of the Great Depression. Hitler rebuilt Germany's prestige and armed forces.

³⁷ Image courtesy of <http://www.amoeba.com/dynamic-images/blog/Charles/triumph-will-ceremony.jpg>

³⁸ *Triumph des Willens*, (Riefenstahl 1935).

³⁹ *Triumph des Willens*, (Riefenstahl 1935).

⁴⁰ Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth*, p. 4.

Hitler put Germany back to work and had stopped the terrible Jews, Communists, and Socialists from taking over the government in the declining Weimar Republic. Hitler was the hero of the people and the very symbol of the Third Reich and German prosperity.⁴¹

Many people were captivated by Hitler's charismatic, powerful appearance. A member of the Hitler Youth in Dresden in the mid-1930s once was so proud of himself because Hitler had stroked his blond hair during a recent visit. On the same visit, one woman was taken with Hitler's "beautiful blue eyes."⁴² Hitler's accomplishments in restoring Germany and its infrastructure after its decline following World War I also won him over with many working-class admirers. He brought back jobs to many Germans who had been unemployed for years. One German worker noted later in life that "I didn't find it at all horrible [when Hitler came to power]...it was different then...the bitter poverty...you can't imagine that today...if I were to hear [Hitler's speeches] today, I would say the man was crazy. He wasn't. Not for the people back then."⁴³

Goebbels personally contributed to the Hitler Myth. On April 19, 1937, the day before Hitler's birthday, Goebbels delivered a radio speech entitled "Our Hitler." Randall Bytwerk argues that Goebbels' goal was to "present Hitler as almost a Christ figure, divine (or at least superhuman), yet also human...not presented as an ordinary person, but rather as an historically unprecedented person with near miraculous strengths."⁴⁴ Bytwerk notes that it is difficult to understand how Goebbels' worshipful words about Hitler could be taken seriously and explains that to understand Hitler's appeal to

⁴¹ Eric A. Johnson, *What We Knew* (Cambridge: Basic, 2005), pp. 337-346.

⁴² Johnson, *What We Knew*, pp. 338-339.

⁴³ Johnson, *What We Knew*, p. 340.

⁴⁴ Bytwerk, *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, p. 79.

Germans, the speech must be put into context.⁴⁵ Goebbels' words praised the Führer. He described Hitler's bitter fight to win the nation over to his side, saying he was "the best expert one can imagine" on any field of endeavor from economics to industry to history to military. His memory is perfect and "under his hand, Germany has lifted itself from shame and impotence...the Germany that bears his name will be great and strong...From all the Reich, from all German hearts on every continent in foreign nations and on the wide oceans, the thanks and praise of millions rise united. May he remain to us what he always was and is: Our Hitler!"⁴⁶

The Pro-Mi did not stop with just film and radio. A massive corpus of literature and newspapers was created for Germans of all ages, such as the children's textbook shown in Figure 1.3. Magazines such as Julius Streicher's *Der Stürmer* and Goebbels' own *Das Reich* put propaganda on paper for all of the country to read. Goebbels wrote articles for each issue of *Das Reich*, in which he outlined various issues to the public in true Nazi fashion. In the very first issue, May 23, 1940, as Germany was at war, he wrote that though in World War I Germany was not prepared to fight the war, history "does not repeat itself." Hitler's "brilliant statesmanship" had restored Germany's power and he had "prepared for this historic conflict with care and foresight." Germany had not been "psychologically prepared" for World War I, "the people had no idea why it was fighting, nor what it was fighting for." Now, Germany was "clearly on the attack. It knows how to use the weapon of truth...the German people are fighting with clarity and determination...thus it is no longer possible to use the international atrocity stories that

⁴⁵ Bytwerk, *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, pp. 79-80.

⁴⁶ Bytwerk, *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, p. 80-85.

were so extraordinarily dangerous to the Reich during [World War I].”⁴⁷ What Goebbels accomplished from a propaganda perspective is showing the public that unlike in the previous war, Allied propaganda would not be truthful and would thus be incapable of breaking the will of the German people. Hitler had prepared them for this fight, and victory was in their grasp.

Like *Das Reich*, *Der Stürmer* was an influential magazine for the Pro-Mi. Much of the propaganda was anti-Semitic, such as cartoons of demeaning Jews and denouncing the supposed Jewish conspiracy. In Figure 1.7, entitled “Jewish Congress,” the text reads “Let the Goyim believe that we can be Americans, Englishmen, Germans, or French. When our interests are at stake, we are always Jews, and nothing but.” The most infamous issue of the magazine in 1934 had the headline “Jewish Murder Plan against Gentile Humanity Revealed” (see Figure 1.8) that actually was pulled by the Nazis because it compared Jewish ritual murder with Christian communion. Anti-Semitic propaganda reinforced the Nazi ideology of a “master race,” to which ideally all Germans belonged. In addition, it reinforced Hitler’s notion that Jews were to blame for Germany’s defeat in World War I and accustomed the German people to the intense discrimination of the Jews that would lead directly to the Holocaust.

⁴⁷ Joseph Goebbels, “A Unique Age,” *Das Reich*, May 23, 1940

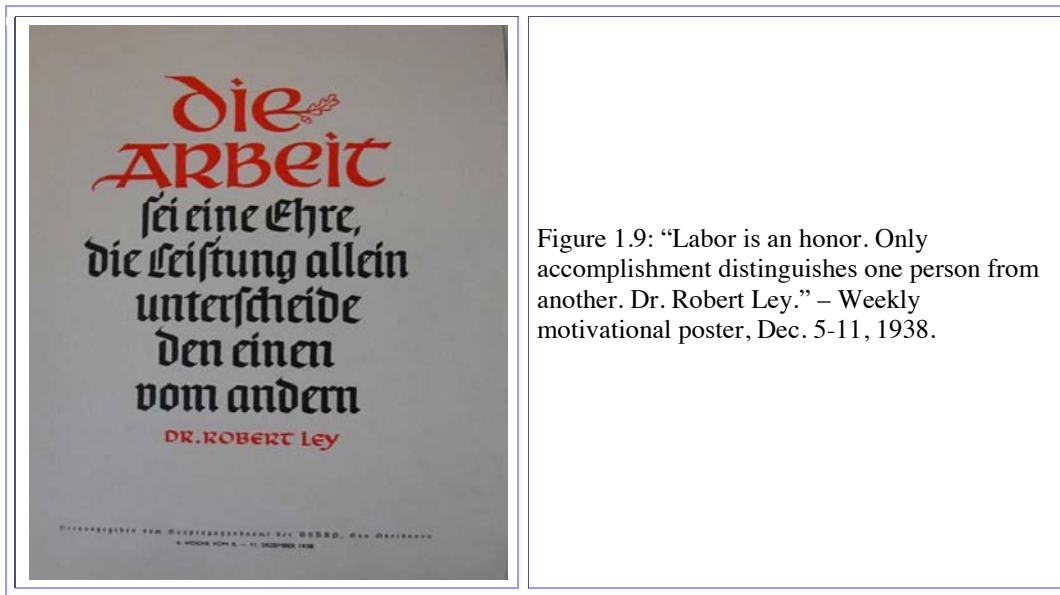


Figure 1.7: “Jewish Congress:” *Der Stürmer*, July 1934 (Issue #34)



Figure 1.8: “Jewish Murder Plan against Gentile Humanity Revealed” Special Issue: May 1934.

Beyond magazines, propaganda was available through pamphlets, newspapers, and even children’s books specially designed for boys or girls of certain ages. They celebrated Nazi Germany and the role of individual Germans in support of the Nazi regime. For instance, in the pamphlet shown in Figure 1.5, a child promised Hitler that he will grow up to do what he must for Germany, while Hitler explains that German children must indeed do that and learn what they must do at a young age. There were also weekly motivational posters with quotes to keep the people’s minds focused on the importance of what the Nazis were saying and, when war broke out, reassured of ultimate victory. Among such posters were quotes such as from Dr. Robert Ley, the head of the German Labor Front (see Figure 1.9), but the Nazis found inspiration for their cause from many sources.



While propaganda was celebrating Hitler and Germany’s rebirth, it quietly prepared the German people for the war to come. In *Triumph of the Will*, Hitler addresses an assembly of German laborers holding shovels as if they were rifles. They speak as a cohesive unit and as one body declaring their support for the Führer. This intimidating scene shows that the German people are united as one behind their Führer. It also subtly indicates that even as these men were rebuilding Germany they also were receiving military-style training and conditioning and could exchange shovels for weapons. At the end of the film, a massive military parade marches down the streets of Nuremberg and each company salutes Hitler as they pass.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ *Triumph des Willens* (Riefenstahl 1935).

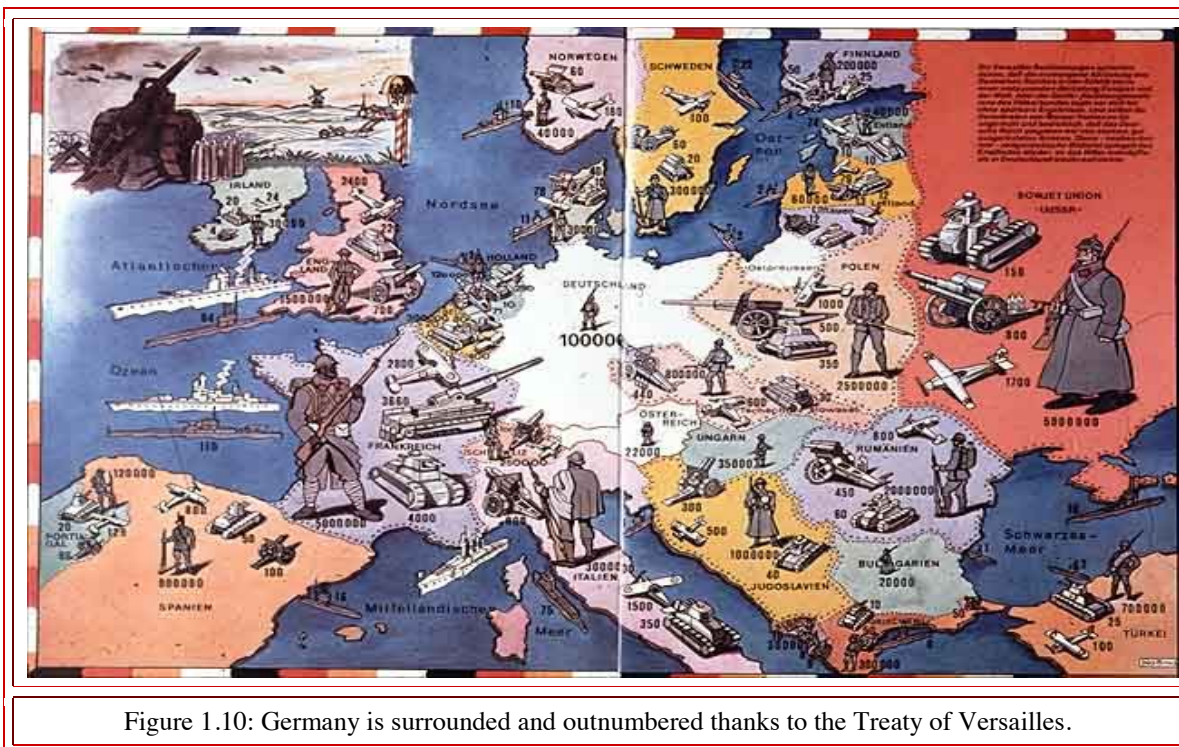


Figure 1.10: Germany is surrounded and outnumbered thanks to the Treaty of Versailles.

Other types of propaganda also portended the likelihood of war. The cartoon above shows the military situation Germany was put into by the Treaty of Versailles: 100,000 German soldiers without any other weapons faced an entire continent full of dangerous armies (see Figure 1.10 above). Other articles and speeches took on a militaristic tone calculated to harden the German people for the struggle to come.

When war broke out, the message of the propaganda changed completely. Before 1939, propaganda praised Hitler, showcased the rebuilding German economy, and quietly prepared the people for war. When war broke out on September 1, 1939, motivational posters featured slogans that reminded the people of their commitment to Germany, such as a message from the Führer, leading by example (see Figure 1.11) or proclaimed messages of victory. All of the pre-war propaganda had worked towards the inevitable war that had now come. The peoples' loyalty was concentrated on Hitler. Industry had

been rebuilt, the military restored. Now, all of German society backed the Nazi Party and the war effort, and it was up to the Pro-Mi to help harden and maintain the resolve of the German people.

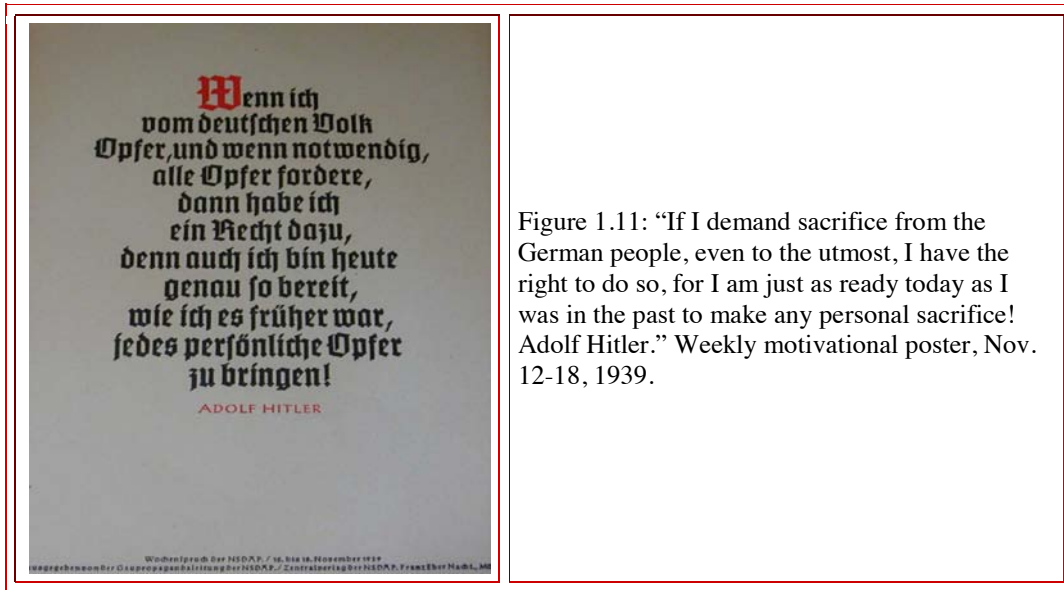


Figure 1.11: “If I demand sacrifice from the German people, even to the utmost, I have the right to do so, for I am just as ready today as I was in the past to make any personal sacrifice! Adolf Hitler.” Weekly motivational poster, Nov. 12-18, 1939.

As the war began, radio broadcasts and speeches were more directed than ever before at focusing the people’s resolve to see the war through. These messages of victory were most appealing during the initial string of German victories across Europe. As nation after nation fell before the advance of the German Wehrmacht, the German people were ecstatic. They finally had regained international power after the disaster of World War I. However, despite the great support of the German people, secured in part through propaganda, there were inconsistencies in Goebbels’ words of victory that Germans started to notice. As early as 1940, with the Reich’s first significant defeat for Germany in the Battle of Britain, German people began to doubt the message of the Nazi party’s propaganda arm.

Chapter Two: Conflict with Reality: 1940-1941

Goebbels' propaganda ministry had an easy time during Hitler's rise to power and the first years of the war. There was a seemingly endless supply of good news to pair with a vast amount of attention on Hitler and his own greatness. With the victories of 1939 and 1940, the German public continued to enjoy Germany's regained power and celebrated the nation's rule over the majority of Europe. However, as the aim of propaganda switched from preparing people for war to maintaining morale during it, the message of the propaganda now faced the actual reality of the struggle. German media reports began to be questioned as early as the Battle of Britain in 1940, both by eyewitness accounts on the front lines as well as German civilians who listened to the BBC broadcasts, which Germany could not censor.¹ Conflicting information from the Nazi-controlled media and the uncensored British airwaves created doubt of the validity of Goebbels' propaganda in German minds, and for the first time in the war, distrust of the Pro-Mi.

Germany's military, spearheaded by its spectacularly successful panzer divisions, ran over Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, and France between April and July 1940. The Allies were completely defeated on land; even if the British managed to evacuate over 300,000 Allied troops from the encircled city of Dunkirk, it did not hide the fact that Hitler had achieved a crushing victory over Germany's old enemies. Goebbels was jubilant: "a victory, such as we could not have imagined in our wildest dreams, is ours. Thanks to the Führer!"²

¹ Bergmeier and Lotz, *Hitler's Airwaves*, pp. 87-88.

² Taylor, Fred, *The Goebbels Diaries 1939-1941*, pp. 122-124.

Now that Britain alone opposed Germany in Europe, Hitler and his generals planned to invade and seize the island nation. This was an ambitious and key operation; should it succeed, the Allies would be totally defeated and no European power could stand against Germany.³ Should Britain manage to resist invasion, however, opposition to Hitler and the Nazis would continue. Two primary problems confronted Germany: first, the complete lack of a ready surface fleet to escort an invasion force. The German *Kriegsmarine* (navy) had suffered major losses in the invasion of Norway and was down to only a few capable surface ships. Without a navy to protect troop transports and supply ships, any German invasion force would be destroyed by the Royal Navy. This led to the second obstacle: the Royal Air Force had to be destroyed so that the German Luftwaffe could cover the fleet from the air and sink any British ships that entered the area. A massive air campaign was fought from June to October 1940 against British targets – the Battle of Britain.

The Pro-Mi took part in the operation as well. The ministry had an ongoing propaganda campaign against the British and Prime Minister Winston Churchill in particular.⁴ Churchill was a favorite target throughout the war (see Figure 2.1), though when attention shifted to the Americans later in the war, Churchill was relegated to the role of President Franklin Roosevelt’s sidekick in Nazi propaganda. The Pro-Mi’s anti-British propaganda noted Britain’s great power, luxury, and influence in the world as opposed to the Germans, who in comparison were “have-nots” (see Figure 2.2.) Figure 2.1 shows Winston Churchill standing on the skulls of England's former allies. The

³ At this time, the Soviet Union was an ally of the Third Reich.

⁴ Willi Boelcke, *Secret Conferences of Dr. Goebbels* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1970), p. 70.

caption: "Churchill and the neutrals: 'There are still not enough vassal peoples dying for England.'"

The pamphlet in Figure 2.2 states that the Germans are poor and are fighting for their liberty as the British sit fat and happy, protected on their island as they send out others to do their bidding. The caption reads "We, the Have-Nots." "46 million Britons control over 40 million square kilometers of land — stolen by brute force in every part of the world! That is more than a quarter of all the inhabitable space on earth! 86 million Germans on the other hand must earn their daily bread from 600,000 square kilometers, and should even have to ask the London plutocratic clique for permission to do that! We, the German 'have-nots' fight for our bread — and what about the British exploiter caste? — They fight for dividends at the cost of the blood of the peoples — but for the last time!"

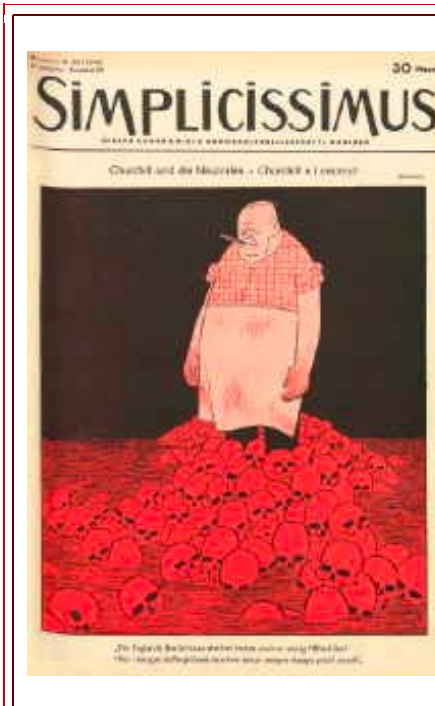


Figure 2.1: "Churchill and the Neutrals" (Spring 1940)



Figure 2.2: "We, the Have-Nots." (1941)

The Pro-Mi proficiently manufactured propaganda based on stereotypes, with which it conveyed both correct and false information to the German people. It regularly portrayed Churchill as fat and seemingly drunk, with a cigar in his mouth or nearby. That Churchill did in fact enjoy his smoking and alcohol combined with his continued resistance to Hitler in the face of utter destruction to make him appear egotistical and maniacal in the propaganda against him. He's munching on a cigar in Figure 2.1, and below in Figure 2.3 he receives a bill from Death for taking a "Holiday" of binge drinking. The empty bottles are labeled Poland, Norway, Belgium, Holland, and England, indicating countries that Churchill had drained of life in the fight against the Nazis.

Attacking the leaders of an opposition group was one tactic, but the Pro-Mi also regularly attacked the British for being wealthy imperial rulers, who had controlled the largest empire in the world for centuries now, and whose military was largely composed of conscripts and volunteers from their various colonies, such as India, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. In Figure 2.4 below, the Pro-Mi attacks both the staunch resistance of Churchill to Hitler's regime as well as the vast, luxurious British Empire in the face of unrelenting aerial attack. The caption of this cartoon is "Philosophy of a Madman" and reads "Our empire is so large that it hardly matters if a small island burns down." The "small island," of course, is Great Britain.



Figure 2.3: Death bills Churchill for his “Holiday” (1940)

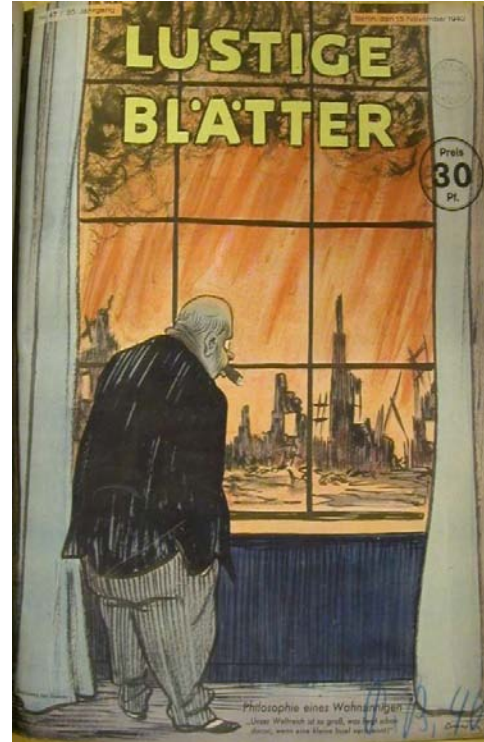


Figure 2.4: “Philosophy of a Madman” (1940)

The British were not the only object of stereotypical propaganda. The Pro-Mi similarly attacked the Jews and later Russians and Americans. The propaganda campaign against the Jews portrayed them as animals, as grizzly, shadowy monsters, or as filthy creatures that were interested only in money and power and making tools and slaves of the German people. The British and Churchill, as mentioned, were pilloried for their great imperial power, sloth, arrogance, indifference, and eagerness to exploit their subjects to achieve their goals and then casting them aside when the subjects had outlived their usefulness. To put it bluntly, Goebbels noted in his diaries in 1942 that “the English seem to me to be rather constipated.”⁵ The Russians were portrayed in stereotypes as well: the supposed inferiority of Russia in comparison to Germany, their Communist rulers, and

⁵ Louis P. Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries 1942-1943* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1948), p. 100.

the stench of the Jews in pulling the Soviets' strings. In fact, Russians would be known as "Jewish-Bolsheviks" in the Pro-Mi's campaign against them. The Americans, like the British, were denigrated for their wealth, laziness, arrogance, and disregard for the lower class and allies.⁶

Besides attacking the British people and their leader, the ministry also continuously denounced Allied propaganda as lies. Before World War II began, Germans were allowed to listen to foreign radio broadcasts. This was banned once the war began on September 1, 1939. By the end of the war people could be executed for listening to foreign radio stations, that is, those not under German control in any way. Germans could still listen to French, Belgian, and other stations because the Reich had control of those countries.⁷

In Figure 2.5 below, a Marxist-looking announcer broadcasts from London, Moscow, and other enemy states, while a German listens in the darkness, trying to conceal his traitorous crime. The propaganda campaign included a war of statistics as well. In Figure 2.6, entitled "Churchill's False Figures," the caption reads "He (Churchill) recently gave the following 'report' on his war, claiming that total British losses through October 1940 were 21,867 men, and 1,170 in German POW camps. The truth, however is that at that point German POW camps held 1,550 British officers, and 35,500 NCOs and soldiers, or a total of 37,050 English prisoners. That shows the nature of Churchill's 'truths.'"

⁶ The campaigns against the Russians and Americans will be discussed in depth in Chapters Three and Four.

⁷ Derrick Sington and Arthur Weidenfeld, *The Goebbels Experiment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943), pp. 145-148.

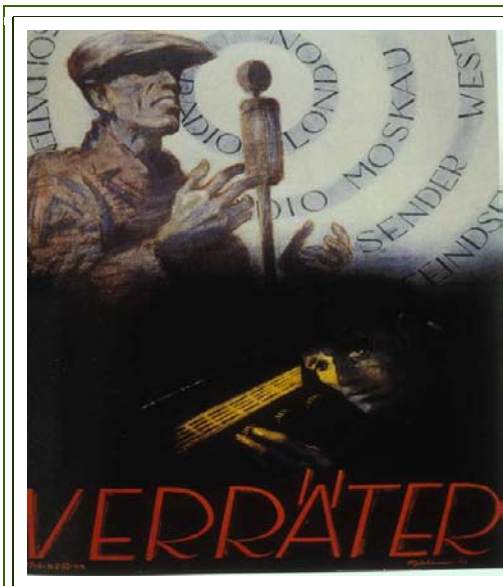


Figure 2.5: “Traitor!”



Figure 2.6: “Churchill’s False Figures”

As the fight raged in the skies over England, German reports of aircraft kills and losses were continually rebutted by the BBC; far more often than not the Luftwaffe had lost more planes than it had destroyed, but the Pro-Mi reported the contrary as its British counterparts gave a much more accurate picture.⁸ This did not keep the Pro-Mi from claiming otherwise. Goebbels noted that, unlike army battles, air battles could be reported either way due to the confusion in aerial combat. For instance, on August 9, 1940, the Germans reported 49 British planes destroyed to 10 German, though the BBC gave the day’s numbers at 53 German planes destroyed to just 16 British. The latter figures were difficult to disprove since they were usually accurate, and the Pro-Mi’s only alternative was to step up their claims of enemy “lies.”⁹

Goebbels actually notes similar bits of information in his own diaries: on October 10, “our Luftwaffe’s losses have been greatly exaggerated...kill ratios 16:3...London sat

⁸ Kershaw *How Effective Was Nazi Propaganda?* pp. 195-196.

⁹ Boelcke, *Secret Conferences of Dr. Goebbels*, pp. 74-75.

in its air raid shelters for 11 ½ hours last night,”¹⁰ while on October 16 he wrote “London attacked in the night and again during the day...kill ratio 6:1.”¹¹ These entries raise the question how much data Goebbels actually had access to, since the RAF obviously held its own over England. Then again, Goebbels’ diaries are the “propaganda minister’s propaganda for propaganda,” and must be taken with a grain of salt. Goebbels wrote three days earlier on October 7 that English bombing raids on German military targets that they claimed as successful had actually damaged “almost all dummy installations.”¹² It is hard to imagine that the Germans had many or any dummy installations set up, so this appears to be a piece of propaganda imbedded in the diaries themselves. Goebbels berated the British for their “laughable” propaganda attempts throughout his diaries.¹³

Besides its anti-British propaganda during the Battle of Britain, the Pro-Mi also issued a large number of flyers in support of the operation. During the first three years of the war, the Pro-Mi issued a series of twelve booklets that commented on different aspects of the war. In the eighth print, “Bombs over England” (see Figure 2.7), the Pro-MI printed a number of articles on the Battle of Britain from a German pilot’s perspective. These were stories of heroism, danger, and success after success. There was nothing to indicate the Germans were failing to destroy British defenses.

¹⁰ Taylor, *The Goebbels Diaries 1939-1941*, pp. 136-137.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

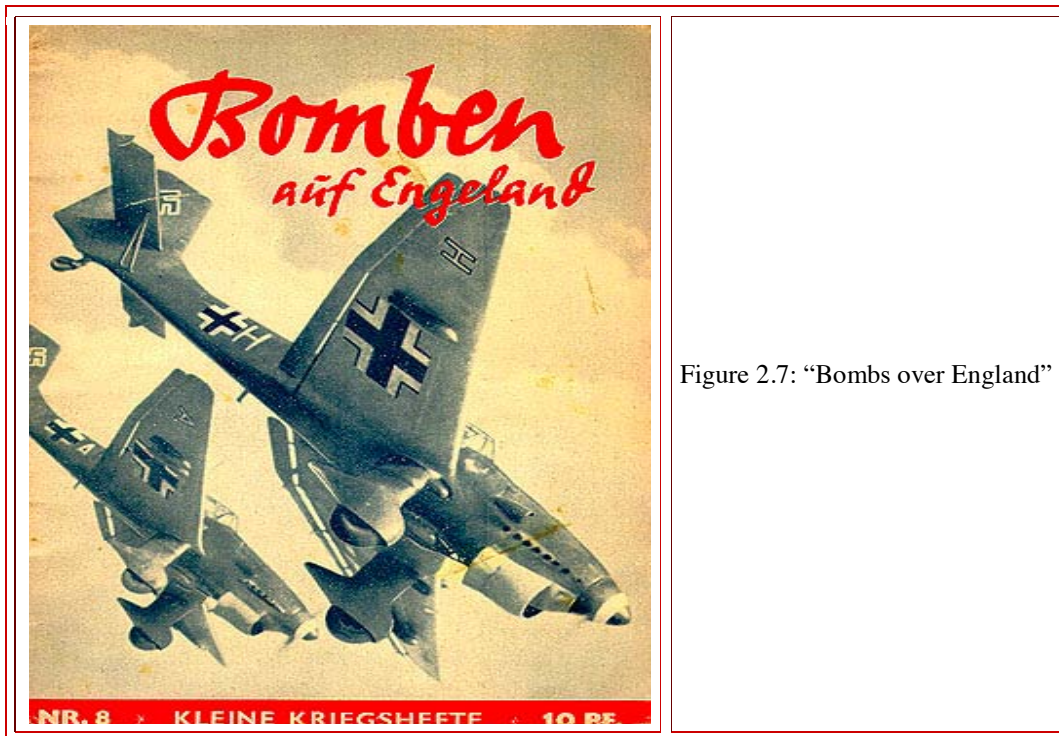


Figure 2.7: "Bombs over England"

Though discouraged from doing so under the threat of arrest and execution, the German people listened to the BBC and some noted that eyewitnesses to the battle were often agreeing with the BBC information rather than the data issued by the Nazi Party. In addition to the numbers, Luftwaffe commander Hermann Göring's boast that the Allies would never bomb Germany was soon proven wrong, as British planes started bombing German targets in night missions as early as 1940. Though the public celebrated the bombing of London and other British targets, the German attacks did not seem to be accomplishing anything. Goebbels noted on October 1, 1940, in his diaries that children were being evacuated from Berlin and other German cities, which made mothers "nervous, and that is a bad sign." Goebbels confidently stated that "I shall soon make up for the lost ground."¹⁴ He never lost faith in himself, and conceivably his ego impeded his job performance, if not this early, certainly later. Seeds of mistrust began to stir in the

¹⁴ Taylor, *The Goebbels Diaries 1939-1941*, pp. 125-126.

population, which would never fully be suppressed. In addition, following large numbers of aircraft losses and the failure to destroy the Royal Air Force, on October 12, 1940, Hitler canceled the planned invasion of England, further hurting public morale and making an already thorny situation even more difficult for the Pro-Mi.¹⁵

Looking back on Hitler's own words in *Mein Kampf*, it is easy to see why the propaganda was having problems. Hitler had written blueprints for how the propaganda should be manufactured and utilized, and attention must be drawn to one particular paragraph once again: "all propaganda must be popular and its intellectual level must be adjusted to the most limited intelligence among those it is addressed to...to influence a whole people, we must avoid excessive intellectual demands on our public, and too much caution cannot be exerted in this direction." Public receptivity "is very limited, their intelligence is small. But their power of forgetting is enormous."¹⁶ Hitler particularly emphasized that propaganda must persistently repeat only a few main points with no half-statements.

The Pro-Mi largely was keeping to this doctrine but was issuing information that was contradicted by actual battlefield data. The inability to silence the BBC only further hurt their cause here, as the British information largely was correct information and often directly countered what the Germans were saying. Weaknesses can be seen in this doctrine as well: despite Hitler's notions of public gullibility, the German people were smart enough to figure out when they were being fed false information.¹⁷

In addition, the simple broadcasting of dubious information went directly against Hitler's own doctrines. He had seen false information work for the Allies in World War I.

¹⁵ Marlis Steinert, *Hitler's War and the Germans* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977), pp. 83-85.

¹⁶ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 180-181.

¹⁷ Boelcke, *Secret Conferences of Dr. Goebbels*, p. 74.

No matter what the Germans threw at the Allies in that war, it affirmed to the Allied soldiers what their propaganda had said about the Germans. This proved not to be the case in World War II. The British were not in fact lazy, fat, and drunk; they defended their homeland with such determination that Hitler called off the invasion of Britain. Stereotypical propaganda worked against the Germans for the first time in this case. Because of the favorable military situation, these weaknesses were only minor in 1940 and 1941. At some point, however, the right blow would shatter the system.

Germany enjoyed many military successes between October 12, 1940, and June 21, 1941, including the seizure of the Balkans, the initial victories against the British in North Africa, and the constant bombing of London and other British cities during “the Blitz.” The Pro-Mi put forth a great deal of supporting material for these operations, including another booklet entitled “Fighting England in North Africa!” (see Figure 2.8) that included soldiers’ perspectives on the battle across the desert. Although the RAF had defended its homeland well, pamphlets like these proved that the Germans still had the upper hand against the British on land. In Africa, the Pro-Mi made a hero out of General Erwin Rommel as his Afrika Korps drove the British across the desert.

Another remarkable book (see Figure 2.9) entitled “That is Victory! Letters of Faith in New Times and War” was a 205-page collection of letters written to the book’s editor, Günter d’Alquen. The editor had written to various people asking them to say what Hitler meant to them. Over 120,000 copies were published by 1941. The responses paint an astounding picture of an almost religious devotion to the Führer. The respondents saw Hitler as Goebbels described him in the “Our Hitler” speech described in Chapter One. One wrote on April 20, Hitler’s birthday, that “you live and are the law.

You are love and strength. My heart is full of thoughts about you this day, too full to express the wishes of many and their thanks to you. You are freedom, for you gave duty its meaning that gives significance, joy, and strength to all our work. You took the curse of sweat and toil from this people, a people that today like me stands in modest stillness with you.” Another loyal German wrote “until my 30th year, my father was the center of my life.... His death in 1930 left a terrible void. Suddenly all that guided my thinking and my efforts — suddenly the center was no longer there....There is not enough space to describe how the Führer came to fill this place in me”¹⁸ After the vast success of the German military and the restoration of German power, Hitler enjoyed the greatest support he had ever had while in power. At this point in the war, aside from the failed invasion attempt of Britain, Germany seemed unstoppable.



Figure 2.8: “Fighting England in North Africa!”



Figure 2.9: The cover to *That is Victory! Letters of Faith in New Times and War*

¹⁸ Günter d’Alquen, *Das ist der Sieg! Briefe des Glaubens in Aufbruch und Krieg* (Berlin: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1941).

The German Army High Command also aided the Pro-Mi by producing a few propaganda films of its own, most notably *Sieg im Westen*, or *Victory in the West*, in 1941. The film chronicled the 1940 victories of the German army in France, claiming that the force of arms was required because Europe would not let Germans live in peace; it highlighted the Wehrmacht's audacious offensive undertaken against the French and showed victory after victory against the outmaneuvered French army. The film was produced as a documentary of the campaign and was one of the greatest German films produced during the war.¹⁹

Despite the great success and intense media coverage of the combat operations in the Balkans and Africa, those victories did not garner the same enthusiasm as the earlier victory in France. Though everyone was proud of the German soldiers for their victories, it was more difficult for propaganda to justify the operations. Hatred of England was waning and Germany already had, after all, achieved control of all of Western Europe. The Germans were beginning to have enough of war. Anger was shifting towards Italy, whose military struggles had drawn German forces into the Balkans and Africa in the first place.²⁰ Goebbels himself was angry at Germany's allies: "Italy has done us a lot of damage by her constant defeats. Without those...Gibraltar would be in our hands...we would have been able to enforce our will effortlessly on the Middle East...the fact that this is wishful thinking is something we have to thank our allies for."²¹

This incipient dissatisfaction among the German public would likely have been greatly exacerbated in 1941 with the defection of high-ranking Nazi Rudolf Hess to Britain, but luckily for the Propaganda Ministry, the BBC failed to capitalize on the

¹⁹ *Sieg im Westen* (Hippler 1941).

²⁰ Steinert, *Hitler's War and the Germans*, pp. 95-97.

²¹ Taylor, *The Goebbels Diaries 1939-1941*, pp. 355-356.

opportunity. Goebbels noted that the British boasted about Hess's defection but was relieved that they never made it much more than that. Goebbels states that "Churchill has little to say about the real motives [behind Hess's defection]," which meant that the Pro-Mi and Hitler himself could counter the British reports by claiming of Hess was suffering from delusions and mental issues.²² A potentially devastating propaganda blow was never landed by the British media.²³ Hitler solved the problem by issuing a speech on May 12, 1941, describing Hess's "delusions" and "mental disorders." The populace assumed Hess was a traitor, which benefitted the Nazi Party and caused a wave of support and sympathy for Hitler.²⁴

This was an interesting time for Germany. Despite all its successes across Europe, the British remained a constant thorn in Germany's side. However, the German public was generally happy with their situation: they had regained the power and respect lost in the disaster of World War I, and most of Europe was under their control. The German military was unstoppable on the ground, as the public was repeatedly assured. One motivational poster from May 1941 displayed the Führer's message that *Wo der Deutsche Soldat Steht/kommt kein Anderer hin* or "Where the German Soldier Stands/No One May Enter" (see Figure 2.10). Aside from minor problems in the propaganda war, there was little for the German public to fear.

²² Taylor, *The Goebbels Diaries 1939-1941*, p. 364.

²³ Taylor, *The Goebbels Diaries 1939-1941*, pp. 363-371.

²⁴ Steinert, *Hitler's War and the Germans*, p. 99.

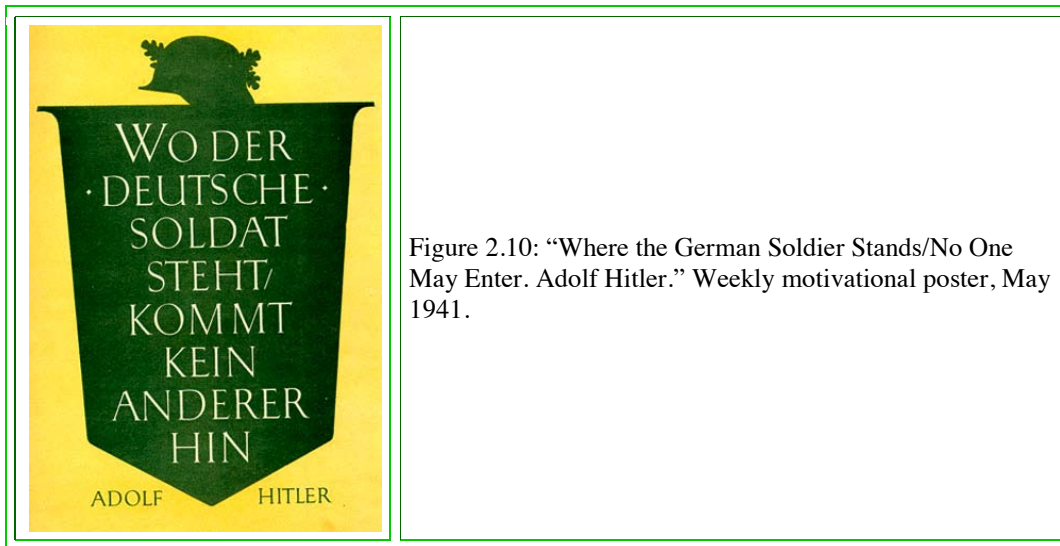


Figure 2.10: “Where the German Soldier Stands/No One May Enter. Adolf Hitler.” Weekly motivational poster, May 1941.

Germans were becoming nervous about the Soviet Union. Soviet-German relations had become increasingly sour since mid-1940, and Soviet troop movements worried people in the eastern German provinces. Reich Finance Minister Schwerin von Krosigk warned Hermann Göring: “Don’t you believe that we are expecting too much from this willing, loyal, and trusting Volk if this treaty with Russia, once celebrated...as the greatest guarantee of victory, as the greatest political achievement, as the security against English blockade plans...is perverted? I fear that most people will not be equal to so severe a task.” Krosigk also noted the already visible signs of overstressed labor supply, food supply, and noticeable signs of fatigue in the population.²⁵ His warning was seemingly ignored, however. The populace’s mood went from anxiety about the Soviet Union to expectance of another combat operation as 75 percent of the German army, including over 3 million troops and almost 3,400 tanks, gathered in East Prussia.²⁶

²⁵ Steinert, *Hitler’s War and the Germans*, pp. 97-98.

²⁶ Steinert, *Hitler’s War and the Germans*, p. 102.

Chapter Three: Propaganda and the Eastern Front: 1941-1943

The conflict between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany beginning on June 21, 1941, was among the most horrific and savage struggles in World War II. Hitler had described his intentions for the Soviet Union in *Mein Kampf*: it would become *Lebensraum* (living space) with the Slavic population reduced to slavery. Months before the initial invasion by the Wehrmacht (Operation Barbarossa), it was clear how the battle would be fought. In March 1941, Hitler informed his generals that the war against the Soviet Union “will be such that it cannot be conducted in a knightly fashion; the struggle is one of ideologies and racial differences and will have to be conducted with unprecedented, unmerciful and unrelenting harshness.”¹

The propaganda that accompanied the campaign too was unmerciful to the Russian people, Stalin, and the Communist Party. The Russians lacked the same scale of mass media support that the Pro-Mi enjoyed, but, as with the Battle of Britain, Nazi propaganda was shown to be very susceptible to refutation. Like the initial invasion itself, propaganda succeeded early on but faltered as soon as real reports of the situation on the Eastern Front came to light. Following the disaster at Stalingrad in February 1943, propaganda suffered a massive loss of credibility. The Pro-Mi had to adapt to the new circumstances, and these efforts succeeded.

Before June 21, 1941, there was not much propaganda circulating in Germany regarding the Soviet Union; the two countries had signed a nonaggression treaty, the Molotov-Rippentrop Pact, in August 1939. However, Wolfram Wette points out that for Germany, preparatory propaganda was unnecessary, as the German population already had general stereotypes of the Russians in their minds. The Pro-Mi had an easy time

¹ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, p. 199.

developing war propaganda against the Russians, largely because German political and social elites had long characterized the Soviet Union in a negative light. Wette identifies several categories of German perceptions of the Soviet Union – cultural, nationalistic/imperialistic, communist, social democratic, and racist, all of which had existed long before Hitler came to power.²

Culturally, a small but well-educated portion of the German population admired Russian writers such as Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy. However, World War I had shut off a great deal of the cultural exchange between the two nations, and the rise of communism was seen as a great political threat to the German bourgeoisie. Those Germans who still thought of Russia only in terms of its intellectual accomplishments were not a very powerful political group and thus had little influence on what the majority of Germans felt about Russia.³ The rise of Bolshevism in Russia saw a mixed reaction by German politicians. While members of the German Communist Party thought of Russia as a peaceful power, the more powerful factions in German politics such as the Social Democratic Party, or SPD, thought of the new Soviet Union an autocratic system in direct conflict with democratic ideals.⁴

Once the Nazis came to power, their views of nationalism, imperialism, and racism pervaded in the German political leadership, and these views of Russia were the most negative of all. German nationalists now saw the Soviet Union as a “colossus with feet of clay,” appearing strong but structurally weak. A second, more aggressive opinion was held by imperialists, such as the Pan-German League and the Nazi Party itself, who believed that Germany should “strive towards the east” and prepare for an “inevitable”

² Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth and Reality*, pp. 1-8.

³ Ibid. pp. 1-8.

⁴ Ibid. pp. 8-11.

struggle between the Slavic and Germanic peoples. This opinion was prevalent as early as 1912 or 1913, and only reinforced by Germany's success against Russia in World War I. The perception was highly supported because it was largely held by influential and powerful figures in the German leadership but more importantly because the imperialist view was greatly motivated by an underlying racism among the Germans. Germans believed they were superior to Slavic peoples in everything from intellectualism to war, even before Hitler came to power. World War I bolstered such views, as the Germans decisively defeated the Russians on the Eastern Front. Furthermore, the Germans believed they were entitled to take control of the Slavic lands and exploit them economically.⁵

The Nazi Party took these existing opinions a step further. Hitler portrayed the Soviet Union as dominated by "Jewish Bolshevism," combining the two most hated enemies of Nazi ideology into one general term to describe the Russians. Under his rule, racism took center stage in the overall view of the Soviet Union. Hitler believed the Germans were racially superior to Slavs and Jews, both classified as racially inferior *Untermenschen* (subhumans). Hitler's goals for the Soviet Union were to eliminate the Jews and seize *Lebensraum* for the German people. His view took the negative elements of every previous belief and combined them into one portrait of the Soviet Union, and did so in a way that could be adapted to specific tactical needs.⁶ The USSR was depicted as a backward country run by corrupt leaders and populated by subhumans who were intellectually, militarily, and most importantly, genetically inferior to Germans. The devastation, the ruined cities, and savage resistance by Russians were all linked to

⁵ Ibid. pp. 11-14.

⁶ Ibid. pp. 14-17.

Hitler's view. Hitler had observed in *Mein Kampf* that World War I propaganda had been compelling for the Allies no matter what the Germans did; he hoped to achieve the same effect on German soldiers in his own propaganda against the Russians.

When Hitler gained power he cut off military exercises with the Red Army that the previous administration had instituted in the late 1920s. This had two major effects on the Wehrmacht. The first was regret on the part of some high-ranking German officers, who had come to respect a "healthy militarism" in the Red Army and a great combat spirit in its men despite their inferior equipment. This was largely forgotten between 1933 and 1941, particularly after Stalin purged the high-ranking members of the Red Army. The lack of senior officers in the Russian Army as well the paucity of information about the Red Army led German officers to fall back on old beliefs, which suited Hitler's ideological goals. The old stereotype was curiously effective: in 1933, Colonel Walther von Reichenau lamented the loss of contact with the Red Army and the end of any chance of creating "German-Soviet friendship." Yet by 1941, Reichenau was a staunch proponent of Hitler's ideology in the German army on the eve of the invasion of the Soviet Union.⁷

Goebbels described the guidelines for anti-Russian propaganda in a diary entry on June 5, 1941. "No anti-socialism, no return to Czarism, no open admission that the country will be divided up...against Stalin and his Jewish masters, land for the peasants...strong indictment of Bolshevism, attack failure in all fields. And otherwise do what the situation demands."⁸ The propaganda campaign to come followed these guidelines closely once military operation began. For the first time during the war,

⁷ Ibid. pp. 17-21.

⁸ Taylor, *The Goebbels Diaries 1939-1941*, p. 396.

ideological differences were a driving force in German propaganda; the Nazis had few ideological problems with the British or French. Ideology now proved to be a very effective wartime tool for the Pro-Mi.⁹

Hitler played a key role in the distribution of the initial anti-Russian propaganda for the campaign, especially with his March 1941 speech to the Wehrmacht field commanders. His commanders received his comments of an upcoming harsh campaign quite well, and then passed the message down to the troops involved. Two of them in particular, Field Marshal Walther von Reichenau of the Sixth Army and General Erich von Manstein of the Eleventh Army, relayed general orders to their troops, essentially repeating Hitler's words. Reichenau's order stated that the most important goal of the campaign against "the Jewish-Bolshevik system" was "the complete smashing of its means and power and the eradication of Asiatic influences in the European cultural sphere...the [German] soldier in the East is...a carrier of an inexorable racial idea and the avenger of all the bestialities that have been inflicted on the Germans and related peoples." Therefore, the German soldier "must have complete understanding for the necessity of the severe but justified atonement of Jewish subhumanity."¹⁰ Manstein's order echoed Reichenau's, and curiously he used the same phrase "harsh atonement" against "Judaism, which is the spiritual carrier of the Bolshevik terror."¹¹ Other commanders urged their troops to be harsh and merciless and argued that compassion and weakness were out of place in the campaign. Hitler made a very telling remark to

⁹ Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda*, p. 100.

¹⁰ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten* p. 199.

¹¹ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten* p. 199.

Goebbels on June 16, 1941, five days prior to the invasion. “Whether right or wrong, we must win,” he said, “And when we have won, who will ask us about the method?”¹²

The Pro-Mi printed 200,000 pamphlets for the troops on June 18, 1941, to be passed out on the day of the invasion. Four days before that, Hitler held a final meeting with his commanders. He emphasized that the troops must realize that the battle was against Bolshevism; should the war be lost, Europe would fall to the Bolsheviks, and thus the operation was for the salvation of Europe. He reassured the commanders that the Red Army, though superior in numbers, was inferior in quality and “would be smoothly rolled up.” Goebbels estimated that Bolshevism would “collapse like a deck of cards.”¹³

Just hours after Hitler launched the invasion of the Soviet Union, he justified his actions in a speech before the German people, stating that though Germany had never tried to impose National Socialism on Russia, the Bolsheviks routinely tried to force their rule onto Europe, with nothing but chaos and starvation to show for it. Now, Britain was trying to restore relations with the Soviet Union and surround Germany as it had in World War I, and the Soviet Union had begun making unfair demands of Germany, which Hitler had not agreed to. In response, Hitler said he could “no longer keep silent” and that “an attack unprecedented in the history of the world in its extent and size has begun.” With Finnish and Romanian support, “this front is no longer the protection of individual nations, but rather the safety of Europe and thus the salvation of everyone.”¹⁴

Goebbels’ diaries noted the tension leading up to the operation. In the early hours of June 22, he recorded everything that happened that evening and in the morning. He seemed incredibly excited and determined, and he described Hitler in the same manner.

¹² Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1936-45: Nemesis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), p 341.

¹³ Kershaw, *Hitler: 1936-45: Nemesis*, pp. 384-385.

¹⁴ Adolf Hitler, “Proclamation of June 22, 1941.”

In the following days, the Russian losses at the hands of the Wehrmacht pleased him: “Military developments in the East are excellent beyond all our expectations. Our new weapons are carrying all before them.”¹⁵

The Pro-Mi and the Wehrmacht used propaganda to further create support for the campaign among the population and troops. It hammered stereotypical images of the Russians and of Stalin and the rest of the communist party into the minds of the German soldiers, focusing on Russian “subhumanity” and inferiority in life as well as in combat. Ian Kershaw noted that Hitler had wanted this war since the 1920s, and it would have gone forward whether Britain had been defeated or not. True Nazi believers were fighting to cleanse the Soviet Union of “Jewish-Bolshevism” and the rest of the army would follow suit in the most destructive part of the war.¹⁶

Goebbels described the Pro-Mi’s task as presenting to the German public and military views of Soviet corruption and inhumane conditions – “this system where Jews, capitalists and Bolsheviks work hand in glove has created a quite inconceivable degree of human depravity.”¹⁷ Two examples (Figures 3.1 and 3.2) are weekly posters, the first put up just over a month following the start of the invasion and aimed at both the civilian population and particularly the troops; the second is from two weeks later.

¹⁵ Taylor, *The Goebbels Diaries 1939-1941*, pp. 420-426.

¹⁶ Kershaw, *Hitler: 1936-45: Nemesis*, pp. 388-389.

¹⁷ Boelcke, *Secret Conferences of Dr. Goebbels*, p. 177.



Figure 3.1: Motivational poster July 27-August 2, 1941.



Figure 3.2: “One Who Should Know...” (September 10, 1941)

Figure 3.1’s caption reads “You bear the banners and standards, and are the guarantee that Europe will be liberated from Bolshevism,” while Figure 3.2, entitled “One Who Should Know...” cites the former Soviet ambassador to Bulgaria, who accuses Stalin of every manner of crime: “The warmongers and Jewish lackeys Roosevelt and Churchill have shamelessly promised all of Europe to this ‘organizer of starvation,’ this inhuman oppressor, who has on his hands the blood of millions who have starved or been brutally butchered!! The German military will put an end to Stalin. And it will not forget his plutocratic patrons and pimps!”

By December, the Soviets had been rapidly driven back. The Wehrmacht was making spectacular territorial gains destruction of enemy forces, so astounding that even Goebbels himself at first refused to believe they were accurate.¹⁸ The poster in Figure 3.1

¹⁸ Kershaw, *Hitler: 1936-45: Nemesis*, pp. 398-399.

Here the Soviet army was defeated. In seven battles of annihilation (Bialystock-Minsk, Smolensk, Uman, Gomel, Kiev, on the Faso Sea, and Brjansk-Wjasma), the Soviet Union lost its best armies and the greater part of its tanks and artillery.... Their plan was for thousands of tanks to flood over the Weichsel River toward Central Germany, then further to the West. There they would join troops from the Lemberg area, where there were also substantial attack forces prepared to give Germany the deathblow. That would have plunged Europe into unimaginable chaos, from which there could have been no escape.¹⁹

This caption certainly paints an optimistic picture for the Wehrmacht and a dismal one for the Russians. It also points to the great duty the Germans were performing for the inhabitants of Western Europe – saving it from Jewish Bolshevism. This helped German morale at home and gave the war on the Eastern Front a sense of purpose.

German soldiers wrote home regarding the sorry state of the Soviet Union. Many echoed Hitler's comments on the starvation and chaos of the Bolshevik regime. One soldier, a Corporal W.F., wrote that "a complete destruction [of Bolshevism] is...required, for if these bestial hordes of soldiers were to fall upon Germany all would be gone that is German."²⁰ A Private F. exclaimed that "Adolf and I are marching against our great enemy Russia. Consequently, one of my wishes has been fulfilled, as I was gladly drawn into this blasphemous country...you see evidence of Jewish, Bolshevik cruelties which I can hardly believe possible...if until now I have taken the declarations of the government rather skeptically and critically, so today I can actually acknowledge the truth of these reports totally."²¹

The cover of the *Signal* magazine's December 1941 issue (see Figure 3.3) is entitled "Decision in the East," suggesting that the Soviet Union was finished, as many Germans believed this was true.

¹⁹ *Signal* magazine, December 1941 issue.

²⁰ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, p. 196.

²¹ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, p. 196.

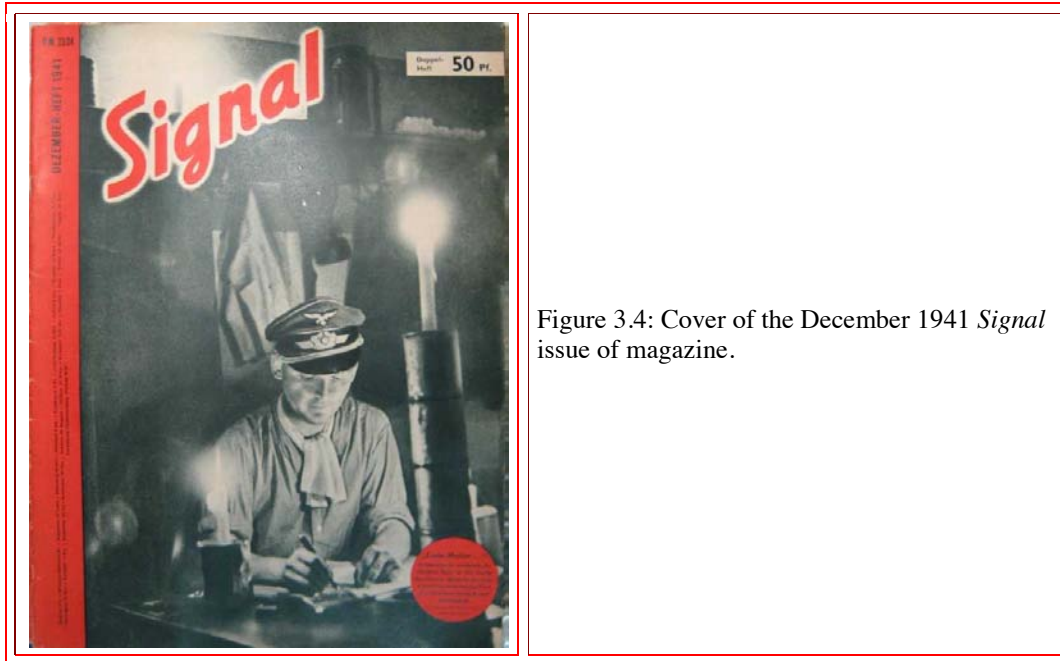
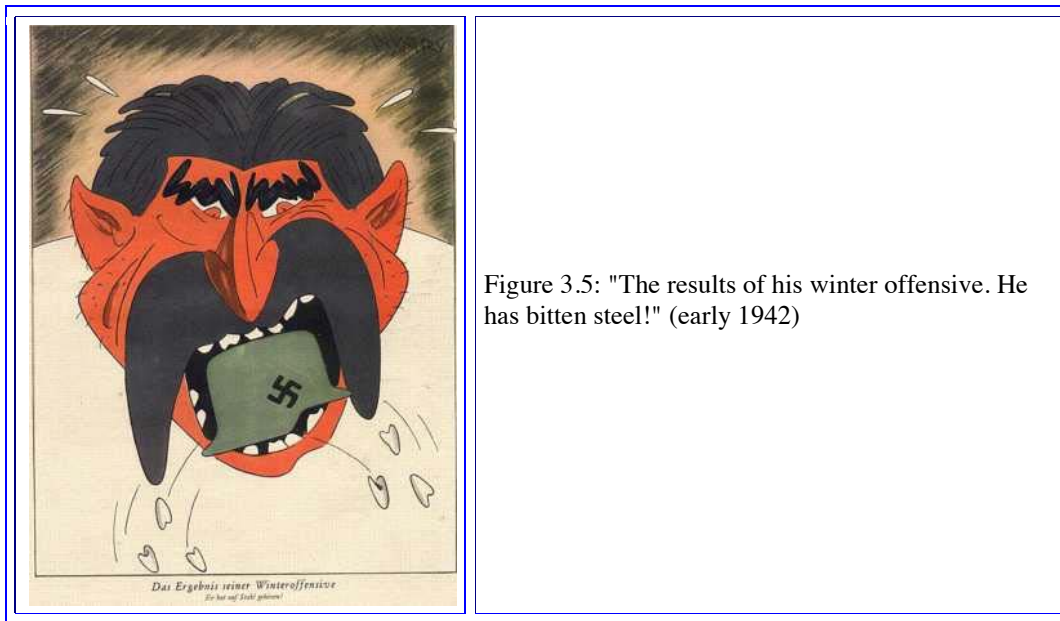


Figure 3.4: Cover of the December 1941 *Signal* issue of magazine.

The cover shows a German officer writing to his mother from the Eastern Front. There is considerable coverage of the Russian campaign. One article claims that Hitler is much greater than Napoleon. Inside, there are further articles on glass blowing, dancing, and a new film. All of this calm coverage and victorious announcements point to an expected quick end of the fighting.

German hopes for an easy victory suffered a setback in December 1941. The Russian winter had set in early, and German forces had advanced so far so fast that their supply lines were badly overextended. The deteriorating road network combined with mechanical failures and shortages of fuel and ammunition increasingly hindered the German advance. To compound the problem, just as German panzers were in sight of Moscow, the Red Army unleashed a massive counterattack all around the city on December 9, 1941. The German advance was halted and very nearly crushed by the onslaught. The Propaganda Ministry downplayed the success of the Russian

counteroffensive using propaganda such as the cartoon in Figure 3.5, which portrays Stalin breaking his abnormally sharp teeth trying to bite down on a German helmet:



The cartoon minimized the results of Soviet offensives over the winter of 1941-42. In truth, German commanders were shocked by the force of the offensive: the front had nearly collapsed. The Pro-Mi's message in early 1942 downplayed the Russian success, but the public was already suspicious of the propaganda messages. Soldiers' letters home also contributed to the public morale problem by their references to limitless Soviet manpower reserves and more importantly "the hopelessness of a decision in the near future." These personal communications were counteracting Goebbels' propaganda message. After destroying 260 Russian divisions, suddenly the Germans could not advance. German troops within sixty kilometers of Moscow were stopped cold. Though not all Germans were pessimistic about the war in Russia, many wondered how an end

might even be possible, since peace was out of the question and Germany lacked the manpower to occupy such a large country.²²

Goebbels himself acknowledged this situation in an entry on February 24, 1942. “We shall have to change our propaganda and our policies in the East...these were hitherto based on the assumption that we would take possession of the East very quickly. This...has not been realized. We must therefore envisage a longer duration and are accordingly compelled to change our slogans and our policies fundamentally.”²³ With the Propaganda Minister himself realizing that he underestimated the situation, clearly the Pro-Mi would have a problem on its hands trying to restore public morale. A couple of weeks later, Goebbels noted that Germans had sustained approximately a million casualties on the Eastern Front. “That is, of course, quite a number,” he writes, “...as things stand today, I do not feel it opportune to make these figures public now. One must wait for a more favorable moment.”²⁴ That is, the Pro-Mi must withhold the truth from the public, which would be its downfall later in the campaign.

Goebbels noted on March 6, 1942, that “The food situation in the occupied eastern areas is exceptionally precarious...tens of thousands of people are dying of hunger without anybody even raising a finger. We shall undoubtedly face exceptional difficulties and problems there for a number of years to come.”²⁵ He knew of the horrible conditions on the Eastern Front for the Russian people. However, they were inferior Jewish-Bolsheviks, and he simply took it into account as a problem that would hurt the

²² Steinert, *Hitler's War and the Germans*, pp. 128-132.

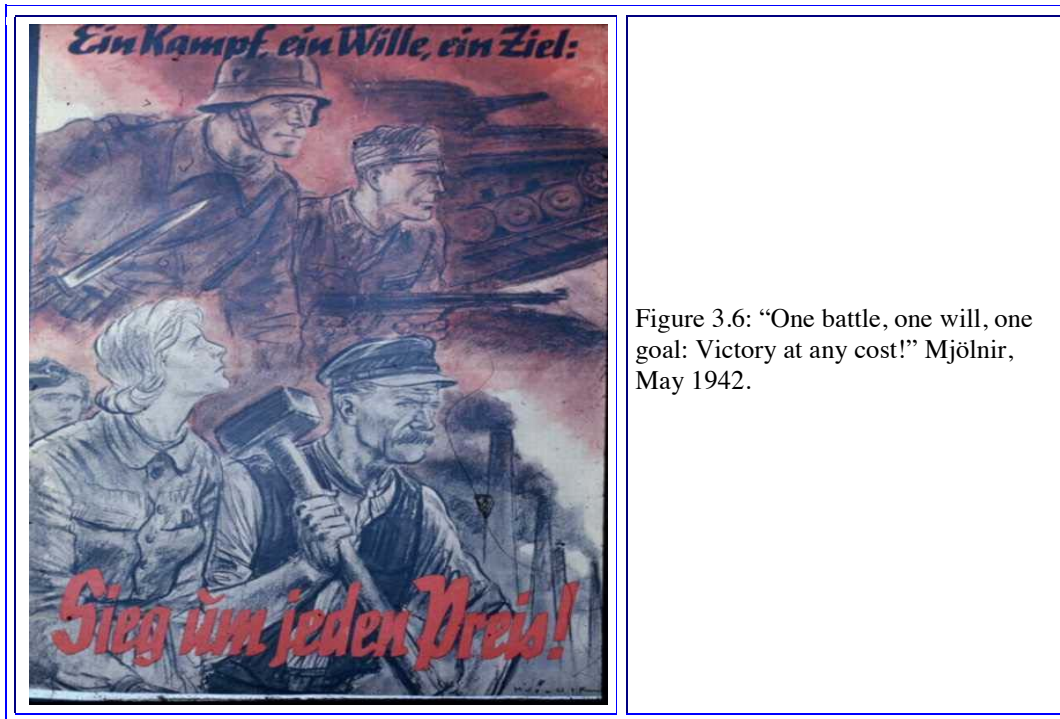
²³ Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries 1942-1943*, p. 100.

²⁴ Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries 1942-1943*, pp. 112-113.

²⁵ Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries 1942-1943*, p. 115.

Nazis' cause in the future, as would a Propaganda Minister taking notes on how to influence a future populace under German rule.

The year 1942 was a tumultuous one for both the Germans and Soviets. Though the German progress stalled outside Moscow, offensive was opened against the Ukraine, bringing considerable combat success in the Crimea. The Pro-Mi continued to supply propaganda to support the war effort with its high-spirited message of certain victory. The poster below is from May 1942 and is entitled "One battle, one will, one goal: Victory at any cost!" (see Figure 3.6). A friend of Goebbels, Hans Schweitzer, better known by the pen name "Mjöltnir," created this image. It plays on a central Nazi ideology of "one nation, one people, one Führer" with its title and shows the hard-fighting German soldiers driving the Red Army before them with the support of hard-working German people back home. This showed the German people that they were actively involved in and crucial to the war effort.



Despite the initial success, the offensive in the south began to be focused on one particularly problematic target – the city of Stalingrad. After driving into the city on July 17, 1942, German forces immediately met some of the most ferocious resistance of the war. The Russians fought to the last man and made the Germans pay for every inch of ground. By November, the Germans pushed the Russians to the banks of the Volga River, which ran through the middle of the city. The Red Army then counterattacked on November 19 from outside the city and surrounded the German 6th Army, in Stalingrad and began to move in on the trapped Germans.²⁶ Despite repeated attempts to break out and to supply the troops trapped in the city, the Germans failed to cut the Russian stranglehold.²⁷

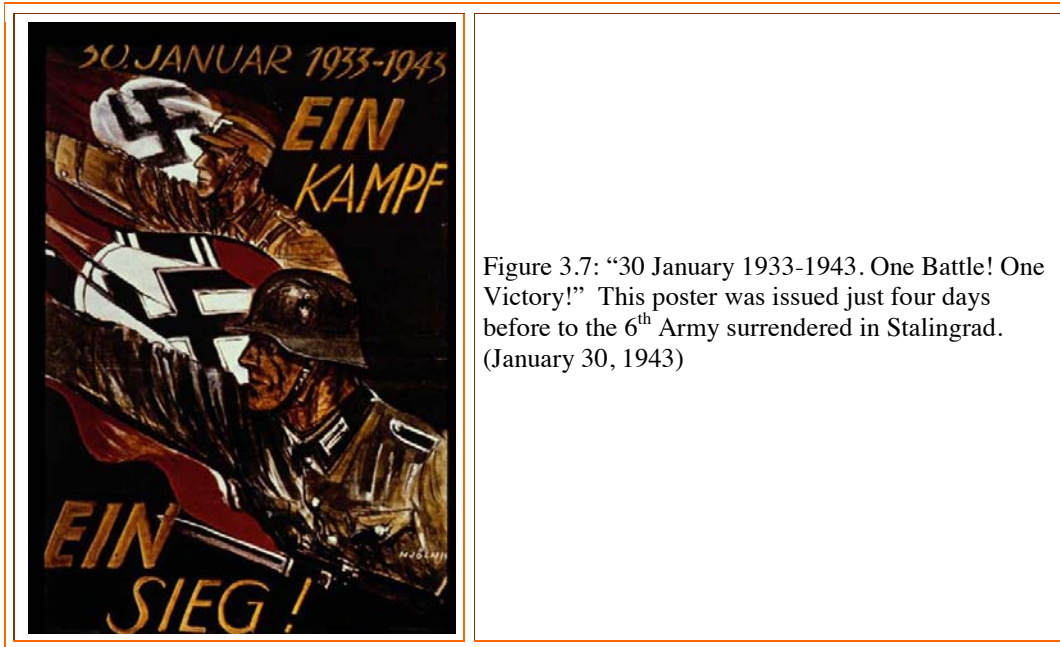
In the months prior to the February 1943 surrender of the German 6th Army, Nazi propaganda took no notice of the fact that Germans, not Russians, were surrounded and steadily being destroyed. Goebbels' memoranda to the Pro-MI barely mention Stalingrad at all, with the exception of stating on January 26, 1943, that it “should not publish the pessimistic Russian comment on the war situation since it does not fit into our propaganda slogan at the moment.” This “pessimistic Russian comment” was delivered by Stalin and listed the destruction of 102 German divisions and near-certain victories at Stalingrad and elsewhere.²⁸ Ignoring the growing desperate news from the Wehrmacht in Russia, on January 30, 1943, just four days before Stalingrad fell (see Figure 3.7), the Pro-Mi released another poster that reads “30 January 1933-1943. One Battle! One Victory!” January 30 was the tenth anniversary of the Nazi seizure of power. The image shows that the battle against the world in 1943 was just a continuation of the struggle that

²⁶ Robert Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), pp. 247-254.

²⁷ Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, pp. 298-301.

²⁸ Boelcke, *Secret Conferences of Dr. Goebbels*, pp. 322-323.

led to Nazi victory in 1933. This poster was removed from circulation when Stalingrad fell.



This was the height of the Pro-Mi downplaying the problems at Stalingrad to the public: encouraging belief in certain victory even as a quarter-million German soldiers were just days away from falling captive to the Russians. Reports from foreign press agencies that the Germans were losing the battle were circulating by late December 1942, but only in late January 1943 did German media finally acknowledge the true situation. Just days later, on February 3, came the terrifying announcement that “the fight for Stalingrad is over.” In propaganda terms, the tide of battle had shifted and ended in just over a week. The Pro-Mi fail not only misled the public but maintained the illusion of a “heroic sacrifice,” withholding the fact that 90,000 Germans surrendered and had been taken prisoner by the Russians. Even worse, propaganda published just after Stalingrad often did not even acknowledge the disaster. For example, the February 1943 issue of the

magazine *Signal* didn't even mention the battle, let alone the defeat.²⁹ The public took part in a day of mourning that Hitler declared for the lost troops, but this fiasco caused a massive loss of confidence in the German leadership, including, finally, Hitler.³⁰

Compared to the relatively minor problems in the propaganda during the Battle of Britain, the Pro-Mi utterly failed on this operation. Up to this point in the Russian campaign the propaganda had done its job fairly well; soldiers believed in its message and the public still trusted Hitler and the rest of the Nazi Party. By ignoring the dangerous turn of the battle at Stalingrad, the Pro-Mi undermined itself. The acknowledgement that something was wrong and that the German forces in Stalingrad were in deep trouble came too little, too late, and the resulting catastrophe caused a severe loss of trust in the Pro-Mi. Unlike in the Battle of Britain, where the Germans sent out pieces of false information, this was a disaster because of the complete absence of information. Stalingrad was as much a defeat for the Pro-Mi as for the Wehrmacht; the ministry suffered a massive loss of credibility that it now had to try to recover from.

To his credit, Goebbels had recognized the propaganda's weaknesses and tried to correct them as early as 1942. He explained to those in charge of mass media that the message seemed to be "so worn out and expressionless that it provoked a feeling of weariness among its listeners and readers," and encouraged his men to promote the cause differently "so as to prevent a further drop in public interest."³¹ Following Stalingrad, the Pro-Mi's image suffered badly. The people had lost confidence in the German high command as well as in the Pro-Mi and Goebbels himself. Weekly newsreels began to lose their appeal, and a general distrust of propaganda spread. Whole libraries were

²⁹ *Signal* magazine February 1943 issue.

³⁰ Kershaw, *How Effective Was Nazi Propaganda?* p. 199.

³¹ Kershaw, *How Effective Was Nazi Propaganda?* p. 197.

maintained on the front lines, and entertainment of a wide variety was sent to the troops.³² The old message wasn't having the effect it used to on the troops, however.

Goebbels stopped broadcasting the same monotonous message used throughout 1942. Lamenting how propaganda was received by the public and the troops, he instituted changes to the tone and eventually the message of the material coming from his ministry. Instead of forecasting approaching victory, the Pro-Mi began to attack the Allies in his message, drawing pictures of corruption and devilry to scare the German populace. These images gradually were combined with a new theme as the tide of battle turned against the Reich: if Germany were conquered, then its people would be wiped out or, worse, be ruled by the Jews and the Bolshevik terror. This message strongly affected the troops, especially on the Eastern Front. The Red Army was coming and the Russians were destroying countless German divisions in its wake; why would that same destruction not happen to Germany itself? Goebbels' new Eastern Front propaganda no longer proclaimed the Russians' inferiority, since they clearly had the military skill to defeat the Germans when given the opportunity. Instead, Goebbels revived the theme of defending Europe against Bolshevism that he had used at the beginning of the invasion.³³

Goebbels also made his famous "Total War" speech on Feb. 18, 1943, following the disaster at Stalingrad.³⁴ With it, Goebbels almost singlehandedly brought some public support back to the Nazi regime. Goebbels captivated the audience, and through radio and film all of the Reich heard his words. Essentially, the entire speech was meant to awaken Germany to its greatest challenge: "I speak first to the world, and proclaim three theses regarding our fight against the Bolshevik danger in the East. This first thesis:

³² Sington and Weidenfeld, *The Goebbels Experiment*, pp. 196-206.

³³ Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda*, pp. 102-103.

³⁴ Actually entitled "Now, People Rise Up, and Let the Storm Break Loose!"

Were the German army not in a position to break the danger from the East, the Reich would fall to Bolshevism, and all Europe shortly afterwards. Second: The German army, the German people and their allies alone have the strength to save Europe from this threat. Third: Danger faces us. We must act quickly and decisively, or it will be too late.³⁵

Other Nazi officials were amazed by the public's positive and thunderous reaction to Goebbels' words. The man in charge of a ministry that had just suffered a catastrophic defeat was now cheered by the entire nation. Albert Speer spoke of Goebbels afterwards: "Except for Hitler's most successful public meetings, I had never seen an audience so effectively roused to fanaticism. Back in his home, Goebbels astonished me by analyzing what had seemed to be a purely emotional outburst in terms of its psychological effect — much as an experienced actor might have done. He was also satisfied with his audience that evening. 'Did you notice? They reacted to the smallest nuance and applauded at just the right moments. It was the politically best-trained audience you can find in Germany.'"³⁶ Goebbels' words somewhat alleviated the negative reaction to the defeat at Stalingrad and public opinion again was behind the war effort, at least for the moment.

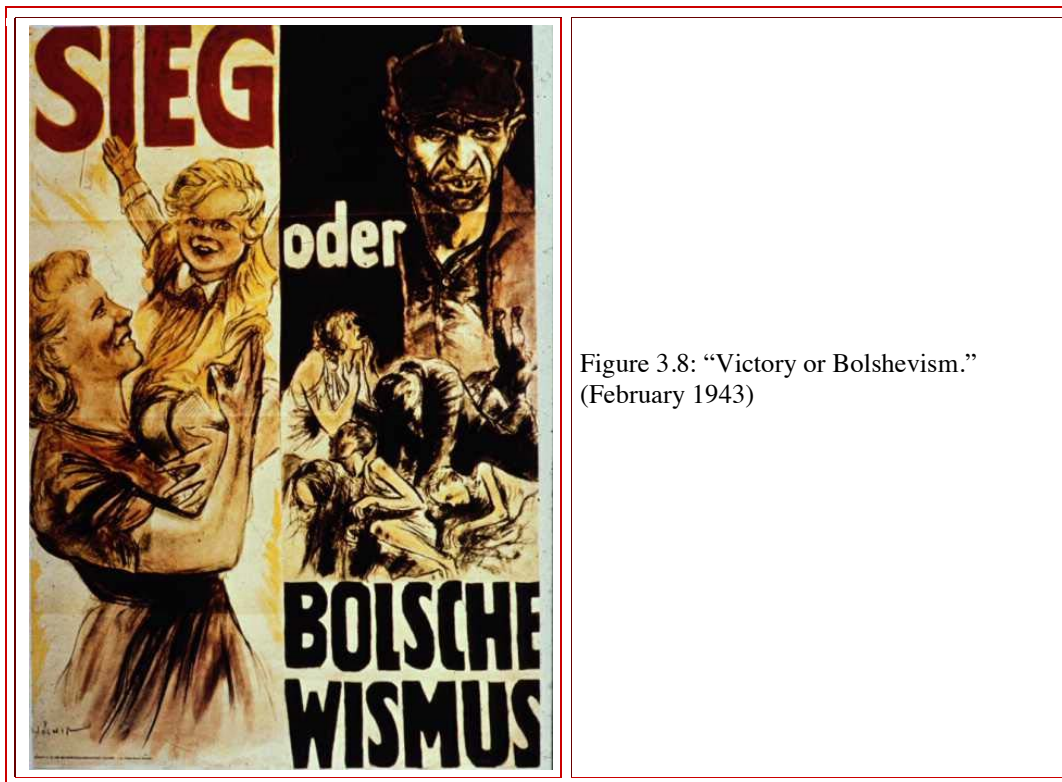
Not only German civilians felt the effect of Goebbels' words. German soldiers wrote home about hearing the speech and how it drove home the need to win the campaign. The "Total War" speech showed that the anti-Bolshevik propaganda had taken root in the public as well as the military, and now the German people did seem to understand what the task at hand was. A German soldier wrote his wife on February 19: "We've known the danger of Bolshevism for years, but we didn't know its full, true

³⁵ Joseph Goebbels, "Total War" February 18, 1943.

³⁶ Bytwerk, *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism* p. 113.

danger until this winter...now we have to be utterly ruthless.”³⁷ Another officer wrote that “every man will have to do his duty, wherever he is sent...I have seen those dehumanized hordes myself, and I can imagine what would happen to our beautiful country if the Bolshevists came flooding in.”³⁸

Following the speech, Goebbels unleashed a determined propaganda campaign, hammering home the idea that defeat would mean the annihilation of Germany. One such item of propaganda appeared in February 1943, almost immediately after Stalingrad fell, about the time of the “Total War” speech. The party’s propagandists made sure this poster was posted by itself rather than next to other posters (See Figure 3.8). The text translates as: “Victory or Bolshevism.”



³⁷ Wette, *The Wehrmacht*, p. 173.

³⁸ Wette, *The Wehrmacht*, pp. 172-173.

The image depicts a little Aryan girl and her mother happily celebrating on one side, while the other side features a dark, sinister, Slavic-looking Russian figure hovering over Germans living in miserable poverty and slavery. Compared to the earlier victorious propaganda of 1941 (see Figure 3.1 and 3.2) and 1942 (see Figures 3.3 and 3.4), and even compared with the material downplaying the problems of 1942 (see Figure 3.5-3.7), this new propaganda had a much different tone. Before, it had guaranteed victory and proclaimed German superiority. Now, the public learned that Germany was, in fact, vulnerable, but could still pull out a great victory if its people did not give up on the homefront. The battle would be grim and difficult, but the stakes were too high not to fight.

Continuing through 1943, the propaganda instilled a determination in the people to resist the Russians. An anti-Bolshevik campaign in the spring of 1943 included a pamphlet entitled “What Does Bolshevization Mean in Reality?” Published by a subsidiary of the SS and one of the two anti-Bolshevist pamphlets issued during the campaign, it begins, “The Battle of Life or Death being fought between us and world Bolshevism is a conflict that will determine not only the fate of our people, but that of all humanity for the foreseeable future.”³⁹ The latest reference in the text is March 1943, that is, after Stalingrad, when it was becoming clear that Germany could lose the war. This pamphlet plays on the already strong German fear of the Russians and communism, in line with Goebbels’ new message of Germany’s certain destruction should it lose the war.

Goebbels noted in his diary on March 1, 1943, that the anti-Bolshevik propaganda was doing its job well, as “all leading London papers warn against the dangerous Axis propaganda whose sole purpose is that of sowing discord between the allies. This discord

³⁹ *Bolschewisierung: was heißt das in Wirklichkeit?* (Berlin: Nibelungen Verlag, 1943).

has already become strikingly visible.”⁴⁰ He further noted political problems that the English papers were trying to keep quiet between Russia and the Polish government in exile. Over the next few days of his diary entries, he mentioned that the Soviets were becoming anxious about the Pro-Mi’s propaganda, attacking an article that Goebbels wrote: “the Bolsheviks are now throwing off the mask wherever they can. A blind man with his cane can feel what Europe would have to expect if they [the Bolsheviks] had the power.”⁴¹

The Pro-Mi also issued cartoons and stories of heroic actions by German soldiers to boost morale on the home front. One cartoon shows a soldier leaping atop a Soviet tank and dropping a grenade down the hatch to destroy it, under the caption “That is Heroism!” (Figure 3.9) suggesting German heroism could overcome all. This is characteristic of much Nazi military journalism, particularly in 1943. Photographers and artists were allowed as close to combat as possible, so they might provide the home front with vivid images of heroic soldiers, depicted as greater warriors than their Soviet counterparts.

⁴⁰ Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries 1942-1943*, p. 258.

⁴¹ Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries 1942-1943*, pp. 270-271.



Figure 3.9: “That is Heroism!”

Despite all its efforts, the Pro-Mi could not disguise the actual events of the war. In July 1943, the Wehrmacht was decisively defeated at Kursk, ending all major offensives on the Eastern Front. Thereafter, the Wehrmacht was strictly on the defensive and needed all the backing from home that it could get to hold back the Red Army. The public’s faith in its leaders was collapsing, however, and Germany could not give the troops the full support they needed. Goebbels was infuriated by this inability to get things moving.

Yet the troops continued to fight. Why? Propaganda like the “What Does Bolshevization Mean in Reality?” pamphlet mentioned earlier were circulated widely, and while the message hit home with the populace, it meant something much clearer to the troops – victory or death. German soldiers were not coming home unless they suffered a grievous wound, and their only option was to survive by getting out of battles alive.

Propaganda was not the only thing that hardened the troops in the East for battle, however. Omar Bartov describes the situation in the German army on the Eastern Front at

this time as devoid of “primary groups:” men who had trained together, gone into the Soviet Union together, and fought together since the start of the war.⁴² Over 3.3 million troops had entered the Soviet Union; by mid-1944 the German army had suffered almost three million casualties. Through hurried replacements, the Wehrmacht had approximately 2.5 million troops still on the front, but virtually all of the “primary groups” had been destroyed. The new replacements were poorly trained and unaccustomed to combat; they seldom lasted long enough for the older soldiers to get to know them.

This all had a devastating effect on morale. One company commander, Lieutenant Friedrich Reinhold Haag, wrote that he had “experienced again how difficult it is to lead a company into a battle and to sacrifice men while hardly knowing any of them. Then they fall right next to you and one of them cries perhaps ‘Herr Leutnant, be sure to write home’ – and you don’t even know what his name is.”⁴³ This was the situation in every company across the front. This same scenario played out on other fronts as well, but not to the severity of the casualty levels sustained on the Eastern Front. Entire companies were wiped out in just days of fighting and then replenished with fresh soldiers who were wiped out again.

All the new faces meant a near-complete loss of comradery on the Eastern Front. Often in the chaos of the war, troops fought for themselves and their own survival rather than for any overall battlefield objective. To keep the troops in line, Hitler ordered German commanders to institute an overly harsh level of discipline. It was “fight or be executed.” Thus, at least 20,000 soldiers were executed for so-called “political crimes” –

⁴² Omar Bartov, *Hitler’s Army* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 30-32.

⁴³ Bartov, *Hitler’s Army* p 96

usually desertion or “undermining the fighting spirit of the troops.”⁴⁴ One punishment that every German feared was assignment to the so-called “punishment battalion,” which carried out the most dangerous functions – mine-clearing, forward patrolling, and burying the dead, all usually under enemy fire. While in the unit, soldiers received no pay, no lighting for night missions, rarely any mail, and had poorer shelter than regular units.⁴⁵ Discipline was so harsh that some soldiers, after surviving a battle, broke down crying in front of their commanders in fear of being assigned to a penal battalion or shot on the spot for fleeing combat even though they had been ordered to retreat.⁴⁶

Between the chaos, the incredible violence, and overwhelming death and destruction, many troops in the East became catatonic. They accepted their situation and their death, and fought on. One soldier noted “after five weeks of battle you view the most terrible wounds or mutilations without batting an eyelid...it is true, war kills all feelings.”⁴⁷ Another infantryman, Harry Mielert, felt “totally removed from all immediate personal concerns; my concerns are impersonal: building positions, munitions, equipment, war material, weapons, overall the technical aspects of war...that now and again comrades lie there wounded or dead belongs to everyday life just like many things at home.”⁴⁸

As the Western Allies began their own push into Germany, troops on the Eastern Front became keenly aware that surrendering to the Americans or British meant survival, while surrendering to the Russians meant near-certain death. Of the 90,000 prisoners taken at Stalingrad there was little to no news about any of them, and most never returned

⁴⁴ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten* p. 90.

⁴⁵ Ibid. pp. 90-91.

⁴⁶ Ibid. pp. 92-93.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 34.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 35.

home.⁴⁹ Thus many soldiers on the Eastern Front did their best to either escape to the Western Front and surrender to the Allies there or survive until they were closer to the Western Allies.

The Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front was now a hardened group of small entities of comrades, consistently replenished by nameless replacements, totally acknowledging their circumstances and prepared to die, but hoping to survive. Propaganda provided the mental backbone of the Wehrmacht. On the Eastern Front, anything that the Pro-Mi told the troops was accepted as true no matter what the Russians did. The Germans stuck to their guns and fought, even while being driven back.⁵⁰

Despite a shaken faith in the Nazi leadership, loyalty to Hitler persisted, especially among the troops. For instance, Bartov notes that a report made in August 1944 stated that out of 44,498 letters sent home, less than 50 contained anything considered a breach of discipline or subversion; that is, less than 0.1 percent of the letters were detrimental to the Nazis or to Hitler. This is even more remarkable because the unit being surveyed, the 3rd Panzer Army, had just experienced a brutal mauling during the recent Soviet summer offensive.⁵¹ Faith in Hitler was due to the Nazi propaganda machine's earlier work, which was still operative in the most critical time of the war.

Propaganda had a decisive effect on how the Wehrmacht fought the war on the Eastern Front. The troops never lost faith in Hitler, and their hatred of the Russians grew and fueled Wehrmacht resistance to the advance of the Red Army. Shaping the troops' perceptions of the Russians were propaganda-infused stereotypes and their own experiences fighting in the horrors of the front; experience rarely disproved the

⁴⁹ Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, p. 126.

⁵⁰ Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, pp. 124-127.

⁵¹ Bartov, *Hitler's Army* pp 172-173

propaganda. However, it was mostly the earlier propaganda, centered on the Hitler Myth, that infused faith and loyalty to the Führer into the soldier's minds. The new propaganda did have some effect, as well, as the soldiers were told that should they fail, the Russians would destroy their homes and families. This helped motivate German soldiers to resist on the Eastern Front.⁵²

Although the Pro-Mi had suffered a disaster at Stalingrad, it managed to revive its message and direct it to the troops and the German people in a way that made them regain some trust in the German leadership and maintain their loyalty to Hitler. The propaganda had been effective when the going was good, and continued to be a driving force for the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front. It adapted when it needed to and maintained the momentum it previously had before Stalingrad. The German soldiers believed in Hitler and knew they had to stop the barbaric Russians from reaching Germany and destroying their homes, and the public knew it had a role to play in aiding the Wehrmacht. However, the Pro-Mi still had one other opponent to campaign against: the Americans, and there was still one remaining front, in the West, where the Germans had a chance for victory.

⁵² Wette, *The Wehrmacht*, pp. 169-175.

Chapter Four: The Western Front and the End of the War: 1942-45

Hitler declared war on the United States after it had decided to enter the war following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. Though the U.S. had been supporting Britain from the beginning of the war and Russia following its invasion by Germany, the American military was lagging far behind the Europeans in both numbers and more importantly experience. American forces didn't reach the front lines until Operation Torch in North Africa in November 1942, and it was quickly apparent that they had a bit of growing up to do to challenge the battle-hardened Wehrmacht. Initial encounters between the two armies led Germans to believe that the Americans were not very good soldiers. The American army was trained to fight differently from the Germans, using their tanks to exploit breakthroughs and seize territory rather than fighting other tanks. As such, the American tanks were much lighter and faster than the frontline German models, and at first were completely outclassed in combat.¹ Germans defeated American forces decisively at the Kasserine Pass in Tunisia in 1943, and consequently had difficulty for some time taking American soldiers seriously.

Though the Germans deployed propaganda against Americans as prevalently as against the British or the Russians, unlike on the Eastern Front they could not exploit ideological differences. The material produced material that instead featured the stereotypical arrogance and wealth of the Americans, proclaiming them to be spoiled, arrogant fools who did not know how to fight. The title of the cartoon in Figure 4.1 is "American Gigantism." The caption reads "Isn't it wonderful? The motor is so powerful that it flies all by itself, saving us the airplane and pilots." This is one example of the

¹ Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982), pp. 3-9.

foolishness the Germans felt that the Americans displayed in combat and leadership, and also the overconfidence the German leadership thought the Americans had in their great industrial system. Goebbels himself was skeptical of Americans reports of their industrial output: “The Americans are so helpless that that they must fall back again and again upon boasting about their material. Their loud mouths produce thousands of planes and tanks daily, but when they need them...they haven’t got them and are therefore taking one beating after another.”²

The first battles exposed American inexperience. Even before the debacle at Kasserine, on December 8, 1942, Goebbels wrote that he wished “experienced Germans troops could tangle with the Americans,” as “the select formations which made the Americans flee in Tunisia [date and battle unmentioned] weren’t even a select body. Some were thrown together...how much greater would our triumph be if the Yankees...were to clash, let us say, with the *Leibstandarte!* [the *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*, Hitler’s favorite Waffen-SS division].³ Goebbels stated on March 2, 1943, just a week after Kasserine, that “The English and Americans have suffered a new setback on Tunisian soil. If only our supply lines were better!”⁴

In addition, the Allied bombing of Germany and the rest of Europe just made feelings towards the British and Americans more virulent at home, and the Pro-Mi took advantage of the hatred of Allied flyers. Figure 4.2 is entitled “The American Century.” The caption reads: “Isn’t that the famous terror bomber who bombed the Monastery at Cassino, Rome, and Florence?” “Yes, but I think he’s a cultural vandal — He recently sat on my best Swing record!” German citizens were shown images of wealthy, self-involved

² Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries 1942-1943*, pp. 41-42.

³ Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries 1942-1943*, p. 235.

⁴ Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries 1942-1943*, p. 261.

Americans more concerned with themselves and their luxury than with what their troops were doing in Europe: destroying cities filled with countless historical artifacts and great cultural significance. Though this cartoon mentions Italian cities rather than German, the point was to prove American arrogance and ignorance to intensify the anger at towards Allied bombings of German-held targets. Goebbels himself wrote a violent article in *Das Reich* proclaiming that downed Allied pilots should be shot on sight or tied to trees near bombing targets so they could watch what their comrades were doing.⁵



Figure 4.1: “American Gigantism”

Figure 4.2: “The American Century”

Like Winston Churchill, President Franklin D. Roosevelt became a major target for the Pro-Mi. He was frequently pictured, like Churchill, as lying to his people and acting as a puppet of the Jews and of the Bolsheviks. In Figure 4.3, entitled “Information from the U.S.A.,” Uncle Sam broadcasts while truth stands on her head.

⁵ Steinert, *Hitler’s War and the Germans*, p. 237.

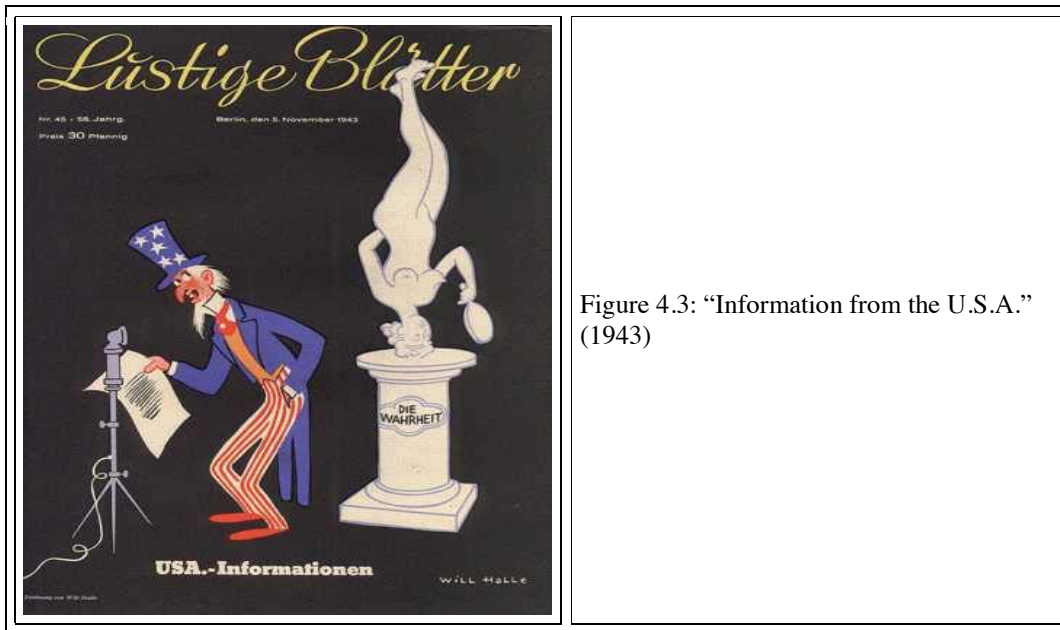


Figure 4.3: “Information from the U.S.A.” (1943)

The Allies drove the Germans and Italians out of North Africa by early 1943, and then invaded Sicily and Italy. This not only took Italy out of the war but also gave the Germans yet another front to defend, further diluting their strength. It soon became obvious to both the Allies and the Germans that a larger invasion of Europe was required to drive out the German occupiers, and that it had to come across the English Channel. Prior to the invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944, Hitler focused the vast majority of his attention on the Western Front, shoring up all possible defensive positions and allocating as many troops to that theater as possible. Clearly the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front could only delay the inevitable, so the priority was stopping the Western Allies completely. Cement bunkers, millions of landmines and beach obstacles, artillery pieces, tanks, and a combined strength of dozens of German divisions were placed in France and along the Channel coast to repel the invasion.⁶

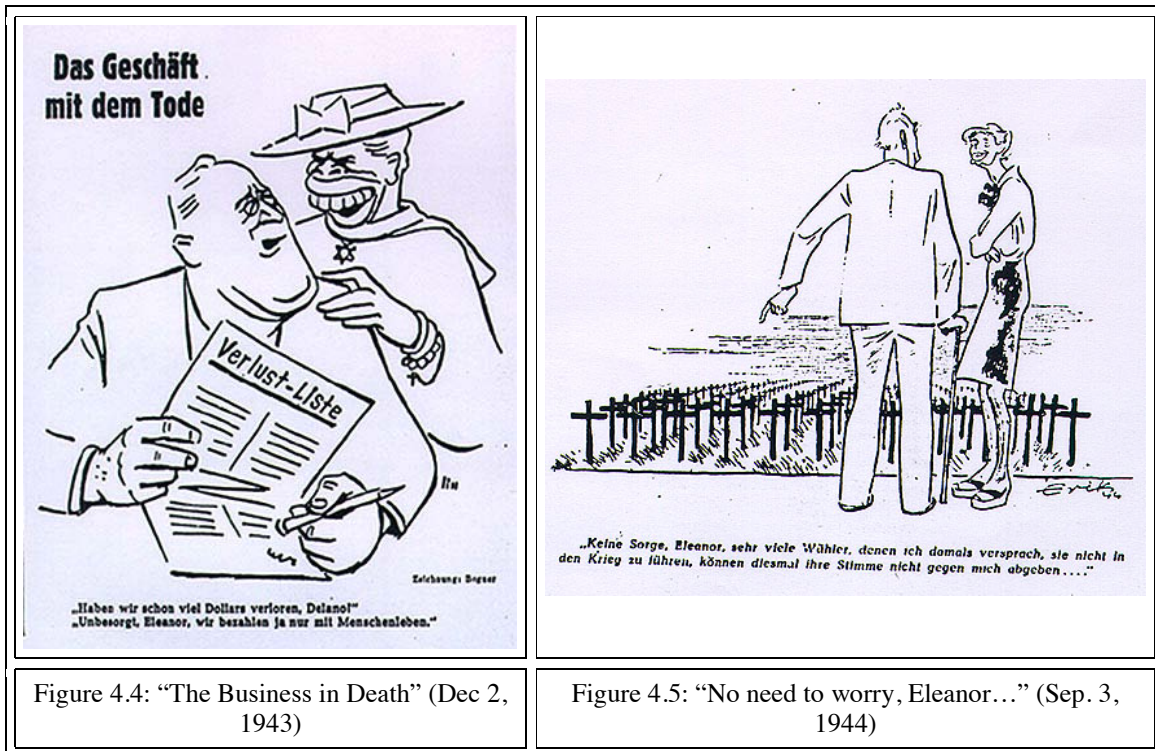
These measures did not thwart the carefully planned D-Day landings, and once the Allies gained a foothold, the Wehrmacht was again thrown on the defensive. Here the

⁶ Stephen Ambrose, *D-Day* (New York: Ambrose-Tubbs, 1994), pp. 27-38.

main enemy was not savagery and numbers as on the Eastern Front, but air power. Although outnumbered on the ground by the Germans, the Allies had near-complete supremacy in the air, which gave an overwhelming edge to their ground forces. German artillery, transport vehicles and any troop concentrations were prime targets for Allied fighter-bombers. Facing the highly mechanized and well-supplied Americans, German troops mentioned that the Americans were fighting a “rich man’s war.”⁷

This notion of the “rich man’s war” was based on the perception that the Americans had limitless supplies; indeed, some Germans felt the Americans were actually *over*-supplied. The American surfeit of equipment was a strong index of the overall wealth of the U.S. Many propaganda cartoons showed Franklin Roosevelt as being more concerned with money than his soldiers’ lives (see Figures 4.4 and 4.5). Though these two cartoons appeared nine months apart, they criticize FDR for being like all other Americans: obsessed with power and wealth rather than truth, justice, or humanity. In Figure 4.4, “The Business in Death,” FDR is reading the casualty list. Eleanor Roosevelt asks: “Have we lost many dollars, Delano?” His reply: “Don’t worry, Eleanor, we are paying only in human lives.” In Figure 4.5, he tells his wife “No need to worry, Eleanor. Many of the voters that I promised that I would never lead to war can no longer vote against me...”

⁷ Stephen Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers* (New York: Ambrose-Tubbs, 1997), p. 383.



Wehrmacht troops constantly complained that the Americans in Normandy and across France would rather blow a well-defended target apart with artillery and aircraft than take casualties engaging it on the ground, which seemed a symptom of cowardice to many German soldiers. One German soldier described his training as “Sweat Saves Blood,” meaning intense training would keep him and his comrades alive; by contrast for Americans, “it was Equipment Saves Men.”⁸

German forces on the Western Front numbered less than a third of those in the East, and proportionate quantities of supplies went to the Eastern Front as well. Undermanned, undersupplied, and subject to constant aerial attack, the Western Front forces also faced a new disadvantage: the Western Allies were far gentler with their POWs than the Russians were, so desertion and surrender were as problematic for the

⁸ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, p. 61.

Germans in the West as they were in the East.⁹ In response, Hitler's strict disciplinary policies were also implemented on the Western Front. Desertion was an offense punishable by death, and the Nazis executed tens of thousands of German troops for this offense during the war. These policies failed to stop Germans from surrendering, however; many American troops wrote home about German soldiers surrendering at the first sign of an American unit.¹⁰

Despite accusations of American cowardice, hatred of the bombing campaign, and the idea of a "rich man's war," it was becoming quite clear that the Americans did indeed know how to fight, and as with the earlier anti-British propaganda, the anti-American propaganda was being disproved before the eyes of German troops, who consequently soon lost interest in it. In the end, anti-American propaganda had little effect on the war effort in the West.

However, as ineffective as the anti-American material was, anti-Bolshevist propaganda from the Eastern Front had great influence on the Wehrmacht on the Western Front, as well as on the German populace. Some American soldiers noted that when they took German POWs, the Germans would mention that the two sides should join together in opposing the Russians.¹¹ This indicates both the overall hatred for the Russians and the effectiveness of Pro-Mi propaganda about them. In addition, by this time Germany was outmanned and forced to call upon soldiers who were too young or too old. The younger ones had been indoctrinated by Nazi ideals since their early childhood and were devoted to Hitler.

⁹ Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, p. 351.

¹⁰ Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, pp. 351-354.

¹¹ Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, p. 383.

Other problems plagued the Pro-Mi, most severely supply shortages. As Allied bombers destroyed Germany's infrastructure, most of the Pro-Mi's publications and many German newspapers were cancelled. Paper shortages cut newspapers in size and length, so that less information could reach the people. Radio was still going strong, but the film industry suffered similar problems like those of the other departments in the ministry. One key film, *Kolberg*, released in February 1945, continued the Pro-Mi's call for resistance, lest Germany be destroyed by the war. The film's title recalled the fortress of the same name that had been the last bastion of Prussian resistance to Napoleon during his successful invasion of Prussia in 1806. The film took several months to shoot and required an entire division of Wehrmacht extras, a significant undertaking with the war on the line. The underlying message of valiant resistance pervades the movie, which saw mixed reviews from the public, but seems to have had some effect on the war effort.¹²

Propaganda appears to have worked at least to a degree on both fronts when the situation was good for the Germans. When the war turned against Germany, propaganda adapted to keep up. On the Western Front there were not enough ideological differences to distinguish the Americans and British to be enemies as vile as the Russians. In the absence of those differences, Goebbels and the Pro-Mi utilized several other elements of propaganda in the West.

The first was anti-Russian propaganda from the Eastern Front. As the Allies came nearer and nearer to Germany, propaganda became darker and darker, emphasizing Germany's certain doom should it lose the war. Figure 4.6 is called "His way to 'liberate' Europe." As the war neared its end, German propaganda presented increasingly grim portraits of the enemy, in this case, the Soviet bear with armbands of the Union Jack and

¹² *Kolberg*, (Harlan 1945).

Stars and Stripes and a Star of David on his forehead marching forward with a bomb labeled “Murder.” This cartoon puts all of the attention on the Russians (so-called Jewish-Bolsheviks) as the ultimate problem as U.S. and British forces played the part of puppets of their regime. It also repeats the theme of Germany’s certain destruction should the war be lost. These same feelings existed on the Western Front, and the German soldiers there were instilled with a determination to stop the Russians from destroying their homeland.

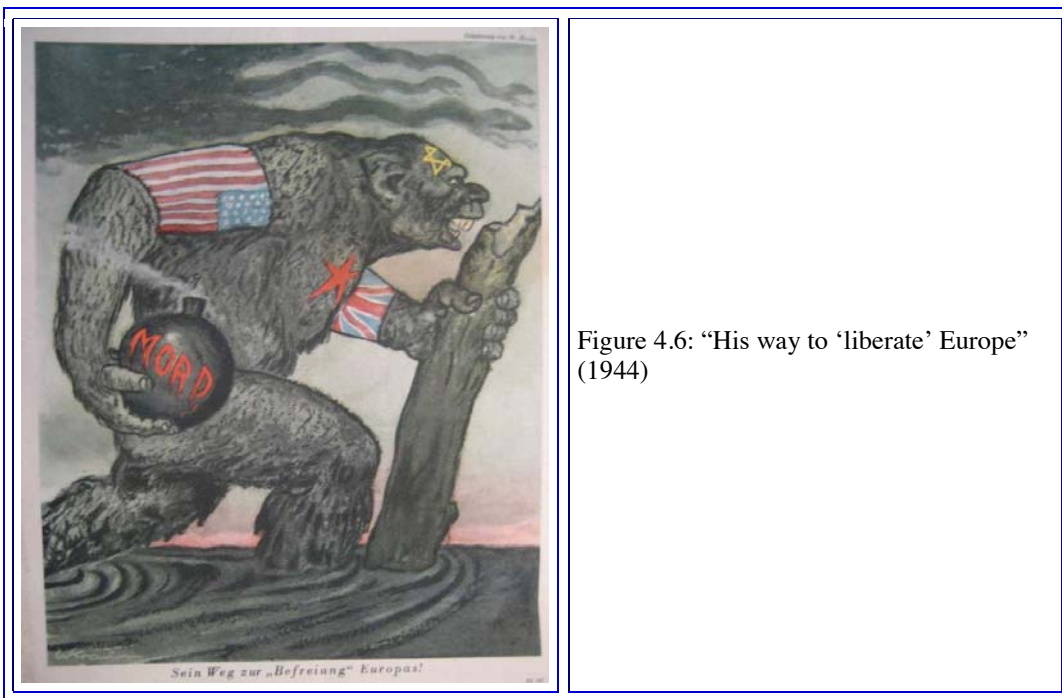


Figure 4.6: “His way to ‘liberate’ Europe” (1944)

The second major propaganda factor that took hold in the West was the Hitler Myth. The German army and populace still backed their Führer, and these emotions led to the third primary factor as to why resistance was maintained: new military personnel. Young Wehrmacht recruits, indoctrinated in Nazi ideology during the mid-1930s, fought fanatically for Hitler on both fronts. These young soldiers were poorly trained but well

equipped and steadfastly resisted the Allied advance. Hitler ordered his men to stand firm and fight to the last. Popular faith in Hitler never failed. Germany grimly stood firm.

The Wehrmacht, unable to halt the Soviet advance in the East, was able to drastically slow the advance of the Western Allies after D-Day. The Pro-Mi began directing propaganda at the Allied troops, trying to induce them to surrender and proclaiming the injustice of their cause, as in the leaflet in Figure 4.7. The German text says to grant the bearer of the leaflet safe passage behind German lines. Germany was being bombed more heavily than ever before, and the fury at the destruction of their homes was still useful to Pro-Mi efforts to foster the people's loyalty. One article in *Das Reich* mentioned that German revenge was coming in the form of new weapons. German citizens eagerly awaited the vengeance weapons, unveiled in 1944 as the V-1 and V-2 rockets.¹³ The V-weapons caused a great deal of damage to London, killing tens of thousands of people, and this injured Churchill politically. Figure 4.8 shows another leaflet that tells of the unstoppable lethality of the V-1.¹⁴

¹³ Hans Schwarz van Berk, "Die ungeahnten Folgen" *Das Reich*, July 2 1943.

¹⁴ Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, p. 118.

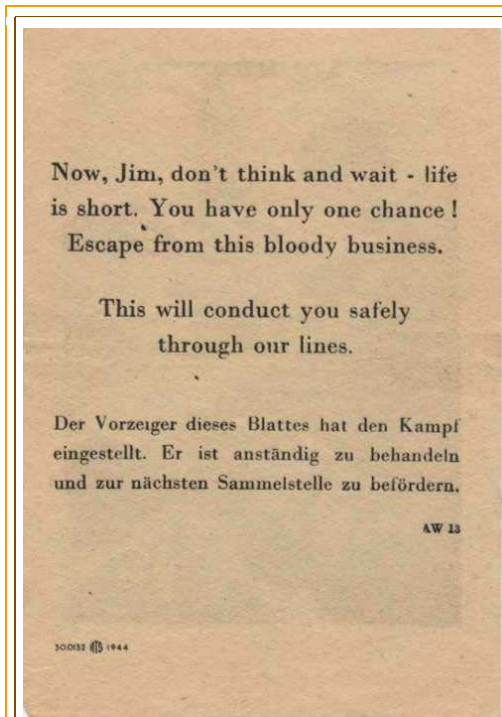


Figure 4.7: A leaflet encouraging surrender.

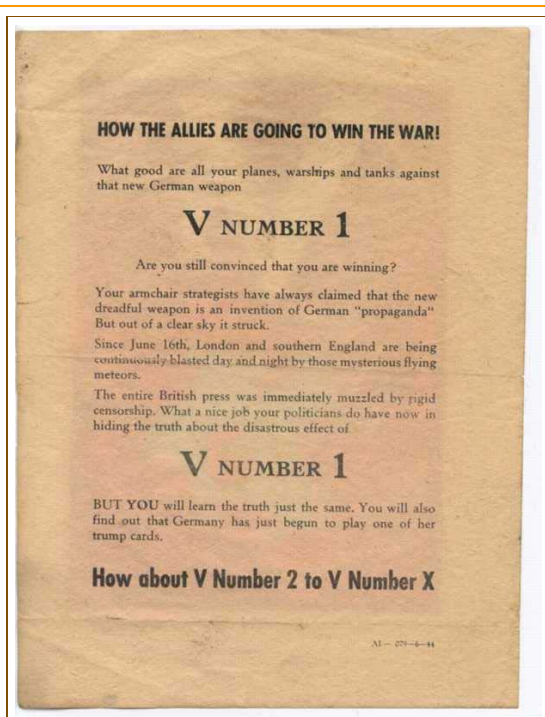


Figure 4.8: V-1 rocket leaflet.

Obviously, not every member of the Wehrmacht was on Hitler's side; some of its commanders attempted to assassinate him on July 20, 1944. At this point in the war Germany, surrounded as it was, seemed destined to lose the war. Had the assassination succeeded, perhaps the conspirators could have made peace with the Allies. However, Hitler survived and responded by rounding up and executing most of the conspirators.¹⁵ The failed plot actually helped Hitler. For a moment, Germany was shocked into believing their Führer was actually dead. When he announced his survival to the people, it inspired another wave of support for him.¹⁶

The Allies broke out of Normandy in July 1944, rushed across France, and almost managed to encircle and capture the entire western Wehrmacht army group at Falaise.

¹⁵ Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth*, pp. 215-217.

¹⁶ Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth*, pp. 217-219.

Only 20,000 German troops and fewer than sixty tanks managed to escape the pocket.¹⁷

This was a defeat on the scale of the ones the Wehrmacht had inflicted on the Allies just a few years earlier. But instead of collapsing completely, the Germans regrouped and then inflicted a major defeat on the Allies in the British-led Operation Market-Garden in Holland in September 1944. In a near miracle, the Wehrmacht pulled together another strong force and continued to hold the line.¹⁸

Though the chance for victory was still slim, Hitler's Wehrmacht never gave up on him, despite mounting defeats. As mentioned previously, the troops were now composed largely of men who were too old or boys too young to fight. In addition, the Wehrmacht's primary combat units were now Waffen-SS (the combat units of the SS) and completely loyal to Hitler. The younger soldiers had grown up immersed in Nazi doctrine, such the children's textbook in Figure 1.5 in Chapter One, and the Waffen-SS was Hitler's bodyguard. These two elements combined for a fanatically loyal military. When Hitler ordered a final counteroffensive through the Ardennes Forest, aimed at dividing the Allied armies and then seizing the important port of Antwerp, the Wehrmacht units equipped and trained for the operation experienced a dramatic morale boost. It felt like the old days of driving through France. One soldier wrote his wife, saying "We March!!"¹⁹ This newfound enthusiasm did not last. The offensive was launched on December 16, 1944, but within a week the Allies halted it and began to drive the Germans back with a massive counterattack. At this point, Germany's offensive capabilities had been nearly eliminated. The Wehrmacht could only delay the inevitable,

¹⁷ Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, p. 106.

¹⁸ Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, p. 131.

¹⁹ Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, p. 188.

yet still fought on. On February 27, 1945, Goebbels wrote that “the situation in the West causes me great anxiety...but we will not assume the worst.”²⁰

The Pro-Mi still had influence remaining by this point in the war. Goebbels no longer guaranteed victory, but constantly reminded the people of Germany’s certain doom under Allied occupation (see Figure 4.6). Goebbels’ diaries at this point are emotionless. There are few victorious exclamations and every diary entry simply recounts the military situation of the day. These are little more than status reports. The last entry compiled on April 9, 1945, simply records on the progress of the incoming Allied armies: “The enemy only made small gains...ammunition situation is becoming difficult for the German side...enemy air activity was particularly heavy...our fighters were not in action.”²¹

One thing did not change, though: the Hitler Myth remained compelling. Hitler was still the centerpiece of the Reich.²² It was a great shock to the German people when Hitler committed suicide in Berlin on April 30, 1945. Many Germans were angry, feeling betrayed that the man who stated many times he would sacrifice himself for Germany would take his own life instead. Some wanted to continue the fight, but almost all of them knew at that moment the war was over.²³

By the end of the war severe paper shortages reduced German newspapers to single sheets. This is the commentary on Hitler’s death, entitled “Farewell to Hitler” in a Hamburg newspaper, dated Wednesday, 2 May 1945.

²⁰ Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Final Entries 1945: The Diaries of Joseph Goebbels* (New York: Avon Books, 1979), p. 3.

²¹ Trevor-Roper, *Final Entries 1945*, p. 404.

²² Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth*, p. 215.

²³ Bartov, *Hitler’s Army*, pp. 109-110.

He once said: "I wish nothing on my gravestone other than my name." Even his name will probably not stand over his grave, for we know that he must have perished while fighting bitterly in the Reich Chancellery...that his body is dead we believe, what is mortal of him has perished, has passed away, but he has fulfilled his most beautiful oath, this affirmation: "The most valuable thing God has given me on this world is my people. My faith rests on it, I serve it with my will, and I give my life to it." His life is fulfilled...Now the world will attempt to explain him...People will criticize him, people will pray for him. A great one has left this world...We swore an oath to this man and his teachings, we pledged ourselves to him during our people's dark days, we rose with him to the heights to which he led our people in the brief, beautiful years of peace, and like all good Germans, we stood by him in battle...We can confidently leave his judgment to world history...

But will posterity be able to understand him fully?...One can only hope that they believe the great words of the great man...Will they be able to understand why a whole people, in the midst of its deepest poverty, affirmed this man?...we see it in the silent unspoken loyalty of the poorest sons of our people that Adolf Hitler gathered as a lens that focuses all light on a single point...That little minds darkened the image of his clear will, that traitors and bad counselors deserted and betrayed him, that finally he was overcome by a great superiority of steel and money, that cannot change the image of him that is in the deepest heart of our people...He wanted the best for his people, which is why it loved him so much. We know that he will continue to live in our land not as a war hero in the form of a metal statue, but rather as a child of the people whose pure will the people understood, and whose most beautiful words will remain a memorial for us, his words that in a people's deepest need, one must love his people more than himself.²⁴

These are not the words of someone who was against Hitler at the end. They paint almost the same picture of Hitler that *Triumph of the Will* had ten years earlier: that of a mortal man with superhuman abilities who had a great love and respect for his people. This article reconfirms that Goebbels' earlier propaganda had indeed succeeded in creating a heightened image of the Führer to Germany, and this "Hitler Myth" lasted through the end of the war for many Germans. Goebbels and the Pro-Mi announced Hitler's death on May 1, 1945, accompanied by solemn music composed by Wagner and Bruckner, followed by the Horst Wessel Song. The impression intended was that Hitler

²⁴ Hamburg newspaper, May 2, 1945

had died the death of a hero fighting to the last against Bolshevism, rather than taking his own life.²⁵

One can see further evidence that the German people still believed in Hitler as the Allies uncovered the concentration and death camps across Germany and Poland and became aware of the full extent of what came to be known as the Holocaust. The German people, asked if they knew about the camps, said no. They proclaimed that Hitler could not have created such places. They blamed everyone else but him, including Goebbels, Göring, Himmler, and Hitler's other primary lieutenants, but not the man himself.²⁶ This is further proof that Germany was behind Hitler even at the end of the war. The Hamburg newspaper article mentions the last stand against Bolshevism in Berlin, indicating that the Eastern Front propaganda was still influential. The Pro-Mi's early accomplishments and adaptability during the war carried through to the very end. Following the fall of Berlin and Hitler's death, Goebbels committed suicide as well, and the Pro-Mi was dismantled with the rest of the Nazi regime as the war came to a close.

²⁵ Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda*, p. 99.

²⁶ Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth*, pp. 248-249.

Conclusion

There have been questions regarding the overall effectiveness of Nazi propaganda, particularly as it seemed to dwindle as the war went on. Even before he came to power, Hitler described in *Mein Kampf* how much the Nazi Party would rely on propaganda. The Pro-Mi and Goebbels expedited Hitler's rise to power, and Nazi control of all German media ensured near-complete control on what the German people heard and knew about the war both and national and international affairs. More importantly, the Pro-Mi created an image of Hitler as a superhuman being and the heart of the Third Reich. The German people loved Hitler, and the German military was firmly behind the Führer. As the war turned against Germany, propaganda was forced to adapt, but three of its primary elements of the propaganda remained potent throughout.

German troops remained loyal to the Führer, some even after Hitler's death in 1945. The Wehrmacht continued to fight despite defeat after defeat by the Allies, yet propaganda still influenced the beliefs of the troops, especially on the Eastern Front. Goebbels' message shifted to warnings of doom should Germany lose the war; given the actions of the Red Army as it drove the Germans back into their homeland, there was no reason to dispute such a message. The Hitler Myth remained strong and the German military and civilians remained loyal to the Führer. Earlier indoctrination during the 1930s created a young, fanatically loyal group of recruits who fought against the Allies during the last stages of the war.

Was propaganda a primary reason for the dogged German resistance to the Allies as the war wound down? Based on the evidence, the answer is yes. As Ian Kershaw correctly put it, propaganda had an easy time during the first years of the war. However,

the notion that propaganda lost its effectiveness as the war went sour is incorrect. Though anti-British and anti-American propaganda, for instance, was unsuccessful, Goebbels adapted and changed the style and the content of his propaganda.

The Wehrmacht still fought with astounding resiliency even as defeat became obvious. On the Eastern Front, images of the savage Red Army led by a corrupt Bolshevik regime were quite believable to any Germans who could see what was in front of them. The notion that Germany would be destroyed if the nation were overrun by the Russians was also credible, as the Red Army devastated German lands and their inhabitants – just as the Germans had done to in Russia. The savagery and inhumanity that prevailed on the Eastern Front corroborated Nazi propaganda being given to the troops, and the Germans fought the Red Army more fiercely than any other opponent as the war dragged to a close. This propaganda had similar influence on the Western Front, as the Germans there, too, became aware of the vile Russians approaching their homeland.

The key link in all of this the Hitler Myth. Hitler remained the critical emotional centerpiece of the Reich. As he went, so did Germany. Though some Germans lost their faith in the Führer as the war closed in on Germany – witness the failed July 20th assassination plot – most of the Germans remained at Hitler's side, and only after he committed suicide did the people finally gave up hope of victory. Goebbels even said creation of what became known the Hitler Myth was his greatest personal achievement. In light of German loyalty to Hitler that lasted until the end of the war, he was right.

The Hitler Myth and other forms of early Nazi indoctrination during the 1930s caused a fanatical generation of young Germans to join the Wehrmacht in resisting the

approaching Allies after D-Day. In addition, the Waffen-SS units became the primary combat units of the German army. Such boys and men gave Hitler had a very loyal army willing to fight to the last man if necessary.

The overall picture of propaganda in the critical years of World War II is complex, but it boils down to three primary elements: propaganda and the people, propaganda and the troops, and the overall image of the Führer. Propaganda had success with the troops, especially in regard to the Russians. However, the fact that propaganda had created Hitler's deific image before the war made a lot of difference during the war itself. Hitler the miracle worker rebuilt Germany and restored its lost glory. He was the glue that held the Third Reich together, and his image was carefully crafted by the Pro-Mi that broadcast his speeches, distributed his words, and teaching the Germans to revere him as godlike. Hitler brought the German people out of economic depression, rebuilt the country, and restored Germany to regaining its overall power. Even as defeat loomed, the Germans never stopped supporting Hitler; the Pro-Mi's earlier success in this regard was continued throughout the war. The Hitler Myth lay at the heart of the Third Reich and continued to influence the Germans throughout the war.

Besides the Hitler Myth, the other primary elements of propaganda that held up through the course of the war were indoctrination of the younger German population and the very effective portrayal of the scourge of the Jewish-Bolsheviks on the Eastern Front. Certain types of propaganda didn't work, and Goebbels cast those aside when they failed him and adapted the Pro-Mi's work to maintain the people's loyalty. The Eastern Front united the German populace in a crusade to save their homeland and potentially Europe from the control of the sinister Jewish-Bolsheviks behind the Soviet regime. The

indoctrination and fanatical bodyguard units created an army willing to serve Hitler to the very end, because, as his myth stated, the superhuman Hitler could bring Germany through any situation to ultimate victory. Nazi Propaganda was undeniably effective throughout the war.

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