Not an Ordinary Man:

Ivan Nikitich Kononov and the Problem of Frontline Defection from the Red Army, 1941-1945¹

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The question of Red Army soldiers crossing the line to the Germans during the German-Soviet war of 1941-45 has long obsessed historians. Some have treated all Soviet prisoners of war as deserters to the enemy, while others have tried to minimize the phenomenon. This paper explores newly available evidence from German and Soviet sources in an empirical exploration of the reasons, the extent, and the problems of the process of switching allegiance at the frontline.

On 22 August 1941, two month after the Germans had attacked the Soviet Union, Red Army Major Ivan Nikitich Kononov defected to the enemy. Kononov was a career soldier, who had joined the Red Army in 1922, had been admitted to candidate membership of the Communist Party in 1928 and was a full member of the Party since 1929, with a clean party record. Before he crossed the frontline, he ordered what was left of 436th Rifle Regiment, which he commanded, to surrender. Hoping to fight Stalinism, he soon built a unit of military collaborators, mostly Cossacks. “Kononov’s men” (or *kononovtsy*, as they called themselves)

Beyda, Elena Govor, as well as my brilliant Honours students of 2015, in particular Georgia Oman and Amy Pracilio.

would fight on the side of the Germans, mostly behind the German lines and against partisans, first in occupied Soviet territory, then in Yugoslavia. In the last days of World War II, Hitler finally allowed their unification with General Vlasov's KONR units. Unlike Vlasov, Kononov managed to escape repatriation to Stalin's Soviet Union and with it certain death. After some time in Germany, he emigrated to Australia in 1950, where he settled under the name of Iwan Gorski in Adelaide.²

In a 1948 letter to the old émigré and former Menshevik Boris Nicolaevsky (1887-1966), written from the American Zone of Germany, Kononov explained his reasons: His father had been executed by the Bolsheviks in 1918, his older brother was also killed by them during the Civil War, and between 1934 and 1937 two more brothers fell victim. In order to make a career, he had been hiding his background, including the fact that he was a Cossack, for 21 years.

Living in the Soviet Union, I saw the depth of the terror, the poverty, and all the insults the people had to suffer under the communist yoke. I firmly decided to choose

² Most extant accounts rely either directly or via a string of secondary sources on a hagiography published by one of Kononov's former subordinates: Konstantin Cherkassov, *General Kononov (Otvét pered istoriei za odnu popytku)*. 2 volumes. (Vol. I: Melbourne: Edinenie, 1963; vol. II: Munich: Tipografiia I. Bashkirtseva, 1965). An exception is the best introduction to the subject: K. M. Aleksandrov, "Kononov Ivan Nikitich," in his *Ofitserskii korpus armii general-leitenanta A. A. Vlasova 1944-1945. Biograficheskii spravochnik* 2nd, rev. ed. (Moscow: Posev, 2009), 481-510; see also id., *Russkie soldaty Vermakhta. Geroi ili predатели* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2005). The date of emigration is wrong in most accounts. For the actual date see: "Gorski Iwan – absconder-release-declaration of intention-application for naturalization," National Archives of Australia D400, SA1956/8909.

the path of the open fight against communism with the goal of liberation of our homeland from the barbarians, the communist bandits led by the cursed, bloody, mountain-jackal Dzhugashvili-Stalin. ... On 22 August 1941, completely voluntary, I went over to the Germans with my entire regiment. Before my defection, I had reached an agreement with the Germans that they would help and would not hinder the organization of armed forces from among the people of the Soviet Union.³

Other documents put some of Kononov's account into doubt.⁴ K. M. Aleksandrov, the historian who has done most work on this defector's life, questions if the Major really took an entire regiment with him. He might have only defected with a battalion, although it is possible that "by 22 August 1941 the actual size of the 436th Rifle Regiment was down to battalion level."⁵ More recently, Igor Petrov and Oleg Beyda have stressed that the original German records do not mention a large group defection at all, concluding that Kononov only came with a few of his commanders, not his entire unit.⁶ Indeed, the 23 August interrogation report

³ Kononov to Nicolaevsky, 26 April 1948, Hoover Institution Archives, Boris I. Nicolaevsky Collection, box 259, folder 4, reel 220.

⁴ For a discussion of several versions of what exactly took place see Aleksandrov, *Russkie soldaty Verkhakhta*, 436-38.

⁵ Aleksandrov, "Kononov Ivan Nikitich," 493, 504 n.30.

⁶ Igor Petrov and Oleg Beyda, "The Soviet Union," in: *Joining Hitler's Crusade: European Nations and the Invasion of the Soviet Union, 1941*, ed. David Stahel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2017).

only noted that Kononov defected “with three of his company-leaders.”⁷ Kononov’s own description of how he came across the frontline, published during the war on the German side, also implies that he did not lead his men across the frontline. Rather, he ordered them, via sub-unit commanders, to cease resisting and give up when approached by opposing forces. Having issued this order, he met the Germans himself with only a few close associates. The Germans recognized them as defectors, but did not do the same with the relatively passive surrender of the rest of his unit.⁸

Questions could also be raised about the context of the defection. Although both Kononov and his hagiographer, Konstantin Cherkassov,⁹ fudge around this issue, Kononov’s troops were indeed encircled at the time the decision to surrender was taken; hence, it might have been also dictated by the hopeless military situation. However, Kononov had been there before, and had in June-July already fought his way out of earlier encirclements.¹⁰ At the very least then he had to decide to not try yet another time. Finally, Kononov might have embellished his level of victimization. The already cited account of his life, published during the war in a German magazine for Cossack collaborators, does not mention the violent death

⁷ 3. Panzer-Div./Ic, “Verhör des Majors Kononow – Kommandeur des 436. S. R./155 S. D.,” Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany (BA-MA) (BA-MA) RH27-3/170, folio 73-75, here: folio 75.

⁸ A. Iaganov, “V pervoi kazach’ei. Ocherk vtoroi. U Kononovtsev,” *Na Kazach’em postu. Dvukhnedel’nyi obshchekazachii zhurnal* No. 37 (1 November 1944): 11-12. For the German definition of who was and who was not to be counted as a defector (*Überläufer*) see Ortwin Buchbender, *Das Tönende Erz. Deutsche Propaganda gegen die Rote Armee im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag, 1978), 71.

⁹ Cherkassov, *General Kononov*, vol. I: 120-123.

¹⁰ Aleksandrov, “Kononov Ivan Nikitich,” 492-93.

of his father, has his older brother die “from heavy wounds in the World War in 1914” and only mentions the arrest of one other brother in 1938.¹¹ The initial German documents, too, mention only the victimization of one brother and his father-in-law, although their execution was this time dated to 1937.¹² Given that he had no reason to diminish his family’s sacrifices when interviewed in 1941 and 1944, it appears that the plot thickened over time.

Despite such variations to the story, a core set of facts is undisputed: first, whatever the complications of context, Kononov and at least some of his men were not overwhelmed by German forces, but gave up of their own accord. Second, Kononov was part of the Stalinist elite, with a long career in the military, and long years in the Communist Party. And third, very soon after his defection, he organized an anti-Soviet military formation, which at the time was against explicit policy and possible only on local initiative.¹³ The entire episode

¹¹ A. Iaganov, “V pervoi kazach’ei. Ocherk vtoroi. U Kononovtsev,” *Na Kazach’em postu. Dvukhnedel’nyi obshchekazachii zhurnal* No. 37 (1 November 1944): 11-12, here: 11. In the questionnaires he filled out in the Red Army about his background, he gave his father’s year of death as 1916, although this, too, could have been made up in order to hide an “anti-Soviet” background. Aleksandrov, “Kononov Ivan Nikitich,” 502 n.5.

¹² 3. Panzer-Div./Ic, “Verhör des Majors Kononow – Kommandeur des 436. S. R./155 S. D.,” folio 75; and Ic 3 Pz. Div to Ic XXIV. Pz. Korps, (23 August 1941), BA-MA RH 27-3/167, folio 176.

¹³ The classic account of the trials and tribulations of those interested in building an anti-Stalin, “Russian” military force see Wilfried Strik-Strikfeldt, *Gegen Stalin und Hitler. General Wlassow und die russische Freiheitsbewegung* (Hase & Koehler Verlag: Mainz, 1970).

seems to support the thesis that in 1941 there was significant popular opposition to Stalin's regime, and that this opposition partially explains the mass surrenders in 1941.¹⁴

Historians have recently doubted the existence of opposition to Stalinism, stressing assent and participation instead.¹⁵ If that were so, how would one make sense of Kononov's act? Could this entire story be a concoction, a self-serving justification by a man who, in order to save his skin, collaborated with the Germans? Maybe, but then how do we explain that essentially the same story also circulated in the Soviet Union? It probably did so because those of Kononov's men who did not heed his order to surrender told the tale, which was

¹⁴ For example: Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair. Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 12-13; Aleksandr Gogun, *Stalinskie kommandos. Ukrainskie partizanskie formirovaniia 1941-1944*. 2nd. rev. ed. (Moscow: Rosspen, 2012), 125. For an overview over the general discussion about loyalty and disloyalty see Mark Edele, "'What Are We Fighting For?' Loyalty in the Soviet War Effort, 1941-1945," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 84 (2013): 248-68; for a specific discussion of the historiography of defection see id., *Stalin's Defectors*, chapter 8.

¹⁵ For example: Robert W. Thurston, *Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia 1934-1941* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996); and in particular id. "Cauldrons of Loyalty and Betrayal: Soviet Soldiers' Behavior, 1941 and 1945," in: *The People's War. Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union*, ed. Robert W. Thurston and Bernd Bonwetsch (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 235-57. See also Jochen Hellbeck, "Einführung," in: *Die Stalingrad Protokolle. Sowjetische Augenzeugen berichten aus der Schlacht*, ed. Jochen Hellbeck (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2012), 9-108.

picked up and retold many times, passing into the oral lore of the Soviet underground.¹⁶ It is also possible that returned survivors of Kononov's unit passed on the story to fellow prisoners in the Gulag or in exile. This independent oral tradition about Kononov's anti-Stalinist defection makes the interpretation of the Cherkassov-Kononov version as entirely a later construction unlikely. It was available to Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who would not have had access to Kononov's ex-post facto self-justification.¹⁷ Finally, Kononov himself claimed a political motivation not just in retrospect, but from the first day of his defection. He "declared," reported his German interrogator on 23 August,

that he would like to take over a unit for the fight against Bolshevism as soon as possible. His strong rejection of Bolshevism is rooted in the shooting of his brother and father-in-law in 1937 as well as the constant spying on officers by political commissars.¹⁸

Given such confirmation from independent sources, by authors working within very different contexts, who could not have read the other accounts, let us suspend disbelief for a moment and take the story of Kononov's defection at face value.

¹⁶ On Kononov's men who return in August 1941 to the Soviet lines as spreading the word see Cherkassov, *General Kononov*, vol. I: 123.

¹⁷ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag GULag 1918-1956. Opyt khudozhestvennogo issledovaniia, V-VI-VII* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1975), 32. For an English translation see id., *The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956. An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, vol. 3 (London: Collins & Harvill Press, 1978), 29.

¹⁸ Ic 3 Pz. Div to Ic XXIV. Pz. Korps, (23 August 1941), folio 176.

Was Kononov, then, an ordinary Soviet man, the impersonation of wider trends in society?¹⁹ As we shall see, he was not. In nearly every aspect, he was part of a minority among defectors, who overall were neither of his social class or military rank, nor of his ethnicity. Only his age (he was born in 1906), and his gender were typical.²⁰ Group defections, while common, rarely involved the voluntary surrender of entire units. His aggressive anti-Stalinism, finally, was also untypical. While many were motivated to give up because they found nothing worth fighting for, only a distinct group actively sought to help defeat Stalin's regime. The majority of defectors, I argue, were refugees from Stalinism rather than budding resistance fighters, let alone willing collaborators with the Wehrmacht.²¹

¹⁹ Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men. Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper, 1993).

²⁰ Kononov's age differs in different sources. The Red Army listed him as born in 1906: "Prikaz upravleniia kadrov Krasnoi Armii (31 July 1943), Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation (TsAMO RF) f. 33, op. 11458, d. 48, l. 195-213, here: 198. Available at: https://pamyat-naroda.ru/heroes/memorial-chelovek_prikaz74672093/ (last accessed 31 August 2016). I have not come across a single case of a female defector, a fact probably explained by their sociological profile. For recent studies of women in the Red Army see Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat. A History of Violence on the Eastern Front* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Roger D. Markwick and Euridice Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline in the Second World War*. (Houndmills: palgrave macmillan, 2012).

²¹ By "Stalinism" I do not mean a political ideal type but the real society that existed during Stalin's years in power. For an elaboration see my *Stalinist Society 1928-1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

To be clear, this paper is not about people who were captured because of the battle situation, as were the vast majority of Soviet prisoners of war (POWs). By “defection” I instead mean what the Germans classified as “*überlaufen*” – willful desertion across the frontline, as in the case of Kononov and his men. The backbone of my source material is constituted by files from German and Soviet archives. On the German side, there are reports on the number of defectors, which allow a reconstruction of both the approximate size of the phenomenon and its share among POWs. There are also reports on the interrogations of defectors, which give a glimpse, however tentatively, into the motivations, but also reveal something of the background of the men involved. These are, of course, fragmentary and problematic insofar as we hear the voices of the deserters only through the writing of their interrogators. They still allow, in a kind of kaleidoscope, to reconstruct the continuum of reasons animating these often desperate decisions.²² In order to go beyond a mere description of individual voices, I have attempted to find a large number of such reports, which can be analyzed quantitatively as well as qualitatively. This quest was complicated by the fragmentary nature of the German source base: not every intelligence officer wrote similarly detailed reports and much was lost in the retreats. I was, however, able to locate one particularly meticulous officer, the Ic of the 296th Infantry Division, who wrote relatively detailed and – more importantly – relatively standardized accounts (*Gefangenen-Vernehmungsergebnisse*), covering the period April 1942 through December 1943.

His notations give the name, year and place of birth, date of defection, nationality, profession, marital status, and a short characterization of the reason for defection for 334

²² For this method, applied to a different source base, see Mark Edele, “More Than Just Stalinists: The Political Sentiments of Victors 1945-1953,” in: *Late Stalinist Russia. Society between Reconstruction and Reinvention*, ed. Juliane Fürst (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 167-91.

cases. At times it gives additional information, such as the fact that a defector is a Muslim, is illiterate, does not speak Russian, or was, in the estimation of the interrogator, more or less intelligent. The source base evolves over time. The basic information for this study began to emerge in May, but did not find a consistent form until April 1942, the time this data-set begins. Nationality was added consistently only from late June 1942, but can sometimes be reconstructed on the basis of the name and place of birth of the soldier in question.²³ The 296th Infantry Division fought, during the time under review here, with Army Group Center, first with the 2nd Panzer Army at Orel, and then, from September 1943, with the 9th Army at Gomel and Bobruisk.²⁴

For reasons of space my focus in this essay is on the analysis of the German source base. The overall project also draws on a wealth of Soviet sources, some of them (memoirs, collections of letters from the front, diaries, official communications) are published, while others (such as reports on defection and how to fight it,²⁵ “review cases” of anti-Soviet agitation,²⁶ or reports on repatriation²⁷) are not. The most solid set of material from Soviet archives are the case files of war crimes trials against collaborators held in the Soviet Union. Not accessible in Russia itself, a large collection of them are available to researchers in the

²³ The reports are contained in three files: BA-MA RH 26-296/97 (1942), 102 (1943), 107 (1943).

²⁴ Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939 - 1945* (Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1974), vol. 9: 296, here: 296.

²⁵ Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), Central Committee, Agitprop. Fond 17, opis 125, delo 85.

²⁶ State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), fond A-461 (Prosecutor’s office of the RSFSR).

²⁷ GARF, f. R-9526, Council for Repatriation Affairs.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) library in Washington DC. I have collected, in particular, a large number of cases of former Red Army men who were trained as SS-auxiliaries in the concentration camp Trawniki in Poland.²⁸ Most of them had become POWs in 1941, a time of particular interest to this study. In their majority, they were not defectors, but “normal” captives, who had been recruited from POW camps. However, there are several deserters to the enemy among them. Moreover, the intense focus of the Soviet interrogators on whether or not an accused had defected in the first instance, lead to very detailed descriptions of the process of surrender, which helps to reconstruct the obstacles and dangers of defection, but also the extent of the grey zone between capture and desertion to the enemy.²⁹ Another rich source base are the transcripts of a large-scale oral history project with Red Army veterans.³⁰

A third set of sources for this study are émigré accounts, memoirs, and diaries. Again, some of them are published. Others are unpublished and available in émigré archives, such as the Bakhmeteff archive of Columbia University, the Hoover Institution, or the archive of the Forschungsstelle Osteuropa of the University of Bremen. The transcripts of the interviews with postwar Displaced Persons, conducted by the Harvard Interview Project also yields the occasional piece to the overall puzzle.³¹

1) “Typical” defectors?

²⁸ Angelika Benz, *Handlanger der SS. Die Rolle der Trawniki-Männer im Holocaust* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2015).

²⁹ See Edele, *Stalin’s Defectors*, chapter 3.

³⁰ <http://iremember.ru>

³¹ They are available in a searchable database: “The Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System Online.” <http://hcl.harvard.edu/collections/hpsss/index.html>.

Was Kononov a typical defector?³² Insofar as we speak here of the organized desertion of an entire regiment, ordered to do so by its commander, the answer is “no.” Such defections were fairly rare. This group defection was, claimed his hagiographer, “the only one in the history of the Second World war.”³³ This was “the largest organized defection” of this war,³⁴ the “most important episode” of its kind.³⁵

Thus often judged as “unique,”³⁶ it was not the only such incident during the chaotic first half year of the war, however. During the dual battle of Bialystok and Minsk, for example, “the mass of the 12th, 89th, and 103rd Rifle Divisions defected to the Germans,” as a standard treatment has it.³⁷ In July 1941, the Wehrmacht-Propaganda-Report noted that “besides uncounted individual defectors even units up to battalion strength deserted united

³² On the problem of typicality see Roger Reese, “Ten Jewish Red Army Veterans of the Great Patriotic War: In Search of the Mythical Representative Soldier’s Story,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 27, no. 3 (2014): 420-29.

³³ Cherkassov, *General Kononov*, vol. I: 140.

³⁴ Aron Shneer, *Plen. Sovetskie voennoplennye v Germanii, 1941-1945* (Moscow and Jerusalem: Mosty kultury, Geshtarim, 2005), 144.

³⁵ S. I Drobiazko, *Pod znamenami vruga. Antisovetskie formirovaniia v sostave germanskikh vooruzhennykh sil. 1941-1945* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2005), 52.

³⁶ “Der geschlossene Übertritt einer Einheit dieser Größenordnung war einzigartig.” Franz W. Seidler, “Kononow, Iwan Nikitisch,” in his *Die Kollaboration 1939-1945* (Munich and Berlin: Herbig, 1995), 290-92, here: 290.

³⁷ Andreas Hillgruber und Gerhard Hümmelchen, “Chronik. Vom 1. September 1939 bis 31. Dezember 1941,” in: *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht (Wehrmachtführungsstab) 1940-1945* (Frankfurt a.M.: Bernhard & Graefe, 1961-65), vol. 1: 1940/1941, 1149-1243, here: 1217.

and led by their officers;” and in August, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the Soviet 60th Infantry Division – altogether 1,500 troops – surrendered in unison to the German 4th Army.³⁸ A witness interviewed in 1992 remembered how shortly after the occupation of a village in Poltava region, a unit of Red Army soldiers several hundreds strong, led by a colonel, gave themselves up to the Germans.³⁹ From the Caucasus front in 1942 come reports of entire battalions defecting, “led by the battalion commander.”⁴⁰ Finally, many Red Army veterans remember the surrender of a surrounded sub-unit of the Estonian Rifle Corps during the battle for Velikie Luki in the winter of 1942-43.⁴¹

³⁸ Ortwin Buchbender, *Das tönende Erz. Deutsche Propaganda gegen die Rote Armee im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag, 1978), 91, 92-93.

³⁹ Shneer, *Plen*, 134.

⁴⁰ Joachim Hoffmann, *Kaukasien 1942/43. Das deutsche Heer und die Orientvölker der Sowjetunion* (Freiburg: Rombach Verlag, 1991), 387 (2 cases); three other cases, which do not mention whether or not commanders defected as well: 406, 415; case of a regiment led by its commanders: 407.

⁴¹ Il’ia Vershinin, interviews with Ivan Iakovlevich Lisetskii (1 April 2012), Karl Petrovich Villemson (26 March 2013), Koppel’ Isaakovich Svitskii (12 October 2013), Arnol’d Konstantinovich Meri (18 July 2006); Nikolai Gerasimovich Vaganov (31 August 2011); Iuri Pavlovich Aland (7 October 2013); <http://iremember.ru/memoirs/pekhotintsi/lisetskiy-ivan-yakovlevich/>; <http://iremember.ru/memoirs/pekhotintsi/villemson-karl-petrovich/> ; <http://iremember.ru/memoirs/pekhotintsi/svitskiy-svitskiy-koppel-isaakovich-itskhakovich/> ; <http://iremember.ru/memoirs/pekhotintsi/meri-arnold-konstantinovich/> ; <http://iremember.ru/memoirs/minometchiki/vaganov-nikolay-gerasimovich/> ; <http://iremember.ru/memoirs/nkvd-i-smersh/aland-uri-pavlovich/> (last accessed 4 November 2015).

There are also reports of attempted surrender of large units, which failed because the Germans would not accept the defectors' conditions:

When we fell into German hands our General turned to the Germans and offered him then to surrender our whole unit, but to have the Germans not disarm us and instead use us against the Soviets. (You think you [sic] unit would have gone along on that?) I know that 80 % would have. There was such a mood then, people felt that they had been abandoned to fate, that the Soviet authorities were responsible [sic] for the abuses and for the neglect of the soldiers.... But the Germans just replied "Verrueckt" [sic: should be "verrückt" – "crazy"].⁴²

Many group defections were thwarted by the Soviet side. According to partial data collected by security forces embedded in the Soviet frontline units, between the start of the war and December 1941, a total of 102 group desertions to the enemy succeeded, involving 1,944 people. Stalin's policemen prevented another 159 attempts involving 1,874 soldiers.⁴³

Group defections were not necessarily committed by military units. As Roger Reese has pointed out, the typical primary group making life bearable at the front were five or fewer comrades, a social integration below the unit level coming "at the expense of the cohesion of the larger military organization."⁴⁴ It was exactly these kinds of spontaneous collectives that

⁴² Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule A, Fol. 20, Case 395. Male, 33, Great Russian, Painter. Widener Library, Harvard University, p. 47.

⁴³ A. G. Bezverkhnyi, *SMERSH. Istoricheskie ocherki i arkhivnye dokumenty* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Glavarkhiva Moskvyy, 2003), 26-27.

⁴⁴ Roger Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought. The Red Army's Military Effectiveness in World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 216-27, quotation: 226.

often defected together, particularly after 1941. Of the 334 defectors to the German 296th Infantry Division in 1942 and 1943, just over half (179 or 54 percent) came as part of a group. These groups were exactly the size Reese postulates for the primary groups in the Red Army: 47 groups of two, 15 groups of three, five groups of four, and only one each of five, seven, and eight.

From 1941, however, we even have reports of larger groups not based on pre-existing military units. Major General A. Z. Akimenko recalled in his 1953 memoir:

... a large number of replacement troops from Kursk, numbering about 900 men, committed treachery to the interests of our homeland. As if by command, this group rose up, threw away their rifles, and, with raised hands ... proceeded to the side of the enemy tanks. ... I gave an order for two artillery battalions to open fire on the traitors and the enemy tanks. As a result, a considerable number of the traitors were killed and wounded, and the enemy tanks were scattered.⁴⁵

Another gaggle of 200 was more lucky. Led by a Siberian, these men fought their way to the German lines. When Soviet commissars tried to stop them the would-be defectors “killed them and moved on.”⁴⁶

As far as the composition of the *kononovtsy* is concerned, we have no information about the social, ethnic, and generational composition of this unit. We only know that many

⁴⁵ A. A. Maslov, “How Were Soviet Blocking Detachments Employed?” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 9, no. 2 (1996): 427-35; here 430-31, citing a manuscript memoir from the Russian Military Archive. See also David M. Glantz, *Colossus Reborn. The Red Army at War, 1941-1943* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 580-81.

⁴⁶ Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 12-13.

of them were, like their commander, Cossacks, a group with a particular history of persecution by the Soviet regime.⁴⁷ This fact seems to confirm the assumptions of historians about who was more likely to fight for Stalin, and who more inclined to refuse to do so. To cite the best book on the topic:

Young, urban, working class, or student, Russians were more likely to stick with the fight and maintain their motivation. The older generation, non-Russians, and peasants were more likely to opt out of the war in the short or long term and to exhibit lower morale.⁴⁸

My data on the defectors to the 296th ID qualifies this image while confirming its broad outlines. Of the 246 defectors whose nationality is known, 55 percent were Russians, 19 percent Ukrainians, 8 percent Kazakhs, 5 percent Belorussian, and 4 percent Uzbeks. Comparisons with the population at large are somewhat spurious, as the composition of defectors might simply reflect the composition of the fighting forces in front of the German 269th ID. Nevertheless, such a comparison does show that Russians (58 percent in the 1939 census) were under-represented among the defectors, while Ukrainians (16 percent in 1939) and Belorussians (3 percent in 1939) are somewhat over-represented. Some of the non-Slavs were found much more often in my sample than in the population at large (Kazakhs: 2 percent in 1939; Uzbeks: 3 percent).⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Peter Holquist, ““Conduct merciless mass terror ‘: Decossackization on the Don, 1919,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 38, Nos. 1-2 (1997): 127-62.

⁴⁸ Reese, *Why Stalin’s Soldiers Fought*, 253.

⁴⁹ *Vsesoiuznaia perepis’ naseleniia 1939 goda. Osnovnye itogi* (Moscow: Nauka, 1992), 57.

On the campaign to integrate non-Slavs into the Red Army and keep them, inter alia, from

Kononov was extraordinary in terms of his social background and military rank. The lower orders were clearly over-represented among defectors. The 1939 census classified 44 percent as collective farmers, 32 percent as “workers of city and countryside,” and 3 percent as artisans. Together, then, these blue collar laboring classes constituted 79 percent in the census. This compares to 86 percent in my sample of defectors. Military rank shows an even more extreme picture. Only two out of 334 were, like Kononov, career soldiers. In their vast majority, the defectors were rank-and-file red army men (83 percent), reflecting the social origin of these conscripts from the laboring masses. Judging from one published breakdown of a frontline unit – the 60th Army in 1945 – this share would imply a serious under-representation of commanders (by 1945 called “officers”: 13 percent, plus 25 percent sergeants).⁵⁰

The age structure of these traitors is interesting as well: they range from the birth year 1895 to 1925. According to the accepted theory, young people should have been more loyal to Stalinism than older ones and hence we should expect the defectors to be from the older cohorts, while the profile of war dead should be younger. As in the case of ethnicity and class, our data set both supports this theory and adds qualifications. As table 1 indicates, the vast majority of defectors were older than 30, while the majority of war dead were thirty or younger.

defection, see Brandon Schechter, “‘The People’s Instructions’: Indigenizing the Great Patriotic War among ‘Non-Russians’,” *Ab Imperio* 2012, no. 3 (2012): 109-33.

⁵⁰ Computed from statistical report of composition of 60th Army (as of 1 January 1945), published in: “Rassekrechennyye dokumenty TsAMO ob osvobozhdenii kontslageria Osventsim”, *Fishki Net* (27 January 2015), http://cdn.fishki.net/upload/post/201501/27/1404604/7_18.jpg (last accessed 27 July 2016).

Age	Defectors (percent ; N=334)	Demographic losses of Red Army (1941-1945; percent)	Difference
20 or younger	13.5	18.0	-4.5
21-30	26.6	39.5	-12.9
31-40	38.3	28.5	9.8
41-50	21.6	13.0	8.6
older than 50	0.0	1.0	-1.0
Sum	100.0	100.0	

Table 1: Age structure defectors and demographic losses of Red Army

Note: The data for the defectors to the 296 ID include the exact date of defection, but only the year of birth. Thus, the exact age cannot be calculated. The proxy used here is “year of defection minus year of birth,” a fairly close approximation. The “difference” between demographic losses and defectors is calculated as percent defectors minus percent demographic losses; a positive number means more defected than died in this age group, a negative number means more died than defected.

Source for demographic losses: G. F. Krivosheev, “Poteri vooruzhennykh sil SSSR,”

Liudskie poteri SSSR v period Vtoroi morovoi voyny. Sbornik statei (St. Petersburg, 1995), 78.

However, this predominance of older men can partially be explained by the age structure of the Red Army itself. Stalin’s soldiers were indeed older than often assumed. According to their commander, Vasilii Chuikov, the majority of the Soviet men fighting in the ruins of

Stalingrad, for example, were “between thirty and thirty-five years of age.”⁵¹ One available breakdown of a rifle regiment in early 1942 shows a predominance of men in the late thirties and early forties (39 percent in their thirties and 53 percent forty and older). Published data on the age of conscripts is less conclusive, showing only that the vast majority (67 percent of the total manpower and 78 percent of those called up during the war) was born before 1920.⁵² Still, defectors tended to be older than soldiers overall. The personnel of the 60th Army was, in early 1945, made up to 42 percent of men and women born after the revolution, compared to only 32 percent among the defectors in our sample.⁵³

While older men, non-Russians, and rank-and-file soldiers were more likely to defect than young Russian officers, this statistical profile should not lead us to disregard the large number of people who were not conforming to this numerical portrait. It is indeed noteworthy that 40 percent of defectors were 30 or younger, that 55 percent were Russians, and that career soldiers like Kononov, but also students, scientists, and even a movie director were among them.

The available quantitative data on defectors are very fragmentary. Thus, we cannot be sure that the shares of the different groups we find in my sample represent the overall picture. Nevertheless, whatever the distortions in my dataset are, it does show that *many* ethnic Russians and *many* young people did defect; it also shows that we can find people of pretty much any kind of social, ethnic, and generational background among defectors. If one digs long enough, it is even possible, in a couple of particularly disturbing cases, to find Jews

⁵¹ Stenographic report of interview of A. A. Belkin of Vassilii Ivanovich Chuikov (Stalingrad, 5 January 1943), in: *Die Stalingrad Protokolle*, 322-48, here: 342.

⁵² Edele, ““What Are We Fighting For?”,” 255-58, especially tables 1 and 2 and chart 1.

⁵³ Computed from statistical report of composition of 60th Army (as of 1 January 1945).

among those going over voluntarily to the Germans!⁵⁴

2) Reasons for defection

Why did Soviet soldiers defect? Kononov asserted that he did so because he hated Stalinism and wanted to fight for the liberation of his country. He was not alone, as overwhelming evidence from the German files proves beyond a reasonable doubt. “The defector claims to have defected out of conviction,” a 1942 interrogation report reads. “He wants to fight in the German army He claims to have killed a politruk while standing guard.”⁵⁵

Political disaffection focused on several issues. One was victimization by the regime, often experienced by the defector himself or a member of his family. Kononov lost at least one brother to the NKVD. Others did, too. A 1941 defector claimed that “he does not want to have anything to do with the communists, because the Reds shot his father in 1918.”⁵⁶

Another noted, in 1942, that his father had been “murdered” by the Bolsheviks and he himself – presumably because of discrimination against sons of “enemies of the people” – had poor chances for advancement in that society.⁵⁷ In 1943, another Red Army soldier cited embitterment over the confiscation of his cattle and his prison sentence as a result of his

⁵⁴ 18. Infanterie Division (mot.), Ic, “Tätigkeitsbericht vom 26.5.-31.12.1941,” BA-MA RH 26-18/55 (2 cases); another case: Abwehr Kd. 103 to Ic/AO, 23 April 1944, “Aufenthaltsmöglichkeit im russ. Hinterland,” BA-MA RW 49/615, document C.

⁵⁵ Gefangenenernehmung, 27.5.42, 18 ID(mot), Ic, “Anlagen zum Tätigkeitsbericht, 1.5.1942-24.8.1942,” BA-MA RH 26-18/62.

⁵⁶ 296. Division, Ic, Gefangenenernehmungsergebnisse, 25.8.41, BA-MA RH 24-17/172, folio 73reverse.

⁵⁷ 21. Infanterie Division, Abt. Ic an Generalkommando XXVIII A. K., Überläuferaussage, 31.12.1942, BA-MA RH 26-21/78, folio 193.

attempts to resist this theft. “Therefore, he no longer wants to fight for this government.”⁵⁸

Another cause of disaffection widespread among defectors was the economic system, in particular the collective farms. “Hatred against communism and the hard life in the kolkhoz,” was a reason for defection cited in January 1943.⁵⁹ But also the entire system of shortage economics was a cause for disgruntlement, as an administrator-turned-lieutenant made clear. Before the war, and despite a two-income white-collar household, he could not afford more than bread to feed his family. When in the summer or early fall of 1941, after his defection, he could not find a translator to speak to, he wrote a pathetic report “to the German staff of the fighting army,” where he laid out why, in his opinion, the entire Soviet people had waited for this war, a war of liberation from Bolshevism, as he erroneously thought.⁶⁰

At the same time, however, such putative resistance fighters against Stalinism were in the minority.⁶¹ Only one percent were, like Kononov, ready to turn their guns against the Soviets, despite the fact that another 34 percent cited political disaffection as a motive for crossing the line. A similarly big group can be described as “defeatists:” they were interested in the war ending for them personally.⁶² They were not motivated to fight *for* Stalin, but often

⁵⁸ Generalkommando XVII. A.K., Abt. Ic, Vernehmungsbericht Nr. 46, 7.8.43, BA-MA RH 24-17/210, folio 107reverse.

⁵⁹ 21. Infanterie-Division, Abt. Ic, an Generalkommando XXVIII. A. K., Überläuferaussage (3.1.1943), BA-MA RH 26-21/78, folio 217.

⁶⁰ A German translation of the letter is included in Generalkommando XXIII Armeekorps, Ic, “Anlagen zum TB” (July to October 1941), BA-MA RH 24-23/239, folio 59.

⁶¹ These data are discussed in greater detail in Edele, *Stalin’s Defectors*, chapter 6.

⁶² On defeatism among ethnic Russians see Oleg Budnitskii, “The Great Patriotic War and Soviet Society: Defeatism, 1941–42,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 15, no. 4 (2014): 767-97.

also not *against* the Soviet regime. This position was summarized by a serial deserter, a barely literate Ukrainian collective farmer, born in 1915. He surrendered to the Germans in September 1941, then ran away from the POW camp and returned to his village on occupied territory, where he lived, apparently unharassed, until 1944. The returning Soviets drafted him into the Red Army in April 1944, and he deserted in October, this time behind the own lines. He was caught, put into a penal unit, where he was wounded in January 1945. In hospital, he uttered the words which would get him a sentence for “anti-Soviet agitation”, but which indeed simply expressed a view of his place in the world. That place was not on either side of the great combat between Hitler and Stalin, but somewhere in between, or, preferably, on the side-lines: “I said, what are we fighting for? It would be better if Hitler and ... Stalin would come out and fight [among themselves]. He who wins, his government also should get victory. The people should not be thrown into ruin, into this war.”⁶³ This basic refusal to fight, if at all possible, was widespread. 30 percent of the defectors in my database gave “no desire to fight” (*keine Kampflust*) as the reason for their desertion across the line. If we add other expressions of defeatism, this share increases to 34 percent. At times this position was coupled with an outright refusal to pick up arms against the Soviet side. One man who came over to the Germans in late May 1942 declined to join an anti-Partisan outfit when this option was put to him. “He defected because he finally wanted to stop fighting,” as his interrogator noted laconically.⁶⁴

⁶³ Review Case concerning anti-Soviet agitation, GARF A-461, op. 1, d. 1820, l. 2, 11. On this view of the world during the war see also Mark Edele, “Toward a Sociocultural History of the Soviet Second World War,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 15, no. 4 (2014): 829-35, here: 834.

⁶⁴ 18 ID(mot), Ic, “Anlagen zum Tätigkeitsbericht, 1.5.1942-24.8.1942,” BA-MA RH 26-18/62.

Thus, the majority of Soviet defectors are better understood as refugees from Stalinism than as resisters against it. They either were defeatists (34 percent) or were disgruntled with the Soviet regime (another 34 percent); neither group intended to fight on the German side. Only a radical, if significant minority of men like Kononov defected because they wanted to turn their guns against Stalin's socialism. For the majority, defection was one, if extremely risky, way to try to end this war. Poor food, housing, and equipment, brutal superiors, a perception, however misguided, that life would be better under the Germans than the Soviets, family on occupied territory, or an imminent threat to the own life were often the immediate reasons for crossing the frontline. The phenomenon of defection among Red Army soldiers, then, might not show us that there was a lot of resistance against Stalinism, but it does show that in many cases, loyalty to the Soviet regime, or even simply to the homeland, was not strong enough to make defection an impossible choice.

3) A mass phenomenon?

How often did defection take place? We cannot be entirely sure, largely because it is likely that the phenomenon was particularly pronounced in 1941, at a time when German might seemed overwhelming and when illusions about German conduct were not yet challenged by observable facts on the ground. During the big cauldron battles of 1941, even units that usually made a distinction between captive and defector were unable to distinguish between the two, partially because the border between them became so fuzzy, partially because so many prisoners were made that even counting them was an overwhelming task. From 1942, however, there was a concerted effort not only to encourage defection, but also to count the results.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ See Buchbender, *Das tönende Erz*, passim.

The available data for 1942-45 are summarized in table 2. They show a high level of defection which remained fairly constant over the course of the war. Indeed, as German military fortunes declined, their share rose from under 5 to over 6 percent. The overall share of about 5 percent for the entire war is an extremely conservative lower limit, both for the reasons noted in table 2 and because it is highly likely that the share was higher in 1941, the year of Kononov's defection.

	POWs	Defectors	Share of defectors (%)
1942	1,653,000	79,319	4.80
1943	565,000	26,108	4.62
1944	147,493	9,207	6.24
1945	33,110	2,015	6.09
sum	2,398,603	116,649	4.86

Table 2: POWs and defectors 1942-1945

Sources: 1942-3 POW data: Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia. 1941-1945. A Study of Occupation Policies* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1957), 427, fn. 2; 1942 defectors: BA-MA RW4/264; 1943 defectors: BA-MA RH 2/2624, folio 2, 42; 1944-45 (POWs and defectors): RH 2/1926 and RH2/2633k.

Notes: Dallin's POW numbers for 1944 and 1945 conform to those listed by BA-MA source (Foreign Armies East), only that his are rounded to thousands. 1945 data here are 1 January to 10 April only; RW4/264 data for 1942 are May to December only, and exclude data for Army Group South in July. Thus, the number of defectors for 1942 and the share of defectors for that year are lower limits.

These are significant numbers. As several German military historians have pointed out, among American, British, and French POWs, only 0.02 percent were classified as defectors.⁶⁶ Thus, even the highly conservative share of 5 percent for 1942-45 is 250 times higher than comparative cases. However we twist and turn the statistical evidence, there is no doubt, voluntary surrender was more prevalent among Soviet POWs than any other military, at least in the European theater. This prevalence is particularly striking, given the treatment Soviet POWs received in German detention. Sometimes described as “genocidal” it cannot be compared with anything their Allied counterparts had to endure.⁶⁷

4) After Capture

After they crossed the line, the traces of defectors quickly get lost in the mass of Soviet POWs. Very many perished. In particular in 1941, when no policy existed to separate defectors from captives, most were simply put into the same terribly lethal POW camps and left to die, just as their less voluntary peers.⁶⁸ Despite official policy to the contrary, though, even in 1941 some defectors, such as Kononov, managed to convince German commanders to

⁶⁶ Christian Hartmann, *Wehrmacht im Ostkrieg. Front und militarisches Hinterland 1941/42*. 2nd ed. (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2010), 727; Joachim Hoffmann, “Die Kriegführung aus der Sicht der Sowjetunion,” in: *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Band 4: Der Angriff Auf Die Sowjetunion* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1983), 713-809, here: 728.

⁶⁷ Thomas Earl Porter, “Hitler’s Rassenkampf in the East: The Forgotten Genocide of Soviet POWs.” *Nationalities Papers* 37, no. 6 (2009): 839-59; Peter Monteath, *POW: Australian Prisoners of War in Hitler’s Reich* (Sydney: macmillan Australia, 2011).

⁶⁸ Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden. Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941-1945* (Bonn: Dietz, 1997).

let them fight on their side, or at least provide supplementary services. Although we have no way to quantify their number, it is likely that very many of the survivors, maybe the majority, became military collaborators with the Germans. Some participated in the most gruesome aspects of the German war in the East, such as the Holocaust.⁶⁹ But of course, defectors were not the only source for the 1.6 million Soviet citizens who served as military auxiliaries on the German side – the majority had been “normal” POWs, or were selected from among the civilian population.⁷⁰

Military collaborators or not, those who had defected to the enemy had reasons for concern at war’s end. After all, they had committed treason, a capital offence even if they did not further aid the German war effort. Here the history of defectors shades over into the histories of repatriation and of displaced persons, and it becomes increasingly hard to disentangle the three. The basic story is that under the Yalta agreement, all Soviet citizens were to be returned to Stalin’s lands, and many were against their will. They passed through a relatively thorough process of identity verification, called “filtration.” The majority were released from this form of temporary detention, and either re-enrolled into the army or sent home. Later, however, many were re-arrested, if evidence against them was found.⁷¹ It is

⁶⁹ For examples: USHMM RG-75.001, box 21, folder 133; USHMM RG-74.001, folder 5.

⁷⁰ For the number: Rolf-Dieter Müller, *An der Seite der Wehrmacht. Hitlers ausländische Helfer beim ‘Kreuzzug gegen den Bolschewismus’ 1941-1945* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2010), 242.

⁷¹ Pavel Polian, *Deportiert nach Hause. Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im “Dritten Reich” und ihre Repatriierung* (Munich and Vienna: Oldenbourg, 2001); Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War. A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society, 1941-1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), chapter 5; Igor’ Vasil’evich Govorov, “Fil’tratsiia sovetskikh repatriantov v 40-e gg. xx vv. Tseli, metody i itogi.” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 49, no. 2 (2008): 365-82.

indeed striking how easy it was to pass filtration with a less than clean record: nearly all of the Soviet war crimes trial records I have read concern defendants who had initially passed the checking system and who were picked up later as part of more normal investigative processes. Many of them had committed terrible crimes but were able to sell cover stories to the filtration officials.

What happened to defectors who were investigated by the Soviet judicial apparatus depended on many variables.⁷² People like Kononov would have been executed, had the Soviets got their hands on them, as happened to the most prominent of the collaborators, General Vlassov.⁷³ But rank and file military collaborators were not necessarily sentenced to death.⁷⁴ For one, there was no death penalty in the Soviet Union between May 1947 and May 1950. Anybody caught during this window typically received 25 years in a labor camp. Rank and file military collaborators, moreover, if they had not been found guilty of war crimes, received the somewhat lesser punishment of “special settlement,” i.e., exile to Siberia or other remote regions, but without the necessity to live in a concentration camp.⁷⁵

⁷² On the process of finding and punishing traitors see Vanessa Voisin, *L'URSS contre ses traîtres. L'épuration Soviétique (1941-1955)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2015).

⁷³ Catherine Andreyev, *Vlasov and the Russian Liberation Movement: Soviet Reality and Émigré Theories* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1987); A. N. Artizov (ed.), *General Vlasov: Istoriia predatel'stva*. 2 vols in 3 books (Moscow: Rosspen, 2015).

⁷⁴ Cf. Tanja Penter, “Collaboration on Trial: New Source Material on Soviet Postwar Trials against Collaborators,” *Slavic Review* 64, no. 4 (2005): 782-90; id., “Local Collaborators on Trial: Soviet War Crimes Trials under Stalin (1943-1953),” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 49, no. 2-3 (2008): 341-64.

⁷⁵ Edele, *Soviet Veterans*, 115.

This relative leniency of a regime which during the war had equated normal captivity with treason has not always been appreciated by historians.⁷⁶ It remains somewhat of a puzzle even today. It could certainly not have been predicted by defectors facing the prospect of return to the Soviet Union. Naturally, many of them tried to evade repatriation, and many succeeded, although we have no way of knowing the number of defectors among these “non-returnees.”⁷⁷ They would migrate to countries all over the world, including, like Kononov (now Gorski), to Australia.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ For example: Ulrike Goeken-Haidl, *Der Weg zurück. Die Repatriierung sowjetischer Zwangsarbeiter und Kriegsgefangener während und nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2006).

⁷⁷ Mark Wyman, *DPs: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980); Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted. European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011); Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Andrew Paul Janco, “‘Unwilling’: The One-Word Revolution in Refugee Status, 1940-51,” *Contemporary European History* 23 (2014): 429-46.

⁷⁸ See Mark Edele and Sheila Fitzpatrick (eds.), *Displaced Persons: From the Soviet Union to Australia in the Wake of the Second World War*, Special issue of *History Australia* 12, No. 2 (2015). See also Mark Aarons, *Sanctuary: Nazi fugitives in Australia* (Port Melbourne: William Heinemann Australia, 1989); id., *War Criminals Welcome. Australia, A Sanctuary for Fugitive War Criminals Since 1945* (Melbourne: Black Inc, 2001); and Klaus Neumann, *Across the Seas. Australia's Response to Refugees. A History* (Collingwood: Black Inc., 2015). Despite its small population, Australia took the third largest number of Soviet-origin

Kononov had not given up his political-military ambitions after he had become Gorski. In June 1951 he approached the Australian government seeking an appointment to the General Staff.⁷⁹ This quest was ultimately unsuccessful, despite Kononov's strong self-promotion as not only "a perfect gentleman" with "military education of the highest rank" who, during battle, had "made correct decisions in all circumstances" and was "a first class speaker with influence on the masses" because of his "inflammable anti-communist speeches."⁸⁰ It appears that he managed to assemble like-minded anti-communists, including a former subordinate, Konstantin Cherkassov, who would become his hagiographer. Stuck in the Australian provinces, however, his political work gradually declined. He did join the Union for the Struggle for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia (SBONR) in 1964, a major anti-Communist organization of the second wave of Russian emigration (as opposed to the first wave, which had left during and after Revolution and Civil War). He died in 1967, according to some sources in a car crash often presumed to be a KGB assassination, according to others of natural causes.⁸¹

DPs. See Mark Edele and Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Displaced Persons: From the Soviet Union to Australia in the Wake of the Second World War," *History Australia* 12, No. 2 (2015): 7-16, here: 9.

⁷⁹ Department of the Army. Minute Paper. "Subject: General Kononoff – Request for Appointment on General Staff," (26 June 1951), NAA MP742/1, 115/1/437.

⁸⁰ "Who General Kononoff Is, and What His Abilities Are," NAA MP742/1, 115/1/437.

⁸¹ Aleksandrov, "Kononov Ivan Nikitich," 500; K. M. Aleksandrov and O. I. Nuzhdin, "Novye dokumenty k biografii General-Maiora I. N. Kononova," *Russkoe proshloe* 12 (2012): 259-79, here: 261.