The Soviet Occupation of Germany

This is a major new account of the Soviet occupation of post-war Germany and the beginning of the Cold War. Dr Filip Slaveski shows how in the immediate aftermath of war the Red Army command struggled to contain the violence of soldiers against German civilians and, at the same time, feed and rebuild the country. This task was then assumed by the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SVAG), which was established to impose order on this chaos. Its attempt, however, intensified the battle for resources and power among competing occupation organs, especially SVAG and the army, which spilled over from threats and sabotage into fighting and shootouts in the streets. At times, such conflicts threatened to paralyse occupation governance, leaving armed troops, liberated POWs, and slave labourers free to roam. SVAG's successes in reducing the violence and reconstructing eastern Germany were a remarkable achievement in the chaotic aftermath of war.

FILIP SLAVESKI is an Honorary Fellow in History at the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne, Australia.

The Soviet Occupation of Germany

Hunger, Mass Violence, and the Struggle for Peace, 1945–1947

Filip Slaveski

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi - 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107043817

First published 2013

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-04381-7 Hardback

For Sr Lieutenant I. N. Sychkov,
who lost more in victory than in defeat
dod 25.3.1946

Contents

Tables and map

Preface

Soviet soldiers marched into Germany in the winter of 1945 on roads lined with wooden plaques inciting them to wreak vengeance on the country. Their pockets were stuffed with newspaper articles explaining why they should. Red Army propagandists planted more plaques and printed more articles over the winter, worrying that the exhausted soldiers needed a morale boost before launching the final stage of the war. They need not have worried. The horrors of German occupation in the Soviet Union which the articles evoked paled in comparison to the sight and smell of them. The soldiers knew these horrors all too well and were ready to avenge the millions dead.

The prisoners of war (POWs) and slave labourers whom the soldiers had liberated from the camps in Poland and Germany were ready to seek their own justice. Many joined the soldiers in the explosion of violence against anyone and anything German. The Red Army command struggled to contain the violence and, at the same time, feed and rebuild the country that it had once been ordered to destroy. The Soviet leadership soon realised that the Red Army, which had defeated one of the largest and most brutal invading forces in history, could not act as a peacetime government.

The army was relieved of its governing duty in June 1945, one month after the war concluded. The Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SVAG) was then established to try and impose order on this chaos and reconstruct the country. SVAG's war was only beginning. It was surrounded by powerful Moscow-backed groups and organisations which pursued policies contradictory to its own. The army was out of control, with many officers incapable or unwilling to follow orders from the army command to stop their men from robbing and raping. They had even less control over the liberated slaves. Many officers were certainly not going to listen to SVAG 'upstarts' who complained about the violence, leaving the upstarts with little choice but to try to arrest the violent soldiers themselves and denounce their negligent officers. There were about 40,000 SVAG members by summer's end in 1945, facing almost a 1.5 million

man army, more liberated slaves, and thousands of unsympathetic Soviet officials.[1]

Many historians can explain convincingly why some soldiers continued to attack German civilians after the end of the war. Such violence was a response to their traumatic experience of war and German occupation.[2] It is more difficult to explain why some of their officers initially sought to protect civilians, more so why they were unsuccessful even when the army command became committed to reining in the violence. The conflict between SVAG and the army is central to answering this question.[3] The indiscipline in the army which erupted during the final stages of the war endured long afterwards. As difficult as it was for officers to bring the troops into line then, when there was still a war to fight, it was almost impossible now in peacetime. Army officers who desired it still could not simply 'go by the book' and discipline their men for every rape, murder, or robbery. They would not have survived long if they did. On the other hand, they could hardly have retained control of their detachments for long if they did nothing. To manage their men in the chaos of 1945, many officers needed to strike a balance between punishing the worst offenders internally and still allowing others (and themselves) to behave like the conquerors they were – a precarious and often unattainable balance that the army command and certainly SVAG refused or failed to appreciate. Most importantly, officers needed to protect their men from SVAG, which, frustrated with the continuation of troop violence, arrested and sought the prosecution of violent soldiers. Army officers understood this as a wanton assault on their authority that cast doubt on the quality of their command. They thus protected their men, in the process reinforcing the very patronage ties essential to maintain control of their units, a task now more difficult with no war to fight and no fear of imminent death. Officers provided alibis for suspects, frustrated SVAG investigations, and

[1] Estimates of SVAG membership vary. By September 1945, SVAG officially numbered 46,867 workers, yet the number was actually closer to 40,000. T. V. Tsarevskaia-Diakina, 'Struktura SVAG,' in *Sovetskaia voennaia administratsiia v Germanii, 1945–1949; Spravochnik*, ed. A. V. Doronin, J. Foitzik, and T. V. Tsarevskaia-Diakina (Moscow: Rosspen, 2009), 24.

[2] Norman Naimark, Catherine Merridale, and Elena Seniavskaia all discuss psychological factors accounting for troop violence at length. N. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); C. Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939–1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); E. S. Seniavskaia, *Frontovoe pokolenie, 1941–1945: Istoriko-psikhologicheskoe issledovanie* (Moscow: In-t Rossiiskoi Istorii RAN, 1995).

[3] Naimark does note that the inability of SVAG officers to exert control over the troops did not help to reduce the level of troop violence, yet does not investigate the conflict between SVAG and the army. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 90. This question is dealt with at length in Chapter 4.

demanded the release of their men from SVAG lock-ups. When the release was not forthcoming, some officers stormed the lock-ups with their units, guns blazing, to free their boys.

Despairing, SVAG reacted to this challenge to their authority by arresting more soldiers and denouncing more of their 'negligent' officers. But this approach only exacerbated the troop violence problem. Sensing themselves under attack, many army officers now spent less time punishing and more protecting their men, often effectively, leaving them to trawl the streets for longer. It also sparked the beginning of violence between SVAG and the army. At its height, this conflict could no longer be contained to denunciations, threat-making and sabotage, but spilled over into the street as fistfights and shoot-outs between SVAG and army units raged outside the bars and theatres of the Soviet occupation zone in eastern Germany.[4] This violent conflict, so detrimental to the combatants and the reconstruction of Germany then, has been largely ignored since.

Some historians prefer to understand the continuation of troop violence as a problem of indiscipline in the army and focus on its cooperation with SVAG.[5] Indiscipline certainly was the problem, and not only in Germany. In other Soviet-occupied territories and the Union itself, active and demobilised troops carried wartime violence into the post-war era but were eventually reined in by governments as they established greater control over their chaotic post-war societies. There was no such government to speak of in Germany. SVAG established control over the occupied population, but not over the army and thus not entirely over the country. The harder it tried to bring army officers into line, the more undisciplined they became.

Some historians also assume that the conflicts which developed between organs in Germany were little different to those which raged

[4] Hereafter, 'the zone'. Germany was divided into four separate occupation zones after the war. Each zone was administered by one of the four occupying powers (Britain, America, France, and the Soviet Union). The Soviet zone was also formally divided into five states (lands/provinces) on 9 July 1945, which broadly corresponded to traditional boundaries in eastern Germany: Mecklenburg and Western Pomerania, Saxony, Brandenburg, Thuringia, and Saxony-Anhalt (Appendix 1). Although SVAG headquarters were situated in Karlshorst (Berlin), each state was governed by a central Soviet Military Administration (SVA) that controlled the numerous *komendaturas* within its borders, which formed the skeleton of SVAG power in the zone. Each *komendatura* was responsible for governing a set geographical area and was run by a *komendant*, small staff, and guard.

[5] For the focus on cooperation in the Russian literature see Vladimir Zakharov's article, 'Voennye komendatury SVAG v sovetskoi zone okkupatsii Germanii 1945–1949 gg.', in *Deiatel'nost' sovetskikh voennykh komendatur po likvidatsii posledstvii voiny i organizatsii mirnoi zhizni v sovetskoi zone okkupatsii Germanii 1945–1949: Sbornik dokumentov*, ed. V. V. Zakharov (Moscow: Rosspen, 2005).

back home.[6] After all, they were expected to strive for power and resources within Stalinism, sometimes even violently. But this drive for power in Germany was fostered by the structure of the Soviet occupation machinery, where lines of jurisdictional control were blurred to a much greater extent than in the Soviet Union. And without a dominant organ in Germany which could settle the disputes among its subordinates, long drawn-out battles were bound to develop among them. At times, such conflicts threatened to paralyse areas of occupation governance. This is what makes SVAG's successes in reconstructing the zone so remarkable. The greatest of these was surely establishing a functioning food rationing system in the post-war chaos, while armed troops and repatriates (liberated Soviet POWs and slave labourers) roamed the countryside conducting their own requisitions, which threatened to starve the country.

Theoretically at least, this conflict should never have emerged. How could there be a conflict between SVAG and the army when the military commanders appointed to the SVAG brass effectively retained command of their divisions? The famous Marshal Zhukov was head of both SVAG and GSOVG, the new name for Red Army forces in Germany.[7] He and some of the military commanders sat on the SVAG Military Council, which tackled the most pressing problems facing the Soviets and issued orders binding on both SVAG and the army. But the synapse between the brass and the army officer corps was wider now than during the war. Even Zhukov struggled to bridge it and resolve the conflict, which was stifling his attempts to bring order to the zone. And when he could break apart the combatants, he was left to settle their internal disputes and clear the webs of organisational confusion that plagued them – the DNA of the infant Stalinist leviathan that was to rule half of Germany for forty years.

The initial years of the Soviet occupation were marked by this tension between the destructive forces of violence and constructive forces of national regeneration. Despite the official 'pro-German' policies pursued by the Soviet leadership, people were simply uncertain as to which of these

[6] For the parallels between Soviet and German state-building see Nikita Petrov's essay on the matter, 'Formirovanie organov nemetskogo samoupravleniia i sovetizatsiia Vostochnoi Germanii', in *SVAG i nemetskie organy samoupravleniia 1945–1949: Sbornik dokumentov*, ed. N. V. Petrov (Moscow: Rosspen, 2006).

[7] The Soviet forces which invaded Germany were reorganised in June 1945 into the Group of Soviet Occupation Forces in Germany (GSOVG), referred to as the 'army'. Many Council members enjoyed dual positions in SVAG and the army, such as Generals F. E. Bokov and V. E. Makarov, etc. The lack of clarity surrounding the nature of the Military Council and the general lack of clarity regarding SVAG–army relations during 1945 and 1946 is discussed in a recent essay, J. Foitzik, 'Zamestitel' glavnonachal'stvuiushchego SVAG po politicheskim voprosam', in *Sovetskaia voennaia administratsiia v Germanii*, ed. Doronin, Foitzik, and Tsarevskaia-Diakina.

forces would emerge dominant in the first years of the occupation. It was only in 1947 that the SVAG–army conflict receded and troop violence ceased to be a staple of occupation life. Now the more positive Soviet policies aimed at engaging the civilian population began to bear fruit. This book is about the fundamental tension between violence and national regeneration, which traces the final victory of those Soviet officers and men who swallowed the pain of their experience under German occupation to rebuild a country with their new German 'allies' on the ruins of the past.

Acknowledgements

I have incurred many great debts in completing this book, none more so than to the eminent Soviet historian Stephen Wheatcroft, under whom I worked for almost a decade. His intellectual guidance and enduring friendship have enriched both this book and my life. In early 2010 I also first met the Australian historian John Hirst, who agreed to assist in preparing the original manuscript and who, years later, continued to do so well beyond his initial obligation. I am most grateful for his advice, friendship, and generosity, without which this book and especially its prose would have suffered enormously.

My fruitful collaborations with Mark Edele on the demobilisation of the Red Army after the Great Patriotic War and with L. H. Lumey on European famines have provided many insights to improve this book and to focus the original research upon which it is based. This research was assisted greatly by the excellent archivist Dina Nokhotovich at the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) and Oleg Khlevniuk, who offered me his valuable time and wealth of archival knowledge in Moscow. Robert Horvath, Steven Welch, and Stanislav Kulchytsky were kind enough to read earlier versions of my work and offer their valuable suggestions, as did my editors at Cambridge, Michael Watson, Gaia Poggiogalli, and particularly Dr Iveta Adams who, as copy-editor, has done much to improve the final version.

I have presented elements of my research at numerous conferences/workshops since 2007, most notably the biannual conferences of the Australasian Association for European History (AAEH) and at the 'International Workshop on Grain and Politics in the Twentieth Century' at Jiao Tong University in Shanghai. I am very thankful for much of the feedback from attendant colleagues. Other colleagues and friends too have always been ready to offer their opinions on the book and help with research, particularly Jared McBride in Russia and, in Melbourne, Shawn Borelli-Mear and Anthony Garnaut.

The most enduring debts are inevitably personal. My wonderful *khoziaika*, Nina Nikeshina, made a home for me in Moscow not unlike the

one that I left in Melbourne. Here I have been blessed with a most supportive family, whose encouragement for my work and tolerance for the discomforts that it sometimes brings always buoy my spirits. Without their support, particularly that rendered by my parents, this book would never have been written.

The original manuscript was produced with the assistance of the Writing Centre for Scholars and Researchers at the University of Melbourne, for which I am grateful – as I am to Nova Science Publishers Inc. for granting me permission to reprint in Chapter 7 sections of another of my works, F. Slaveski, 'The Occupiers' Burden: Tackling Food Shortage and Related Health Problems in Post-War Germany, 1945–47', in *Early Life Nutrition, Adult Health, and Development: Lessons from Changing Diets, Famines, and Experimental Studies*, ed. L. H. Lumey and A. Vaiserman (New York: Nova Science Publishers Inc., 2013).

Of course, any errors in this book are mine alone.

Abbreviations

ACC	Allied Control Council
Agitprop	Department for Agitation and Propaganda in the Central Committee of the VKP (b)
ARC	Allied Reparations Commission
CDU	Christian Democratic Union
DWK	German Economic Commission
GARF	State Archive of the Russian Federation
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GKO	State Defence Committee
GlavPURKKA	Main Political Administration of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army
Gosplan	State Planning Committee
GSOVG	Group of Soviet Occupation Forces in Germany
Komendant	Soviet commander in charge of *komendatura*
Komendatura	Area of Soviet administration in Germany
KPD	German Communist Party
KPÖ	Austrian Communist Party
KS	*Komendant*'s Service
LDP	German Liberal-Democratic Party
LIP	Level of Industry Plan
MGB	Ministry of State Security
MVD	Ministry of Internal Affairs
NCO	Non-commissioned officer
NKGB	People's Commissariat of State Security
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
NKID	People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs
NSDAP	National Socialist German Worker's (Nazi) Party
OGPU	Joint State Political Administration
OMGUS	Office of Military Government Unites States (Germany)
POW	Prisoner of war
RGAE	Russian State Economic Archive

RGASPI	Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History
SED	German Socialist Unity Party
SGAO	Soviet–German Joint Stock Company
SMERSH	Death to Spies (Soviet Military Counterintelligence)
Sovmin	Council of Ministers
Sovnarkom	Council of People's Commissars
SPD	German Social-Democratic Party
SPÖ	Austrian Social-Democratic Party
SVAG	Soviet Military Administration in Germany
TsK VKP (b)	Central Committee of the All Union Communist Party (bolsheviks)