

Introduction

In December 1941, several months into the occupation, peasants in the OPOCHKA district of northwest Russia organized a collection of Christmas gifts for German soldiers. Thousands of felt boots, gloves, and wool socks were delivered in what German officials saw as a display of gratitude for the liberation from Bolshevism.¹ In one pair of socks, a handwritten note was discovered.² It said:

I send the socks as a gift to the invincible German army and I wish for your victory over the Bolsheviks so that they will cease to exist everywhere and forever, and [I wish] for you a swift victory and a healthy return home.

Pushkin uezd, Voronets district . . . Rakhovo village,
 Mikhail Nikiforov

Embedded in a pair of socks sent as a gift to keep a German soldier's feet warm while fighting Soviet forces at the front, Nikiforov's message contained real material support. Like many others, he wished to do away with the Bolshevik regime, to make it disappear "everywhere and forever." Yet the offering also signaled a repudiation of Nazi Germany's imperial ambitions. Having no desire to see his fatherland controlled by foreign rulers, Nikiforov wished the Germans "a healthy return home" upon accomplishing their mission. The message reflects an anti-Soviet form of Russian patriotism, but also indicates the limits of pro-German loyalty. Mikhail Nikiforov's letter thus neatly encapsulates the main themes of this book: the fragility of political loyalties, the ambiguities of patriotism, and Soviet Russians' widespread readiness to invest hope and effort in the German promise of a better life without the Bolsheviks.

¹ Sich.Div. 281, Abt. VII, "Betr.: Verwaltungsbericht," December 7, 1941, BA-MA, RH 26-281/25a, 33-34; Aussenstelle 51 (Opotschka), "Kriegstagebuch der Aussenstelle 51 vom 30.8.41-31.12.41," n.d., BA-MA, RW 31/900, 5-6.

² "Übersetzung eines in einem von der russischen Bevölkerung gelieferten Paar Strümpfe gefundenen beschriebenen Zettles," n.d., BA-MA, RH 26-281/4.

Today, with the benefit of hindsight, we know how hopelessly destructive the Nazi project was. Waging a war of annihilation, Hitler intended not only to murder the Jews and other “undesirable elements,” but also to decimate the Slavic population by mass starvation and deportation, keeping the rest as slaves for Germanic settlers. Hitler’s plans for “the East” amounted to the most murderous scheme in world history. Even though they could not be carried out to the extent envisioned by Nazi planners, German policies of annihilation claimed millions of Soviet victims among prisoners of war and civilians in the occupied territories as well as in the besieged city of Leningrad. Soviet Russians witnessing the advancing Germans in summer 1941, however, knew nothing about Nazi plans – many even thought of Germany as a civilized country and Hitler as a strong and capable ruler. For many of them, the future now appeared radically open. War leads to change, big wars to profound changes. What would become of Russia? The Bolshevik revolution was only twenty-four years old, and most people did not share the Marxist–Leninist vision of its historical inevitability. Against this backdrop, my book attempts to add one missing piece to the vast puzzle of how Soviet society lived through the Great Patriotic War by answering the following questions: How did the mostly peasant population of northwest Russia experience the upheaval of war and invasion? How did they deal with the new masters of the land, and how did they relate to the old Soviet masters still present in the shape of partisans and the possibility of Soviet victory? And what can we learn from all of this about the relationship between the Stalinist regime and its core Russian population?

The Soviet victory over Nazi Germany, gained at a harrowing price, contributed decisively to the outcome of World War II and remains one of the defining events of the twentieth century. Caught by surprise when the Germans attacked, the Red Army reeled in retreat during the first weeks and months of the war, leaving the enemy to occupy vast territories inhabited by as many as 80,000,000 Soviet citizens – some 40 percent of the population.³ Given the magnitude of the Soviet occupation experience, one would expect historians of Stalinism to have focused much energy on this period of upheaval. Yet histories of Soviet society in the Stalin era have tended to skip or stop short of the war, treating it almost like a pause between pre- and postwar Stalinism.⁴ Studies that do focus on

³ A. Ia. Livshin and I. B. Orlov, eds., *Sovetskaia povsednevnost i massovoe soznanie 1939–1945* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2003), 297.

⁴ See, for instance, Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Lynne

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wartime Stalinist society generally concentrate on the home front and the Red Army.⁵ Outside the field of Soviet studies, many historians of the German–Soviet war have studied the occupation, but mostly from a Berlin-centred perspective, using German sources to study German actors.⁶ As a result, most of what we know about the occupied Soviet territories concerns the occupiers and their plans, policies, and actions in “the East” rather than the people living there.

As always, there are exceptions: Some historians have explored Soviet citizens’ occupation experience in depth, focusing mostly on Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic countries. To be sure, these borderlands of the Soviet empire remain fascinating sites of historical inquiry and the subject of several important studies.⁷ A crucial question remains, however: How did people in the ethnically more homogeneous, presumably more

Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Lynne Viola, ed., *Contending with Stalinism: Soviet Power and Popular Resistance in the 1930s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

⁵ William Moskoff, *The Bread of Affliction: The Food Supply in the USSR during World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Catherine Merridale, *Ivan’s War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939–1945* (New York: Picador, 2006); Roger D. Markwick and Euridice Charon Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline in the Second World War* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Roger R. Reese, *Why Stalin’s Soldiers Fought: The Red Army’s Military Effectiveness in World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011); Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front*, reprint edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Mark Edele, *Stalin’s Defectors: How Red Army Soldiers Became Hitler’s Collaborators, 1941–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁶ E.g., Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia 1941–1945: A Study of Occupation Policies* (London: Macmillan, 1957); Gerald Reitlinger, *The House Built on Sand: The Conflicts of German Policy in Russia 1939–1945* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1960); Theo J. Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1989); Timothy Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion and Empire: German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1942–1943* (New York: Praeger, 1988); Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weissrussland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999); Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Christian Hartmann, *Wehrmacht im Ostkrieg: Front und militärisches Hinterland 1941–42* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2009); Alex J. Kay, Jeff Rutherford, and David Stahel, *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941: Total War, Genocide, and Radicalization* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2012).

⁷ Bernhard Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front: Besatzung, Kollaboration und Widerstand in Weissrussland 1941–1944* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1998); Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2004); Geoffrey Swain, *Between Stalin and Hitler: Class War and Race War on the Dvina, 1940–46* (London/New York: Routledge, 2004); Tanja Penter, *Kohle für Stalin und Hitler: Arbeiten und Leben in Donbass, 1929 bis 1953* (Essen: Klartext, 2010); Olga Baranova, “Nationalism, Anti-Bolshevism or the Will to Survive? Collaboration in Belarus under the Nazi Occupation of 1941–1944,” *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d’Histoire* 15, no. 2 (April 2008): 113–128; Björn M. Felder, *Letland im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Zwischen sowjetischen und deutschen Besatzern 1940–1946* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2009).

sovietized, and predominantly rural *Russian* territories experience the German occupation?⁸ This is no peripheral question. After all, Russia was the political and demographic core of the Soviet Union, and the state's wartime appeal to Russian national sentiment is widely regarded as key to the successful Soviet war effort.

The importance attributed to Russian patriotism in the struggle against Nazi Germany has a long tradition. On May 24, 1945, Stalin proposed a toast to the Russian people, whom he credited with firm wartime loyalty, putting “boundless trust in our government” despite its “mistakes” of 1941–1942 when the Red Army suffered catastrophic losses. The notion that a strong Russian patriotism fueled the Soviet war effort continues to be taken for granted. In Richard Overy's words, “material explanations of Soviet victory are never quite convincing. It is difficult to write the history of the war without recognizing that some idea of a Russian ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’ mattered . . . to ordinary people.”⁹ The Bolshevik policy shift from 1920s internationalism (“the proletariat has no fatherland”) to the official sponsoring of Russian national pride in the 1930s, historians argue, led to a coming together of Soviet and Russian national identity, or the *sovietization* of Russian nationalism – a development culminating in the wartime crystallization of Russianness as a Soviet patriotic endeavor.¹⁰

The notion of a strong Russocentric sense of Soviet identity and belonging has shaped our view of Russians' wartime attitudes and

⁸ Laurie Cohen's recent micro-study of occupied Smolensk is an admirable effort to study the Russian occupation experience, but focuses on one town only and does not deal with the peasantry. Laurie R. Cohen, *Smolensk under the Nazis* (Rochester: Rochester University Press, 2013). For another recent foray into the question of the specifically Russian experience of war, see Oleg Budnitskii, “The Great Patriotic War and Soviet Society: Defeatism, 1941–42,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 15, no. 4 (2014): 767–797. While Soviet-era Russian histories of occupied Russia narrowly focused on Nazi crimes and partisan feats, post-Soviet historiography has produced several valuable and more nuanced studies. See S. V. Kudriashev, “Predateli, ‘osvoboditeli,’ ili zhertvy rezhima? Sovetskii kollaboratsionizm (1941–1942),” *Svobodnaia mysl* no. 14 (1993): 84–98; Mikhail Ivanovich Semiraga, *Kollaboratsionizm: priroda, tipologiia i proiavleniia v gody Vtoroi mirovoi voiny* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2000); B. V. Sokolov, *Okkupatsiia. Pravda i mify* (Moscow: AST, 2002); N. A. Lomagin, *Neizvestnaia blokada (vol. 1)* (St Petersburg: Izdatelskii Dom “Neva,” 2004), 444–546; Boris Kovalev, *Kollaboratsionizm v Rossii v 1941–1945 gg.: tipy i formy* (Velikii Novgorod: Novgorodskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet imeni Iaroslava Mudrogo, 2009); Igor Ermolov, *Tri goda bez Stalina. Okkupatsiia: sovetskie grazhdane mezhdru natsistami i bolshevikami, 1941–1944* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2010); Boris Kovalev, *Povsednevnaia zhizn naseleniia Rossii v period natsistskoi okkupatsii* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 2011).

⁹ Richard J. Overy, *Russia's War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), xviii–xix. See also Geoffrey Hosking, “The Second World War and Russian National Consciousness,” *Past & Present* 175, no. 1 (2002): 168.

¹⁰ Hosking, “The Second World War”; David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931–1956* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 180; Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 230.

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behavior. The resulting conventional wisdom may be summed up as follows: While non-Russian peoples in the recently annexed Western borderlands despised Stalin's regime and frequently greeted German forces as liberators in 1941, the situation was entirely different in the ancient Russian heartlands farther to the east, which had been Soviet for more than two decades. Here, there was "not the slightest hesitation on any part of Soviet society to serve the country."¹¹ In most of Russia, another historian claimed, "the majority of the population remained loyal to the Motherland . . . The Germans found no sympathy in the temporarily occupied districts, apart from that of a few renegades."¹² In the words of Catherine Merridale, "the Wehrmacht enjoyed support from a portion of the local population, especially as it had yet to reach ancient Russian or even long-held Soviet soil."¹³ Only recently have historians begun to question the image of a steadfast Soviet Russian patriotic loyalty,¹⁴ an image that, I hope to show, fades further in light of evidence from northwest Russia.

This book sets out to challenge the commonly held view that Russians, in contrast to people in the Western borderlands of the USSR, put up widespread patriotic resistance against the German occupiers. Far from remaining loyal to Soviet power, a substantial part of the population in northwest Russia actively supported or passively acquiesced in German rule. While the German occupation brought suffering and death for tens of thousands, including Jews, Roma, disabled people, prisoners of war (POWs), and civilian victims of the brutal antipartisan campaign, many others saw real improvements in their daily life, not least related to the dissolution of the despised collective farms and the German-sponsored revival of the Orthodox Church. To be sure, initial pro-German sentiment subsided over time because of the occupiers' murderous policies and

¹¹ Bernd Bonwetsch, "War as 'Breathing Space': Soviet Intellectuals and the 'Great Patriotic War'," in *The People's War: Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union*, ed. Robert W. Thurston and Bernd Bonwetsch (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 142.

¹² Kees Boterbloem, *Life and Death under Stalin: Kalinin Province, 1945–1953* (Montreal/London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 58.

¹³ Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 185. For similar assessments, see Overy, *Russia's War*, 83; Sheila Fitzpatrick and Alf Lüdtke, "Energizing the Everyday: On the Breaking and Making of Social Bonds in Nazism and Stalinism," in *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared*, ed. Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 275; Stephen Lovell, *The Shadow of War: Russia and the USSR, 1941 to the Present* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 6.

¹⁴ Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought*; Mark Edele, "'What Are We Fighting for?' Loyalty in the Soviet War Effort, 1941–1945," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 84 (2013): 248–268; Budnitskii, "The Great Patriotic War and Soviet Society"; Edele, *Stalin's Defectors*.

colonial condescension, which kindled Russian national sentiment. Nevertheless, until the Germans began to prepare their retreat in late 1943, inhabitants tended to support German power rather than the Soviet government and the partisan movement. They did so because of material interests, political and patriotic passions, and in pursuit of *calculated pragmatism* – a strategy of heeding the stronger power, shifting one’s loyalties when needed, and working the prevailing system to one’s least disadvantage.

Soviet Russians’ occupation experience sheds new light on the relationship between regime and people in Stalin’s Russia. For decades, this question has loomed large in the historiography of Stalinism, generating debates that have helped define the field. The dominant account of Stalinism studies has it going through three major movements, from totalitarianism via revisionism to postrevisionism.¹⁵ The “totalitarian model” of the 1950s and 1960s became defined as such mainly through later “revisionist” attacks on that first generation of Stalinism scholars. Revisionists, who were mostly social historians, entered the scene in the 1970s and 1980s, charging totalitarians with purveying a narrowly political history driven by rightwing Cold War concerns that produced a top-down view in which a monolithic regime dominated an atomized population. While the polemics against the “totalitarians” often targeted straw men and had as much to do with politics and careerism as they did with scholarship,¹⁶ the revisionists’ actual research greatly advanced our understanding of Stalinism by posing new questions and using new sources. In particular, the early revisionists sought to challenge (what they saw as) the totalitarian view by showing how Stalin relied on not only terror but also bases of social support among upwardly mobile workers, youth, and other beneficiaries. Later scholarship in the revisionist tradition also focused on how stubborn realities on the ground, be it hotbeds of resistance in the villages and factories or chaos in the local administration, often frustrated the regime’s totalitarian ambitions.¹⁷

¹⁵ Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Revisionism in Soviet History,” *History and Theory* 46, no. 4 (2007): 77–91.

¹⁶ I owe this point to Mark Edele, who showed how the “totalitarian model” contained much of what later generations of scholars would frame as novel insights. Mark Edele, “Soviet Society, Social Structure, and Everyday Life: Major Frameworks Reconsidered,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8, no. 2 (2007): 349–373; Mark Edele, *Stalinist Society, 1928–1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 217–219.

¹⁷ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union 1921–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Roberta T. Manning, “Government in the Soviet Countryside in the Stalinist Thirties: The Case of Belyi Raion in 1937,” *Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies* no. 301 (1984): 1–71; Lynne Viola, *The Best Sons of the*

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The 1990s witnessed the emergence of “postrevisionism.” Influenced by the cultural turn in the humanities and spurred on by Stephen Kotkin’s major 1995 study *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, this new cohort of cultural and intellectual historians focused on discourse and ideology. Studying the formation of “Stalinist subjectivity” and the ways in which ordinary people strove to belong to Stalinist society by “working on the self,” postrevisionists emphasized internalization of and identification with the regime’s values.¹⁸ As Kotkin argued, ordinary people living within “Stalinist civilization” not only sought to fit in by “speaking Bolshevik,” but also experienced Stalinism as “something hopeful” because of its positive ideals and public welfare measures.¹⁹ Scholars such as Jochen Hellbeck went further, arguing that people living under Stalin were immersed in the all-encompassing ideology and language of the regime and thus “lacked even the most basic precondition for the articulation of dissent: an outside frame of reference against which to evaluate the performance of the Stalinist system.”²⁰ In this extreme version, postrevisionism seemed to refashion the social support argument of the early revisionists, albeit indiscriminately, applying it not to particular groups but the general population.

No one can deny the insights provided by scholars such as Kotkin and Hellbeck into the ways in which individuals, pulled into the ideological orbit of the regime or captivated by its visions, promises, and enemy images, helped shape the regime itself through their own thoughts and practices. Yet we should be careful not to identify a social part with the social whole. While Stalin’s regime had its share of true believers and hopeful followers, the dictator also presided over a much larger mass of

Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin’s Industrial Revolution: Politics and Workers, 1928–1932* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*; Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*; Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin’s Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934–1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Jeffrey J. Rossman, *Worker Resistance under Stalin: Class and Revolution on the Shop Floor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

¹⁸ Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck, “Rethinking the Stalinist Subject: Stephen Kotkin’s ‘Magnetic Mountain’ and the State of Soviet Historical Studies,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 44, no. 3 (1996): 456–463; Jochen Hellbeck, “Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi (1931–1939),” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 44, no. 3 (January 1996): 344–373; Jochen Hellbeck, “Working, Struggling, Becoming: Stalin-Era Autobiographical Texts,” *The Russian Review* 60, no. 3 (July 2001): 340–359; Matthew Rendle, “Post-Revisionism: The Continuing Debate on Stalinism,” *Intelligence and National Security* 25, no. 3 (2010): 370–388. Postrevisionist arguments, too, had their predecessors among the “totalitarians.” See Edele, “Soviet Society, Social Structure, and Everyday Life,” 355–356.

¹⁹ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, chapter 5, 358. ²⁰ Hellbeck, “Fashioning the Stalinist Soul,” 366.

people for whom the Bolsheviks appeared not as one of “us,” but as an intrusive and violently oppressive “them.” Unlike Hitler’s regime, Stalinism can hardly be called a “consensual dictatorship.”²¹ Young urbanites and upwardly mobile workers – those most likely to embrace Stalinist civilization – made up a minority of the population (and even among urban workers, a great deal of dissent occurred),²² while in the villages the regime patently failed to secure popular legitimacy. Peasants, though relegated to the margins of official Stalinist civilization, were by no means marginal in Soviet society. On the contrary, by 1941 rural inhabitants made up *two thirds* of the Soviet population. The final third was not entirely urban either: large-scale peasant migration had turned Soviet cities into “peasant metropolises” during the 1930s. By 1940, peasant migrants made up 40–50 percent of urban workers in Soviet cities, where they largely retained their village identities, culture, and practices, quite stubbornly refusing to be transformed into a Communist proletariat.²³ In short, Soviet Russian society on the eve of the German invasion was predominantly peasant.

Northwest Russia, in also being predominantly peasant, reflected Soviet Russian society. The inhabitants of this region, as I hope to show, were perfectly able to think outside the regime’s frame of reference. Alternative frames were readily available, not least through religion and the living memory of other times, places, and political orders. Outward opposition, for obvious reasons, was not a viable option in the 1930s. In dealing with the regime, most people chose to adapt and associate rather than oppose and dissociate. Crucially, however, they did so not because they believed in the Stalinist project or could not escape its language, but simply because of the very violently enforced absence of alternatives. While going about their business, performing their roles and wearing their masks as best they could, some people ended up identifying with the regime and its values.²⁴ At the same time, and particularly in the villages, many more began developing

²¹ Götz Aly described the Third Reich as a *Zustimmungsdiktatur*. Götz Aly, *Rasse und Klasse: Nachforschungen zum deutschen Wesen* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2003), 243. See also Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Robert Gellately, *Lenin, Stalin and Hitler: The Age of Social Catastrophe* (London: Vintage, 2008), 15.

²² Rossman, *Worker Resistance*.

²³ David L. Hoffmann, *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow, 1929–1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

²⁴ As Fitzpatrick notes with reference to Erving Goffman, there is no clear line between “cynical” and “sincere” performances of social roles – people often become what they act. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear Off the Masks! Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 12–13.

and nurturing subversive thoughts, if only vague ones, about a future radical change of the political order. When the German invasion came, it exposed Stalinism's failure to forge robust bonds of loyalty between the regime and its core Russian population.

Northwest Russia

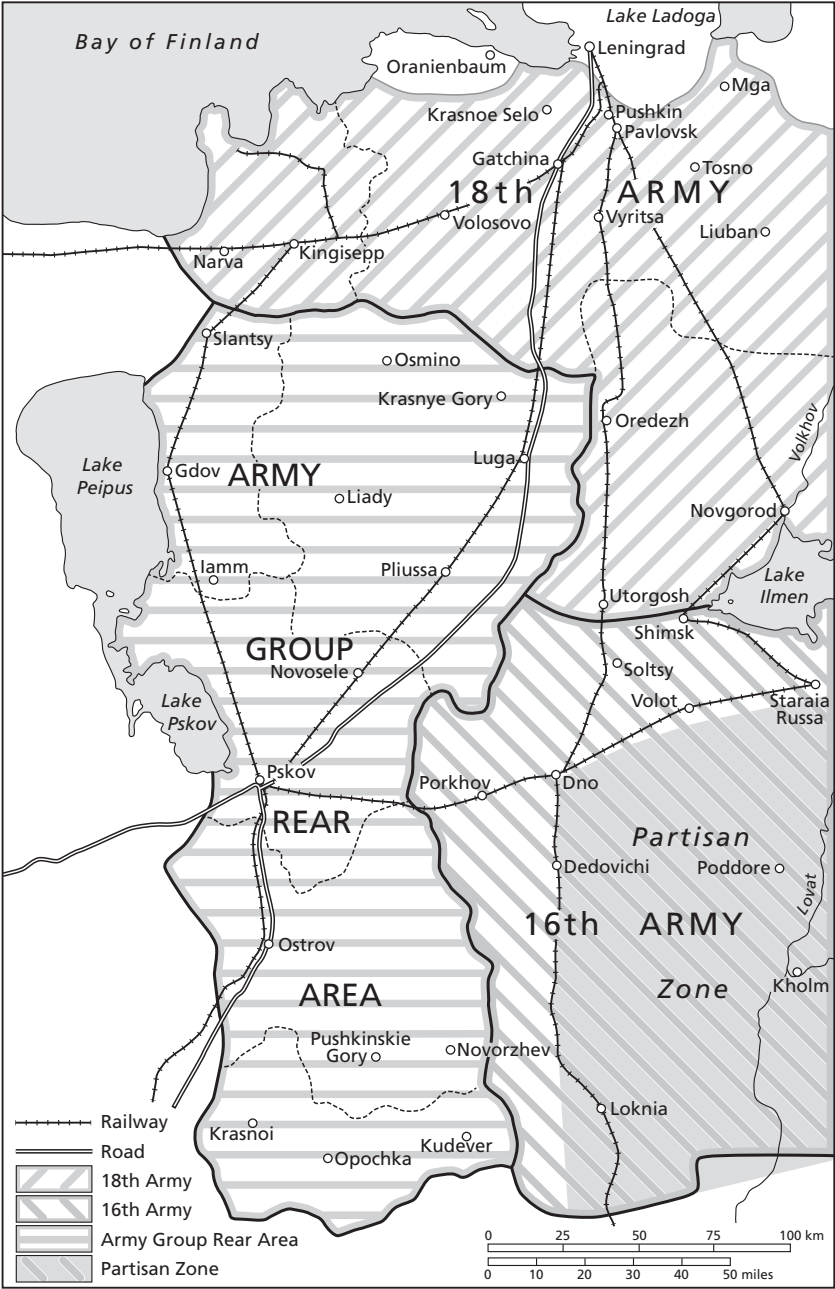
Situated between the two historic capitals of Moscow and St Petersburg/Leningrad, the lands of the northwest are geographically and historically core Russian territories. The German-occupied area covered parts of what were then the Leningrad and Kalinin regions (oblasts) of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR).²⁵ Encompassing some 81,000 square km (somewhat less than present-day Austria), the territory extended from Sebezh and Velikie Luki in the southwest and southeast to the Gulf of Finland and the suburbs of besieged Leningrad in the north. Lake Peipus (*Chudskoe ozero*) marked the western border, and in the east, German troops advanced as far as Tikhvin, Demyansk, and Lake Seliger before the front line stabilized roughly along the Volkhov and Lovat rivers following the Soviet winter offensive of 1941–1942 (Soviet forces eliminated the Demyansk salient in February 1943).

The number of people inhabiting the soon-to-be-occupied districts on June 22, 1941 was about 1.9 million, the majority of whom lived in the countryside.²⁶ Up to 95 percent of them were Russians by nationality, most of them Orthodox by faith.²⁷ Various Finnish-speaking groups, Estonians, Jews, and a small number of ethnic Germans also peopled the towns and villages of northwest Russia. Following the invasion, the population dropped by hundreds of thousands due to evacuation, flight, and mobilization into the Red Army. Of those remaining on occupied territory, a minority of about 7 percent inhabited the towns, while the rest were spread out over 11,900 villages in about 250,600 peasant households. A large number of men had been evacuated or mobilized, leaving a

²⁵ In 1944, parts of the Leningrad and Kalinin regions were transferred to the newly established Novgorod and Pskov regions.

²⁶ Jürgen Kilian, *Wehrmacht und Besatzungsherrschaft im Russischen Nordwesten 1941–1944* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2012), 94–95.

²⁷ Oleg Anisimov, *The German Occupation in Northern Russia during World War II: Political and Administrative Aspects* (New York: Research Program on the USSR, 1954), 1.



Map 2 Occupied northwest Russia