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FORGOTTEN: FILM DOCUMENTS FROM THE LIBERATED CAMPS FOR SOVIET POWS

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Introduction

The Second World War was not only the war with the heaviest losses in history, it was also marked by previously unimaginable mass violence. The German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 marked a turning point.¹ The German occupation forces had already systematically committed crimes in Poland.² However, German warfare and the occupation policy in the Soviet

Union prompted a radical expansion of violence. While by June 1941, the Nazi regime was responsible for a total of about 200,000 victims whose death did not result directly from military combat operations, by spring 1942 these figures had risen to well over three million.³ Out of a total of 12 to 14 million victims of Nazi mass violence, more than half were Soviet nationals at the time of their murder.⁴

Based on the 1941 borders, the more than three million members of the Soviet armed forces who died in German captivity were the largest victim group among Soviet nationals. The dead were of different nationalities and came from various ethnic groups within the Soviet Union.⁵ The second largest victim group was the Jewish population: the SS, the police, and the Wehrmacht shot 2.4 million Jewish men, women, and children, mostly in the occupied territories of Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic states. Tens of thousands of Roma and inmates from sanatoriums and nursing homes were also among the victims, as were many members of the Communist Party and members of the Soviet administration and intelligentsia. Civilians died during forced labour in the occupied territory or during deportation to the German Reich. About half a million Soviet citizens were murdered by the occupation forces in the course of the anti-partisan struggle. And well over a million people starved to death, most of them in besieged Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), but also in the major cities of the occupied territories, such as Kharkov (now Kharkiv), Kiev, and Minsk, and in the so-called clear-cut zones near the front. The Wehrmacht continued to commit systematic crimes as it retreated.

Within weeks of the invasion, the Soviet government understood the special character of the German warfare and occupation policy. News from the front and from the occupied territories gave indications of systematic crimes against POWs and civilians. From 1941 onwards, as they were recovering these territories, Soviet forces repeatedly came across traces of these crimes. Two

diplomatic notes dated November 27, 1941 and January 6, 1942, signed by Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Mikhaylovich Molotov, document that the Soviet government informed its allies of these crimes.⁶

From 1941 and increasingly so until early 1942, one of the main tasks of the Soviet cameramen was to document crimes in the reconquered territories.⁷ This article focuses on survived film material related to the victim group of Soviet POWs.⁸ It relies on selected film documents from the Russian State Archive of Film and Photo Documents (RGAKFD) in the database of the project Visual History of the Holocaust, to explore the following questions:⁹ What role did the cinematic documentation of these crimes play? Can typical themes and motifs be found? Did these change over time? As an initial inventory, its aim is to present and describe the footage rather than to raise questions about its publication or reception. For ease of reference related to the historical context, we will start with a brief overview of the situation of the members of the Soviet armed forces captured by the Wehrmacht.

Soviet POWs in German Hands

The Wehrmacht denied the Soviet POWs their fundamental, internationally established rights. Already in the run-up to the invasion, the so-called Commissar Order of June 6, 1941, stated that Wehrmacht units were to immediately shoot political officials of the Red Army. This assassination policy was intended to help break down the Soviet forces and ensure a quick victory. On June 22, 1941, after the invasion, hundreds of thousands of Red Army prisoners were surrounded and captured by the rapidly advancing German troops.¹⁰ The Wehrmacht first gathered them in provisional camps, in the divisions, before deporting them to areas far from the front; they first went through army prisoner assembly points and transit camps (dulags), until they reached officers' and regular camps (oflags and stalags).

Political officials of the Red Army were shot, as were Jewish Red Army soldiers. In the first three weeks of the war, the Prisoner of War Department in the OKW and the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) agreed to identify and murder other groups among the prisoners in the camps:

*all important officials of the State and the Party, especially professional revolutionaries, officials of the Comintern, all authoritative Party officials of the CPSU and its subsidiary organisations in the Central Committees, the GAU and Area Committees, all People's Commissars and their deputies, all former political commissars in the Red Army, leading personalities of the central and intermediate bodies in the State authorities, any leading personalities in economic life, the Soviet Russian intelligentsia, all Jews, all persons identified as agitators or fanatical communists.*¹¹

The aim was to eliminate all potential troublemakers in order to use the remaining prisoners as labour. The Wehrmacht and the security police worked hand in hand in the search for "intolerable elements"; this was subsequently regulated by additional deployment orders from the RSHA. In the German Reich, those selected for execution were taken to concentration camps and murdered there by the SS. In the occupied territories, this was done by the local SS and police units.

At the same time, the Germans looked for people among the POWs who seemed "particularly trustworthy" to them.¹² These people were to act as interpreters, denounce fellow prisoners, serve as camp police, or be deployed as so-called *Hilfswillige* in the Wehrmacht and in auxiliary police or military units. While Russians were considered fundamentally dangerous, some Soviet Germans, Finns, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians were temporarily released from captivity from August 1941 onwards.¹³

The Commissar Order and the RSHA deployment orders were only partially responsible for these killings. After the invasion, the front units of the Wehrmacht repeatedly shot individual prisoners or entire groups of prisoners, such as the wounded or those unfit for transport. People whom German soldiers particularly distrusted or hated because of anti-communist, racist, or sexist images of the enemy were also under life-threatening conditions. At times, this applied to officers, Red Army women defamed as *Flintenweiber*, or members of the Army from the Central Asian Soviet republics. In areas in the hinterland, the German security divisions also shot many Red Army soldiers scattered about at the rear of the front after having been separated from their units and gone into hiding. They were considered potential partisans.

The journey to the camps in the hinterland was also life-threatening. Some of the prisoners had to march hundreds of kilometres on foot, and the Wehrmacht did not provide them with sufficient supplies or medical care. The small number of guards shot exhausted prisoners and those who could not keep up and left their bodies on the side of the road. From autumn 1941 onwards, thousands froze to death during transport in open freight wagons. Russian estimates put the number of Soviet POWs who perished in transit at between 200,000 and 250,000.¹⁴

Those who reached the camps were confronted with catastrophic conditions. Lack of infrastructure, completely inadequate supplies, and brutal and ruthless treatment cost many prisoners their lives in the very first months of the war. Food was only given out to the extent the Germans thought possible and often consisted of slaughter and fish waste, or it was spoiled. Epidemics soon spread among the undernourished prisoners, who were defenceless against the weather. The impoverishment for which the Wehrmacht was responsible led to rapidly rising death rates within the camps.

It was the failure of the planned Blitzkrieg that led the Nazi leadership to decide to starve millions of Soviet POWs. In autumn 1941, the rations of non-working Soviet POWs were drastically reduced, but, in fact, the Wehrmacht did not provide enough food to the working ones either. As a result, a significant number of deaths occurred among the prisoners in the camps. By spring 1942, about two million of the three million Red Army prisoners of war had starved to death. Only when the Nazi regime gave higher priority to the preservation of labour forces over food supplies in its policy considerations did the situation of the Soviet POWs somewhat improve. In May 1942, Hitler suspended the Commissar Order, and in the summer the murder of "intolerable elements" in the camps mostly stopped, except for Jewish POWs. More attempts were made to recruit "volunteers" in the "fight against Bolshevism." From 1943, the increasing shortage of personnel in the Wehrmacht led to recruitment campaigns that also targeted Russians. All in all, the Wehrmacht formally released hundreds of thousands from captivity until the end of the war so they could serve German interests, armed or unarmed.

Although the treatment and living conditions of Soviet POWs in the camps and labour commandos improved slightly as of 1942, they remained significantly worse off than POWs from other countries until the end of the war. Especially in the last months of the war, when their situation once again took a dramatic turn to the worse. From 1941 to 1945, out of a total of about 5.7 million Soviet POWs, more than three million perished; most of them died due to the Wehrmacht's failure to provide them with adequate supplies, and about 150,000 were shot.

Filmed by the Soviet Camera Teams

The first film footage of German crimes against Soviet POWs was taken as early as the end of 1941.¹⁵ Rostov-on-Don was occupied by the Wehrmacht from November 20 to 28, 1941. When the Wehrmacht was forced to retreat,

German units shot more than 100 wounded POWs near the railway station. After the Red Army reclaimed the city, cameramen filmed the bodies on November 29, some showing large visible signs of torture. The footage taken on that day in Rostov-on-Don of atrocities against civilians and POWs were the first ever film recordings of German crimes.¹⁶ They were included in the *Soyuzkinojournal* No. 114 of December 23, 1941, as well as in the film produced in 1942, LET'S TAKE REVENGE! DOCUMENTARY FILMS ABOUT THE MONSTROUS ATROCITIES AND THE VIOLENCE OF THE NAZI INVADERS / OTOMSTIM! KINODOKUMENTY O CHUDOVISHCHYKH ZLODEYANIYAKH I NASILIYAKH NEMETSKO-FASHISTSKIKH ZAKHVATCHIKOV.¹⁷ In the same manner as images of civilian fatalities, the footage of the POWs was meant to elicit feelings of both pity and revenge and thus help mobilize the population for the defensive war.



LET'S TAKE REVENGE! DOCUMENTARY FILMS ABOUT THE MONSTROUS ATROCITIES AND THE VIOLENCE OF THE NAZI INVADERS / **ОТОМСТИМ! КИНОДОКУМЕНТЫ О ЧУДОВИЩНЫХ ЗЛОДЕЯНИЯХ И НАСИЛИЯХ НЕМЕЦКО-ФАШИСТСКИХ ЗАХВАТЧИКОВ** / OTOMSTIM! KINODOKUMENTY O CHUDOVISHCHYKH ZLODEYANIYAKH I NASILIYAKH NEMETSKO-FASHISTSKIKH ZAKHVATCHIKOV (1942), reel 2, 4114 - 5170, shot 34–39, RGAKFD 4884, VHH-I-0009304

On December 5, 1941, the Red Army began its successful offensive from Moscow, pushing back the Wehrmacht 250 kilometres and reclaiming large territories for the first time. In dozens of locations, Soviet troops came across traces of German crimes against POWs. In Tikhvin, which had been occupied from November 8 to December 9, 1941, a large number of POWs were found shot. Film crews documented the work of the Red Army's medical investigation commission.¹⁸ As part of this process, murdered victims were identified and named.¹⁹ Film recordings of POWs, some tortured and mutilated before they died, from Gorokhovets (Leningrad front),²⁰ Vereya in the Moscow region,²¹ or Yukhnov have also been preserved.²²

Even at this early stage, long before the establishment of the The Extraordinary State Commission for the Establishment and Investigation of the Atrocities of the German Fascist Invaders and Their Accomplices and the Damage They Caused to Citizens, Collective Farms, Public Organizations, State Enterprises and Institutions of the USSR in November 1942, the footage contained reports from witnesses and survivors.²³ For example, on December 16 in Kalinin/Tver, a cameraman filmed a conversation between Red Army soldiers and a young peasant woman, Agrippina Tevontina, who had sheltered wounded Red Army soldiers until the Germans discovered them and burned them alive in a barn.²⁴ In another situation, in Yukhnov, in March 1942, one of the rescued POWs told his story on camera.²⁵

The rescue of survivors was also documented. In Mozhaysk, which was reclaimed from the Wehrmacht in January 1942 after three months of occupation, film footage from January 20 shows Red Army soldiers carrying on their backs weakened POWs out of buildings and bringing them over to a medical service truck. Traces of the catastrophic accommodation and care were also captured on film. The cameramen filmed the sleeping quarters in the building, which only consisted of straw on the floor; one shot shows a food bowl

and a severed horse leg.²⁶



LET'S TAKE REVENGE! DOCUMENTARY FILMS ABOUT THE MONSTROUS ATROCITIES AND THE VIOLENCE OF THE NAZI INVADERS / **ОТОМСТИМ! КИНОДОКУМЕНТЫ О ЧУДОВИЩНЫХ ЗЛОДЕЯНИЯХ И НАСИЛИЯХ НЕМЕЦКО-ФАШИСТСКИХ ЗАХВАТЧИКОВ** / ОТОМСТИМ ! KINODOKUMENTY O CHUDOVISHCHYKH ZLODEYANIYAKH I NASILIYAKH NEMETSKO-FASHISTSKIKH ZAKHVATCHIKOV (1942), reel 2, 88 - 903, shot 2-9, RGAKFD 4884, VHH-I-0009304

On some occasions the Red Army was able to seize German files which were used as evidence of their crimes. In some cases they were filmed. For example, the order of the 11th Infantry Regiment of the 9th Panzer Army from the end of July 1941 gave every officer the right to decide on the execution of POWs at their own discretion.²⁷

The footage of crimes against POWs made in 1941 and 1942 thus covers

topics that include the process of documenting the bodies found, their recovery and examination, the rescue and care of the liberated prisoners, the recording of statements made by witnesses and survivors, and occasional additional documents. POW camps had not yet played a significant role in this footage, although shelters can be seen from time to time. This is hardly surprising, as the areas reclaimed in 1941–1942 were usually occupied by the Wehrmacht for a relatively short time. Particularly from 1943 onwards, as the Red Army troops advanced further to the West in the course of their offensives, they came across POW camps with a well-developed infrastructure. The Wehrmacht had set up hundreds of such camps in the occupied Soviet territories; more than two million Soviet POWs died there.²⁸

During 1943, the “staging” of the topography of these camps became increasingly important. Among other things, the motif of barbed wire or camp fencing played a major role.²⁹ An early example is that of a POW camp in Prokhladny, liberated in January 1943 as part of the Soviet armed forces’ North Caucasus Operation. Here too, the camera crew filmed the dead left on the camp grounds and survivors leaving the shelters or being carried away on stretchers – but they deliberately set the barbed wire in the frame.³⁰ The barbed wire fencing, albeit quite simple and improvised, was also featured in camera footage taken around the same time in a former prisoner collection centre in Malaya Rossoshka near Stalingrad.³¹

Many of the POW camps liberated from 1943 onwards were large, developed infrastructures with multiple fencing, watchtowers, barracks, infirmaries, detention cells, etc. The site of the former Stalag 339 Darnytsia (in today’s Kyiv metropolitan area), liberated in the Battle of Kyiv at the end of 1943, covered about 1.5 hectares; in September 1942 it housed almost 15,000 prisoners, including civilians. According to more recent estimates, about 20,000 inmates died at Darnytsia.³² The film footage taken on site by Konstantin P. Brovin

(1913–1991) on November 10, 1943 devotes a great deal of attention to the topography of the camp.³³



POWS CAMP IN DARNITSA; BABI YAR / ЛАГЕРЬ ВОЕННОПЛЕННЫХ В ДАРНИЦЕ; БАБИЙ ЯР / LAGER VOYENNOPLENNYKH V DARNITSE; BABIY YAR (1943), RGAKFD 9119, 1–1731, shot 1–12, VHH-I-0009319

From the end of 1942, the delegations of the State Investigation Commission also gained more importance. After the recapture of Kharkov (now Kharkiv) on August 23, Valentin I. Orlyankin (1906–1999) and Solomon M. Golbrikh (1916–2001) filmed the inspection of a hospital compound on Gospitalnaya Street in early September 1943, where hundreds of bodies of murdered POWs had been found. The lined-up bodies, displayed next to an open mass grave, can be seen as they are being examined by the forensic experts.³⁴

The murder of wounded POWs was repeatedly documented by the cameramen, as was already the case in Rostov-on-Don in November 1941. Extensive filming took place in the so-called *Großlazarett Slavuta*, where at least 15,000 prisoners died due to lack of medical assistance and hunger.³⁵ When the Red Army troops and partisan units recaptured the town on January 15, 1944, they found mass graves on the site where the German occupiers had buried the POWs and about 5,000 murdered Jews.³⁶ Vladimir S. Tsitron (1913–2009)³⁷ extensively documented the camp, as well as the exhumation and investigation by the Extraordinary State Commission that took place in the second half of January 1944.³⁸ His footage shows, among others, how men with shovels began to uncover a grave in the large burial grounds. On another, one sees how the human remains were later recovered.³⁹



DEATH MILITARY HOSPITAL IN THE CITY OF SLAVUTA / ЛАЗАРЕТ СМЕРТИ В ГОРОДЕ СЛАВУТА / LAZARET SMERTI V GORODE SLAVUTA (1944), RGAKFD 8889, shot 40–71, VHH-I-0009808

The Soviet prosecution at the Nuremberg trial, which intent was, among other things, to prove the systematic mass extermination of the Soviet civilians and the Soviet POWs by the German occupation forces, painted Slavuta with the same brush as Majdanek and Auschwitz:

In these camps for POWs and civilians, there were exterminations and tortures, which the Germans called 'Siebung', 'Hinrichtung' and 'Sonderbehandlung'. The 'Großlazarett' set up by the Germans in the town of Slavuta has left gruesome memories. The whole world knows the atrocities committed by the Germans against Soviet POWs and against the prisoners of other democratic states in Auschwitz, Maydanek and many other camps.⁴⁰

The village of Lamsdorf also played a central role at the Nuremberg trial. Lamsdorf (Łambinowice) near Oppeln (Opole), on the territory of present-day Poland, was located in the very east of what was then German imperial territory. Already during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871, the Prussian authorities had established a POW camp on the military training area near Lamsdorf, which was also used as such during the First World War. During the Second World War, there were several camps, so that Lamsdorf temporarily became the largest camp complex for POWs in the German Reich. Between 1939 and 1945, a total of about 300,000 POWs from various countries passed through these camps, about half of them were members of the Red Army. More than 42,000 camp inmates died in Lamsdorf, well over 90 percent of the victims were Soviet POWs. As the front approached, the Wehrmacht drove the prisoners west on death marches in late January 1945. Only the sick and weak remained behind, including at least 3,000 Soviet POWs. Severe frost and lack of food led to an exceedingly high mortality rate. When the Red Army troops reached Lamsdorf on March 17–18, 1945, they encountered only about 500 survivors, many of them terminally ill.⁴¹ Those who had died in the previous weeks had not often been buried, so that hundreds of corpses were lying in the

barracks and on the grounds. The film footage taken on March 24, 1945 by Grigory A. Mogilevsky (1905–1964) and Kenan Kutub-Zade (1906–1981)⁴² is among the most gruesome taken in liberated camps.⁴³

The surviving material is divided into two thematic categories, or consists of two thematically different sequences: the discovery of the camp and the evidence of German crimes that was found there, including the rescue and care of the survivors. Oriented quasi to the perspective of the arriving Red Army troops, a sign is first shown with the following information in different font sizes: *Lager I*, *Zum Gef.Lager 344* and *Russenlager*. The German camp administration subsumed all Soviet POWs under the term “Russians,” including, for example, Ukrainians, Belarusians, or Tatars. Two long shots show the road and, after a cut, the camp gate. Then, the camera films through the barbed wire fence onto the camp grounds. The following shots show the inside of a barrack, and it is only in the second shot that it becomes clear to the viewer that what is lying on cots are not bundles of clothes, but dead bodies. A close-up of lice crawling over pieces of cloth is counter-cut with the individual faces of dead people. The next shots show six corpses, stripped-to-the-bone and lying close together, in a row, on the floor of an open barrack. A close-up of naked dead bodies lying on top of each other and intertwined closes the first sequence, which shows the suffering and death of the Soviet POWs.



ON THE OFFENSIVE IN SILESIA (CAMP IN LAMSDORF) / К НАСТУПЛЕНИЮ В СИЛЕЗИИ (ЛАГЕРЬ В ЛАМСДОРФЕ) / K NASTUPLENIYU V SILEZII (LAGER V LAMSDORFE) (1945), RGAKFD 10950, 1-3931, Shot 1–19, VHH-I-0009825

The second sequence is dedicated to the rescue and care of the survivors. It begins with a long shot of the camp grounds, where large piles of clothes lie between tree trunks in the foreground, with a barrack that can be seen in the background. A woman and a man dressed in white come into view, carrying clothes on a stretcher and throwing them onto the piles. The disposal of contaminated clothes forms the transition to scenes that show in detail the rescue of the sick from the barracks, their transport to the military hospital, and their medical care.⁴⁴

The images of suffering and death are juxtaposed with elaborately staged images of the rescue and care of the liberated, who are well looked after in

clean beds and sunlit rooms and can even laugh while shaving. The editing naturally served to highlight the achievements of the Red Army and its medical service.



ON THE OFFENSIVE IN SILESIA (CAMP IN LAMSDORF) / К НАСТУПЛЕНИЮ В СИЛЕЗИИ (ЛАГЕРЬ В ЛАМСДОРФЕ) / K NASTUPLENIYU V SILEZII (LAGER V LAMSDORFE) (1945), RGAKFD 10950, 3932-13270, Shot 20–58, VHH-I-0009825

In the following months, cameramen came to Lamsdorf at least two more times. In spring and summer of 1945, they filmed the work of the forensic experts and in January 1946, the activities of the Soviet-Polish investigation commission, which included a site inspection and the hearing of various witnesses.⁴⁵ On this occasion, several documents (including their translation into Russian) were filmed, which the Soviet prosecution was to present a few weeks later at the Nuremberg trial.⁴⁶ The German files captured in Lamsdorf played a central role in Nuremberg in the presentation of evidence of crimes against POWs.⁴⁷

In spring and summer of 1945, the camp grounds with its fencing, watchtowers, and barracks were extensively filmed.⁴⁸ The focus had now also shifted to include the detention barracks. In addition to exterior shots, the interior of the building was filmed. Subsequent editing focused on the chains used to shackle prisoners to the wall, as well as on the writings and inscriptions they had left on the cell walls.⁴⁹ The cameramen also documented four half-destroyed gas chambers and a large number of cartridges containing the poison gas Zyklon B.⁵⁰ Such legacies were drawing attention especially after the liberation of Majdanek and Auschwitz. However, unlike in the extermination camps, the Germans did not suffocate prisoners with poison gas in Lamsdorf. The chambers and the Zyklon B were used to disinfect prisoners' clothing.

In some shots, heaps of clothes can be seen piled up in front of a barrack. In this case, the cameraman mainly put the jackets of the Soviet POWs marked "SU" into the frame.⁵¹ Many corpses were also filmed once more – by that time they were badly decomposed and partially mummified – and they were still lying on the camp grounds.⁵² In addition, the cameramen captured the extremely large field of mass graves, in which Soviet POWs had been buried since the rapidly increasing death toll of autumn 1941.⁵³ This can be juxtaposed with the footage of the cemetery and individual graves of British POWs.⁵⁴ These had formed the second largest group in Lamsdorf and had been buried with military honours by the Germans until the end. Additional shots show a group of five people walking across the large burial grounds, including three people who appear to be witnesses. The next scene shows an open mass grave with human remains shot in various takes. The footage ends with various camera pans across the field, with hundreds of exhumed bodies lined up in seemingly endless rows.⁵⁵

The importance that the Soviet authorities attached to the crimes in Lamsdorf is also evident from the fact that some of the footage from March 1945 was used

in the film THE ATROCITIES BY THE GERMAN FASCIST AGGRESSORS IN THE USSR / KINODOKUMENTY O SWERSTWACH NEMEZKO-FASCHISTSKICH SACHWATSCHIKOW, which was shown at the Nuremberg trial on February 19, 1946. The footage from Lamsdorf was inserted directly before the scenes from Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau.⁵⁶

In the film material made in the liberated POW camps in 1945, there is another theme; the ceremonial burial of the dead. One example of this is film footage from Luckenwalde.⁵⁷ Stalag III A, about 60 kilometres south of Berlin, was liberated by the Red Army on April 24.⁵⁸ On April 29, Anatoly I. Pogorely (1905–1961) filmed the burial of the Soviet fatalities, which was attended by representatives of other Allied armies.⁵⁹



POWS CAMP IN LUCKENWALDE / ЛАГЕРЬ ВОЕННОПЛЕННЫХ В ЛУККЕНВАЛЬДЕ / LAGER VOYENNOPLennyKH V LUKKENVALDE (1945), RGAKFD 10937, 2806-7297, shot 12–30, VHH-I-0009823

The cameraman also staged shots of soldiers happily laughing and waving behind the barbed wire fence in Luckenwalde⁶⁰ – these images were symbolic of the arrival and rescue by the Red Army.



POWS CAMP IN LUCKENWALDE / ЛАГЕРЬ ВОЕННОПЛЕННЫХ В ЛУККЕНВАЛЬДЕ / LAGER VOYENNOPLENNYKH V LUKKENVALDE (1945), RGAKFD 10937, 133-1065, shot 2–5, VHH-I-0009823

Leonid Kotlyarenko (1917–1969) took similar pictures in Neubrandenburg, 150 kilometres north of Berlin. There, Stalag II A was liberated by the Red Army on the night between April 29–30, 1945.⁶¹ Kotlyarenko filmed individual groups of former prisoners leaving the camp under their respective national flags.⁶²

The surviving footage of the Soviet camera teams reflects their mission not only to document German crimes and to preserve the evidence, but also to portray

the Soviet forces as liberators and saviours. However, any grievances within their ranks, such as poor organisation, shortages, supply difficulties, dying after liberation, or dissatisfaction with the liberated, were generally not documented.⁶³

Conclusion

Members of the Red Army who fell into German captivity constitute the largest group of victims among the Soviet citizens. Soviet cameramen were asked to document the systematic crimes committed against them in the same way as those committed against the civilian population. As early as 1941–1942, the film material included typical themes, such as finding the dead, rescuing, providing medical care to the survivors, and securing evidence (investigations, witness statements, documents). During the war, the work of the State Commissions of Inquiry became increasingly important, which included the exhumation of dead bodies from mass graves near the POW camps.

What particularly distinguishes the film footage from 1943 onwards is the material from the large prisoner-of-war camps liberated during the Red Army offensives. In these camps, the cameramen filmed, among other things, the fences, the watchtowers, and the barracks, as well as places of particular suffering of the prisoners, such as infirmaries, military hospitals, or detention bunkers, in addition to the corpses and mass graves that they found. As a central visual motif, they repeatedly placed the barbed wire in their frames. When classifying this film footage, it is important to understand that the POW camps were the most important architectural evidence of German mass crimes on Soviet territory. Concentration and extermination camps were only isolated cases in the occupied Soviet territories; the Jewish population was mostly shot near their homes.

Research has paid little attention so far to the film footage of crimes committed

against Soviet POWs. However, they were an important subject for the cameramen, so further research is possible, e.g. on the question of which footage was published and which was not; how did it relate to the footage of crimes against Soviet civilians; how did it differ from the latter? It is striking, for example, that the theme of grieving relatives, which is central to the civilian victims, does not or could not appear in relation to the POWs. It is also important to examine the extent to which the classification and commentary of the POW footage changed, for example in the context of a government-initiated discourse that equated war captivity with treason against the fatherland. Finally, what influence did the footage taken in the POW camps in 1943 have on the footage taken in the liberated concentration and extermination camps in 1944–1945? Is it possible that they served as models for the compositional patterns used by the cameramen in the death camps? While the filmed documents of 1944–1945 have become iconographic and continue to shape visual memory to this day, especially in Western Europe,⁶⁴ those from the liberated POW camps have been forgotten. This also applies to the Soviet POWs, the second largest victim group of Nazi mass violence with more than three million dead.

1. I would like to thank Irina Tcherneva and Marie Moutier-Bitan for the invitation to the conference “Documenting Nazi Crimes through Film. Soviet Union, 1942–1945,” Paris, November 24–27, 2022, and the opportunity to work with the great database “Visual History of the Holocaust.” The project team, which includes recognized experts such as Valérie Pozner, Irina Tcherneva and Marie Moutier-Bitan (<https://www.vhh-project.eu/the-team/>), contextualized the Soviet film documents through extensive research. The information in this article about cameramen etc. is based on their research results. I would also like to thank Irina Tcherneva for her support in translating the article into English.

2. Cf. Jochen Böhrer, *Auftakt zum Vernichtungskrieg. Die Wehrmacht in Polen 1939* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Verlag, 2006).

3. Cf. Christoph Dieckmann and Babette Quinkert, "'Kriegsnotwendigkeiten' und die Eskalation der deutschen Massengewalt im totalen Krieg. Einführende Bemerkungen," in *Kriegführung und Hunger 1939–1945. Zum Verhältnis von militärischen, wirtschaftlichen und politischen Interessen*, dies. eds. (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2015).

4. In 1939/40, on the basis of the secret agreements concluded within the Hitler-Stalin Pact, the Soviet Union, among others, occupied large areas in Eastern Poland and annexed them to the Belarusian and Ukrainian Soviet Republics. It also exerted considerable pressure to force the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to join the USSR.

5. The Soviet armed forces were multinational and multi-ethnic in composition. The largest groups among the dozens of nationalities were Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians. Jews (considered a national category in the Soviet Union) were particularly threatened when captured. See below.

6. Cf. The Molotov Notes on German Atrocities. Notes sent by V. M. Molotov, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, to all governments with which the USSR has diplomatic relations, London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1942, <https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/great-patriotic-war/pdf/atrocities.pdf>.

7. Soviet film documents from the Second World War only came to the attention of Western researchers in the 2000s. See Valérie Pozner, et al., "Zwischen Augenzeugenschaft und Fiktion. Das Bild des Zweiten Weltkrieges in sowjetischen Wochenschauen," in *Die Kamera als Waffe. Propagandabilder des Zweiten Weltkriegs*, ed. Rainer Rother and Judith Prokasky (München: Edition

text+kritik, 2010); dies./Natacha Laurant, eds., *Kinojudaica, Les representations des Juifs dans le cinema de Russie et d'Union soviétique des années 1910 aux années 1980* (Paris: Nouveau mondes éditions, 2012); Jeremy Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust. Soviet Cinema and the Genocide of the Jews, 1938–1945* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2012).

8. On crimes against mainly Jewish civilians, see Hicks, *First Films*.

9. Sources: RGAKFD 4672, Soyuzkinojournal No. 114, 1941-12; RGAKFD 4884, *Otomstim! Kinodokumenty o chudovishchnykh zlodeyaniyakh i nasiliyakh nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov* [Let's take revenge! Documentary films about the monstrous atrocities and the violence of the Nazi invaders], Reel 1-2, 1942 [cit. as RGAKFD 4884, *Revenge*, 1942]; RGAKFD 6315, *Osvobodhdennyi g. Kharkov / Zverstva v gorode Kharkove* [Liberated city of Kharkov / Atrocities in the city of Kharkov], 1943-08-23 [cit. as RGAKFD 6315, *Kharkov*, 1943-08-23]; RGAKFD 6117-3, *Lager v Darnitse* [Camp in Darnitsa], 1943 [cit. as RGAKFD 6117-3, *Darnitsa*, 1943]; RGAKFD 9119, *Lager voyennoplennykh v Darnitse; Babi Yar* [POW camp in Darnitsa; Babi Yar], 1943 [cit. as RGAKFD 9119, *Darnitsa/Babi Yar*, 1943], RGAKFD 8889, *Lazaret smerti v gorode Slavuta* [Death military hospital in the city of Slavuta], 1944 [cit. as RGAKFD 8889, *Slavuta*, 1944]; RGAKFD 10950, *K nastupleniyu v Silezii (Lager v Lamsdorfe)* [On the offensive in Silesia (camp in Lamsdorf)], 1945-03 [cit. as RGAKFD 10950, *Silesia/Lamsdorf*, 1945-03]; RGAKFD 6483, *Lamsdorf - lager russkikh voyennoplennykh* [Lamsdorf - the Russian POW camp], 1945 to 1946 [cit. as RGAKFD 6483, *Lamsdorf*, 1945 to 1946]; RGAKFD 10936, *Reportazh iz Germanii (pervye dni v gorode Luckenvalde)* [Report from Germany (first days in Luckenwalde)], 1945-05 [cit. as RGAKFD 10936, *Report*, 1945-05]; RGAKFD 10937, *Lager voyennoplennykh v Luckenvalde* [POW camp in Luckenwalde], 1945-05 [cit. as RGAKFD 10937, *Luckenwalde*, 1945-05]; RGAKFD 11256, *Dva lagerya soyuznykh voyennoplennykh* [Two Allied POW camp], 1945 [cit. as

RGAKFD 11256, Two Allied POW camp, 1945]; VHH-AVC-0004544, Kinodokumenty o swerstwach nemezko-faschistskich sachwatschikow [The Atrocities by the German Fascist Aggressors in the USSR], Reel 1-7, USSR 1945/46 (1946-2-19, IMT Nuremberg) [cit. as Atrocities, 1945/46].

10. On pre-war planning and its implementation, see Babette Quinkert, "Die gefangenen Rotarmist*innen im Kontext der verbrecherischen Kriegführung gegen die Sowjetunion," in *Dimensionen eines Verbrechens. Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, eds. Margot Blank and Babette Quinkert (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2021), 172–193.

11. Appendix 1 to Einsatzbefehl No. 8 of July 17, 1941, reproduced in: Blank, Quinkert, *Dimensions*, 52 f.

12. Ibid.

13. See *Rotarmisten in deutscher Hand. Dokumente zu Gefangenschaft, Repatriierung und Rehabilitierung sowjetischer Soldaten des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, ed. by Rüdiger Overmanns, Andreas Hilger, and Pavel Polian (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2012), 21 f.

14. Dieter Pohl, *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht. Deutsche Militärbesatzung und einheimische Bevölkerung in der Sowjetunion 1941–1944* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2008), 210.

15. The film material can rarely be assigned to specific cameramen or film crews.

16. See Hicks, *First Films*, 46. On the problem of concealing the Jewish identity of the majority of civilian victims, see in detail *ibid.*

17. RGAKFD 4884, *Revenge*, 1942, Reel 2, 4114 - 5170, Shot 34–39.

Somewhat altered and with a different commentary, this film also formed the basis for the film *Atrocities*, 1945/46, which was later shown at the Nuremberg trial (on Rostov-on-Don cf. *ibid.*, Reel 1, 7754-9461, Shot 22–32). For the release on December 23, 1941, see RGAKFD 4672, *Soyuzkinojournal* No. 114 , 12346-14030, Shot 99–108.

18. RGAKFD 4884, *Revenge*, 1942: reel 2, 1506-2513, shot 14–22; *Atrocities*, 1945/46, reel 1, 10136-10802, shot 34–39.

19. Cf. *ibid.*

20. RGAKFD 4884, *Revenge*, 1942, Reel 2, 6436 - 7200, Shot 51–56.

21. RGAKFD 4884, *Revenge*, 1942, Reel 2, 5500 - 6435, Shot 40–50.

22. RGAKFD 4884, *Revenge*, 1942, Reel 2, 904 - 1294, Shot 10–12.

23. Since sound recordings were very rare, one usually only sees the speakers; the content was sometimes recorded, but ultimately added interpretatively during subsequent editing in Moscow. Cf. Hicks, *First Films*, 67.

24. RGAKFD 4884, *Revenge*, 1942, Reel 2, 2514-3409, Shot 22–32. Again, the film crew captured the bodies in various shots.

25. RGAKFD 4884, *Revenge*, 1942, Reel 2, 1183-1294, Shot 12. See also the example in Kalinin (see above).

26. RGAKFD 4884, *Revenge*, 1942, Reel 2, 88 - 903, Shot 2–9.

27. RGAKFD 4884, *Revenge*, 1942, Reel 2, 3410-4113, Shot 33.

28. Blank, Quinkert, *Dimensions*, 121 ff.

29. Hicks points to longer traditions in this regard: "In fact, cinematic representations of concentration camps had appeared as early as the 1938 Soviet film *The Swamp Soldiers*, where barbed-wire camp fences figure prominently." Hicks, *First Films*, 137.

30. *Atrocities*, 1945/46, Reel 2, 5895-7695, Shot 48–55.

31. *Atrocities*, 1945/46, Reel 2, 7696 - 8852, Shot 56–63.

32. Babyn Yar Memory Place, Basic Historical Narrative of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center, October 2018, 84–85, <https://babynyar.org/en/historical-narrative/>. See also USHMM, *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, Vol. IV (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022), 335–338. In many POW camps, the Wehrmacht also temporarily held civilians.

33. RGAKFD 6117-3, *Darnitsa*, 1943, 1-1421, Shot 1–8; RGAKFD 9119, *Darnitsa/Babi Yar*, 1943, 1-1731, Shot 1–12. S.a. *Atrocities*, 1945/46, Reel 4, 20-1094, Shot 2–7.

34. RGAKFD 6315, *Kharkov*, 1943-08-23, 1-3414, Shot 1–23. S.a. *Atrocities*, 1945/46, Reel 3, 213-1343, Shot 6–13.

35. <https://www.memorialmuseums.org/denkmaeler/view/1576/Erinnerung-an-die-ermordeten-Juden-von-Slawuta>. Cf. USHMM, *Encyclopedia*, 283.

36. Cf. *ibid.*

37. Tsitron also filmed at Majdanek a few months later.

38. RGAKFD 8889, Slavuta, 1944-01, 5730-10900, Shot 40–71.

39. Ibid.

40. Opening speech of the Soviet Chief Prosecutor Rudenko on February 8, 1946, NP, vol. 7, p. 200, http://www.zeno.org/Geschichte/M/Der+Nürnberg+Prozeß/Hauptverhandlungen/Vierundfünfzigster+Tag.+Freitag,+8.+Februar+1946/Nachmittagssitzung#google_vignette. Cf. also: "The Buchenwald concentration camp, established in 1938, and the Dachau concentration camp, founded in 1934, only paled by comparison to Majdanek, Auschwitz, Slavuta and numerous death camps established by the Hitlerites in the territories of Latvia, Belarus and Ukraine." Ibid, p. 215.

41. The exact numbers and dates differ: Cf. <https://www.cmjw.pl/en/obozy1/lata1939-1945/>; Janusz Sawczuk and Stanisław Senft, "Die Gefangenenlager in Lamsdorf in den Jahren des Zweiten Weltkrieges," in *Lager in Lamsdorf/ Łambinowice (1870–1946)*, ed. Zentrales Kriegsgefangenenmuseum in Łambinowice-Opole (Opole: Zentrales Kriegsgefangenenmuseum, 2009); USHMM, *Encyclopedia*, 343 ff, incorrectly dates the liberation to 26.3.1945, *ibid.* 344.

42. Kutub-Zade also filmed in Auschwitz a few weeks earlier.

43. RGAKFD 10950, Silesia/Lamsdorf, 1945-03-24, 09:12 min.

44. The RGAKFD's archive details also contain more detailed information on the persons shown.

45. RGAKFD 6483, Lamsdorf, 1945 to 1946. The shots were combined: Reel 1, 1-1999, 4721-5226, Shot 1-11, 26-28 show forensic scientists working on a site without snow; in contrast, when the outdoor site is entered in January 1946, there is snow, 2000-8376, 5227-8376, Shot 12-25, 29-48. For the examination of witnesses, see 8377-14243, Shot 49-81.

46. See *ibid*, Reel 1, 14245-16505, Shot 83-106. The filmed documents are some of the evidentiary documents presented on February 26, 1946.

47. Cf. remarks by Chief Justice Smirnov on the morning of February 26, 1946, NP, vol. 8, p. 290 ff,
<http://www.zeno.org/Geschichte/M/Der+Nürnberger+Prozeß/Hauptverhandlungen/Achtundsechzigster+Tag.+Dienstag,+26.+Februar+1946/Vormittagssitzung>.

48. RGAKFD 6483, Lamsdorf, 1945 to 1946.

49. *Ibid*, Reel 2, 4081-7352, Shot 17-36.

50. *Ibid*, Reel 2, 7353-7979, Shot 37-40.

51. *Ibid*, Reel 2, 7980-8600, Shot 41-44.

52. *Ibid*, Reel 2, 8601-10964, Shot 45-61.

53. *Ibid*, Reel 2, 10965-11747, Shot 62-64.

54. *Ibid*, Reel 2, 11748-13342, Shot 65-77. Among other things, the gravestone of a sergeant of Jewish origin is also documented, *ibid*. Some footage was also taken at the monument in Lamsdorf commemorating the dead Russian soldiers of the First World War. Cf. RGAKFD 6483, Lamsdorf, 1945 to 1946, Reel 1,

16547-17497, Shot 108–112.

55. Ibid, Reel 2, 13343-18226, Shot 78–103.

56. Atrocities, 1945/46, Reel 5, 2006-5283, Shot 15–32.

57. RGAKFD 10937, Luckenwalde, 1945-05.

58. For Stalag III A, see *Encyclopedia*, Vol. IV, 402–405.

59. RGAKFD 10937, Luckenwalde, 1945-05, 2806-7297, Shot 12–30.

60. Ibid, 133-1065, shot 2–5.

61. Cf. USHMM, *Encyclopedia*, 392–393.

62. RGAKFD 11256, Two Allied POW camp, 1945, 1357-3394, Shot 11–20.

63. On the later fate of the liberated Soviet prisoners of war, see Blank, Quinkert, *Dimensions*, 70–85.

64. See Ulrike Weckel, “Liberated on Film: Images and Narratives of Camp Liberation in Historical Footage and Feature Films,” *Research in Film and History* 2 (October 2019): 1–21, <http://dx.doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/14796>.

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Films

Отомстим! Кинодокументы о чудовищных злодеяниях и насилиях немецко-фашистских захватчиков, RGAKFD 4884, VHH-I-0009304, 1942, Shots 34-39

Отомстим! Кинодокументы о чудовищных злодеяниях и насилиях немецко-фашистских захватчиков, RGAKFD 4884, VHH-I-0009304, 1942, Shots: 02-09

Лагерь военнопленных в Дарнице; Бабий Яр / *Lager voyennoplennykh v Darnitse; Babiy Yar* / POWs camp in Darnitsa; Babi Yar, RGAKFD 9119, VHH-I-0009319, 1943, Shots 01-12

Лазарет смерти в городе Славута / *Lazaret smerti v gorode Slavuta* / Death military hospital in the city of Slavuta, RGAKFD 8889, VHH-I-0009808, 1944, Shots 40-71

К наступлению в Силезии - Лагерь в Ламсдорфе, RGAKFD 10950, VHH-I-0009825, 1945, Shots 01-19

К наступлению в Силезии - Лагерь в Ламсдорфе, RGAKFD 10950, VHH-I-0009825, 1945, Shots 20-58

Лагерь военнопленных в Луккенвальде / *Lager voyennoplennykh v Lukkenvalde* / POWs camp in Luckenwalde, RGAKFD 10937, VHH-I-0009823, 1945, Shots 12-30

Лагерь военнопленных в Луккенвальде / *Lager voyennoplennykh v Lukkenvalde* / POWs camp in Luckenwalde, RGAKFD 10937, VHH-I-0009823, 1945, Shots 02-05

Credits

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