4 INTERROGATING THE WEHRMACHT

'I shall never in my life forget the moment I saw the Führer', professed a naval officer during interrogation in April 1941. 'I felt an electric shock, as if I had touched a live wire … [the] shock went through and through me, and it is just the same when he speaks', he continued. 'The Führer casts a spell over anyone he looks at. He looks at you once with his pale blue eyes, and when you hear him speak he carries everybody with him, no matter what their opinions.'[1] The encounter took place three years earlier in Kiel, at the launch of the cruiser *Prinz Eugen*, which Hitler had attended with Hungarian regent Miklós Horthy. The officer, now a prisoner in England, did not interact with Hitler directly. But seeing him in person and hearing him speak was enough to turn him into a Nazi Party supporter. Up until that day, he had backed the conservative-liberal *Deutsche Volkspartei* and had even opposed the Nazi seizure of power in 1933. 'You can't hear him on the wireless, you must see him. He takes possession of you', he told the interrogator.

Unbeknown to the officer, his interrogation was being recorded, with excerpts later included in a report of just over a page. Some 10,000 German soldiers (and just over 500 Italians) were monitored in this way in the CSDIC camps in England between 1939 and 1945. Some were also monitored in active theatres of war – from Khartoum to Cairo to Baghdad to Delhi and Rome – and others were monitored by US intelligence who, after training their interrogators in the British

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camps, set up their own eavesdropping operations for German and Japanese prisoners.[2] Besides his vivid account of that 1938 day, the officer's report also included a reference to 'the big offensive in 1918', which he believed was interrupted by the 'staged' munition strike in Germany that resulted in the seizing 'of the weapons from our hands, just when we were on the verge of victory'. This was followed by his defence of the Gestapo, whose 'only task' was 'to prevent a second revolution'. Some thirty copies of this interrogation were circulated across a dozen recipients, mainly sections of military intelligence but also the Foreign Office and the predecessors of SOE and PWE. Because while on its own this account was an anecdote, when combined with other prisoners' words – such as one who said 'If Hitler no longer lived, I should not desire to live either' – it helped to illustrate the messianic light in which Hitler was cast and, as the war progressed, allowed CSDIC to detect changes in attitudes towards him and the regime.[3]

The resulting transcripts – known as Special Reports – are an unusual source. They capture the private views of hundreds of soldiers, recorded without their knowledge. It is unsurprising, then, that CSDIC is defined by them, as if it produced nothing else of note. This is not to say that the soldiers' words have been studied widely either. Barring a project led by Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer, few others have used these dialogues in any systematic way.[4] A likely reason is that their volume and format – some 19,000 reports, spanning close to 50,000 pages – give the appearance of a free-standing collection, suitable only to the kind of large-scale analysis undertaken by Neitzel and Welzer. This is not a valid assumption, however. These transcripts were never produced with the intention of being read independently, perhaps with the exception of the conversations between the generals in Trent Park.[5] For everyone else, many of the transcripts are just a few sentences long, they concern several unrelated topics between them and the identity of the speakers was, for security reasons, not included.

Yet their exact purpose – if not to be read on their own – is not self-evident. The approximately sixty-five War Office files in which they are found contain only these dialogues and no other materials to contextualise them. This explains why these transcripts both define CSDIC and, paradoxically, prevent its history from being studied more fully. The answer to the question of what purpose the transcripts served can be seen in the other types of reports CSDIC published, and which were not the product of microphones. Amounting to *c.*2,500

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documents, these fall into five categories, published at different points during the war. They include 'Interrogation Reports', brief accounts of an individual's wartime service, and 'Subject Interrogation Reports', in-depth accounts of various military questions such as how specific weapons or defences worked.[6] These documents were the result of direct questioning, with microphones then used to check that the prisoner had not lied. There were also 'Prisoner of War Papers', focusing on soldiers' professional lives in the Third Reich. For these, soldiers who in civilian life were doctors, teachers, lawyers and civil servants were asked to write essays explaining how their professions had functioned since 1933, with the aim of using those accounts in administrative guides that were being drafted for the Allied occupation authorities. While only 137 of these papers were produced, they are incredibly detailed and exceed 3,000 pages in total. And then there were surveys of prisoners' opinions. The expansion of the wartime state meant that non-military information was soon needed as much as military intelligence, including for economic and propaganda purposes, and CSDIC began gathering it for the benefit of civilian departments. The resulting surveys – the fourth type of report, known as GRX: General Report Mixed – were published between 1941 and 1943 and include information on the impact of Allied air raids in Germany and elsewhere; rationing in Germany; living conditions in occupied Europe; and the effect of Allied propaganda on soldiers and civilians. Finally, a psychiatrist called Henry Dicks and his team conducted 'morale research' in CSDIC in 1943 and 1944. Their goal was to study what motivated German soldiers to continue fighting despite unfavourable odds, in the hope that this scientific understanding would make Allied propaganda more effective. To measure morale, prisoners would be asked their opinions of Hitler, the regime, the US, the USSR and the outcome of the war. Their findings were published as statistical surveys, known as GRS: General Report Statistical.[7]

The purpose of the transcripts was to complement these other investigations rather than to tell a separate story. This is in line with our earlier discussion about the methods of CSDIC and the purpose of secret listening in the overall process, which was to confirm what a prisoner had said in interrogation or to reveal new topics of interest which could then be followed up in interrogation. This creates a link between the topics covered in these other reports and those in the transcripts. And it also means that while CSDIC's material has so far been

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studied from the German perspective – what those dialogues tell us about German soldiers – it was the British who determined what questions prisoners were asked, what was considered worthwhile enough to record and put on paper, and what topics were not paid particular attention. The history of CSDIC therefore tells us at least as much about the British as about the Germans. And the British side of the story, as it emerges from the entirety of material produced, is one of how Britain tried to understand the enemy it was confronting.

4.1 INKLINGS

The initial expectation behind CSDIC, shaped by the Great War experience, was that it would be required for eliciting order-of-battle intelligence, ad hoc information about tactics and weapons, and occasional insights into enemy morale. Another early expectation was that the three services would be operating largely within their own distinct domains, despite an acknowledgement of the need for combined operations. This too was reflected in what was called CSDIC's 'federal' structure. It was to be a War Office affair, but its intelligence activity would be split into three sections: Air, Army, Navy. Each of these sections, however, would be operating independently of the others and each would be responsible for interrogating the prisoners of its German equivalent. The Air and Navy Sections were accordingly staffed by the Air Ministry and the Admiralty respectively, and were independent in deciding how to format and issue their reports. The Navy Section, for example, would collate information and publish a single interrogation report per vessel, not per prisoner; the Army Section, in contrast, initially attempted to publish a single report per prisoner.

One positive implication of this structure was that it quickly made it possible to see the value of CSDIC to each ministry. As the Battle of Britain and then the Blitz raged overhead, the Air Section had far more prisoners to interrogate than the others and thus got much out of CSDIC from the start. Many interrogations concerned air defence, however, which had implications for the War Office as well. The 'most important single contribution' of microphones in their first year of use was on the Knickebein, X-Gerät and Elektra radio-navigation aids.[8] To counter German air attacks, Britain needed first to understand how the Germans were navigating their fleet and how pilots knew they were over a target in total blackout conditions. Airmen in CSDIC provided that information,

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mainly by discussing it among themselves. With countermeasures introduced to detect and jam those systems, by mid-1941 CSDIC was then able to confirm that those were working because, again, German pilots were saying so to each other.[9] Airmen's discussions of British anti-aircraft measures also helped Britain gauge the accuracy of its anti-aircraft aiming and the type of barrage that was most effective. And they also spoke about what tactics they had been instructed to use to evade those countermeasures, such as varying the pitch of the propeller in order to mislead the British sound detectors. All of this strengthened British air defence, to the extent that in March 1941, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Anti-Aircraft Command visited CSDIC to see the organisation that was helping him 'to shoot down more Huns!'.[10] There was also intelligence on order-of-battle matters and on losses: the number of airmen who were killed or missing. The latter topic in particular was one that airmen were reluctant to disclose directly to interrogators but would regularly discuss among themselves. Some glimpses into morale were also gained from the beginning, for instance based on how they spoke of the Spitfire (which had acquired 'the reputation of a bogey').

When it came to bombing targets, however, and more generally to time-sensitive intelligence, these were less in line with CSDIC's strengths. On the one hand, CSDIC was not expected to secure such intelligence because there was some delay between prisoners being captured and then being transferred to CSDIC. But even when that delay was small, there was much hesitation in relying on what a single prisoner had said without corroborating evidence from other, more objective sources such as aerial photographs or signals. The most striking example of this reluctance was in the winter of 1940. On 12 November, an airman told his cellmate that Coventry and Birmingham were about to be bombed: 'He [the prisoner] believes that riots have broken out in London and that Buckingham palace has been stormed and that "Hermann" [Göring] thinks the psychological moment has come for a colossal raid to take place between the 15th and 20th of this month at the full moon and that Coventry and Birmingham will be the towns attacked.'[11] This information came on the back of an Enigma decrypt received only a day earlier, suggesting that the Germans were about to launch a particularly important operation codenamed 'Moonlight Sonata', presumably to take place at or near November's full moon.[12] The decrypt contained a list of four alternative targets in the Home Counties and London, but appeared not to mention the primary target.

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The interrogators went back to the prisoner who upon being questioned repeated that, based on what he knew, the target would be Coventry or Birmingham. But with no mention of either Coventry or Birmingham in the decrypt, the belief that the targets would be London and the Home Counties prevailed.[13] After Coventry was bombed on 14 November, under a full moon, it was realised that the decrypt did, in fact, name the target through the word *Korn*, which turned out to be code for Coventry. Information that CSDIC obtained, and which proved to have been accurate was, for reasons beyond CSDIC's control, not acted upon. This, however, did not overturn the policy of not relying on a prisoner's word in the absence of other evidence. Despite the enthusiasm around CSDIC's potential, interrogation was always seen primarily as a provider of raw information, to be corroborated against other sources.

Naval intelligence had its own reasons for valuing CSDIC. By 1940, the Admiralty had already realised that prisoners could help trace the histories of individual ships and their tactics –sometimes, it was only information from these prisoners that would help the Admiralty to do this.[14] The additional benefit for the Navy Section was that several members of the same vessel were usually taken to CSDIC at once, and so whatever information a prisoner gave could then be corroborated by others on the spot. This concerned information about the strength, movements and losses of a prisoner's vessel; occasionally such information was given by prisoners about vessels other than their own; and on progress made on the construction of battleships. Through secret listening in particular, detail was also received on topics such as codes and more technical questions, such as different types of torpedoes and mines that the Germans were using. As with the airmen, Kriegsmarine prisoners also discussed among themselves how effective they believed British tactics and weapons to be – for instance, the effectiveness of British torpedo attacks. And like the Air Section, the Navy Section would also overhear interesting discussions, such as about how many U-boats were thought to have been sunk or lost. Here, too, there was an attempt to gain insights into morale. It was noticed, for instance, that by the spring of 1941, U-boat crews were much less optimistic about the prospects of a successful German blockade of Britain, in contrast to the Luftwaffe prisoners' optimism.[15]

Things looked less promising for the Army Section. They too tried to capture tactical and operational intelligence, initially by issuing an 'Interrogation Report' for each prisoner they interrogated. Those

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reports, issued in early 1940, offered little real value. As with much else at that point, the reports followed 'the old standard pattern' used in the previous war, where they contained the prisoner's military background, the names of his officers, the order of battle of his unit, its organisation and movements, its training and its armament.[16] This type of information was, of course, useful. The problem was that this line of questioning differed little to the brief, field interrogations these prisoners had already been subjected to, with the added hindrance that CSDIC was seeing them on average twenty days after capture. In these reports – 109 of them in 1940 – there was also a remarkable absence of detail. With few exceptions, each report was a page long, simply because prisoners refused to speak. A common excuse given was lack of knowledge. Others refused as a matter of principle, regardless of their rank. One man at the junior rank of *Oberschütze* was interrogated three times in a day and refused to talk in any of them.[17] The officer interrogated immediately after was an exception, with his report taking up three pages. Since he was so talkative, he was put in a bugged cell with a man for whom no interrogation report exists, unwittingly interrogating him.[18]

Yet for all the tricks available, the real problem was one of numbers: only 168 Army prisoners were to pass through CSDIC between 1939 and 1942 inclusive. There were some successes still. The most notable was early information about the development of the 'liquid air weapon', which turned out to be the V-1 flying bomb, an early cruise missile; and the development of the V-2 rocket, which was the first long-range guided ballistic missile to be developed. Both of these missiles were dropped over London in 1944 and 1945. But there was no constant stream of information on topics such as order of battle or losses. Even the intelligence that was being received on specific topics, such as an account of the Vågsøy raid, still needed naval prisoners to be interrogated for supplementary and corroborating information.

The situation changed drastically in 1944, when army prisoners started to arrive in unprecedented numbers. The 21st Army Group, preparing to invade north-west Europe, had already liaised with CSDIC on what information they wanted them to obtain from prisoners, and these were questions about their units, their tactics and what they knew about German defence lines.[19] It was for this purpose that the Subject Interrogation Reports started being published daily. Of the 1,728 such reports issued, around 40 per cent concerned specific German military units – from field armies down to companies. Initially, these

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tracked formations as they were being captured in France. The focus then turned eastward, with units in the Netherlands and Germany, and some also covering Eastern Europe.[20] Defences were also widely covered, especially prior to D-Day, and again concerned France, the Netherlands, Germany and Austria.

The value of these documents was not to anticipate what would come next, but to record what had happened and be better prepared for the next war with Germany, which was seen as only a matter of time. Their aim, therefore, was to paint a fuller picture of Nazi Germany's war and improve British military doctrine. For these reasons, there was an effort to make this material more reliable: to pre-empt accusations of false memory or lying, interrogators made efforts to confirm these reports before distributing them, usually by interrogating more than one person with similar experience. This meant that even a month after Germany had surrendered, CSDIC's Army Section was still producing a report on Flak defences at Leuna, and many more such examples exist where a report was issued too late to be of operational use but its circulation was still considered useful.[21] Other than their 'historical' military function, some of these reports still served immediate uses. A topic that featured with increasing frequency was the state of the Abwehr, information on which was needed by the London Counter-Intelligence War Room, an Allied operation gathering information on subversive enemy activities. In compiling their own reports, CSDIC's material came to be one of their most vital sources. Similarly, information that featured with increasing frequency in 1945 concerned topics of long-term interest, including German cyphers. Information on the latter was of particular interest to SIS, the DMI's signals intelligence (MI8) and to the DMI sub-section processing intelligence from Germany (MI3(c)), all of which were preparing for Germany's occupation.[22] Based on the early assumptions about the war and interrogation's role within it – that it would provide order-of-battle intelligence, information about tactics and weapons, and occasional insights into enemy morale – CSDIC was a success indeed.

But this leaves out much and suggests that the Army Section lay dormant until 1944, when its interrogators suddenly sprang into action. The reality was very different, in that the Army did take on other tasks in the preceding years which proved transformative, both for CSDIC and for filling an important gap in the intelligence effort. From the very beginning, and based on the limited experience of the Great War, there was

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an inkling that secret listening would provide untainted insights into soldiers' attitudes and morale. That initial feeling became stronger as the first months of the war progressed, especially when Winston Churchill replaced Neville Chamberlain and took a personal interest in the development and coordination of intelligence.[23] This, in turn, drove the broader expansion of the wartime state and led to the refinement of several specialist organisations, which now also recognised the potential value of CSDIC to their work. This meant that very quickly after mid-1940, there was an interest in what soldiers had to say on non-operational matters such as economic and political conditions in Europe.[24] And there was also the propaganda dimension of their dialogues. Even references soldiers made to 'scandals, local colour, erotic stories and low-class jokes' were considered worth recording for propaganda, and so were any references they made to Hitler or other Nazi leaders.[25] The determination on the part of CSDIC to deliver is evident by discussions that were recorded while London was being bombed. An example was a conversation between two prisoners during one of the first days of the Blitz:

> (Heavy guns firing)
> B: That gets on my nerves every time, it shakes me, body and soul.
> A: Do tell a story!
> B: I'm not in the mood for it at present.
> A: Yes, but by telling it, that will help you through! It's rocking here! There's another. It is terrifying. My nerves are so bad now that if anything moves, it makes me jump.
> B: You can say what you like. It would be best if we were dead, then we should not have to go through this.
> A: Yes, it's best to talk at night and sleep during the day. I'd like to know what ADOLF is after, what is the use of the bombing, you can't do that forever … Good God, what's that? Everything is wobbling – at least they [presumably the guards] can get out of here.[26]

Technical and operational intelligence was central to justifying CSDIC's existence – and it was delivering that – but the interest in non-operational matters was important too. And so when a survey of different recipients of CSDIC's reports was carried out in late 1940 to gauge their opinions of them, it was the propaganda organisations that judged that material to be 'vital' more consistently (Table 4.1).

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Table 4.1 Summary of comments in response to the survey on CSDIC(UK), partially reproduced from 'Summary of Attached Comments from Recipients', unknown author and date, WO 208/3455, TNA.

User	Comment
MI2(b) – Scandinavia and Baltic countries	Of interest.
MI3(c) – Italy	Of interest.
MI5	Important.
MI6	Vital.
MI8 – Signals & Wireless	Sometimes of great importance. Source very valuable.
MI10 – Technical intelligence	Majority of interest only; 10% important; a few of vital importance.
Inter-Services Security Board	What concerns is of importance.
MI14 – Germany	Vital importance regarding enemy combined operations; Important for *Feldpostnummer* locations, personalities etc.; Of interest for morale etc.
MI14(e) – German Flak	Majority of considerable importance.
MO3 – Great Britain	Useful. Gives ideas on tactics in event of invasion.
MO8 – Ireland, Iceland	Important. Any moment may yield something of vital importance.
IP1 – Internal propaganda, War Office	Vital.
Brigadier General Staff (Intelligence) – Home Forces	Important for general atmosphere.
Anti-Aircraft Command	Considerable importance. Probably soon vital importance.
Department Electra House – Enemy Propaganda (later **Political Warfare Executive**)	Vital.
Future Operations (Enemy) Section	Great importance.
Special Operations Executive	Vital.

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The more specific question of morale was also of great interest, including to figures such as the Director of Military Intelligence and the Vice Chief of the Imperial Chiefs of Staff, both of whom were curious to hear what CSDIC had to say on the topic.[27] Yet while the initial thought that CSDIC would offer insights into soldiers' attitudes was proving correct, what was also being realised was that this feature still had to be harnessed – it was of no real use simply by existing. It was, for instance, of little value to be noting things such as that one airman sounded more pessimistic than a different airman the week before, when the German Air Force was made up of hundreds of thousands of men; nor was it useful to circulate only fragmented transcripts such as the conversation between the two prisoners during the Blitz, without at least grouping them into a more coherent narrative.

The attempts to address this problem in late 1940 were superficial. While the Army Section did attempt to produce a 'morale survey' in early 1941, and it admitted from the outset that this was unlikely to be representative of the Wehrmacht, the entire report was without systematic method or much evidence. One of the supposed trends noticed was that in the second half of 1940, prisoners more consistently began to criticise Nazi Party bureaucrats (whom they called 'little Hitlers') and, to a lesser extent, Hitler and the top Party leadership. Although respect for Hitler persisted, there was noticeable disappointment over his failure to deliver a quick victory, and the earlier aura of reverence around him was beginning to diminish. Overall, while not exactly anti-Nazi, prisoners were beginning to discuss politics with a more sober tone.[28] But the evidence behind these trends was missing and this study was driven more by assumption than anything else.

4.2 A WINDOW ONTO NAZI EUROPE

This first 'morale report' was published just over a year into the war, when it was realised that the Army Section needed to carve out a different role for itself compared to the Air and Navy Sections, not least because the possibility of capturing large numbers of army prisoners was at that point non-existent. This was also the time when CSDIC's reputation began to grow, and it was becoming more apparent how interrogation would fit into the wider intelligence effort; in the words of the Director of Military Intelligence after inspecting Trent Park in early 1941, 'the whole show … was very efficiently run'.[29] And

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so the impression was formed that CSDIC could be trusted with more. Asking it to cast its net wider was the logical way forward.

The expansion of CSDIC's remit was therefore not simply the result of the Army Section having nothing else to do. It was shaped by the development of the wartime state and of the war more generally because the war now looked very different from the one imagined a year before, with Nazi Germany having dominated Europe within a matter of weeks. In this darkest hour, there were calls to take propaganda more seriously. When war broke out, Britain had turned again to Sir Campbell Stuart, the man who had overseen the Department of Propaganda in Enemy Countries at the end of the First World War. He came back in 1939 with a conviction that propaganda had to be tied directly to intelligence and military operations.[30] This view reflected pre-war Foreign Office thinking, which had argued for tight coordination between government, military and propaganda.[31] In theory, it all seemed entirely suitable. By early 1940, Stuart's secret organisation – Department Electra House – had its own man on the ground interviewing prisoners of war (not in CSDIC) in order to help determine what the content of propaganda should be. This was possibly Cyrus Brooks, a Germanist and translator, and he even interviewed Franz von Werra before his escape.[32] Such activities promised depth, but in practice propaganda in 1940 remained shallow. Built around tired stereotypes and jokes, it was criticised in Britain for showing little grasp of German mentalities and what was needed to break them.[33]

The lesson drawn from that experience was that propaganda conducted without a real understanding of its intended audience and purpose was simply ineffective. Ideas about how to address this came from different quarters, but several had mentioned the term 'political warfare'. One of those calling for it was Churchill's literary agent, the Hungarian Emery Reves. He wrote to Churchill towards the end of 1940 to say that Britain was too passive in how it was using propaganda, restricting itself to pointing out the dichotomy between the moral righteousness of the Allied cause and the evilness of Nazi Germany. This was not enough. Britain needed to take 'political warfare' seriously and integrate propaganda into the war effort with clear aims and a strategy, Reves wrote.[34] Other intellectuals were at that point echoing this criticism, arguing that propaganda should be used offensively, not restricted to merely stating the British 'case'.[35] And so although Chamberlain favoured Stuart, Churchill quickly shut down

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Electra House soon after he took over and dispatched Stuart to Canada to do other work.[36] Electra House's propaganda tasks were absorbed partly into Hugh Dalton's SOE, and partly into the Foreign Office's Political Intelligence Department – the deliberately bland cover name for what became the Political Warfare Executive. The information that had once been gathered directly by Stuart's organisation from prisoners of war through Cyrus Brooks would now be collected by CSDIC's Army Section.[37]

To provide more systematic insights into life in occupied Europe as well as German opinions of the war, the Army Section started to interrogate prisoners (regardless of service) on questions including the impact of Allied air raids, especially on Germany; rationing; living conditions in occupied Europe and Germany; fighting morale; and the effect of Allied propaganda on both soldiers and civilians. These opinions would be published monthly, with soldiers' comments grouped by topic. Whenever propaganda sections wanted to use such material – or any other material coming from CSDIC – there was a specific process to follow, in order not to betray the source. If, for example, PWE wanted to use a piece of information in its propaganda towards Germany, its Director-General would contact CSDIC's Arthur Rawlinson for permission. Then, Rawlinson would contact his own Director, Norman Crockatt, who would decide whether to allow this.[38] Even when permission was given, this was not simply a matter of putting CSDIC's quotations onto leaflets. One example from early 1941 arose when CSDIC noticed that many prisoners were commenting on the high quality of food in British camps. One of them went as far as to say that 'if German airmen only knew how good the food was, they would make more forced landings than they do'. Upon reading that transcript, Crockatt himself thought it could be used by PWE. He checked with the Air Ministry to make sure they had no objection to this information being used and then reached out to PWE's Director-General with an idea for a 'small plot'. The plot was that a comment along the lines of what the prisoner said would be broadcast on the BBC in Britain, and then it would deliberately be put into letters to British prisoners of war in Germany, so that German censors would pick it up.[39] PWE thought this was an excellent idea and 'shall be very glad to carry it out'.[40] Even though CSDIC's material was occasionally used in these ways, however, its real value was that it was giving British propaganda a window onto Nazi Europe in the first place.

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A number of key themes arose from these more consistent investigations. One of the first was how soldiers spoke of the prospect of an invasion of Britain. This was a topic that was monitored and featured prominently in CSDIC's early reports until prisoners gradually lost confidence in its likelihood. By the end of 1941, barely one in ten prisoners talked about it.[41] What was instead discussed with increasing frequency in 1941 were the 'strained relations' with the Soviet Union, which some prisoners knew were leading to Germany fortifying its eastern frontier and undertaking air reconnaissance over the USSR. Such discussions became more frequent as the year progressed, to the point that nine days before Operation Barbarossa, a Luftwaffe officer spoke of Hitler's 'intention to break the Russo-German pact and drive the Russians to the Urals in 10–14 days'.[42]

Another theme was the relationship between Germans and Italians. The German soldiers asked between 1941 and 1943 all said, in various ways, that the Italians were bad soldiers, and that Germany 'would have been better off' without Italy. Their expressions ranged from one who said the Italians were good people but bad soldiers, to another who said that if Italy was invaded, it was the Germans who would have to defend it, not the Italians. A third thought that if Germany controlled the Italian Navy, 'the English would have long ago been cleared out' of the Mediterranean. Another believed that 'the Italians are a poor lot who, without the German stiffening, would have been thrown out of AFRICA long ago'. And a further one thought that in Greece the Italians 'strut about as though they had beaten the Greeks, whereas everyone knows that the Germans saved them from defeat'. Among the few Italians surveyed, the sentiment was similarly consistent. They knew that the Germans did not see them as equal partners and had them do the 'dirty work' for them. One of them thought 'the German is a natural soldier and a very good one, but he is the most vain man in the world'.[43] A second declared that he never wanted to see another German after the war – 'unless they were tourists who had come to spend their money' in Italy.[44] Even when they revealed nothing new, these transcripts helped to gauge the force with which those opinions were being expressed.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, prisoners' opinions on Japan also started to be covered in the reports, under the racist and brazenly named category 'Yellow Peril', because the 'Yellow Peril' was what the prisoners were worried about. The

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consistent narrative that emerged from the start and remained until these surveys ceased in 1943 was that Japan was in the war for its own aims and that it would, in the long run, turn into a threat to Germany and 'the white races'. From the beginning, in December 1941, an airman 'pooh-poohed the claim put forward by Nazi propaganda' that Japan entered the war as 'part of a general Axis plan'. He instead believed Japan was 'playing a lone hand and was out exclusively for her own interests'.[45] Half a year on, another prisoner said that he had 'heard talk of the so-called "Yellow Peril" but … in a general sense of a "remote possibility in a remote future"'.[46] Others thought it was less remote. A naval rank reported in October 1942 that during training he was given a lecture on Japan. There, he was told that 'there must be full co-operation' with Japan now, 'but that they must always bear in mind the idea of the Yellow Peril, and it was definite that in the future the white races would have to fight JAPAN'.[47] At the end of 1942 – a year on from Pearl Harbor – the view remained that 'after this war CHINA and JAPAN (having settled their differences) will unite against the Western Powers and will make a bid for world domination'. The few who were more optimistic based that belief on the fact that Germany 'is so strong and is getting so much stronger, that JAPAN would always confine her activities to purely Asiatic interests'.[48]

Since each monthly survey drew on a different cohort of prisoners, other topics and locations varied depending on where soldiers had served. But there was an attempt to gauge living conditions in occupied territories. An airman, for example, was asked in August 1942 about Jews in Germany, and said 'they are still to be seen on the streets', and that in the Netherlands 'there were only certain streets where Jews might be seen and only certain hours when they might be on those streets. Almost all cafés and public resorts bore the notion "Forbidden for Jews"'.[49] In October 1942, a naval rating who had served in Greece in 1941 said that 'conditions there were appalling, people were dying of hunger … Dying people were taken off the streets to German hospitals, given food and when they were better, were turned out again to starve'.[50] The following month, a new insight concerned the spread of venereal disease, which was reported to have increased 'to a dangerous extent' in both Germany and in occupied territories.[51] Various such comments were circulated each month.

Fighting morale was another constant feature of these analyses from the start. German morale was found to be as high in 1941

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as the first 'morale report' had found it to be in 1940, and soldiers who had been on leave to Germany prior to capture were reporting the same for civilians: they were 'still confident in German victory'.[52] Faith in victory remained the prominent mood well into 1942, but there was occasional pessimism, which coincided with developments on the Eastern Front. A prisoner, for example, remarked that his friend had 'completely grey hair' after being on that front for eighteen months, despite being in his early twenties.[53] Others noted the brutalisation of those who had served there. A prisoner commented in August 1942 that 'the troops [in the East] are becoming completely coarsened. They are just like animals when they get home'.[54] A month earlier, an airman said that the Eastern Front was 'guaranteed to cure anyone of Bolshevism', while another similarly thought that those who 'still tarred with the brush of Bolshevism' before the war but had since fought in the Soviet Union 'had now been converted into fanatical supporters of National Socialism'.[55] By December 1942, an airman said that friends of his whom he met when they were on leave from the Eastern Front 'were confident of defeating the Russians by Summer 1943, and far from not wanting to return to that front, all were anxious to go back in order to be "in at the kill!"'.[56]

Even when aware of military realities, however, few prisoners would criticise Hitler for them. A non-commissioned naval officer interrogated in June 1941 was a case in point. Thought by the interrogators to be 'the complete picture of war-weariness and dejection' – he had lost his father in the previous war, he had not heard from his soldier brother since 1939 and his mother was surviving on a small pension – he 'still had a word of praise for Hitler'.[57] Hitler remained 'for the majority of [prisoners] above controversy', with only some 'unusually irreverent references' to him being made by naval personnel in particular.[58] Even in 1942, when the quick victory that the Führer had promised had still not materialised, there was reluctance to criticise him. Individual exceptions existed here too, but they were outliers. They included a non-commissioned officer who, against the backdrop of Stalingrad in February 1943, told his cellmate, 'I can't bear this "Heil HITLER" … He is supposed to be a most unpretentious man who wears no decorations, yet he introduced this form of greeting for himself. There's nothing like it in any other country – "Heil ROOSEVELT" or "Heil CHURCHILL", not even "Heil King GEORGE". This "Heil HITLER" business is ridiculous.'[59] A

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conversation between three officers in June 1943 is another example of vocal and direct criticism of Hitler:

> M199: Why did the ammunition shortage arise? Because the Russians had captured two Army dumps. That all happened and the Führer must take the blame for it. The Russians have robbed us of our aura of invincibility. In fact, against the Russians we have lost. We have sacrificed the flower of our youth and lost our best divisions – eighty of our best General Staff officers were left in Stalingrad. Let us assume that the Russians would have attacked us; still, a war on two fronts should have been avoided at all costs, no matter what the cost might have been.
>
> M186: And they were always making speeches and saying that they were following the right policy.
>
> M200: The newspapers are right: we have become infected by such a megalomania. […]
>
> ?M199: It had all gone so well. It was all so marvellous and perfect, and then with that damned Russia it all went awry. There are two people who didn't know that in Russia it is cold in winter; one was Napoleon Bonaparte, and the other was the Führer, the dilettante general, but everyone else knew.[60]

But the general attitude was against speaking negatively of Hitler, with semi-religious attitudes towards him surviving the Battle of Stalingrad.[61] 'A shock went through one, as if sacrilege had been committed', said a prisoner in 1943 in response to someone saying 'Hitler lies'; he made 'an involuntary prayerful folding of the hands' as he told interrogators the story.[62] Hitler was akin to a deity, which is what Nazi indoctrination was built to inculcate.[63] Uncritical faith in Hitler was also a mechanism for soldiers to surrender their own individual conscience and judgement in relation to the war, the surveys concluded in 1943. Others refused to criticise Hitler simply because he was the 'supreme military leader of the German state'. Or, as one airman explained to CSDIC in 1942, 'the feeling towards Hitler is more one of respect for a person with whom one could not risk a joke'.[64] Whatever the logic, the outcome was the same: few were 'conscious of any immorality' on Hitler's part, and thus remained loyal to him, his regime and the war.[65]

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Faith in other Nazi leaders remained high as well, even though individuals in Hitler's entourage were criticised more regularly than he was. This was understood by CSDIC to be a way for soldiers to criticise developments without criticising Hitler. The anti-British propaganda of Goebbels was to blame for the failure to achieve a negotiated peace with Britain, some thought in the summer of 1941. They believed that such rhetoric 'had never gone down well' at home, and that Germans would favour a peace with Britain, as it conformed to 'Nazi race-theories, German-Anglo-Saxon kinship, etc.'.[66] Earlier in 1941, prisoners had also expressed a dislike of Ribbentrop and Himmler. One said:

> I'll tell you what I feel about Ribbentrop. I think that the 'Führer' is too much under the influence of Ribbentrop. He's afraid of him. Ribbentrop has got that Gestapo, a special body of men which stands by him to the death and not by the 'Führer'. I had the feeling when I occasionally saw Ribbentrop, that he and Himmler are as thick as thieves.[67]

Another prisoner who favoured 'a well-mannered dictatorship on nationalist lines with a good mixture of Prussian tradition and privilege' thought Hitler was the only person who could hold such a regime together, yet he deplored his 'choice in many of his chieftains, who are much too vulgar and rowdy', including Himmler and Ribbentrop.[68]

Yet even when prisoners were willing to criticise the regime and even Hitler, they were not prepared to withdraw their support for the war. Soldiers shared a conviction that this was an existential war for Germany, as again cultivated by Nazi propaganda, and this conviction served to stiffen morale when military developments were unfavourable. The fact that prisoners associated the outcome of the war with their own personal ruin is captured by the fact that in 1941, some 'seriously discussed the likelihood of mass sterilization of the German people in the event of an Allied victory'.[69] Such talk continued into 1942. A naval prisoner was convinced that if Germany was to lose, 'the Allies [would] systematically sterilise all German men in order to exterminate the German race'. His fear was shaped by 'various publications [in Germany] which gave convincing proof that such action was the intention of the Jews and naturally those Jews were bound to be influential factors behind Allied policy'.[70] Some still had a 'lively fear' of mass sterilisation in mid-1943, in part influenced by Theodore N. Kaufmann's *Germany Must Perish* which was published in 1941.[71]

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But knowledge of the extermination policies Germany was pursuing across Europe must have also influenced this thinking. And indeed, fear of revenge by occupied populations was prevalent and explicit. Defeat would not only mean political and economic ruin, a prisoner explained in the summer of 1942, but that 'hordes of Slav beasts would overrun the country, ravishing all women, abusing all children and crippling all men. It would mean the extinction of all German hopes and aspirations for at least a thousand years and the total elimination of German culture'.[72] Even though Germans had become war-weary since 1941, opined an airman in early 1943, the 'fear of being overrun by the Russians had made them determined to hold out'.[73] Military realities were thus failing to translate into decreased support for the war and the regime. If anything, the fear of vengeance made soldiers to rally more forcefully around the regime as the tide was turning against them.

This desperate need for victory also meant that soldiers did not blame the regime for starting the war: all prisoners asked in September 1941 'agreed that Germany was blameless'. For some, the guilt instead 'lay in England's determination to maintain economic domination to the exclusion of Germany', whereas for others it lay with 'the Jews and international financiers' or with 'England's bolstering up of Poland's intransigence'.[74] Asked again in November, a different cohort of prisoners answered 'no' to the question of German responsibility – the only one who said 'yes' explained it away in terms of Germany's 'inevitable expansion'.[75] An interrogator took it upon himself to challenge the Nazi slogans a prisoner was repeating that month, while also giving an air of civility to these interrogations, quite different to what one might imagine:

> the [prisoner's] hitherto unquestioning belief in the Nazi 'Stab in the back in 1918' theory was rapidly dissipated by citation, with chapter and verse, of dispatches and official documents of Ludendorf [*sic*], Hindenburg and Max v. Baden in August, 1918 and the following months. This, as an instance of the deliberate falsification of history by the Nazis, shook him deeply. His blind belief in the 'race theories' was shaken with equal ease by an appeal to his common sense on the basis of the judgments of biologists and agreed facts of history … He was also brought to see the barbarity of the Nazi conceptions

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> of justice with reference to the accepted Nazi principle of punishing innocent hostages, with special mention of the shooting of the hostages in France. He was most disconcerted when told that, on the basis of the above and similar arguments, the whole civilianised world ostracised the Germans as Huns and barbarians.[76]

Even in mid-1943, blame for the war was being attributed to Allied leaders for being 'warmongers' when 'Hitler only wants the right to live'.[77] Interrogators were disappointed that even a naval officer, who had a good education and had travelled extensively during his several years of service, was 'completely enclosed in a world of Nazi clap-trap', rendering him 'as utterly incapable of original judgment or thought as the simplest Nazi sailor. All his knowledge and abilities were devoted to making a consistent and coherent "Weltanschauung" out of the Nazi catch-words'.[78]

When CSDIC started gathering intelligence on these non-operational matters in 1941, by morale they meant an individual's 'fighting qualities' – their resolve to continue fighting.[79] If that showed signs of decline, prisoners' political support for the war and the regime's pursuit of it would be upset as well. This association was not proving valid. Even when soldiers disagreed with aspects of the regime, they vehemently supported its war. And even when they were war-weary, they vehemently wanted the war to be won. This disconnect between soldiers' political views and their attitudes towards the war was caused by what appeared to be a separation phenomenon between Hitler and National Socialism: it was not incompatible for an individual to be critical of aspects of National Socialism such as the SS, Gestapo or Hitler Youth and yet to be entirely devoted to Hitler and to the war he was pursuing. Germans were separating Hitler from his ideology and were advancing the latter by being devoted to him, not always by ascribing to the ideology directly and independently.

To confirm this observation, in 1943 CSDIC combined data it had gathered on the opinions of 223 prisoners between September 1939 and May 1943. It found that this phenomenon was indeed true, and that 'attitude to Hitler personally may be a more reliable test of the loyalty of Germans to their regime than attitude to National Socialism'.[80] In fact, half of the prisoners asked during those forty-three months 'put Hitler above criticism', refusing to even question his

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decisions. What these findings also proved, however, was that evaluating German morale was proving a more complex exercise than expected. Yet with the prospect of Germany's defeat and likely occupation becoming clearer, and with a growing number of Germans in British hands, Britain really needed a better understanding of what Nazism meant to the Germans.

4.3 'WHAT DO YOU THINK OF HITLER?'

It is at this point that Henry Dicks, the psychiatrist, was attached to CSDIC. This development arose from a mix of factors within and outside CSDIC, all unmistakeably pointing to the need for a more scientific study of morale. Discussions about attaching a psychiatrist or a psychologist began in the summer of 1942, the aim being to conduct studies that would serve mainly the propaganda interests of PWE. Soon after, the War Office's Directorate of Army Psychiatry (to which Dicks belonged), also recorded its interest in understanding the 'psychological weaknesses of Nazis'.[81] These discussions ran parallel to Anglo-American plans for deploying psychologists in active theatres of war in order to inform – including through interrogation – Allied propaganda efforts. As part of the latter efforts, the Psychological Warfare Section of the Allied Force Headquarters (later renamed Psychological Warfare Branch) also came into being in late 1942.[82] They were effectively waging what in Britain had long now been called 'political warfare' though the term was now 'perverted into "psychological [warfare]" by the Americans'.[83]

Questions about authoritarian attitudes had been troubling social scientists well before 1942, not least the German thinkers of the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research in the 1920s and 1930s. American researchers picked up the topic in a more speculative way in the 1930s, while in December 1939, a Foreign Office document tried to draw on Alfred Adler's theories to say that after the 1918 humiliation, 'the group psychology of the German nation, as it has developed during the past twenty years, bears a marked resemblance to the psychology of a typical neurotic'.[84] The start of the war saw even more speculative research into the personalities of Hitler and other Nazi leaders, influenced by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. What was different in 1942, however, was the option to look at these questions by gathering empirical evidence from German soldiers. It is at this moment

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that Dicks and CSDIC came to play their part, doing foundational research that would later be taken up by American social scientists on the Continent in the final stages of the conflict.[85] By 1945, Theodor Adorno had already joined the project that would culminate in *The Authoritarian Personality*, published in 1950, arguing that authoritarianism was not a German peculiarity but a broader phenomenon. In this way, the work done at CSDIC between early 1943 and early 1944 was in the middle of an intellectual current.

At this point in the war, Dicks joined CSDIC's Army Section in order to develop 'a technique of morale assessment … which sought to avoid the dangers of one-sidedness, chance impression, and subjective bias'.[86] Born in Estonia in 1900 to a Baltic German mother and an English father, he was not only fluent in German but he had already done important work as part of the medical team that monitored Rudolf Hess after he crash-landed in Scotland in 1941. Now, in attempting to assess German morale, Dicks tried to make the process as scientific as possible, despite operating in a limited context. Samples, for instance, never included army personnel, and thus could not have accurately reflected the Wehrmacht, let alone Germany as a country (not to mention the absence of women). As each survey relied on a new cohort of prisoners, the groups being studied were also never static – what they gave were snapshots of soldiers' attitudes during a particular period. Yet the need to start gaining a deeper understanding of German attitudes was acute, and so partial statistical inferences were seen as more desirable than none at all. The process involved selecting at random prisoners who were in the camp and having what resembled 'a casual chat'. During this chat they would be asked their opinions of Hitler, the regime, the US, the USSR and the outcome of the war. Other material would be consulted afterwards, particularly each prisoner's secretly recorded conversations. An assessment would then be reached about how high each man's morale was and what was driving it. A combination of assessments would be published in statistical form, with an average of sixty prisoners involved in each monthly survey.

In the resulting surveys (Figure 4.1), prisoners were divided into four categories when it came to their attitudes towards Hitler: those who worshipped him; those who accepted him; those who had doubts about him; and those who were hostile towards him. For those classified as worshipping him, Hitler was fulfilling a 'pseudo-religious function' – he was 'the omniscient being'. For those accepting him, he

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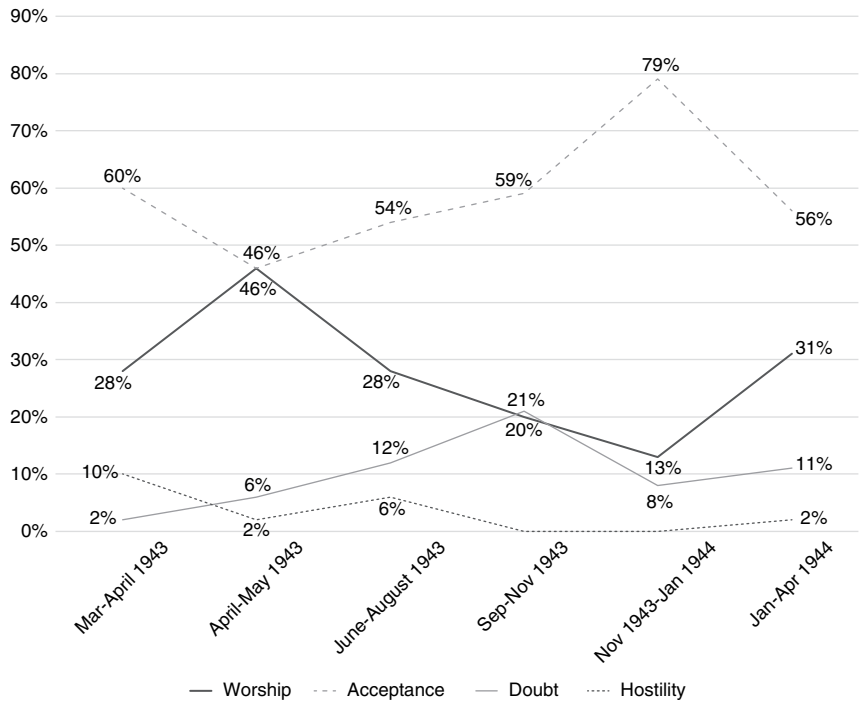


Figure 4.1 Attitudes towards Hitler in the CSDIC(UK) surveys (N = 355), using the six 'Survey of P/W opinion' reports in WO 208/5522, TNA.

was regarded as 'the legal Head of the State, who, as such, deserved respect and support, in time of war'.[87] Between April 1943 and April 1944 when CSDIC undertook these surveys, the combined total of those who worshipped and those who accepted him was over 80 per cent. Hitler was indeed commanding the support of a majority of prisoners despite the unfavourable military odds.

When it came to their attitudes towards the regime, prisoners were again divided into four groups: those completely loyal; those loyal but capable of criticising the regime, called 'believers with reservations'; those who were anti-Nazis; and those who were 'unpolitical'. The regime too commanded the majority support throughout the surveys, but in lower proportions to Hitler – the combined total of those completely loyal and those loyal with reservations ranged between 50 and 73 per cent.

If Hitlerism and Nazism were not synonymous, what did the latter mean to soldiers? The first survey in the spring of 1943 found

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that, for those completely loyal (27 per cent), the regime was indistinguishable from Germany, 'to which it has given unity and social purpose'.[88] These prisoners repeated the lines of Nazi propaganda, including that Poland and Czechoslovakia 'cannot be considered as real nations', that they are a necessary 'living space' for the Reich, and that in the event of German victory – in which these completely loyal prisoners still believed – would be put under direct Nazi rule. Antisemitism was also prevalent in this group who treated Jews as the 'universal scapegoat'. Some of them made comments to the effect that '[Jews] are responsible for all Germany's troubles' or that 'the Jew with his capital was behind it all'. This was precisely how National Socialism was perceived outside Germany, and just over a quarter of prisoners in CSDIC personified this definition.

A much larger proportion – the largest in the spring 1943 cohort (42 per cent) – were those who had some reservations about the regime but remained loyal to it. These men had 'an essentially Nazi mentality', in that they subscribed 'to the main tenets of the creed – for example the "Führerprinzip" in home politics, German domination in the international field, and the anti-Jewish obsession'; indeed, some of the men in this group were classed as 'worshipping' Hitler, despite having reservations about his National Socialism. But they disproved of, in order of importance, 'Nazi fanaticism – particularly of the S.S. – atrocities, Party rule with its graft and little Hitlers, the general regimentation of life, and sometimes, but not always, anti-Semitism'. Why did they remain loyal to a regime whose *means* they disagreed with? The main reason was that it had 'alleviated the economic situation existing prior to 1933'.[89] Despite disagreeing with key manifestations of National Socialism, individuals in this group preferred the regime over alternatives because they saw it as responsible for the improvement of their own economic position. Yet in its attempt to understand National Socialism from the perspective of the Germans, CSDIC also failed to see antisemitism itself as fanaticism. Believers with reservations, found to be as antisemitic as their completely loyal counterparts, were not considered fanatical Nazis because they opposed 'atrocities' and 'Nazi fanaticism' in general terms, both of which were of course systematically targeting Jews.

In the next survey, published in June 1943, those completely loyal to the regime were in higher numbers than before (40 per cent) but based their loyalty 'less on ideology than on [the regime's] alleged

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practical achievements in social welfare'.[90] Those who had reservations still had them in regard to the violent means the regime was using – 'e.g. religious persecution and the excesses of the S.S and Gestapo'.[91] It was only in the autumn of 1943 that, although still the majority position, complete support for the regime decreased, possibly due to the survey taking place in the aftermath of the surrender in North Africa. Those who refused to question National Socialism (20 per cent), even at this stage, were those whose personal success was entangled with the regime's, such as regular officers, sons of party members and landowners. Yet those who ceased being completely loyal at this point did not, of course, become anti-Nazi.[92] They instead became 'unpolitical' – a group made up of those whose attitude was driven primarily by 'immediate personal satisfactions – work, family, or personal pleasures – as opposed to more abstract loyalties such as Party or country'.[93]

The flight from complete loyalty to 'unpoliticism' was reversed two months later, when in early 1944 more prisoners were found to be completely loyal to the regime than ever before.[94] They included people 'who attach themselves to the regime because it appears to be the best guarantor of their (fundamentally unpolitical) private satisfactions'. This 'unpolitical' group hovered between complete loyalty and apathy depending on whether the regime was advancing their own position, and were thus seen as being motivated by opportunism, not ideology.[95] Those with reservations remained sceptical about the means used by the regime but not its ends. 'In the essentials', including 'the acceptance of an authoritarian philosophy, belief in the inevitability of social conflict and war, identification of personal satisfaction with national aggrandisement', believers with reservations were the same as fanatical Nazis, CSDIC again observed. But unlike fanatics, this group was capable of expressing reservations, which implied 'a greater readiness to listen to argument on the rational plane'. One of those considered to have had 'reservations' was a twenty-one-year-old seaman who opposed 'the expulsion of Jewish doctors and scientists, as they now work against instead of for Germany'; he went on to describe 'the massacre of 75,000 Jews in Vilna without any sign of being shocked' nor could he 'avoid a number of anti-Semitic remarks'.[96] Yet the strongest reservations in this group continued not to pertain to anything concerning Jewish populations directly, but to 'the German record with regard to atrocities, about which men in the Services are often well informed' and the 'restrictions of personal freedom under a totalitarian

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system'.[97] Here again – in February 1944 – there was a distinction between 'antisemitism' and 'atrocities', illustrating that CSDIC was still not drawing the link between the two.

In April 1944, those who were unreservedly loyal remained in the majority (54 per cent). This time they were more 'defensive in spirit', making statements about 'Germany being encircled', as well as 'of a Jewish international conspiracy, of British manipulation of the balance of power in her own interest, and of Germany's lack of colonies and "Lebensraum"'.[98] Those with reservations (19 per cent) remained critical of restrictions on personal liberty, but continued to see no relationship between their reservations about the regime and their allegiance to it. The case of one such prisoner exemplified how conflicting views coexisted in a soldier's mind:

> On the one hand he admits that many of the measures adopted by the Nazis were not only cruel, but also a mistake. Many Jews have been killed; at the most they should have been deported … On the other hand he … praises [Nazi] economic achievements and creation of unity in Germany. He wanted to see a strong Germany triumphing over other nations whether this was ethically right or wrong. He likes the excitement of war and candidly regrets he can no longer take an active part.[99]

This man regarded the means by which antisemitism was pursued as wrong and was for this reason not considered a fanatical Nazi. Yet his determination to see a dominant Germany was far stronger than his reservations, and his eagerness to play an active part to that end was such that he countenanced deportations of Jews. And so for CSDIC he was not completely loyal but had reservations. Others had made similarly contradictory statements before Dicks's research began in 1943, such as a lieutenant of the Luftwaffe who in July 1942 said that 'he approved of National Socialism, but objected strongly to the Jewish persecution'.[100] In 1940, an officer initially appeared to have opposed Kristallnacht; 'I could not understand the object of that plundering. If it was not desired that Jews should own property, it could have been confiscated', he told his cellmate. Yet he continued that 'the only thing I was not sorry about in the Jewish pogroms was that the synagogues were burnt. The plundering damaged our reputation abroad to a considerable extent. We have to defend these actions to foreigners but in our hearts we must be ashamed of them'.[101] Contradictions therefore

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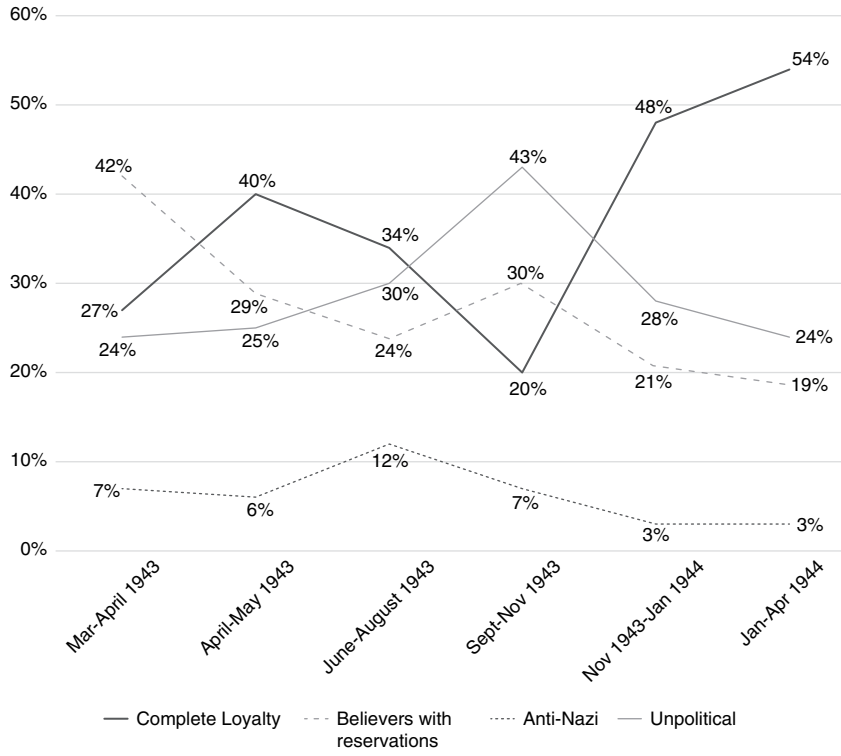


Figure 4.2 Attitudes towards the regime in the CSDIC(UK) surveys (N = 355), using the six 'Survey of P/W opinion' reports in WO 208/5522, TNA.

coexisted, with some soldiers objecting to some acts of antisemitism but not to others, and some soldiers being complacent about anything the regime did to achieve its ends (which they also desired). It is thus no surprise that throughout the year-long morale investigations, anti-Nazis formed a tiny proportion of prisoners, as seen in Figure 4.2. They came from groups already suspected to be critical of Hitler and his regime: Catholics, Social Democrats and Austrians.

In trying to capture Nazism as perceived by the Germans, CSDIC and Dicks allowed for a definition of Hitler as a social reformer, and of the regime as a more conventional movement. Yet in this effort, they appeared to focus upon the slightest degree of doubt in the regime expressed by a prisoner, perhaps as a cause for hope: the less 'Nazi' soldiers appeared to be, the easier it would be to bring the war to an end and to 'rehabilitate' Germany. The recognition that a majority of Germans desired prosperity rather than atrocities also gave more hope to the conviction that the Germans could be 're-educated'

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and democratised. Finding that Germans were not motivated by Nazism as widely understood – 'the most accepted parts of National Socialism were its democratic aspects, the most rejected parts its fascist means'[102] – was probably a better basis on which to build occupation policies, as it allowed the British to believe that Germans ultimately wanted democracy. The work in CSDIC played an important part in creating this cultural framework, which remained after the war. When subsequent research by the British Military Government in post-war Germany found that 60 per cent of Germans thought that National Socialism was 'a good idea, badly carried out', this was not seen as proof of ongoing support for National Socialism per se:

> when half the Germans today assert the idea of National Socialism was good, but badly carried out, they mean primarily the idea of social and economic betterments, and find fault with its realization through oppression, aggression, and persecution. In this event the problem of the German mind is much less puzzling. No change of basic motives and goals is needed, only a more complete understanding on the part of the Germans of the real meaning of National Socialism, namely, that its vicious aspects were inseparably intertwined with its more constructive sides. Likewise, our concept of National Socialism also needs broadening, namely to include an awareness of the powerful rewards it offered to its followers – rewards not of an undemocratic nature. If such rewards made for loyalty to National Socialism, they would make for loyalty to democracy in Germany today.[103]

In the more immediate term, those surveys also provided the assumptions through which Britain evaluated the German people after the war: Dicks's research went on to form the basis for a political classification scheme which was used to evaluate German prisoners of war in Britain – all 500,000 of them – into 'Nazi', 'unpolitical', or 'anti-Nazi' groups. The purpose was initially to facilitate the Foreign Office's 're-education' policy, of which the prisoners in Britain were the first (and arguably only, considering the myriad of other priorities in Germany) receivers. But those political classifications also went to determine who was to be repatriated first (the anti-Nazis) and who last (the Nazis). Even Dicks himself was sent to Germany to assist with denazification in the British Zone and the selection of Germans for public posts.[104]

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The surveys, which drew on 355 prisoners from the German Navy and Air Force, ended in April 1944, the point when the number of prisoners being sent to Britain was overwhelming, the Army Section was turning its focus on the Subject Interrogation Reports and the prisoners being sent to CSDIC were more carefully selected for their willingness to cooperate. The surveys had several weaknesses, including their samples. But they were not meaningless. They consistently found that soldiers were supporting the regime for different reasons and to different degrees, even though the outcome was the same: a majority remained loyal to the regime until the end. Another consistent finding was that soldiers were not fighting the war merely because this was their job as soldiers. They were instead fighting in pursuit of certain ends that the regime promised them, even when they disagreed with the means. Even those who were motivated by more conventional economic and social aims were driven by them to such an extent that they would be complacent about anything the regime did to achieve them, activities about which they had knowledge. Crucially, what also emerged from these surveys was that soldiers were able to recognise excesses for what they were. This was not the case of men being immersed in a military culture that prevented them from recognising atrocities. The surveys repeatedly found that loyal servicemen were aware of, and often uncomfortable with, the regime's criminal means. Yet they remained loyal.

4.4 ATROCITIES

That prisoners were aware of the atrocities committed by the Wehrmacht and paramilitary units was evident both in the morale surveys but also in their secretly recorded conversations long before Dicks joined CSDIC. What was being captured across the various types of reports were testimonies of the horrors unfolding in Nazi-occupied Europe – accounts of violence, rape, murder and extermination. The first such discussions concerned Poland. Speaking of the rape and murder of Polish women in October 1940, an airman said that in Radom 'every woman had 14–15 men an hour. They changed the women there every two days. We buried a lot of women there'.[105] So many people were being killed in Poland that a prisoner complained in December 1941 that his unit was not 'allowed to bathe in the VISTULA. Not on account of the malaria but of dysentery; there were always dead bodies

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floating down the river'.[106] Some blamed the SS for such crimes, though not always for their cruelty. It was also for their futility, like an airman who in June 1941 said 'these S.S. are the biggest blackguards that ever lived. They go to POLAND and shoot the people'. He instead thought that 'they ought to put the swine into aircraft as rear-gunners. We are the men who are really doing the fighting. Once we have defeated the enemy, the S.S. and S.A. men march in with a lot of show and bluster'.[107]

In some of these discussions, the soldiers themselves interpreted the treatment of the Poles (Jewish and non-Jewish) as foreshadowing genocide. This was mentioned in conversations they were having even before the decision for the 'Final Solution' was seen as having crystallised in the Nazi leadership's minds in the second half of 1941.[108] 'Of course, abortion is flourishing in POLAND, so done by German doctors so that it is supposed to help the poor girls', said a prisoner to his cellmate in the autumn of 1940. 'The foetus is removed', he continued, '[b]ut it is taken out so thoroughly that they cannot bear children again! Moreover, if a Pole is found drunk a few times […] he is sterilised'. The prisoner did not see these actions as senseless cruelty but as having a specific aim. Through them, he explained:

> a brake is put on the propagation of […] the Polish people. It is all done with such humane and outwardly justifiable methods. If it continues like this, a man told me who is in the Gestapo […] in the course of a generation of thirty years the Polish nation […] will be a heap of ruins. The men can't do anything and the women can't produce children.[109]

In a similar vein, a Luftwaffe officer told another prisoner in early 1941 that only certain Jews were being spared in Poland, 'for natural historical' reasons:

> Besides, what are the Poles? They are on such a low level of civilization that you cannot compare them to the Germans. It's a good thing we recognised the Jew in time. The Jew is always a disruptive influence. We are only protecting some of the worst specimens of Polish Jewry, those swine with the red beards, from a natural historical point of view, so that we can show the coming generation what parasites they were.[110]

The prisoners' language continued to be explicit about the fact that these atrocities did not seem to be random but coordinated. 'What do

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they intend to do with the Poles? Do they want to exterminate them?' asked one prisoner in November 1941. 'It seems like it', his counterpart replied.[111] And in many discussions about the treatment of civilians – both in Poland and elsewhere – soldiers would often single out the Jews, like the prisoner who said that in the Baltic States 'at six o'clock every evening they used to shoot up a lot of Jews. They simply threw a bit of sand over them and rolled a tank over them'.[112] Another such account concerned mass executions in Poland in 1940, when an airman told his cellmate:

> The prisoners who were brought in POLAND and who were in possession of revolvers and razor blades, had to dig their own grave at once. There was an old Jew, who was to be shot, too. He had probably brought food to the ones who were in the wood. He was not capable of digging his own grave. The F.L.A.K. usually got the job of shooting the people. At that time we couldn't get water from anywhere and what we could get from CZENSTOCHAU was poisoned. So they opened one of those water-holes and water rose at once from the subsoil. Then they dragged him along … and shot him. He fell into the water-hole and they shovelled it all in again.[113]

By September 1942, and as part of CSDIC's 'opinion surveys' discussed earlier, a German airman could see that the targeting of the Jews was not just coordinated but universal:

> In his opinion, HITLER never meant to extend the persecution of the Jews in GERMANY to include all members of that race. He is quite convinced that HITLER's original intention was merely to get rid of the 'Ostjuden' from the GERMAN REICH and to incorporate those Jews who, or whose families, had been in GERMANY for a number of years, into his New Order. But the campaign, once started, assumed greater proportions than the Nazi leader had envisaged.[114]

There were many more references to what prisoners had witnessed happen to civilians in Europe. When two boys aged around fifteen were captured as suspected 'guerrillas' somewhere in the Soviet Union, they were made to 'dig their own graves, two pits, and then one of them was shot. He didn't fall into the grave, he fell forwards over it.

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The other was told to push the first one into the pit before he was shot himself'. The airman telling the story continued that the boy 'did so, smiling – a boy of fifteen! There's fanaticism and idealism for you!'[115] Or a non-commissioned officer who recounted how he took hostage a group of French civilians in Conches, near Evreux: 'there were school teachers and all sorts of people among them and a whole crowd of Jews'. His cellmate, also a non-commissioned officer, thought that 'it's the only way to deal with them if they won't change their ways'.[116] Other discussions were had in more general terms, such as the fact that 'in France a lot of people are being shot', that 'dreadful things are going on in Czechoslovakia' and that 'when the S.S. enter a village in RUSSIA they simply take all the men and put them up against the wall'. Another informed his fellow prisoners that 'in Czechoslovakia general intelligence is being gradually eliminated. No one is allowed to complete his five year (university) studies'.[117] An officer confessed that 'sometimes we didn't behave too well in France' and described seeing soldiers in Paris rape girls and women 'in the middle of a restaurant'.[118]

Others discussed reprisals against occupied populations. After a German was killed in Poland, an officer told his cellmate in early 1941, 'the next day they stopped every tram in that district and hauled out every man. A quarter of an hour later there was the rattattatt of M.G.s'.[119] 'When one of us is murdered' explained another officer in September 1942, 'every single one of the male relatives (of the murderer) is shot, the women are put in a forced labour camp, and the children in institutions … In HOLLAND they got a troop train, but they couldn't catch the perpetrators, so they immediately shot five or six hostages'. His cellmate interrupted him to say that 'innocent people suffer thereby', with the officer responding that 'that's inevitable in total war'.[120] A bomber pilot similarly justified his own actions on the grounds that 'in war you have to put all sentimental considerations aside. I have attacked hospitals myself'.[121] Other prisoners were less reflective. An airman proudly declared that in his Staffel he was known as the professional sadist: 'I went for everything, a bus on the road, a passenger train at FOLKESTONE. We had orders to drop our bombs right into the towns. I fired at every cyclist. In every town we attacked the station. We flew two metres above the water.'[122] Another officer announced that he had bombed the centre of a town near Hastings: 'A little seaport, it was on Sunday afternoon at 4 o'clock … we didn't care. The people in the little town drinking their coffee will have been

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surprised and in the end will no longer have needed the coffee.'[123] Two bomber mechanics were also proud of their targets, with one boasting about an attack over Penzance:

> We flew across at a low level and dropped our bombs. You could see each bomb separately, could see the people walking below, people who were doing their evening shopping, etc. The attack was such a surprise and besides, it was at such a low altitude … I (fired) away with the M.G. into the streets. After all you can shoot people. That was great fun. That was the only time I ever did any shooting. We had only flown on night raids. I fired six drums. I was also the only one who had the chance of firing so well.[124]

The prisoner listening to that story had a competing experience: 'We plastered both the patrol boats which they sent out, with our M.G. We made a special approach to do that, when we had no bombs left – we only used M.G.'s [*sic*]. The people down below were properly sprayed, you could see it perfectly clearly.' Months earlier, in November 1940, another airman described a similar experience with equal pride: '(You fly) along the streets, the streets in the middle of the town. You only have one M.G. pointing downwards, left and right past the houses, the pavement, riddle the cars in the middle of the road, that is great fun.'[125]

The treatment of prisoners of war on the Eastern Front was also known to CSDIC, especially in 1942. An airman told two others in July that 'in a battle for one village the Russians left behind them close on 5,000 killed and I believe only 300 wounded, for the Germans were giving no quarter, and practically no prisoners were being taken'.[126] A second prisoner told his cellmates that Russian prisoners 'were not guarded, they had no shoes, their faces, hands and feet were all black with frostbite, and they got nothing to eat. They were all Kirgheeres [*sic*] and such like. They let them all perish, they collapsed where they stood – except for the Ukrainians, they were [*sic*] well treated'. He also described a case where leaflets were dropped over enemy territory promising a hot meal to anyone who collected them: 'Thousands of them came running over to us. Everyone had a leaflet and a tin. They came for food and were taken prisoner – were shot down.'[127] Another officer of the Luftwaffe spoke of Russian prisoners of war being forced to sleep near a

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'rubbish dump … when the new ashes, etc. are tipped out on to it, you should see how the Russians make a dash for it; they eat lemon-peel and smoke cigarette-ends. A guard told me that the Russians ate each other … When they go to work, they put really sadistic fellows in charge of them, armed with pistols and whips'.[128] Referring to a citadel near Templin, an airman said that 50,000 Russian prisoners were kept there:

> It was crammed full – they could just stand – they could hardly sit down, the place was so full. When we arrived … in November, there were still 8,000 there, the others were already under the ground. At the time there was an outbreak of typhus (Flecktyphus). A sentry said to us: 'We've got typhus in camp, it'll last another fortnight, and then the Russian prisoners will all be dead and the Poles and the Jews'.[129]

The excerpts quoted here are from 1940, 1941 and 1942, but such conversations continued throughout the war. And they were landing on several desks, even if in a more fragmented way than presented here. Broader considerations would have foreclosed their practical use – in addition to the cultural, political, and military considerations that prevented a more forceful British and American stance towards the persecution of Europe's Jews in particular, here there were the additional sensitivities around using CSDIC's material.[130] But these dialogues seemed to have had no impact on how the war was being interpreted either. They were acknowledged as evidence of atrocities, but the intentional and increasingly genocidal character behind those atrocities was not – despite evidence to that end coming from Britain's own sources, and sources it considered untainted.

Indeed, while these discussions were seen as important enough to record, the topic did not appear to be probed any further in direct interrogations. Of the over 1,700 Subject Interrogation Reports produced, most of them between 1944 and 1945, only 15 dealt entirely with atrocities. One was on 'personalities and incidents at Dachau', as witnessed by a Czech prisoner of war who had previously been sent to Dachau by the Gestapo. He was interrogated in September 1944, and described how prisoners were purposefully infected with malaria, subjected to cold baths and put in a 'gyrating sphere'.[131] In the 'Prisoner of War Papers' reports, which CSDIC issued between May 1944 and October 1945, describing some prisoners' civilian experiences in the

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Third Reich, there were again only a handful of reports on atrocities. One of them contained further information on Dachau by the Czech prisoner, and another was a report on euthanasia – entitled 'the fight against the extermination of incurables', issued in April 1945.[132] In it, an *Evangelische* pastor from the Bethel Institute, part of the Inner Mission (church-run Protestant asylums) described his attempts to convince Nazi Party doctors that 'incapable persons' such as epileptic children 'were capable of enjoying life'.[133] Other interrogation camps – especially the Royal Patriotic School interrogating refugees, and PWIS (Home) selecting soldiers for CSDIC – were also beginning to gather some intelligence on concentration camps from mid-1944 onwards. Their aim was to understand how those places functioned and to prepare for their liberation.

Towards the end of the war, and alongside these other interrogations, there was discussion about using CSDIC's transcripts. This seems to have come from Churchill himself, who was clearly aware of some of these conversations. In 1944, he suggested that CSDIC's reports would form 'a useful basis for a book on Germany, and German atrocities to be published after the war' – and propaganda is perhaps the reason why they were being recorded in the first place. To assess whether a story could be told using those sources, Major Eric Linklater, a well-known author in civilian life who was at that point writing some of the War Office's 'instant histories' (short accounts of the war for public consumption), was given access to relevant material. He seemed eager to start work, but the matter was left there.[134] The additional considerations that likely reversed this intention were concerns around jeopardising war crimes trials and the uncertainty that surrounded Germany's future. In discussions about how much to release to the public from the wealth of material captured upon Germany's occupation, the Foreign Office wanted no documents 'which threw light on Germany's conspiracy to dominate the world and her firm intention to make war, nor documents concerning German atrocities' to be released until the trials of major war criminals had started.[135]

The additional concern about revealing the sources of British intelligence turned this into a more permanent instruction, in effect long after the trials of major war criminals ended. As MI5 put it: 'it is undesirable to advertise our successes in the Intelligence field. The more stupid our enemies believe us to be the easiest will be our task

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in dealing with them in the future'.[136] While MI5's primary concerns were its own deception operations and double agents, the logic applied to CSDIC too. And so when it came to its transcripts, the outcome was an explicit decision not to disclose them, including in war crimes trials. Revealing how such information was obtained, even for the purposes of justice, would render CSDIC's methods 'largely valueless – and the future must be considered'; it was 'of the highest importance' to avoid 'anything which could draw attention to or make public the methods' that those camps used.[137] It was decided that not only would CSDIC not use its material in trials, the organisation would not be taking part in efforts to identify war criminals at all, even though some of its former prisoners were clearly implicated. For instance, a prisoner whom CSDIC interrogated for information on the organisation of the *Ordnungspolizei* and the police in Cologne was then released to a permanent prisoner-of-war camp.[138] A year on, he was boasting in that camp 'of atrocities which he committed in Warsaw', which is how he was identified as a war crimes suspect and made to sign a statement admitting his guilt.[139]

The troubling compromise between secrecy and justice is partly the result of the value assigned to CSDIC's work; the JIC had already put it on record that those camps had provided 'much valuable operational, technical, economic and political intelligence' and so its methods had to be protected, not least because a new CSDIC was at that point about to start operations in the British Zone of Germany.[140] From a basic camp set up to ask soldiers the names of their officers and the order of battle of their unit, and then having them talk among themselves, CSDIC had expanded both in reach and sophistication. It was not a static organisation but one which reflected a broader evolution of the types of information that British intelligence considered worth collecting. This went from conventional military information to in-depth reports on specific topics to serve post-war purposes. The rudimentary attempts to gauge soldiers' morale in 1940 were also transformed into more scientific studies, which influenced British occupation policies as well as policies pertaining to the prisoners of war in Britain. Throughout its existence and alongside all these efforts, CSDIC's microphones kept recording persistent mentions of individual atrocities – reprisals, mass shootings, starvations – and soldiers beginning to see the genocidal intention behind them. This further confirms the widespread knowledge of crimes in the Wehrmacht, if even the

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small numbers sent to CSDIC, many of whom were navy and air personnel, were so aware of them. This evidence was quantitatively and qualitatively significant. Yet preserving CSDIC's methods was considered more important than anything else. The irony, then, was that CSDIC as an organisation ended up being more important than the very information it was created to obtain.

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