Introduction

On 12 July 1944, Colonel Zolotukhin, a high-ranking official in the powerful Main Political Administration of the Red Army (GlavPURKKA), sent his superiors in Moscow an alarming report about the breakdown of discipline in the Red Army's ranks in Romania. After he inspected the 2nd Ukrainian Front (army group), which had recently occupied parts of Romania and Moldavia, he reported that there was an explosion in instances of desertion, self-inflicted wounds, drunkenness, and venereal disease.[1] Zolotukhin specified dozens of examples that illustrated the deteriorating situation, including instances of rapes of civilians, widespread use of prostitutes by officers in Romania, the leadership's brutal treatment and neglect of the new recruits, large-scale looting, and drunken violence between Soviet officers. This book explores the disintegrating discipline that Zolotukhin's report vividly illustrated in the context of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts' encounter with the countries of the Balkans and Central Europe.

The Red Army's *Disciplinary Regulations of the Red Army*, issued in 1941 by the Commissar for Defence Marshal Semen Timoshenko, defined Soviet military discipline as: "knowledge of and strict compliance with the established Red Army procedures (*poriadka*), based on the laws of the Soviet government and on military regulations, which regulate the life (*zhizn'*), everyday life (*byt'*), and military activities of the armies."[2] In official documents, violations of the disciplinary regime were known as either violations (*prostupki*) or crimes (*prestupleniia*). The latter term was usually used to describe the troops' actions that were covered by the criminal code, such as committing robberies or rapes, whereas the former was used to describe violations of military regulations, such as sleeping on duty or loss of personal documents.

The wartime Red Army was the largest military in Europe. An estimated 34 million Soviet citizens served in their country's military between 1941 and 1945.[3] In the summer and early fall of 1944, some 6,714,300 Red Army soldiers and officers faced the forces of the Axis in Europe.[4] They were organized into nine army groups, which received

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their names from their geographic locations: three Baltic fronts, two Belarusian fronts, and four Ukrainian fronts.

The 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts, the focus of this study, fought at the southern end of the Soviet-Axis frontlines. Although these two army groups' numbers constantly fluctuated in the period under discussion, the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts numbered 1,314,200 during the Iasi – Kishinev Operation in late August 1944, when the Soviet forces broke through German and Romanian defenses in the Balkans.[5] After Romania, the two army groups fought in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Hungary, finishing the war in Austria.

Violence and Occupation: The Red Army in the Balkans and Central Europe, 1944–1945 focuses on two related issues: the decline in discipline and the soldiers' encounter with Europe. The book illuminates the Soviet troops' ill-disciplined conduct and criminality from above and below, both from the perspectives of the political and military leaderships and the frontline soldiers and officers. The study also tries to give a voice to European civilians who experienced the Soviet occupation, especially the victims of Soviet-perpetrated sexual violence. The book asks questions such as: How did the army's leadership want its troops to behave? What were the army's disciplinary policies toward the criminals in the ranks? What were the typical punishments for violators of discipline? What message did the leadership try to convey to the rank and file through propaganda? When it comes to the frontline troops, the study seeks to illuminate issues such as: How did the soldiers view each country that they occupied? What was their identity? Why did soldiers fight? How did they view women and sex? Why did they commit so many acts of sexual violence? Did Soviet soldiers engage in nonviolent sex with European women?

Military violations and criminal code violations committed by the Soviet troops, as defined by the Red Army's regulations, included getting drunk and shirking from duties, which usually took the form of straggling and deserting. The troops also committed many acts of robberies, rape and, more rarely, murders. Usually, these crimes were linked to each other. An upsurge in one set of crimes meant that there was an increase in other crimes.

The study pays attention in particular to the issue of sexual violence and what these crimes tell us about the Red Army – both the troops' attitudes and how discipline was enforced in the military. Rape was one of the more common crimes the Soviet troops committed. For many Europeans, assaults on women came to symbolize the Soviet occupation, and rapes had a profound impact on European societies. The Red Army personnel committed more rapes in "enemy" Romania, Hungary, and Austria than in "neutral" Bulgaria or "allied" Yugoslavia. Moreover, as historian Miriam Gebhardt noted, in 1945, authorities and societies

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understood rape to be forceful vaginal penetration with the use of force and credible resistance by the victim. More respectable women, such as married and older women, were more readily believed than young and single women.[6] Thus, the number of victims of sexual violence was much higher than the victims of rape, but neither Soviet nor European officials bothered to record them. The study also discusses other sexual encounters between European civilians and Soviet soldiers, which often fell in the gray area between outright rapes and consensual relations as we would understand them today.

The book tries to make sense of the world in which the soldiers and officers of the two army groups lived and acted. Whenever possible, the study provides figures and estimates. A comparative perspective is also important. It often references the research on the Red Army's peer armies, which helps contextualize the Red Army's experience. The comparative perspective is, in particular, developed in the conclusion. This is a study about a relatively large collective, but it also employs techniques of microhistorians, who analyze everyday stories to make larger points.[7] In every chapter, the book dwells on individual stories of soldiers, officers, or civilians that illuminate larger events. The Red Army's treatment of civilians and the leadership policies differed across the phases of military campaigns and the countries occupied by the two army groups. Most thematical chapters follow this chronological order.

The book also uses the troops' behavior as a prism to make sense of other important issues pertaining to the Red Army at war. The army leadership's often unsuccessful struggle to limit straggling and prevent the outbreaks of unsanctioned violence against civilians helps us understand the limits of the high command's ability to shape the frontline troops' worldviews and conduct while illuminating how discipline was enforced in the Soviet army. Focusing on the high command's attempts to control the rank and file, ultimately, illuminates how the Kremlin governed the Red Army during the war. The frontline soldiers' and officers' subculture, which enabled the violence against civilians to flourish, illuminates their attitudes and identity. It is impossible to grasp troops' fury and behavior without thinking about their growing nationalism, assertiveness, their conception of masculinity, vengefulness, and sense of entitlement vis-à-vis their commanders and the Europeans that they conquered. A discussion about the proliferation of stragglers and deserters leads us to evaluate the Red Army's cohesiveness and military effectiveness. Focusing on the issue of discipline, especially violence against the civilian population, can also help us understand how Europeans experienced the closing stages of World War II and how they viewed and interacted with Soviet troops.

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I.1 Sources

Violence and Occupation relies mostly on Soviet documents. The Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation TsAMO RF the Red Army's principal wartime depository under the jurisdiction of the conservative Ministry of Defense, is mostly closed off to foreign researchers. However, thousands of documents have been published in various documentary collections. More significantly, archives in union republics or friendly countries, as well as many Soviet agencies, institutions, and commissariats (ministries) received documents from TsAMO RF after the war or were copied into the army's correspondence while generating their important information about the war. These collections are now largely available to researchers, or at least they were until 2022. Finally, I obtained hundreds of pages of documents from TsAMO RF from a colleague.

The study relies most heavily on documents from the Russian State Military Archive (RGVA), under the civilian Federal Archival Agency. RGVA holds documents from the NKVD Army for the Protection of the Rear of the Red Army (the NKVD Army). The NKVD Army was part of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, but it was under the Red Army's operational control. The NKVD Army in the field was also divided into fronts, and the NKVD Armies of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts reported to and received orders from their respective army group commanders. Four types of NKVD Army documents are particularly important: the orders that the NKVD Armies of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts received from their front commanders, the NKVD Army's reports on the behavior of Soviet soldiers as it related to the issue of violence against civilians and desertion, and the reports on the mood of civilians in the occupied countries. The fourth type of documents used are documents about discipline in the two NKVD Armies, which tell us something about the occupying Soviet forces in general.

Other Red Army documents utilized are from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), the Military Archive of Serbia (VA), the Central State Archives of Public Organizations of Ukraine (TsDAGO), and the Historical Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IAN RAN). Other sources have been published in documentary collections. The study also relies on the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) records in TsDAGO and the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI).

The book uses personal sources. It relies extensively on the website, "Reminiscences of the Veterans of the Great Patriotic War" (*Ia pomniu*),

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which holds hundreds of interviews with Red Army soldiers and officers.[8] Furthermore, it utilizes Jewish soldiers' sources from the Russian Research and Educational Holocaust Center (Tsentr Kholokost) and the Blavatnik Archive (BA). The study also utilizes diaries and memoirs (when it is possible to find them) written by veterans from the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts and letters from archives and published collections.

Although the Red Army sources extensively discuss the issue of murders, sexual violence, and robberies, they rarely offer a close look into acts of violence and seldom depict the victim's perspective. Available Soviet sources typically state tersely the nature of the crime, sometimes noting the punishment meted out to the perpetrators and actions taken to avert such behavior in the future. The military officials writing these reports were practically never interested in victims or what happened to them afterward, viewing the crimes primarily as a disciplinary issue or a political problem. More details could likely be found in the documents generated by the army's Military Tribunals that prosecuted and sentenced the perpetrators, since the prosecutors and judges would typically use victim and witness statements. Military Tribunal records, however, are in TsAMO RF and are inaccessible even to Russian historians who are allowed to work in the archive.[9] At best, partial information about the activities of Military Tribunals can be occasionally gleaned from internal military reports about the morale of the troops.

The book seeks to give a voice to the occupied populations. It uses extensively Serbian-language sources, including Yugoslav army and police documents from VA, the records from the Communist Party of Yugoslavia collection in The Archive of Yugoslavia (AJ), as well as three provincial Historical Archives of Zaječar (IAZ), Negotin (IAN), and Subotica (IAS) that hold municipal government and court records. The author conducted twenty-two interviews in Serbia with former soldiers and civilians of various political persuasions. The book also utilizes numerous published Austrian, Hungarian, Romanian, Yugoslav, and Bulgarian primary and secondary sources, including diaries and memoirs in various languages, to give voice to the occupied populations and victims of Soviet sexual violence.

Yugoslavia gets more attention than other countries that the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts occupied for two reasons. First, we know almost nothing about how Yugoslavs reacted to the Red Army and how the Soviet troops behaved in the country. In contrast, there is some literature on the Soviet occupation of Austria, Hungary, and Romania, although not as nearly as there is on the Red Army in Germany.[10] Second, the author is fully fluent in Serbian, making research possible in the country.

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It should be mentioned that the vast majority of Soviet soldiers in Yugoslavia fought only in Serbia and headed north into Hungary, instead of moving further west into Bosnia and Hercegovina and Croatia. Thus, they did not encounter Muslim and Catholic populations who were historically less sympathetic to the Russians than the Serbs. Throughout the text, the term "Yugoslavs" rather than "Serbs" is used because not all the civilians and especially not all the Partisans in Serbia were ethnic Serbs, while many who were would have identified as Yugoslavs. Furthermore, Serbs were citizens of Yugoslavia, so the term Yugoslavs is formally accurate.

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The book is divided into three parts. The first part of the book provides the context for the rest of the study. Chapter 1 examines the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts before they stormed into Europe in August 1944. The two army groups began their westward advance at Stalingrad and Kursk in 1943, pushing the Axis across southern and eastern Ukraine throughout 1943 and 1944. On the eve of their entry into Europe, the majority of the troops of the two army groups were recent recruits, mostly from Ukraine. The chapter outlines the major operations fought by the two fronts and their extremely high casualties. It also explores the soldiers' worldview, their brutal treatment by the high command that often viewed them as little more than cannon fodder, and how many of them were eventually integrated successfully into the army.

Chapter 2 discusses the military operations of the two fronts in Europe, and it traces the Soviet casualties. Crucially, it also discusses the rapid growth of military violations in the ranks. There was an increase in all types of military violations, including alcohol consumption and straggling. However, the attacks on civilians increased drastically, especially sexual assaults. The chapter also seeks to illuminate the approximate number of rape victims in each European country.

The second part of the book explores the role of political and military leadership in the rapid growth of military violations. Chapter 3 focuses on the Kremlin and its policies in Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Austria. It argues that the Kremlin set the tone for the army on how to deal with the local population by ruthlessly exploiting the region's economy for the war and by exacting war reparations.

Although much has been written about the Soviet anti-German indoctrination campaign that was used to mobilize Soviet society for war, we know very little about the information given to the rank and file about Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Austria. Yet, the official discourse is vital to understanding the troops' conduct as it communicated to them how to view these countries and what kind of behavior was

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acceptable. Chapter 4 discusses the content of the propaganda about each country that the two army groups occupied.

Chapter 5 examines the Red Army's repressive institutions, which historian David Glantz called "control organs."[11] These institutions' activities played a vital role in implementing orders from above and in signaling to the rank and file what they could get away with (or not). It discusses the laws and regulations in the Red Army, how they were enforced, and the orders issued to the armies in the field by the command. It also considers the types of punishments meted out to perpetrators of various kinds of crimes.

The third part of the book switches the focus to soldiers and officers in the field. Chapter 6 examines the troops' actual attitudes toward Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Austria. These views reflected how the troops behaved in each country. This chapter underlines that there was no "single" view of Europe.

Chapter 7 seeks specifically to explain the sexual violence committed by the troops. It builds on Chapter 6 by examining the troops' views of women. The final chapter, Chapter 8, discusses the period after the war. It illuminates the difficult process of the high command's struggle to rein in the troops in the new postwar context.

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