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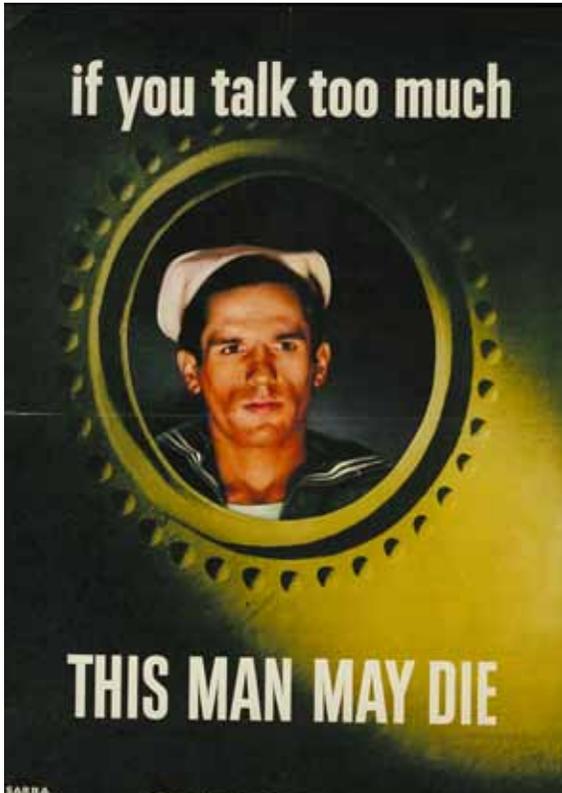
## Deploying the Dead: Combat Photography, Death and the Second World War in the USA and the Soviet Union

**A**s Susan Sontag has noted, 'Ever since cameras were invented in 1839, photography has kept company with death' (Sontag, 2003: 24). It has done so, principally, by taking its place on the world's battlefields and, from the US Civil War onwards, bringing to the public graphic images of war's ultimate truth. The camera's unflinching witness to death helped establish photography's authority as an apparently unimpeachable record of events. 'A photograph', Sontag observes, 'passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened' (Sontag, 1977: 5). Yet the 'truth' of any photo is only ever conditional: 'the photographic image ... cannot be simply a transparency of something that happened. It is always the image that someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude' (Sontag, 2003: 46). Photographers often worked, and continue to work, under close editorial direction with a detailed brief to collect specific images from designated areas in prescribed forms. The photographs they take are 'Crafted through a maze of practices and standards, both explicit and implicit' overseen by 'photographers, photographic editors, news editors and journalists' who collectively determine 'how war can be reduced to a photograph'. The resulting images, Barbie Zelizer argues, 'reflect what the camera sees by projecting onto that vision a set of broader assumptions about how the world works' (Zelizer, 2004: 115). In this context it is clear that the photographic truth is less an elusive ideal than a consciously crafted product – it is manufactured, not discovered or revealed. Accordingly the

important questions raised by images of the dead focus less on their authenticity than on the bureaucratic and editorial structures that produced and approved them and the political purposes to which they were then put. This is clear when one compares US and Soviet treatments of death in photographs from the Second World War. Central government control over the release of images of the dead in both countries ensured that while such photographs were reflective of broader national narratives they were also carefully calibrated against the ebb and flow of public morale and the political imperatives of the moment. Once the dead had met their doom they served the cause posthumously when their images were drafted into the service of public information. While there are many significant national differences between how the Soviets and the US portrayed and used their dead they share one common purpose. Susan Sontag notes that 'Photographs shock in so far as they show something novel' (Sontag, 1977: 19). This paper will argue that while certain images were deployed at particular times to administer carefully targeted shocks to specific segments of the national communities that consumed them, the greater number of the most shocking photographs from World War 2 resisted the novel and were purposed not to unsettle but to reassure. Barbie Zelizer has noted that images of war that are 'composite, more schematic than detailed, conventionalized and simplified' can be used to tell 'stories larger than can be told in a simple news item,' and thus become 'a key tool for interpreting the war in ways consonant with long-standing understandings about how war is supposed to be waged' (Zelizer, 2004: 115). In accordance with this assertion, the paper will contend that in the USA and the Soviet Union during World War 2 photography functioned not 'as an art' but as 'a social rite,' not as a species of shock therapy but as 'a defence against anxiety, and a tool of power' through which the authorities in each country sought to engender public support for the campaign and approval of their leaders' conduct of it (Sontag, 1977: 8).

For the authorities in Washington, anxieties about national morale were the principal factor explaining why, as late as September 1943, the US public was still largely ignorant about what modern weaponry was doing to its servicemen. By the end of February 1942, with the country still badly shaken by the attack on Pearl Harbor and the military situation in the various theatres of conflict 'close to the nadir for the Allies', American morale was on the critical list and would only recover, US officials believed, with constant observation and round-the-clock care (Fussell, 1989: 235). The censorship policies of the Office of War Information (OWI) and the images they made available to the press demonstrated the conviction within the Roosevelt administration that the US public was not ready for an unvarnished

account of what its servicemen were enduring.<sup>1</sup> While photography was used to drive home the vulnerability of the men at the front (Fig. 1), where death itself was portended or portrayed it was done through the use of illustration thereby distancing the public from the stark reality, sparing its feelings and providing some measure of comfort.



(Fig. 1)

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<sup>1</sup> The OWI was established in 1942 to oversee and coordinate the release of domestic news and propaganda.



(Fig. 2)

In wartime, professional norms and the informal strategies they embody coincide with explicit regimes of prohibition to ensure that 'only certain aspects of war are ever seen in the images of war.' Those aspects of a conflict that 'do not fit the prevailing interpretive assumptions about how war is to be waged' are unlikely to feature in its photos. As a result, 'In most wars, there are few or no images of human gore, one's own war dead or POWs, military operations gone badly, or the effects of one's own war on civilians of the other side' (Zelizer, 2004: 116). Photographs from the first 20 months of US involvement in the war, morale-raising images of a massed, multi-racial home-front workforce gearing up for battle bear out Zelizer's assertions. They were complemented by an elaborate censorship apparatus that ensured that only images deemed sufficiently morale-raising would

make it back from the war's various fronts and into the US press. Only military photographers or those accredited by the military were permitted in US combat zones and they had to submit all photos to the military for censorship at source. The censors would classify their photos in accordance with policies established by military and civilian leaders. They would then send the photos onto Washington for review by the War Department's Bureau of Public Relations (BPR). Captions for pictures passed through two American military censors and the complete layout was censored again in Washington. Cleared photos were made available to pools and pool editors then determined which photos should be sent on to member organisations – newspapers and magazines – who would then select a few for publication. Given the thoroughness of this filtering process it is little wonder that the early photographs from World War 2 were so anodyne.

The censorship regime concealed tensions at the highest levels of the US government centred on how much of the truth about the war the US public was ready for and when. Through 1942 and well into 1943, President Roosevelt and his Secretary for War, Henry L. Stimson, felt that after so many military defeats too explicit a reflection of the brutality of the battlefield would shatter fragile national confidence and impede the development of broad based public support for what was going to be a long and bitter struggle.<sup>2</sup> However, Elmer Davis, the head of the OWI, disagreed. When he assumed his role he had pledged 'to tell nothing but the truth' and 'to see that the American people get just as much of it as genuine considerations of military security will permit' (qtd Roeder, 1985: 9). He was convinced that 'most of the American people seem ... to want their news to be brutally frank' (qtd Roeder, 1985: 192). But in his efforts to furnish such frankness he was frustrated by Roosevelt's caution and the more direct obstructionism of certain sections of the US military who used their control over the combat arena to rigorously screen the images that came out of it.

During America's first year in the war only a handful of images – like this photograph (Fig. 3) of an injured man being stretchered aboard the USS *Minneapolis*

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<sup>2</sup> Not that the US public had much to give them hope, or showed much enthusiasm for the trial ahead. *Time* magazine noted, in the six months after Pearl Harbor, that the US 'had not taken a single inch of enemy territory, not yet beaten the enemy in a major battle on land, not yet opened an offensive campaign' (qtd Hess, 2011: 44). A survey taken in mid-1942 indicated that 'three out of every ten Americans would view favourably a negotiated peace with German Army leaders' (qtd Roeder, 1993: 8).

during the Battle of Guadalcanal – had acknowledged the cost of US involvement, though there were plenty more, and far worse, to choose from.



(Fig. 3)

For almost two years all images considered too graphic for public release were collected in an archive cheerfully known as the 'Chamber of Horrors' whose

existence remained secret until 1985. By early 1943, Roosevelt was warned that while there would be bloody fighting to come, the current policy on the release and publication of photographs from the front might be giving the US public a misleading impression of what their men were enduring. A memo from the OWI noted that on the basis of currently available images, the public was under the impression that 'soldiers fight, that some of them get hurt and ride smiling in aerial ambulances, but that none of them get badly shot or spill any blood' (qtd Roeder, 1993: 10). It urged the government to grant the public access to more graphic images of the fighting and its costs both to correct these misleading impressions and to prepare them for the greater sacrifices to come. Such images, it was believed, would also help counter increased absenteeism from and strike-action in factories serving the war effort.

The early months of 1943 saw a decisive turning of the military tide with the defeat of the Germans at Stalingrad, the allies pressing home their advantage in North Africa and the Japanese in retreat from Guadalcanal and on the run in New Guinea. As a consequence over the ensuing months the US government's anxieties rapidly shifted focus. What the administration feared now was not deepening public demoralisation but growing complacency. Yet at the very moment that Davis, the OWI and others were calling for more explicit images from the front the military was more reluctant than ever before to release graphic material. In August 1943 the OWI's News Bureau complained that the Army Signal Corps was imposing more, not fewer, restrictions on access to its material, that the Marine Corps had closed its files to the OWI after they released a photograph of a Marine's temporary grave, while the Navy's picture files had been 'absolutely closed to our Photographic Section for a long time' (Roeder, 1993: 11). Driven to despair by the recalcitrance of the armed forces and the dithering of the administration, in late August 1943 Davis told Roosevelt he would resign unless the military and the government cooperated to give the US public a more realistic depiction of the war. His ultimatum was well timed. Not only had the military situation further improved but public dissatisfaction with the nature and release of official information was also on the rise. On the same day that Davis wrote to Roosevelt, OWI's regional observers noted a growing public conviction that 'the war news is incomplete and sugar-coated' (qtd Roeder, 1993: 11). In June 1943, 39 per cent of those surveyed believed that government news releases made the situation look better than it was – an increase of 11 per cent from July 1942. Roosevelt acted. The military were directed to cooperate with the OWI – though they continued to withhold material – more particularly the BPR were instructed to re-examine

the material they had previously blocked and consider it for release. The BPR subsequently cleared 108 photos for release, among them George Strock's image of dead US servicemen on Buna Beach, the first photographs of dead GIs that the American public saw.

When this photo, taken in December 1942, first appeared in *Life* magazine, on 20 September 1943, it was accompanied by a full page editorial ('Three Americans'), which in explaining the reasons for publishing the picture expressed irritation that such photographs had not previously been released to the public and relief that the President and the Secretary of State for War had finally conceded 'that the American people ought to be able to see their own boys as they fall in battle; to come directly and without words into the presence of their own dead.' As the US's most popular photo-magazine, *Life* understood the power of images to bring the war home to a domestic audience as no other medium could: 'Why print this picture anyway of three American boys, dead on an alien shore? The reason is that words are never enough. The eye sees. The mind knows. The heart feels. But the words do not exist to make us see, or know, or feel what it is like, what actually happens.' The dead 'boys', as the editorial insistently referred to them, embody the values that the US is fighting to defend on the war's various fronts and the qualities that will ensure victory in that struggle, qualities that have made America what it is today, values that the whole nation must now struggle to uphold: 'This is the reality that lies behind the names that come to rest at last on monuments in the leafy squares of busy American towns. The camera doesn't show America and yet here on the beach is America ... three fragments of that life we call American life: three units of freedom. So that it is not just these boys that have fallen here, it is freedom that has fallen. It is our task to cause it to rise again' (*Life*, 20 Sept., 1943: 34).

Over the next two years, in their efforts to motivate the disinterested American worker to help put 'freedom' back on its feet and to see the war through to its bitter end, the censors and the OWI were driven to release increasingly graphic depictions of the damage done to US servicemen in battle. Where dead GIs were at first shown in dignified postures, implying repose as much as extinction, as worker absenteeism, job switching and strikes increased, and voluntary enlistment dropped off, the US public, but particularly those working in strike-threatened or refractory plants, were exposed to more shocking images intended to bolster their resolve and counter complacency. These photographs of GIs stripped of their boots and belongings lying in the slush at a crossroads near the Belgian-German border (Fig. 4), others massacred after their surrender at Malmedy (Fig. 5), and the lone soldier slumped forward, dead at his station, his equipment scattered around

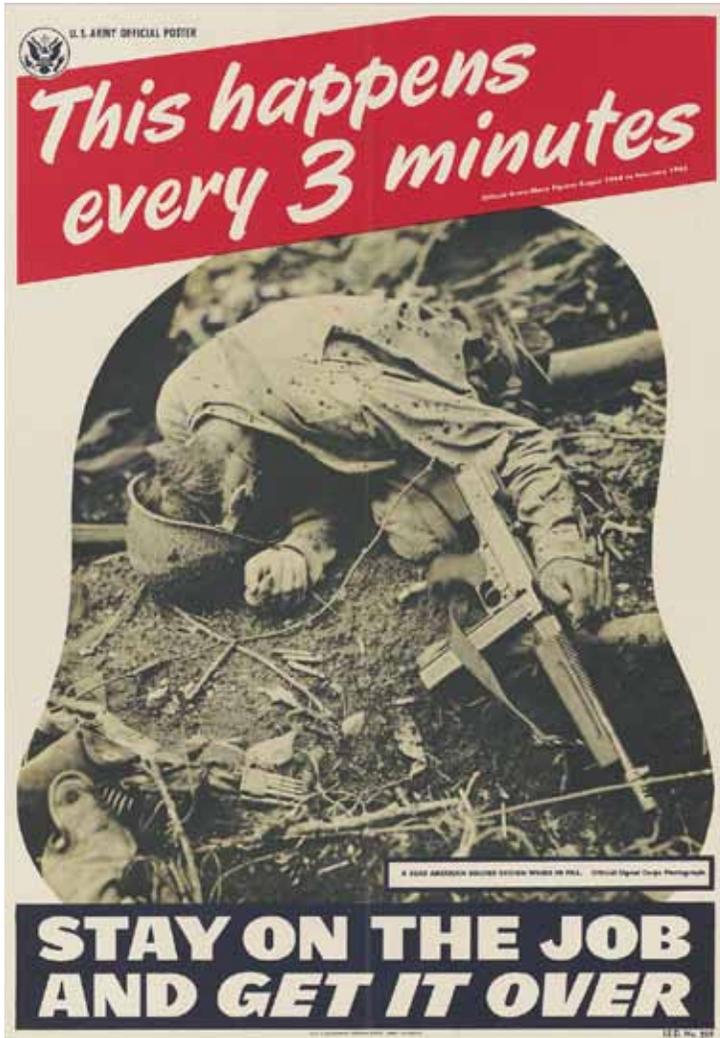
him, his tattered uniform spattered with dirt and blood, maggots on his hand (Fig. 6), explicitly challenged the 'prevailing interpretive assumptions' about the war and its airy talk about 'patriotism, sacrifice, humanity, the nation-state' and freedom (Zelizer, 2004: 115, 115). In their efforts to shock the viewer into action, the photographs illustrate how the dead GI became a carefully calibrated tool in the administration's efforts to exhort and discipline its disengaged civilian workforce.



(Fig. 4)



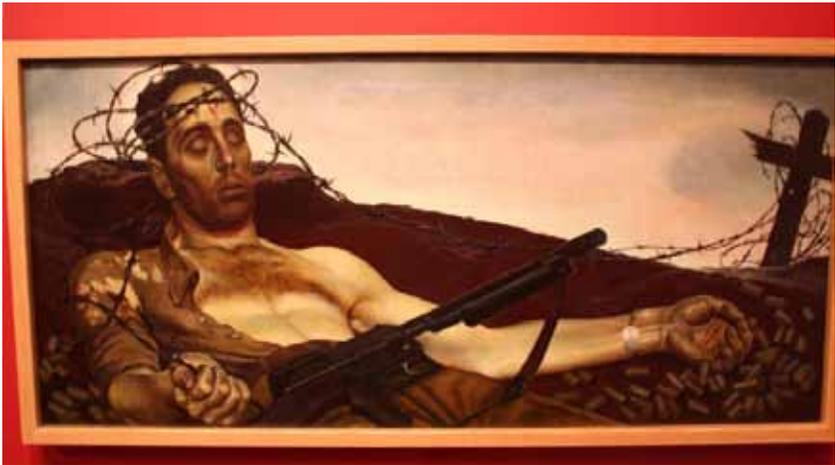
(Fig. 5)



(Fig. 6)

The release of the photos had the desired stiffening effect on public resolve. By October 1943 an OWI report found that the most effective images, those best able to reach and motivate the public were ‘those “hate” pictures that showed American war dead. Everyone seems to agree that the latter are the strongest appeal and make the people so mad they dig down deep’ (qtd Roeder, 1993: 14).

This employment of the dead GI was increasingly in tension with his other principal propaganda purpose, to sanctify the cause and to reinforce the war's seemingly straightforward moral polarities. Paul Addison has noted how the Second World War 'served a generation of Britons and Americans as a myth which enshrined their essential purity, a parable of good evil' (Addison, 1975: 405). For Geoffrey Perrett, World War 2 was 'the perfect war ... a war against palpable evil' (Fussell, 1982: 231). As a result, as Paul Fussell has noted, 'For the successful pursuit of uncomplicated High Purpose, a profound chasm had to be opened between good and evil' (Fussell, 1989: 165). To this end it was increasingly common for the war to be regarded and written about as 'virtually a religious operation' (Fussell, 1989: 166). In that vein, Isaiah Berlin believed that America's role in the war was nothing less than 'a divine mission to save the world' (Nicholas, 1981: 46). This conviction was given pictorial form in John Falter's 1943 illustration (Fig. 7), 'By his deeds measures yours', featuring a dead GI as a Christ-like figure, complete with a barbed-wire crown of thorns and stigmata, who has laid down his life that others might live.



(Fig. 7)

Roosevelt's public prayer on D-Day allotted a supporting role in the biblical drama to those on the home front: 'for us at home ... help us, Almighty God, to rededicate ourselves in renewed faith in Thee in this hour of great sacrifice ... Give us strength to redouble the contributions we make in the physical and material support of

our armed forces' (qtd Fussell, 1989: 167). If those at home were struggling to be worthy of the responsibility thrust upon them it was vital that the combatants themselves were seen to be beyond reproach. As moral exemplars of the purity of a great common cause, while it was fine to portray their 'sacrifice', however gritty the detail, it was crucial that no image implying any moral ambivalence in their behaviour or the conflict more broadly should reach the public. Yet the OWI released a number of images that suggested that US servicemen were as much the agents as they were the objects of brutality.



(Fig. 8)

The photograph (Fig. 8) of lieutenant, junior grade, E. V. McPherson, of Columbus, Ohio putting a cigarette into the mouth of a Japanese skull that served as a mascot aboard the United States Navy Motor Torpedo Boat 341, reflects the casual desecration of the remains of Japanese combatants while hinting at the extraordinary brutality that lay behind such gestures. *Life Magazine's* Picture of the Week in its 22 May 1944 issues featured Arizona war worker, Natalie Nickerson writing her 'Navy boyfriend a thank-you note for the Jap skull he sent her' with the skull front and centre of the photo, propped up on her writing table. Though

the piece notes that ‘The armed forces disapprove strongly of this sort of thing’, the prominence of the photograph in the nation’s most popular news magazine suggests that the public felt otherwise. The gift arrived, signed by her lieutenant beau and thirteen others, accompanied by the following inscription: ‘This is a good Jap – a dead one. Picked up on the New Guinea beach’ (*Life*, 22 May 1945: 34). The lieutenant’s assertion that he and his friends had found rather than purchased, or personally souveniered the skull, and the moral delicacy this implies, hinted at a darker truth – the growth of a minor industry among US servicemen in the South West Pacific in the sourcing, preparation and sale of Japanese body parts. Kenneth Iserson has noted that:

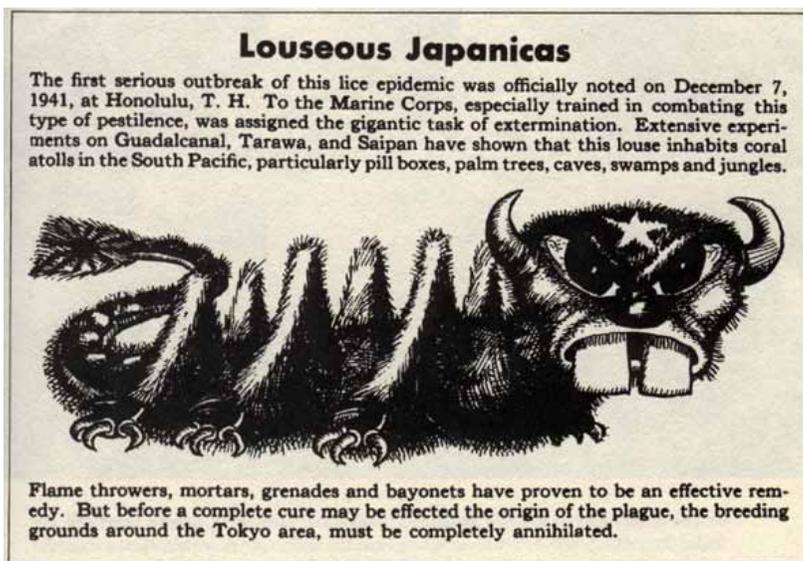
Japanese skulls were much-envied trophies among U.S. Marines in the Pacific theater during World War II. The practice of collecting them apparently began after the bloody conflict on Guadalcanal, when the troops set up the skulls as ornaments or totems atop poles as a type of warning. The Marines boiled the skulls and then used lye to remove any residual flesh so they would be suitable as souvenirs. U.S. sailors cleaned their trophy skulls by putting them in nets and dragging them behind their vessels. Winfield Townley Scott wrote a wartime poem, ‘The U.S. Sailor with the Japanese Skull’ that detailed the entire technique of preserving the headskull as a souvenir. Referring to this practice, Edward L. Jones, a U.S. war correspondent in the Pacific wrote in the February 1946 *Atlantic Magazine*, ‘We boiled the flesh off enemy skulls to make table ornaments for sweethearts, or carved their bones into letter-openers.’ On occasion, these ‘Japanese trophy skulls’ have confused police when they have turned up during murder investigations. It has been reported that when the remains of Japanese soldiers were repatriated from the Mariana Islands in 1984, sixty percent were missing their skulls (Iserson, 1994, 382).

When Ralph Morse’s photograph of a Japanese soldier’s severed head from Guadalcanal in 1942 was published in the 1 February 1943 edition of *Life*, its accompanying caption – ‘A Japanese soldier’s skull is propped up on the hull of a burned-out Jap tank by U.S. troops. Fire destroyed the rest of the corpse’ – again extended the servicemen a degree of exculpation, that though they may have placed the head here they were not responsible for parting it from its trunk (*Life*, 1 February 1943: 27).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Morse later noted that it was just as likely that the Japanese put the skull on the tank in an effort to lure curious onlookers into a prepared fire zone. See <http://life.time.com/history/guadalcanal-rare-and-classic-photos-from-a-pivotal-wwii-campaign/#1>

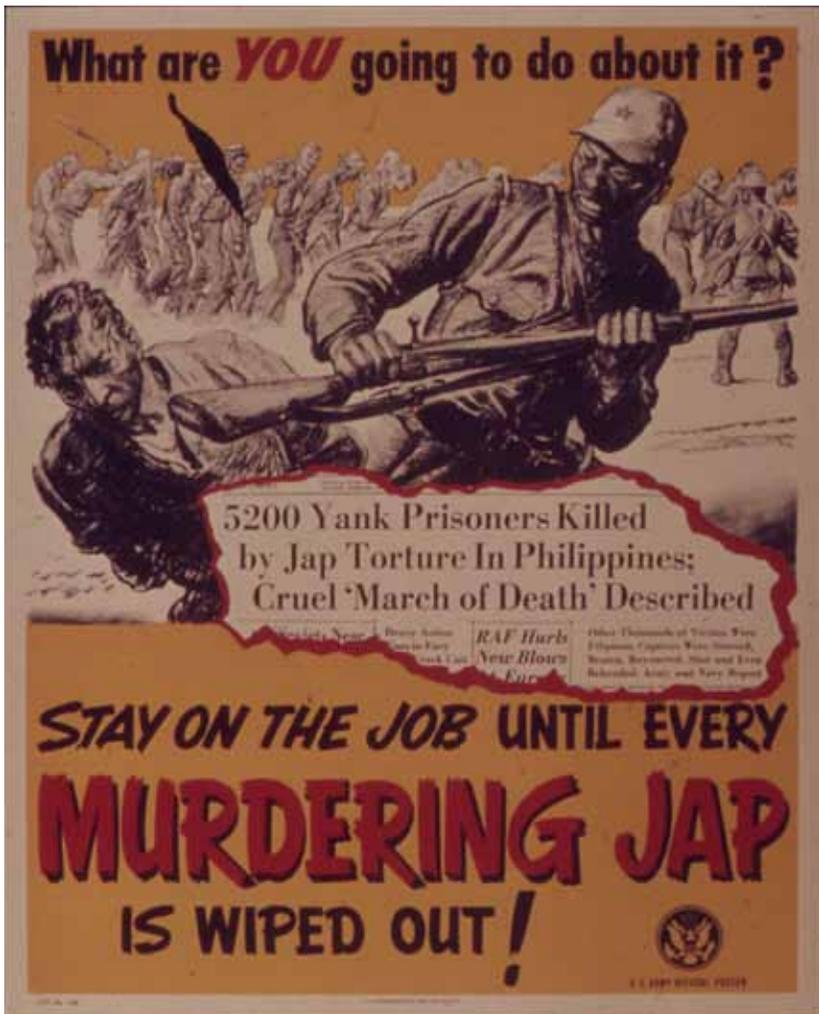
What distinguished these photographs and enabled them to co-exist with the continuing ideal of the GI's moral purity was the race and provenance of the corpses: they were Japanese. John Dower notes that 'In the United States and Britain, the Japanese were more hated than the Germans before as well as after Pearl Harbor' (Dower, 1986: 8). Evidence of Japanese atrocities in the Pacific entrenched such views. American propaganda asserted that the Japanese need not be accorded humane treatment as they were not only a race apart but part of a separate, sub-human species – they were rats, bats, octopus, monkeys, lice (Fig. 9) – whose extermination was not only a national responsibility but a form of international moral hygiene in which US forces were showing particular distinction.



(Fig. 9)

In June 1944, as the US determination to enforce unconditional surrender on Japan hardened, the OWI encouraged the release of stories and pictures of Japanese atrocities in an effort to 'nullify any voices that might be raised here if we should undertake the bombing of Japanese cities' (Roeder, 1985: 193). As John Dower has noted, 'as late as February 1945 the Pentagon was still blue-penciling [Hollywood] scripts on the grounds that the passages in question would evoke "too much sympathy for the Jap people"' (Dower, 1986: 19). It is, thus, no surprise to find the Japanese assuming an increasingly central role, alongside the dead

GI, in the publicity campaigns encouraging American workers to stick to their tasks and finish off the job, and the Jap. In some cases (Fig. 10), these campaigns explicitly linked the need to sustain effort in the workplace to enable the exaction of retribution for Japanese atrocities, as at Bataan in this case.



(Fig. 10)

The OWI was painfully conscious that such racial vilification sat uneasily in a war fought by a united nations of colours and creeds, in part, against a perverse theory of racial purity. The US wanted the Asian peoples labouring under Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere to regard its soldiers as liberators, not conquerors and oppressors, and the Japanese made much propaganda use of evidence confirming its racial bigotry. Accordingly, in other publicity campaigns the Americans were encouraged less to despise the Japanese than to emulate their legendary work ethic.



(Fig. 11)

This particular image, with its curiously negroid protagonist, illustrates the discomfiting domestic contradictions laid bare by America's wholehearted rhetorical commitment to the equality of all peoples. Those most keenly aware of

the gap between the US's pronounced positions on racial equality and the dispiriting experience of its actual practices were the black soldiers who had enlisted from the segregated southern states of the US to fighting in racially segregated units, billeted in discrete areas in a war against a racist ideology. At the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor there were only five black officers in the entire US Army, three of whom were Chaplains. While the US's racially discriminatory systems came under direct pressure during the war due to new access to educational and professional opportunities it afforded black servicemen, the government demonstrated that it valued domestic harmony, and the racial status quo that in part constituted it, above the values of liberty and equality it so loudly espoused. The censorship of photographs played a key role in ensuring that racial norms were still seen to be in place. When in August 1943, photos from the UK of black GIs dancing with white Englishwomen appeared in the US press they caused a storm of protest inflaming entrenched racial prejudice. Thereafter the BPR ordered military censors to block all images depicting inter-racial intimacy. Little wonder that one black recruit told the Army's Research Branch that his tombstone should read: 'Here lies a black man killed fighting a yellow man for the protection of a white man' (Myrdal, 1944: 1006). While this, and related policies, purchased national unity they did so at the cost of exacerbating post-war conflicts and storing up greater pressure for and more bitter resentment of inevitable social change. National innocence offered a powerful motivating narrative: but the dawning of national experience was a bitter and disillusioning experience for all Americans.

The Soviet Union, like the US, confronted deep divisions of race and ethnicity, and a troubled history of imposed national unity, that the war and the propaganda needed to advance its causes threatened to bring to the surface. Unhindered by the impositions of democratic accountability, Stalin and the Red Army were able to ensure—as in the US—that the media's first responsibility was not to the truth or the people but to the service of the State and its prevailing myths of coherence. Party control over the media functioned through parallel mechanisms to those employed by democratic political control in the US and the articulation of central war aims via specific instructions to photojournalists in the field was notably direct.<sup>4</sup> On the day after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, 23 June 1941, Lev Mekhlis, head of the Main Political Administration for the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army (MPA), which oversaw all propaganda efforts, reminded the press of the responsibilities

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<sup>4</sup> A good example of the directness and detail of US government control over the portrayal of the war can be found in the *Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry* issued in June 1942. See Short, 1983: 171-80. See also Koppes and Black, 1977: 87-105.

that now fell to it: 'The main tasks of the press in battle must be to develop heroism, bravery, military art, and selflessly carry out the commanders' orders' (Shneer, 2012: 91). The press was thus regarded from the outset as another weapon at the leadership's disposal.

Wartime conditions posed significant challenges for the media. Supplies of paper and ink were limited, means of distribution were straitened, personnel were called up for military service, and in the west of the country plant and premises were subject to Nazi bombing and invasion. For photographers all the basics of their trade, cameras, film, chemicals and paper, were in desperately short supply, so no shot could be wasted. The Party recognised the importance of an informed and motivated populace and devoted considerable resources to ensuring sufficient newspaper and magazine publication. If there was an overall decrease in the numbers of newspapers and their print run, the war saw a more strategic diversification of print, with smaller newspapers published in dozens of languages reflecting the diverse ethnicity of the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup> Soldiers at the front were kept up to date with news and motivated to greater exertions via Divisional, Army and Front newspapers. These had their own mobile print works complete with generators, typesetting units, presses and zincographs for the production of photos. The troops thus had access to a range of words and images, often in their own languages, from a variety of sources, ranging from their own front newspapers, like *Red Army*, to Moscow-based publications, *Pravda*, *Izvestia*, *Red Star*, and illustrated magazines like *Ogonyok*. Everything in these publications was subject to scrutiny by the MPA whose over-watch function, as its name suggests, combined the civilian and the military. As a result the Soviet Union's information management regime had none of the tensions between the civilian administration of the OWI and the armed forces that characterised the US experience.

From the first days of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, which commenced on 22 June 1941, *Ogonyok* and illustrated magazines like it bore witness to and interpreted this traumatic historical moment for their readers. Throughout the war the MPA reminded editors of the need to keep Nazi atrocities front and centre in their written and visual coverage of the fighting. *Ogonyok's* coverage, like that of other Soviet illustrated magazines, revolved around the 'dual narrative strategy of celebrating Soviet heroism and publicizing Nazi atrocities', the twin themes that 'visually defined the war for the Soviet population' (Shneer, 2012: 96). As a consequence of this approach, if the US public was shielded from disturbing

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<sup>5</sup> Down from 8,800 titles and a print run of 38 million in 1940 to 4,561 titles and a print run of 18 million in 1942.

evidence of war's destructive power, Soviet citizens, many millions of whom were living directly in the path of the Nazi advance, were exposed to it and the excesses perpetrated by the Nazis from the outset of the fighting with the express purpose of rousing them to vengeance.

*Ogonyok* published its first Nazi atrocity photograph on 25 June 1941 in the first edition after the Nazi invasion – that is only three days after the Germans crossed the Soviet frontier. The photograph shows two Poles, almost certainly Jews, digging graves for a pile of corpses that occupy the centre of the frame. This was a perpetrator or ‘trophy’ photo taken by a German soldier, intercepted on its way to its intended recipient and sent on to the allies to publicise what the Nazis were doing in Eastern Europe. Given the publication timeframe of the photo it is clear that the Soviets had been collecting and stockpiling images of Nazi atrocities during the period of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact for later propaganda use in the event of a Nazi invasion. Throughout 1941, as Soviet forces were pressed back ever eastward, nearly all photographs of Nazi atrocities that appeared in the Soviet press had been taken by Germans. The Soviets were keenly aware of the propaganda value of such photographs and established an ordered system for their collection, assessment and use. Red Army soldiers were exhorted to search the bodies of German soldiers and to retrieve and hand over any cameras to the unit commissars who would ensure their return to Moscow where their film was developed and any useful photographs could be used for propaganda purposes. Janina Struk has noted that in the occupied lands of the East, ‘To those who resisted the Nazi regime photography was of the utmost importance. In the first days of the war, as German bombs started raining over Warsaw, the city’s mayor, Stefan Starzyński, made regular broadcasts to the besieged population to take photographs and collect documentary evidence’ (Struk, 2011: 78). Well aware of the propaganda value of such photograph, the Nazis did their utmost to control the flow of images from the front lines and the occupied territories. Poles and Jews were not allowed to own cameras, purchase film, take photographs or otherwise bear witness to the Nazi atrocities in Poland. Yet the Germans obligingly compensated for any resulting shortfall in evidence of their excesses. Despite a 1941 order that forbade ‘members of the Wehrmacht to take photos of executions, shootings as well as hanging, as well as to take photos of the bodies of dead Russian soldiers’ and a further prohibition on the dispatch to the homeland of ‘such prints already in existence’, German soldiers habitually photographed their exploits (qtd Eller, 2005: 20). In Poland, and throughout the occupied nations, when the soldiers took their film to the photo studio to be developed shop assistants ‘were encouraged to talk with their German customers to

find out as much information about the pictures brought in by them as was possible – where they had been taken, by whom, and exactly what they showed’ (Struk, 2011: 80). In the darkroom, negatives thought to contain valuable information were copied and passed on, via couriers, to sympathisers in both the East and the West. ‘Evidence suggests that many Polish workers in photo shops throughout Poland were involved with duplicating or distributing incriminating pictures taken by Nazis or German soldiers’ (Struk, 2011: 80). By 1942 a cell in Poland’s main post office was routinely intercepting the private mail of German soldiers, extracting valuable intelligence from the letters and copying the photos that they contained. In some cases, anti-Nazi activists seized and copied incriminating material in Germany itself before distributing it to resistance factions elsewhere in Europe. Maria Seidenberger worked in a photo lab in Munich where she made and saved copies of atrocity photos, such as figure 12, brought into the studio for developing by German soldiers.



(Fig. 12)

Soviet photographers could not begin to bear their own witness to Nazi excesses until late 1941 when the Red Army first began re-taking towns and cities that had been under German occupation. The record of German atrocities they then offered was unique because ‘Soviet photographers were among the first people in the world to photograph the Nazis’ actions from the perspective of the liberator’, giving them ‘extensive first-page coverage as soon as the war began’ (Shneer, 2010: 30). The first major stories of this kind centred on the liberation of Kerch, in the south of the country, and Volokolamsk, 130 kilometres north west of Moscow where in early December 1941 photojournalists recorded (Fig. 13) the discovery of the bodies of eight alleged partisans hanged and left dangling in the main square as a warning to the populace: ‘All Soviet press outlets ran stories on Volokolamsk and how it revealed the depravity of the enemy’ (Shneer, 2010: 34).



(Fig. 13)

On New Years Eve 1941, Kerch, on the shores of the Sea of Azov, was the first city with a sizeable Jewish population to be re-taken by the Red Army. A few days later, photojournalists Dmitri Baltermants and Yevgeny Khaldei arrived to cover the story. Close to the airport they saw men and women searching for their loved

ones among the corpses of the 7,000 Jews who had been rounded up, taken to an anti-tank ditch on the outskirts of the city and shot. The resulting images (Fig. 14), and the captions that anchored them, expressed both outrage and horror: 'Hitler ordered his bandits to annihilate the peaceful Soviet population. Wherever the Germans found themselves, they murdered thousands of women and children' (qtd Shneer, 2012: 103).



(Fig. 14)

Notably, while this and other descriptions of the massacre focused on the defencelessness of the victims, none identified the fact that the victims were almost exclusively Jews. The German assault was on the Motherland and all of its peoples and, as David Shneer notes, the crimes were reported to reflect that fact and so engender a truly national thirst for revenge: 'In an effort to universalize Nazi atrocities, Soviet editors rarely labelled the victims of Nazi atrocities explicitly as Jews or included Jews in lists of peoples who were targeted' (Shneer, 2012: 105).

Over time, as more areas returned to Soviet control, liberation photo-essays began to assume a formulaic quality combining images of exultant townsfolk greeting the liberators with a stark enumeration of the human and physical costs of German occupation. At the centre of this visual narrative lay the uncovering of the

victims of Nazi excesses, bodies piled in fields and by roadsides, the exhumation of mass graves in trenches and ravines under the supervision of white-coated Soviet officials, as here at Krasnodar (Fig. 15), relatives identifying loved ones. As with the ‘hate pictures’ of US dead that made the American public ‘so mad’, no Soviet images more powerfully or more succinctly conveyed the wounds suffered by the Motherland and its people and so motivated the population to revenge than those of the revealed corpse.



(Fig. 15)

In the summer of 1942, as the Red Army’s brief advance was slowed, the MPA issued a directive to the heads of political administration pointing out that ‘now ... we need, more strongly than earlier, to raise the hatred of each Red Army person and the whole population to the enemy’ (qtd Shneer, 2012: 109). Editors were instructed to collect all facts and material detailing evidence of enemy atrocities against prisoners, injured Red Army soldiers and the population at large; to collect and send on images of the destruction of cities, cultural institutions, historical sites, hospitals, etc; to collect testimony from victims; and to redouble efforts to gather all photos, letters and diaries discovered on enemy combatants that attests to their atrocities, attacks and robberies as this material ‘develops hatred towards

the enemy and prepares our citizens for the merciless vengeance for the suffering of our people' (qtd Shneer, 2012: 109). If the first atrocity photos expressed shock or outrage, later images, particularly those from after the summer of 1942 offered motivation and a context for vengeance. After the MPA directive, and Stalin's 'Not a Step Backward' order on 28 July 1942, atrocity photos featured more prominently in the Soviet press as new levels of fear and rage required new levels of incentive to drive the Red Army forward and to fire the whole Soviet people with a new resolve.

To ensure that the people were getting exactly the right message, in August 1942, noting that 'too many reporters do not have enough experience with the military and are revealing secrets', the Central Committee decided to limit the number of journalists at the front and exercise more direct control over their professional preparation, assignments and output through increased training and more direct editorial control (qtd Shneer, 2012: 111). While journalists had to attend seminars on military matters, editors compiled and disseminated detailed lists of approved subjects that reporters and journalists were required to cover. The results of this regime are reflected, in part, in the coverage of the Battle of Stalingrad. This coverage brought to the fore the other key plank of Soviet photojournalistic representations of the war – the indomitable spirit of the heroic Red Army. While atrocity photos continued to feature prominently in the Soviet media for the rest of the war, David Shneer notes that after the victory at Stalingrad in February 1943, 'their frequency diminished, and those that did appear tended to fall into two categories—images used in Soviet war crimes trials, which began in 1943, and photographs taken at the liberation of concentration camps, especially at Majdanek in July 1944' (Shneer, 2010: 38).

Most photojournalists at Stalingrad worked for the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS), the Soviet's central news agency, and the head of its photographic division, P. Serebriannikov, maintained a constant correspondence with his photojournalists ensuring that they were apprised of the latest directives from the MPA, what subjects were in demand, what sort of censorship was in order and how often photographers were expected to file material. By October 1942 Serebriannikov's patience with his photographers in Stalingrad was wearing thin. He upbraided them for their failure to give the Soviet public a clear, and positive, idea of what was happening in the great battle on the Volga: 'For more than a month the heroic defenders of Stalingrad have bravely and stoically held off all attacks of the bestial Hitlerite forces. However the photo agency Fotokhronika TASS has not received a single shot from a single photojournalist about the defence of the city itself ... The photo agency is not at all pleased with this situation'. He

exhorted his photographers to get out and get the images and gave a list of what was required: ‘We’re interested in scenes of street battles, important people, residents of Stalingrad – defenders of their hometown, and other themes’ (qtd Shneer, 2012: 120). To goad his photographers into action he noted that other journalists ‘have produced a series of impressive historical photographs of Stalingrad’ (qtd Shneer, 2012: 120).

One of these was the Uzbek photographer, Georgii Zelma (1906-1984) who covered the war for *Izvestia*. Assigned to General Chuikov’s Sixty Second Army in August 1942, Zelma remained in Stalingrad throughout the battle. In an effort to ensure that his photographs got out of Stalingrad first, and looked as he intended them to, Zelma set up his own darkroom and developing lab on the eastern, Soviet side of the Volga, in the village of Burkovski. His photograph (Fig. 16) of Red Army soldiers charging up Mamayev Hill in a counter-attack, their dead and wounded comrades occupying the right fore and middle ground of the photo, has become an icon of Soviet heroism.



(Fig. 16)

Yet differing incarnations of this photograph, and its increasingly punctilious construction, reflect a fundamental shift in official attitudes towards images of Soviet dead in the nation’s visual propaganda as the war drew to a close. The original photograph of the assault on Mamayev Hill (Fig. 16) is actually composed of two images, one of the soldiers advancing up the slope, and the second, that sits to the right of the first, an empty landscape of ruined buildings with a Russian soldier’s corpse in the foreground and a wounded man being carried to safety in the middle distance.<sup>6</sup> During the war, only the right hand side of the left (first) photograph was published – the photo of the crouching soldiers courageously advancing up the

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<sup>6</sup> The join between the two photos runs up the far left of the rocky outcrop in the foreground.

hill. The second, right hand image was cropped out. It had to go because the Soviet corpse at its centre ran counter to the heroic narrative promoted by the rest of the image, while the man in the far right carrying a comrade on his back might imply that the environment wasn't quite as deadly as the photo suggested. Zelma finally re-united the two halves of the photo in his 1972 book, *The Battle of Stalingrad*, by which time the myth of the battle was hardening as recognition of its significance grew. Here (Fig. 17), with some creative cropping and a little deft re-touching, we are presented not with an image of war's inherently contradictory qualities, its heroism and its bloody cost, but with a more straightforwardly celebratory rendition of Soviet heroism. The dead body – or at least its top half – has been replaced by a recumbent soldier, rising as it were from the ground to urge on the advance of his comrades. The Russian corpse that had embodied the outrage of Nazi invasion, the sacrifice of the nation's defenders and motivated the people to seek vengeance now occupied a more problematic place in the narrative of national resurgence and irresistible force. Hence the dead are airbrushed out of the picture and the living rise from the earth to mark the resurrection of the Motherland and produce 'a grand icon of unambiguous heroism' (Shneer, 2012: 220).



(Fig. 17)

In both the United States and the Soviet Union the corpse played a crucial role in embodying cherished national values, illustrating the peril the war had put them in and emblematising the sacrifice needed to secure their defence and the safety of the homeland. Where the Americans were at first nervous about the release and dissemination of such images and the damage they might do to public morale, as the war progressed and the public regarded victory as an inevitability, the dead GI featured more frequently and in ever more graphic portrayals in an effort to drive the nation's workers to stick to their jobs and see the war through. By contrast, in the Soviet Union the barbarities perpetrated by the Germans during their invasion

and occupation of the country put images of the Soviet dead front and centre in state propaganda and the media from the first days of the war. While these images furnished evidence of war crimes they were also calculated to stir hatred and a thirst for vengeance amongst the Red Army and the populace at large. Yet after the triumph at Stalingrad, as the Germans fell back, the Soviets saw themselves less as victims than as victors. The visual record of the war increasingly reflected this celebration of heroic Soviet endeavour by relegating images of atrocities and the bodies that marked them to the inner pages of newspapers and magazines leaving the front pages for photographs of conquest and liberation. If American photography of the Second World War moved from reassurance to shock the Soviet visual record took the reverse journey. In both cases the dead continued to serve their nation long after they had fallen in battle.

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## Illustrations

1. Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1942. Source, Northwestern University Library ID: <http://digital.library.northwestern.edu/wwii-posters/img/ww1646-72.jpg>
2. Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1942. Source, Northwestern University Library ID: <http://digital.library.northwestern.edu/wwii-posters/img/ww0207-04.jpg>
3. 'An injured man in a stretcher on board USS Minneapolis (CA-36), 1 December 1942, the day after the ship was damaged by torpedoes in the Battle of Tassafaronga.' Official U.S. Navy Photograph, US National Archives. ID No., 80-G-211222.
4. 'American soldiers, stripped of all equipment, lie dead, face down in the slush of a crossroads, somewhere on the western front. Note the bare feet of the soldier in the foreground. Captured German photograph. Belgium, ca., December 1944.' Department of Defense. U.S National Archives, ID No., 111-SC-198245
5. 'Bodies of U.S. officers and soldiers slain [sic] by the Nazis after capture near Malmedy, Belgium. 12.11.1944' Courtesy of Franklin D. Roosevelt Library Public Domain Photographs, ID No., NLR-PHOCO-A-74596
6. 'This happens every three minutes: stay on the job and get it over' Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1945. ID: 1945-O-636370: I.S.D. No. 229.
7. John Falter, 'By his deeds measure yours', 1943. No copyright details.
8. 'Alexishafen, New Guinea. 1944-04-30. Lieutenant (Junior Grade) E. V. Mcpherson, of Columbus, Ohio with a Japanese skull which serves as a mascot aboard the United States Navy Motor Torpedo Boat 341.' Courtesy Australian War Memorial. ID No., 072837.

9. Courtesy of the United States Marine Corps Association.
10. 'Stay On The Job Until Every Murdering Jap Is Wiped Out', 1944. Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1944. US National Archives, ID No., NWDNS-44-PA-1804.
11. 'If You Worked as Hard and Fast as a Jap', 1944. Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1944. US National Archives, ID No., NWDNS-44-PA-1070.
12. A partisan is hanged somewhere in the Soviet Union'. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, ID No #99247.
13. 'Volokolamsk, Russia, November 1941, A Russian soldier and a woman standing before eight bodies of partisans who were hanged.' Courtesy Yad Vashem, ID No., 49564.
14. 'Kerch, Ukraine, The bodies of a woman and her children who were murdered by the Germans, 1942.' Courtesy Yad Vashem, ID No., 6357.
15. F. Belosludcen, 'Krasnodor, Russia, An exhumation by a medical staff, July 1943.' Courtesy Yad Vashem, ID No., 69926.
16. Georgii Zelma, 'Assault, Stalingrad.' National Archives and Records Administration, College Park. Courtesy of Office of War Information Sovfoto/Eastfoto. ID No., 34539.
17. Georgii Zelma, 'Assault, Stalingrad.' Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. ID No., #34539.



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