

Chaos and Confusion: British Oversight of Russian Repatriations in Postwar Southern Austria

by

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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In 1945, as the Second World War ended, British troops serving under 5 Corps in southern Austria encountered a number of critical problems which hindered their ability to occupy the region and enact the policy of repatriation as set out in the Yalta Agreement. Fragile lines of supply and communication, and the need to feed and house diverse groups of hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war and refugees impeded British attempts to administer the area. Further complicating the situation was the infiltration of Yugoslav Partisans, supposed allies, fighting under Josip Broz Tito who claimed northern Italy and southern Austria as part of a “Greater Yugoslavia.” In preparation of an anticipated forceful ejection of these Partisans, the British military prioritized the fighting effectiveness of its troops over a consistent application of repatriation. The British military issued orders which interpreted Soviet citizenship, and therefore liability for repatriation, in very broad terms. This resulted in an inconsistent application of the policy, in which non-Soviets were either retained or handed over, with both courses of action seemingly in keeping with orders. While subsequent authors, most notably Nikolai Tolstoy and Christopher Booker, have written on this topic, none have yet recognized the connection between the chaotic circumstances in the region and the haphazard application of repatriation. By re-examining archival records of communications between military units involved, this thesis rectifies that lacuna and acknowledges for the first time the irregular and inconsistent nature of these repatriations.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my Mom and Dad, and Mama and Poppa for their eternal support of my lifelong desire to learn. Your love and encouragement have made this, and everything else I have ever done, possible. I cannot ever thank you enough.

Introduction

In the aftermath of the Second World War, British troops in southern Austria captured and repatriated to the Soviet Union thousands of Russian civilians and soldiers who had actively fought against the allied powers during the war. This group included Soviet citizens, as well as former citizens of the Russian Empire who had either never lived in the Soviet Union or had fled during the Russian Civil War and had acquired other citizenships (or were officially stateless and held Nansen passports) in the interwar period. While these non-Soviets were not liable for repatriation, they were spread throughout groups made up predominantly of Soviet citizens who were slated for return to the Soviet Union. Repatriation was the responsibility of British troops in southern Austria, fighting under 5 Corps, who already faced several major obstructions in occupying the area. These problems included the disruptive presence of Titoist Partisans from Yugoslavia, narrow supply lines, and the need to administer and organize hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war and refugees. Consequently, 5 Corps interpreted repatriation in very broad terms and then applied this interpretation inconsistently. As a result, non-Soviets were both retained and handed over to Soviet authorities, without any regularity throughout 5 Corps' area. Decades later, the revelation of this information touched off an intense debate regarding who, if anyone, should be held responsible for these actions. While 5 Corps faced a number of particularly acute problems in southern Austria, the situation in Europe more broadly was tumultuous as well.

Combat in the Second World War ended on 8 May 1945, but the conflict was far from settled. The war had wreaked havoc across much of the continent and brought about massive, unprecedented upheavals of peoples and populations. Millions of civilians throughout Europe

were displaced by various means during the war and its aftermath. This included ethnic Germans ejected from east and central Europe, ethnic Italians expelled from Yugoslavian territory, concentration camp survivors, political refugees, and persons displaced from their homes by the war itself.¹ For people more directly involved in the conflict, circumstances were no less complex. The allied powers had to accept the surrender of millions of enemy soldiers, and simultaneously liberate their own former prisoners from camps across the continent. Both of these groups had to be returned to their countries of origin, but in a landscape with changing borders and limited administrative power, this was an immense challenge. The convoluted nature of the war, which aligned disparate nations based on little more than a common enemy, further complicated the situation. In Yugoslavia for example, Communist leader Josip Broz Tito was aligned with the allied powers to fight against the German Army, but had territorial claims of his own for the final settlement of the war. The situation in the Balkans was likened to a Civil War and was so tangled by the sheer number of relevant parties that the United States initially refused to involve itself there.² Diverse military units based on a network of shifting allegiances added to the already astonishing administrative problems of postwar Europe. Several of these problems came to a head in the relatively undamaged region of southern Austria, culminating in forceful repatriations of ethnic Russians to the Soviet Union. This was a severe example of one way in which the allied powers sought to resolve administrative challenges caused by population upheaval brought about by the war.

An examination of all the secondary literature, and a preliminary exploration of many pieces of documentary evidence from the UK National Archives these secondary writers used,

¹ Jessica Reinisch and Elizabeth White, eds., *The Disentanglement of Populations Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Post-War Europe, 1944–9* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers, 2011), xiv.

² Christopher Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy: The Controversy over the Repatriations from Austria* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Limited, 1997), 111.

shows that no author has fully realized the connection between this chaos and how inconsistently British troops applied the policy of repatriation. Through a more rigorous interrogation of communications between military and governmental units, one can trace this inconsistency back to orders emanating from 5 Corps. These orders categorized several entire groups as Soviet citizens for the purpose of transfer to Soviet authorities, but also included a definition for individuals. Based on this dual definition, non-Soviets could be retained or handed over, depending entirely on how British troops in that area interpreted their orders. Already familiar with the relevant primary sources, I recognized that 5 Corps' inability to screen on an individual level derived from the lack of available manpower in the area, but only after even more detailed inquiry of these sources did I realize the full extent of the issues they faced. As a result, I argue here that the chaos confronting 5 Corps led British military leaders to issue orders which limited their workload by forgoing widespread individual screening and instead judged several groups in their entirety to be Soviet citizens, while also providing a definition which could be applied to individuals who "pressed their case." This imprecise definition, in turn, allowed for a haphazard application of the policy in which British troops kept or handed over non-Soviets, depending solely on individual circumstances, rather than a uniform understanding of the policy. This inconsistency was not the intention of the government officials who crafted the policy several months earlier.

The issue of repatriation first presented itself prior to the allied invasion of Normandy when the British military received reports that large groups of "Russians" were among the German troops occupying France. The very notion was originally rejected by the Soviet government, but after the invasion, many of these "Russians," some of them undeniably Soviet

citizens, were taken prisoner by the western allies.³ Lengthy negotiations between the British Foreign Office and the Soviet government regarding these prisoners were complicated by the fact that they had been captured in German uniforms. This unusual circumstance forced the Foreign Office to balance several concerns. They were reluctant to return these troops to the USSR out of fear that the Germans could potentially seek reprisals against British troops captured in Europe for perceived mistreatment of soldiers fighting for Germany.⁴ Simultaneously, there was concern that not returning these soldiers could lessen the Soviet willingness to return British prisoners in territories the Soviet Red Army was quickly approaching.⁵ If the Soviets opted to push the issue, there was also concern they might slow their advance towards Germany and thus put additional pressure on the western allies.⁶ In an effort to maintain goodwill with their vital ally, the British sought an agreement that would involve a swift exchange of prisoners, but only after the cessation of hostilities so as to avoid German reprisals. This agreement was signed at the Yalta Conference on 11 February 1944 and would be applied later to numerous nominally Russian groups made up of Soviet citizens and non-Soviet citizens of Russian backgrounds at the close of the war.⁷

Among Soviets found by the western allies, there were several categories of people with varying levels of desire to return to the Soviet Union. *Ostarbeiters* (eastern workers), who had been captured by the German Army and forced into labour battalions, largely believed they had not committed any crimes and wanted to return to their families. Liberated Soviet prisoners and

³ Nikolai Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), 44.

⁴ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 424-425.

⁵ Nicholas Bethell, *The Last Secret: Forcible Repatriation to Russia 1944-1947* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1974), 9.

⁶ Bethell, *The Last Secret*, 12.

⁷ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 234.

other Displaced Persons also predominantly wished to return to the Soviet Union.⁸ British troops in southern Austria, however, came into contact with diverse, but fiercely anti-Soviet military units who were in a much more unique position than other Soviet groups. They were eager to surrender to the British and universally feared what they knew would be severe punishment if they were handed back to Soviet authorities. These included anti-Soviet Russians who had fled the USSR with the retreating Wehrmacht after the Battle of Stalingrad, defectors from the Red Army (voluntary and otherwise), old émigrés who had left the former Romanov Empire during the Russian Civil War and were never Soviet citizens, and an assortment of Caucasians from Georgia and Azerbaijan, all of whom had served in some capacity on the German side.⁹ One of these groups, the Schutzkorps, was comprised of Russian Civil War veterans and exiles who left Russia by 1921 and lived in the Balkans between wars. During the Second World War, they formed a combat unit to fight Yugoslavian Communist leader Josip Broz Tito and his Partisans.¹⁰ Another group was the 1st Ukrainian Division, freshly renamed from the SS Galicia Division and made up of Ukrainian volunteers from Eastern Galicia, which had been Polish territory before being annexed by the Soviets in 1939 and recaptured in the summer of 1944. They had fought against the Red Army in Eastern Galicia (now known as Western Ukraine) in 1944, and, later, against the Slovak anti-Nazi partisans.¹¹ Another large group was the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps, a force of 21,000 men formed by the Germans in occupied Soviet territory from Red Army defectors and POWs in 1943 who were then sent to Yugoslavia to fight Tito. These men were led by the German General Helmuth von Pannwitz who had fought alongside the British

⁸ Pertii Ahonen et al., *People on the Move: Forced Population Movements in Europe in the Second World War and Its Aftermath* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2008), 184-185.

⁹ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 19, 217. ; Bethell, *The Last Secret*, 2. ; Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 151.

¹⁰ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 164. ; Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 257.

¹¹ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 218.

Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean Harold Alexander in the Russian Civil War in 1919.¹²

General Timofey Domanov and his collection of “Cossacks” also surrendered to the British and were ultimately subject to the most violent aspects of repatriation. Domanov, a former Red Army general, grew his force significantly while stationed at Tolmezzo in Northern Italy from 1944 to 1945 as anti-Soviet “White” Russians fled their adopted homeland of Yugoslavia. By the time of their surrender on 8 May 1945, they numbered more than 35,000, with half of this total comprising civilian camp followers.¹³ Among this diverse group were people who had lived between the wars in Belgrade, Munich, Paris and Berlin, with jobs as varied as schoolmasters, taxi drivers, restaurants owners and journalists.¹⁴ Alongside these “Cossacks” were several famous Civil-War generals who had fought against the Soviets, some since 1918. The group included Generals Petr Krasnov (his great-nephew Nikolai Krasnov was also among the Cossacks) and Andrei Shkuro who had fought as part of the White Army alongside the British during the Russian Civil War.¹⁵

After surrendering to British forces, these so-called “Cossacks” were encamped at a former barracks in Peggetz, a small town near Lienz in the Drau Valley in southern Austria and placed under the supervision of the 8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Battalion (Argylls) of the 36th Infantry Brigade. Here they stayed for three weeks, fostering a good relationship with their liaison officer Major “Rusty” Davies.¹⁶ They lived in relative peace with the belief that they might be used by the British in an upcoming war with the USSR, or settled by their Civil-War

¹² Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 156-157. Booker notes on page 217 that during the Civil War Alexander was awarded the “Imperial Order of Saint Anne with Swords” from the Tsarist government while Andrei Shkuro, the repatriated leader of a Cossack training regiment, was made part of the “Order of Bath” by the British.

¹³ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 152, 63. ; Bethell, *The Last Secret*, 78.

¹⁴ Nikolai Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres* (London: Century Hutchinson Limited, 1986), 43-45.

¹⁵ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 84, 20.

¹⁶ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 155. ; Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres*, 45.

ally somewhere in the British Empire.¹⁷ In this they were greatly mistaken. Due to the agreement made at Yalta, and local administrative pragmatism, they were slated to be handed over to Soviet authorities. The operation involved deception, as 1600 Cossack officers were lured into trucks on the premise that they would meet Field Marshall Harold Alexander at Oberdrauburg, a small town, just down the Drau River from Lienz.¹⁸ They were then taken to a caged camp at Spittal (near Oberdrauburg), where they spent one night before being physically forced onto trucks and handed over to their old enemy, the Red Army, on the boundary of Soviet territory at Judenburg. During this process, some men, fearing the harsh punishment they would receive, committed suicide.¹⁹

There was much more widespread fear and panic at Peggetz when the remaining Cossack soldiers and civilians were informed they too would be returned to the USSR. On the morning of 1 June 1945, with the entirety of the camp in the central square celebrating an Orthodox service, Major Davies gave several warnings before sending in a platoon of men with bayonets affixed to force people onto the trucks going to the train station from which they would be sent to the Soviet zone and handed over to the Red Army. British soldiers violently struck individuals with pick handles and rifle butts, and in the ensuing melee, two people suffocated and several more committed suicide. The total number of people killed during this operation is unknown. The 36th Infantry Brigade sent an official report up to 78 Division (their immediate superior in the chain of command) on 3 July 1945 on the nature of the handovers which states that nine Cossacks died, but the Cossack cemetery that still stands on the site of Peggetz Camp holds twenty eight

¹⁷ Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres*, 51.

¹⁸ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 249. ; Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 170-171.

¹⁹ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 249. ; Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres*, 239.

graves.²⁰ By noon, 1749 Cossacks from three camps along the Drau Valley were on board trains to Judenburg.²¹ After the chaos of the first day in Peggetz the British managed to move two more trainloads of people on 2 and 3 June with much less difficulty.²² Overall, in the first week after transfers began with the Cossack officers, 17,702 Cossacks were handed over to the Red Army at Judenburg. The exact fate of all those repatriated is largely unknown. While *Ostarbeiters* and returning prisoners were mostly given light discipline and allowed to return to their homes after a few months working in reconstruction, these anti-Soviets were in a different category.²³ As the Soviet Union viewed them as traitors and collaborators, they were sentenced to varying terms in the Gulag and perhaps the more fortunate were allowed to live in external exile after serving a few years.²⁴ The more prominent figures among the repatriates met a more tragic end. On 17 January 1947, *Pravda*, the Soviet state newspaper, announced the executions by hanging of several Cossack generals and von Pannwitz.²⁵ Many others died in prison camps, though some survived long enough to be freed in 1955 by Nikita Khrushchev's Amnesty Decree.²⁶ Non-Soviet citizens among these survivors were then allowed to leave the Soviet Union. The inclusion of these non-Soviets among repatriates, and the fact that the Soviet authorities executed or imprisoned many of them, provoked interest in the story of repatriations and became grounds for allegations of scandal in the early literature on the topic.

This study begins by addressing the existing scholarship on repatriations from southern Austria in the months after the end of the war and analyzing the shortcomings of previous

²⁰ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 278. This cemetery hosts an annual ceremony on 1 June for the families of survivors, and local Austrians (who share a decidedly negative view of British actions). Locally, Lienz is so closely associated with the repatriations that a monument nearby memorializes the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps even though this group never passed through Lienz and was repatriated from Klagenfurt, nearly 150 kilometres away.

²¹ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 260.

²² Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 268.

²³ Ahonen et al., *People on the Move*, 184-185.

²⁴ Ahonen et al., *People on the Move*, 185.

²⁵ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 236, 195.

²⁶ Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres*, 279.

approaches. In the second chapter I will examine the myriad problems which faced the British military upon their arrival in southern Austria and created considerable chaos and confusion. Not least among them was the large and growing presence of Titoist Partisans in the area. Their claim on Carinthia (southern Austria), presumably supported by Stalin, caused considerable apprehension within the British military, and led to a British plan to forcefully eject their supposed ally from Austria. Problems caused by the presence of Partisans were exacerbated by a number of additional administrative concerns. These included clogged supply lines and lines of communication, the need to feed and house hundreds of thousands of prisoners and refugees, and the sheer diversity of the groups that fell under British control. The overstretched British military sought to discern who amongst them was liable for repatriation and who was not. This process was undertaken with great difficulty, and culminated in conflicting orders and several conferences in order to come to some kind of conclusion. The resulting broad interpretation of repatriation was then applied irregularly and inconsistently.

The third chapter explores the haphazard application of the policy of repatriation. This began with a broad interpretation in which entire groups were designated as either liable for repatriation or not. These included a unit of Caucasians, the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps, and the “Ataman Group,” which encompassed soldiers under General Domanov and their camp followers held at Peggetz. Groups that were deemed non-Soviet for the purpose of repatriation included the Ukrainian Division and the Schutzkorps. These formations were to be treated as a whole despite the fact that each held a minority who should not have been included. This meant that a number of Soviet citizens were retained, and more distressingly, non-Soviets were handed over. In some cases, individuals managed to gain exclusion, but these exemptions were inconsistently given out and depended very much on individual circumstances. The Red Cross,

citing humanitarian reasons, put an end to repatriations based on this broad interpretation when it took over administration of Displaced Persons from the military in early June of 1945, and began screening on an individual level. Prior to this, repatriations took place under the British military administration. Because of the chaotic nature of the circumstances in southern Austria, the military was unable to enact repatriation uniformly. Several military leaders at varying points in the chain of command stated that the conditions at the time in Carinthia resulted in repatriation occurring in a haphazard and less than ideal fashion.

The challenging circumstances facing the British military in southern Austria dictated the way in which repatriation was envisioned and enacted. The presence of hundreds of thousands of prisoners and refugees in an area only loosely controlled by an overstretched British military complicated a situation already tense due to Partisan infiltration in the area. Liability for repatriation and exemptions were handled haphazardly and irregularly because of the logistical and administrative disaster dominating the attention and straining the resources of the British military in the area. Examination of messages and correspondence between several levels of the British military and government held predominantly by the Public Records Office at the National Archives in Kew, London, yields a much more nuanced understanding of events than the polemic works of previous writers attained. My investigation of these documents reveals both the extent of the confusion at the time and the irregular execution of repatriation operations. The inconsistent application of the policy of repatriation was born of military exigency and resulted in thousands of personal tragedies. There is no way to extract the broad and erratic interpretation and enactment of repatriation as a policy from the desperate circumstances in which those who applied it operated. These challenging circumstances produced both the muddled interpretation of repatriation, and its haphazard application.

Chapter One: Historiographic Debate

While writers on the topic of postwar repatriations have contributed incrementally to understanding of the events, none has adequately comprehended the extent to which the circumstances in southern Austria contributed to an irregular application of repatriation. Prior to the opening of pertinent archival information, writers such as Peter Huxley Blythe and Julius Epstein employed the recollections of eye witnesses to piece together a somewhat limited picture of what took place. Nicholas Bethell used documentary evidence once the relevant archives were opened to present a slightly more balanced, but still uneven conception of the repatriations. Nikolai Tolstoy expanded on this work, but sought to expose a conspiracy in which several leading British figures knowingly handed over non-Soviets who were not liable for repatriation. In response, Christopher Booker and the “Cowgill Group,” analyzed further documentary evidence in order to explicitly counter Tolstoy’s narrative, and restore the honour of the targets of Tolstoy’s accusations. These most recent works of scholarship focus on opposing one another, rather than seeking out a more full and balanced perception of how and why repatriations occurred as they did. As a result, neither author sufficiently grasps the severity of the problems facing 5 Corps in southern Austria and the impact these problems had on the haphazard application of repatriations.

Awareness of repatriations only became more widespread after the release of non-Soviet survivors of repatriation from the Gulag in 1955. Survivors of the repatriations who settled in the United Kingdom sought redress from the government they felt had betrayed them. Journalist Peter Huxley-Blythe aided in their cause and in 1958 wrote an unsuccessful petition to the Macmillan Government asking for compensation for years lost in Soviet prison camps as a result

of repatriation.¹ Huxley-Blythe then wrote *The East Came West*, the first published book on the topic of post-Second World War repatriations. Using interviews with survivors, he recorded the history of the Cossack groups repatriated from Austria and attempted to piece together the chronology of the handovers to Soviet authorities. At that time, archives in Britain had not yet been opened and, as a result, Huxley-Blythe's book is decidedly one-sided in its approach. The focus on a Cossack narrative created an unbalanced interpretation and produced several misunderstandings. Huxley-Blythe romanticizes Cossack history and traditions, and focuses on the seemingly "heroic" actions of their leaders. He even relates one story of a White Russian Civil War hero (Nikolai Kulakov) climbing from a hiding place under his home during the Second World War, dusting off his hand-carved prosthetic legs, and storming through his town rousing his fellow Terek Cossacks to fight with the invading Germans against Stalin and the Bolsheviks.² Huxley-Blythe calls the entire process of repatriation from Austria "Operation Keelhaul," when this term related only to one single operation that occurred in Italy much later.³ These misunderstandings extend to the time of the repatriations as well. Following an émigré understanding of the events, Huxley-Blythe accuses General Domanov of betraying his fellow Cossacks to the British in the hopes of securing preferential treatment.⁴ Regarding the enactment of the policy of repatriation, Huxley-Blythe also makes several misguided assertions. In particular, his understanding of the aftermath of initial repatriations from Peggetz is heavily affected by his one-sided source base. Following the perception of his sources, Huxley-Blythe wrote that repatriations stopped only after the British military discovered the presence of non-

¹ Christopher Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy: The Controversy over the Repatriations from Austria* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Limited, 1997), 313.

² Peter J. Huxley-Blythe, *The East Came West* (Shildon UK: Caxton Press, 1964), 25-26.

³ Nicholas Bethell, *The Last Secret: Forcible Repatriation to Russia 1944-1947* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1974), 216.

⁴ Bethell, *The Last Secret*, 127.

Soviet citizens among the Cossack groups.⁵ He also falsely states that screening at Peggetz occurred on 1 and 2 June, when in reality, no such screening took place. In fact, the events of 1 June represent some of the worst scenes of violence in compulsory repatriation.⁶

While archival evidence remained unavailable, Julius Epstein took a more balanced approach. His book, *Operation Keelhaul: The Story of Forced Repatriation from 1944 to the Present*, includes interviews and statements from people involved in both sides of repatriations.⁷ Like Huxley-Blythe, Epstein thought “Operation Keelhaul” referred to all repatriations and began in 1944, even before the Yalta Agreement was signed.⁸ While Epstein includes more British voices in describing repatriations than Huxley-Blythe, still lacking archival evidence, he could not fully comprehend the policy itself, nor its implementation. Utilizing interviews with numerous witnesses, he manages to piece together a fuller picture of events at Peggetz, but could not address broader issues. Epstein argues that the interpretation of the Yalta Agreement that allowed for the use of force originated with Soviet authorities and was merely accepted by the western allies.⁹ In his account, forcible repatriation, as put forward by the Soviets, violated international law, morality, and humanity.¹⁰ He also includes brief descriptions of other instances of repatriation, including operations that sent Russians from the United States to the Soviet Union during the Second World War. In his conclusion, Epstein describes his fight to get American and British archives opened so that more in-depth scholarship could be written about repatriations.

⁵ Bethell, *The Last Secret*, 160-161.

⁶ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 260.

⁷ Julius Epstein, *Operation Keelhaul: The Story of Forced Repatriation from 1944 to the Present* (Old Greenwich, Connecticut: The Devin-Adair Company, 1973), vii, ix.

⁸ Epstein, *Operation Keelhaul*, 1, 11.

⁹ Epstein, *Operation Keelhaul*, 26.

¹⁰ Epstein, *Operation Keelhaul*, 211.

In 1974 Nicholas Bethell published *The Last Secret: Forcible Repatriation to Russia 1944-1947*, the first book on postwar repatriations to include archival sources from the newly opened British Public Record Office. Bethell was able to address several gaps in the contemporary understanding of events, particularly the debates surrounding the creation of the repatriation policy and the British military's perspective on the subsequent operations. He discusses the 1944-1945 debate on whether or not to repatriate Russians found in Europe that occurred between the War Office and the Foreign Office within the War Cabinet. Bethell reveals that the Foreign Office, seeking to placate an ally and maintain good diplomatic relations, supported repatriating all Russians.¹¹ It was additionally concerned that the Soviets might even slow the Red Army's progress through Eastern Europe to put additional pressures on the western allies if they failed to comply.¹² Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden believed the potential damage to Anglo-Soviet relations was too great to risk retaining captured Russians, telling Prime Minister Winston Churchill "[w]e cannot afford to be sentimental about this."¹³ The War Office on the other hand, was more concerned about the effect this policy would have on soldiers in the field, especially if repatriation were applied to unarmed prisoners and civilians.¹⁴ As a result of this interpretation, Bethell blames Eden for forcing the War Cabinet to agree to repatriations and the Foreign Office for being out of their depth and failing to recognize the human cost of the policy.¹⁵ Bethell notes the considerable impact of wartime propaganda on the Foreign Office's decision to support repatriations, arguing that several years of pro-Soviet propaganda hid the true danger that those returned to the Stalinist Soviet Union would face.¹⁶ Bethell claims the impact

¹¹ Bethell, *The Last Secret*, 1.

¹² Bethell, *The Last Secret*, 9-12.

¹³ Bethell, *The Last Secret*, 9.

¹⁴ Bethell, *The Last Secret*, 177.

¹⁵ Bethell, *The Last Secret*, 12, 209.

¹⁶ Bethell, *The Last Secret*, ix.

of pro-Soviet propaganda also affected British treatment of captured Russians. He believes they were viewed as enemy soldiers and traitors to a noble ally.¹⁷

Utilizing the newly opened archival sources, Bethell was able to fill in gaps left by previous interpretations of the repatriations themselves. He was the first to recognize that Operation Keelhaul did not, in fact, refer to all operations involving the handing over of Russians to the Soviet military.¹⁸ Based on the 36th Infantry Brigade Report on Repatriations, Bethell was able to recount, from the British perspective, the story of the Cossacks in southern Austria from capture to handover in far greater detail than had been previously possible. This included the first description of the fictional Oberdrauburg conference for Cossack officers, additional accounts of the violence at Peggetz from the perspective of the British military, and a brief exploration of discussions within the British military in the Mediterranean theatre regarding their interpretation of repatriation as a policy.¹⁹ As a result of a cursory reading of these communications, Bethell argues the orders to repatriate the Cossacks originated from General Charles Keightley, commander of 5 Corps in southern Austria.²⁰ Bethell ascribes to Keightley a very unsympathetic role in repatriations based on a 21 May order defining Soviet citizens liable for return to the Soviet Union.²¹ In this order, Keightley stated that in all cases of doubt regarding the nationality of prisoners, individuals were to be treated as Soviet citizens.²² Bethell blames Keightley for trying to placate Soviet authorities rather than following the intended implementation of the policy.²³ Problematically, this explanation still envisions the repatriation of the Cossacks as somehow external to the Yalta Agreement, or explicitly contrary to the established policy.

¹⁷ Bethell, *The Last Secret*, 92.

¹⁸ Bethell, *The Last Secret*, 194.

¹⁹ Bethell, *The Last Secret*, 96-97.

²⁰ Bethell, *The Last Secret*, 92.

²¹ Bethell, *The Last Secret*, 92. ; Nikolai Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), 253.

²² Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 252.

²³ Bethell, *The Last Secret*, 117.

Bethell noticed in the 36th Infantry Brigade Report that émigrés had been sent back despite orders that seemingly exempted them from the definition of a Soviet citizen, and thus, repatriation.²⁴ He argues that the decision to include émigrés had been opposed by several military commanders at the time, but had been overruled by some mysterious political figure he had not yet been able to identify.²⁵ While Bethell understood the actions of the military in repatriating some Cossacks as necessary to uphold the Yalta Agreement, he believes the inclusion of émigrés and non-Soviets was a breach of the policy.²⁶

Building on Bethell's efforts, Nikolai Tolstoy, a British author of White Russian background and a distant cousin of Leo Tolstoy, expanded the scholarship on repatriations extensively and presented several culprits for the alleged violation of established policy. Former Prime Minister Harold Macmillan bore the brunt of Tolstoy's accusations due to his position as the British Minister Resident at Allied Forces Headquarters Mediterranean in Caserta, Italy, and his roles as both the official liaison between the Churchill Government and the British military, and an advisor to Harold Alexander. In 1974 Tolstoy published *Victims of Yalta*, relying on a great deal of archival records and personal interviews to describe the formation of the policy, the enactment of repatriations, and the fallout for those involved. He notes the concerns that caused the Foreign Office, and Anthony Eden in particular, to recommend repatriation to the War Cabinet. One such concern was that if the German Army heard reports that their soldiers (albeit of Russian origin) were being sent to the Soviet Union, they might carry out reprisals against western prisoners.²⁷ As Germany became less and less powerful, this concern was increasingly

²⁴ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 321-322.

²⁵ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 322.

²⁶ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 323.

²⁷ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 424-425.

disregarded.²⁸ Another concern was that the refusal to repatriate Russians fighting in the German Army could possibly endanger the alliance by alerting the Soviets to differential treatment. To further support this position, Tolstoy repeats Bethell's assertion that the Foreign Office did not want to risk the slow return of British prisoners from Eastern Europe. Tolstoy argues that in making the case for repatriation to satisfy Soviet demands, Eden and the Foreign Office attempted to convince themselves that repatriation was not only the politically expedient course of action, but also morally justified.²⁹ He blames Eden and the civil servants at the Foreign Office for pursuing a ruthless policy that would ensure the return of every last Soviet citizen, regardless of their individual circumstances, to the Soviet Union.³⁰ Tolstoy then provides a detailed account of repatriations of Russians captured in Europe and held in Britain, before moving on to describe the repatriations in southern Austria.

Using documentary sources from the archives, and interviews with soldiers and émigrés involved in repatriations, Tolstoy was able to provide a much more thorough account of the operations themselves than had been written previously. His work clarifies the circumstances of the arrival of the Cossack groups to southern Austria and their establishment of camps along the Drau Valley.³¹ Tolstoy also explains the relationship Major Davies fostered with his charges at Peggetz as the Cossack liaison officer, and the shock Davies felt when he found out that the people in his care were to be sent to the Soviet Union.³² Like Bethell, Tolstoy relies heavily on the report written by the command of the 36th Infantry Brigade to describe the events at Peggetz. He added to this picture by interweaving statements from several eyewitnesses. Lacking a more critical approach to his sources, Tolstoy's resulting narrative reads like a novel, framed by

²⁸ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 51.

²⁹ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 60-61.

³⁰ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 323.

³¹ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 160-161.

³² Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 166, 177.

drama, and filled with passion. At one point, he even creates the entire dialogue of a tense conversation in which Major Davies had to lie to Lieutenant Butlerov, Davies' translator and liaison among the Cossacks.³³ Tolstoy also states that the Cossacks were received in Judenburg not by the army, but by the NKVD (the Soviet security service), though he gives no reason for this belief.³⁴ This more fictionalized style extended into the aftermath of the repatriations as well, for which Tolstoy relies almost entirely on émigré accounts.

Tolstoy recounts the post-repatriation lives of people handed over to the Soviet authorities using interviews with survivors, and a book written by Nikolai Krasnov in 1958 after his release from Soviet prison camps. Tolstoy trusts the narrative this book presents not because of the veracity of the evidence, but because Krasnov wrote that he had promised his grandfather (Petr) to tell the truth.³⁵ He borrows heavily from Krasnov's story without critically engaging with it, or assessing any potential biases within it. Without any evidence, he even suggests that Krasnov, having returned from the Soviet Union to Sweden and eventually Argentina, died there "almost certainly poisoned by Soviet killers."³⁶ On top of credulous reliance on interviews and personal memoirs over other sources, Tolstoy also misread several new pieces of evidence that greatly affected his understanding of how repatriation was applied in southern Austria.

In *Victims of Yalta*, Tolstoy bases his arguments on how he believes repatriation should have been enacted in regards to the Cossacks. He realizes that there were several difficulties in trying to define a "Soviet citizen" for the purposes of repatriation. Because the British did not recognize the Soviet Union's territorial annexations during the period 1939-1940, they excluded Poles, Balts, and people holding Nansen Passports (officially stateless) from being liable for

³³ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 171.

³⁴ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 236.

³⁵ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 194.

³⁶ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 187.

repatriation.³⁷ They defined Soviet citizens as persons coming from within the Soviet Union as it was constituted before the war broke out in 1939.³⁸ Tolstoy realizes that the Russian émigrés who made up part of the Cossack groups were not covered by this definition, but were handed over anyways.³⁹ He therefore states that despite instructions to the contrary, someone deliberately ordered the handover of these émigrés to Soviet authorities. He argues the handover originated from the headquarters of 5 Corps, which he believes would have been aware of all the relevant facts on the ground in the area.⁴⁰ In seeking the source of the misguided orders, Tolstoy misinterpreted Harold Macmillan's role.

In his search for the causes of why émigrés had wrongly, but deliberately, been included in repatriations, Tolstoy focussed on a Macmillan visit to Klagenfurt, Austria, in May 1945. On the morning of 12 May 1945 Macmillan flew from Caserta to Treviso, Italy, to brief General Richard McCreery, Commander of Eighth Army, on several issues they faced in northern Italy and southern Austria.⁴¹ In the afternoon, Macmillan repeated this briefing exercise at Monfalcone, Italy, with General John Harding, the commander of 13 Corps.⁴² After hearing from McCreery about the acute problems in southern Austria, Macmillan decided to fly to Klagenfurt the next day to address General Charles Keightley of 5 Corps.⁴³ Tolstoy states that Macmillan's reason for meeting Keightley was to urge him to transfer Cossacks to Soviet authorities as soon as possible.⁴⁴ To support this idea, Tolstoy notes that Macmillan stated in his memoirs that there were 40,000 "Cossacks and White Russians" captured in the area who needed to be returned.⁴⁵

³⁷ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 134-135.

³⁸ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 135.

³⁹ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 249.

⁴⁰ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 270.

⁴¹ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 171.

⁴² Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 171.

⁴³ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 172.

⁴⁴ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 276.

⁴⁵ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 277.

Tolstoy understood “White Russians” to mean émigrés, even though at the time, this term was also used to differentiate anti-Soviet Russians from “Red Russians,” and was not used exclusively to describe prewar émigrés.⁴⁶ Tolstoy also uses Keightley’s report to Allied Forces Headquarters (AFHQ) of 14 May, in which he states “on advice [of] Macmillan” he had approached Soviet authorities in the area (General Tolbukhin) for the purpose of transferring Cossacks, as evidence that Macmillan knowingly sought to return émigrés to the Soviet Union.⁴⁷ He interprets the lack of discussion on the presence within this group of Civil-War émigrés to mean that their presence was purposefully disguised so that they would be included among those repatriated. In reality, their existence was not fully recognized outside of 5 Corps Command. His misreading of the situation extended to a discussion of the events after the start of the repatriations. Trying to distance Alexander from the handovers, Tolstoy believes the repatriations were stopped because the Red Cross alerted him to the fact that émigrés had wrongly been handed over to Soviet control.⁴⁸ In fact, they protested to McCreery regarding the violence used against repatriates and the undue hardship caused by the lack of adequate administrative measures (including identity checks) in some camps. Tolstoy also notes that on 29 May, a convoy to send Cossacks to the Soviet zone was stopped by the commanders of the unit in charge of the transport to segregate fifty émigrés from those who were within the definition of Soviet citizens.⁴⁹ Tolstoy interprets this to mean that once the mistake of returning émigrés was discovered, repatriations were halted to avoid any additional such mistakes. However, this separation of émigrés was unrelated to Red Cross objections, and occurred prior to their

⁴⁶ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 113.

⁴⁷ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 31-32.

⁴⁸ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 270-271.

⁴⁹ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 245-246.

involvement. Based on Tolstoy's understanding that the repatriations had purposefully included non-Soviet émigrés, he argues that the British could have retained these people to no ill effect.

Tolstoy conjectures that the British military could have screened for non-Soviets, in part because the Soviets did not even demand the return of émigrés. Contradictorily, he then states that only one of the Cossack generals they specifically demanded fit the definition of a "Soviet citizen."⁵⁰ Tolstoy believes the segregation of fifty émigrés mid-transport on 29 May shows that another course was possible and that most, if not all, émigrés might have been "saved" from repatriation in this way.⁵¹ Similarly, Tolstoy argues that a complete individual screening of the Cossacks was possible and would have been "easy," although he offers no reasoning as to how this might have been done.⁵² In fact, the Brigade Report on which he relies so heavily states that a full screening for individual non-Soviets was not possible because of the lack of documentation, and the need for speed and secrecy in the evacuations.⁵³ Tolstoy recognizes that screening of some type was done in the area, as the Ukrainian Division (which included a large number of former Polish citizens) and the Schutzkorps (made up mostly of émigrés who left Russia at the end of the Civil War) were both exempted from repatriation.⁵⁴ Tolstoy argues, based on an émigré source, the majority of Cossacks officers were émigrés who had never been Soviet citizens, but he does not assess this source for potential biases.

The presence of émigrés among the Cossacks was not well understood at the levels of military command that made decisions regarding who was to be kept and who was to be handed over.⁵⁵ Tolstoy did not recognize that screening feasible at the time was not done on an

⁵⁰ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 250-251.

⁵¹ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 248.

⁵² Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 263.

⁵³ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 263.

⁵⁴ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 256-257.

⁵⁵ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 322.

individual level but rather of entire units. The Ukrainian Division and the Schutzkorps were judged to consist of mostly non-Soviet citizens and were retained, while the Cossacks at Peggetz were judged as a group to be mostly Soviets and were consequently returned under the Yalta Agreement. Tolstoy uses the fact that screening was done in a very broad sense to argue that it could, and should, have been done on an individual basis, which would have required far more manpower than was possible at the time. Tolstoy also uses the retention of certain groups from outside prewar borders of the Soviet Union to argue that British concerns regarding Soviet reactions to perceived contraventions of the Yalta Agreement were unfounded.⁵⁶

Tolstoy states that because the Soviets did not make any issue of British interpretation of who qualified as a “Soviet citizen,” they would not have taken any kind of drastic action if Cossacks had been exempted as well.⁵⁷ This analysis is reliant on a Cold War understanding of an antagonistic relationship between the western allies and the Soviet Union. Tolstoy makes this argument assuming that the British wanted to keep the Cossacks in Austria, but at the time, their focus was to adhere to the Yalta Agreement and maintain cooperative Anglo-Soviet relations. Tolstoy hypothesizes that Soviet leader Joseph Stalin would not have protested if repatriations were halted because he would not want to publically expose the fact that thousands of Russians had taken up arms against the Soviet Union and refused to return there.⁵⁸ Tolstoy’s interpretation of repatriation, as expounded in *Victims of Yalta*, is reliant upon the assumption that the bulk of the Cossacks were non-Soviet citizens as defined by the British military, and therefore outside of the Yalta Agreement.⁵⁹ Like Bethell, Tolstoy postulates the existence of some kind of sinister

⁵⁶ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 334-335.

⁵⁷ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 334-335.

⁵⁸ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 424.

⁵⁹ Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, 264.

force on the British side that, against the policy set down in the Yalta Agreement, pushed the inclusion of émigrés upon military commanders in southern Austria.⁶⁰

After *Victims of Yalta*, Tolstoy continued his search for the political agents behind the postwar repatriations from Austria and uncovered parallel operations that involved handing over of Yugoslavs to Titoist forces. This discovery suggested to Tolstoy that the two “ghastly mistakes” could not possibly be a coincidence.⁶¹ In *the Minister and the Massacres*, he posits that rather than being the result of an oversight or error, the Russian repatriations were part of a deliberate conspiracy by Macmillan to ensure that the maximum number of people, including émigrés and civilians, were returned to the Soviet Union.⁶² This alleged conspiracy included hiding the presence of non-Soviet citizens among the Cossack groups from higher commands, deliberately disobeying orders to screen Cossacks for any non-Soviets, utilizing unauthorized force in order to effect repatriations, enlisting General Keightley in order to complete these tasks, and altering the documentary evidence in order to shift the blame onto Alexander. The first step in the supposed conspiracy was Macmillan’s visit to Klagenfurt on 13 May 1945 to meet with General Keightley. Initially, Tolstoy placed minimal importance on this meeting, but now he ascribed to it a much more sinister purpose. He argues that Macmillan flew to 5 Corps HQ in Klagenfurt on his own initiative and with the sole purpose of discussing the return of Cossacks to Soviet hands.⁶³ Tolstoy bases this interpretation on a telegram Macmillan sent to the Foreign Office on 15 May reporting his visits to Generals McCreery and Harding at two other military headquarters in the area, but not his meeting with Keightley.⁶⁴ Macmillan reported that Keightley

⁶⁰ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 31.

⁶¹ Nikolai Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres* (London: Century Hutchinson Limited, 1986), xvii.

⁶² Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres*, xv.

⁶³ Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres*, 67.

⁶⁴ Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres*, 78.

had found a pocket of thirty Cossacks, but in his diary, Macmillan wrote 30,000.⁶⁵ Tolstoy read this discrepancy as a purposeful deception that then coloured the rest of his narrative. In Tolstoy's interpretation, Macmillan's concealed information and alleged secret orders extended to several aspects of the repatriations and multiple levels of British military command.

Tolstoy believes that Macmillan, with the goal of returning as many Cossacks as possible, sought to include any émigrés among the Cossack groups, and specifically the White Army generals. Tolstoy argues that Macmillan, working with individuals at 5 Corps, deceived Eighth Army and AFHQ, and concealed the presence of émigrés by suggesting all Cossacks were Soviet citizens and referring to them as such.⁶⁶ The failure to mention the presence of émigrés suggested to Tolstoy, already under the assumption that a great conspiracy had been enacted, that this was intentional and done to maintain the idea that all Cossacks were Soviet citizens and therefore liable for repatriation. Further, Tolstoy alleges that orders to screen for non-Soviets were deliberately set aside in order to ensure all Cossacks were handed over. He believes that Keightley hid the fact that screening was not done from Alexander and McCreery because Macmillan had given them an oral directive to disregard screening orders.⁶⁷ Tolstoy then suggests that the written record was doctored to appear as though some screening had taken place in order to hide the fact that non-Soviets and émigrés were transferred to Soviet control.⁶⁸ He uses the inclusion of supposed false screening orders in the documentary record to suggest that the lack of screening was part of a deliberate conspiracy and not related to any pragmatic concerns in the area.⁶⁹ Tolstoy continued to write under the assumption that screening could only

⁶⁵ Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres*, 227. This telegram was recorded incorrectly, as Booker points out, and the actual figure was "30k".

⁶⁶ Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres*, 210, 313.

⁶⁷ Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres*, 316.

⁶⁸ Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres*, 254, 255.

⁶⁹ Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres*, 317.

mean on an individual basis. Once he created a narrative based on conspiracy, he was able to distort the actions of central figures into a dichotomy of what Christopher Booker called “heroes” and “villains.”⁷⁰ He then alleges that a second conspiracy took place, one that involved his “villains” hiding their involvement and forging documentary evidence to blame his “heroes.”

According to Tolstoy’s interpretation of events, Keightley and his Brigadier General Staff Toby Low were “villains” for allowing the handovers despite orders to the contrary, and deceiving their superiors regarding the presence of non-Soviets among the Cossacks. Keightley allegedly applied to reverse a ban on the use of force in repatriation operations in order to ensure the handover of Cossacks, proceeded with preparations for handovers against established policy, disobeyed orders from AFHQ and “consistently deceiv[ed] his superiors over the non-Soviet status of many Cossacks.”⁷¹ Tolstoy similarly accuses Low of purposefully concealing the presence of old émigrés among the Cossacks from AFHQ by consistently referring to Cossacks as Soviet citizens, and incorrectly including Cossack groups within the definition of Soviet nationals.⁷² These accusations relied on Tolstoy’s belief that everyone in the area knew of the famous White Russian generals and the distinction between Soviet nationals and old émigrés. This assumption also led Tolstoy to argue that the “villains” knowingly and wilfully acted contrary to the accepted interpretation of repatriation as it was envisioned by the policy’s creators. He ascribes to the actions of his “villains” a sinister tint that greatly colours his understanding of events.

In contrast to Keightley and Low, Tolstoy presents Alexander in the most positive light possible as a “hero” for seemingly attempting at all costs to retain Cossacks on humanitarian grounds. He claims that Alexander sought to move all Cossacks to the American zone (under

⁷⁰ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 326.

⁷¹ Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres*, 220, 228.

⁷² Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres*, 313, 212, 221.

control of Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force: SHAEF) in order to save them from being sent to the Soviet Union. Tolstoy argues that this goal was disrupted by Low and Keightley at every turn.⁷³ He interprets every action and communication sent from AFHQ in a way that assigns Alexander a very sympathetic role, believing that Alexander knew about the status of the Cossacks and for humanitarian reasons wanted to prevent their handover to the Soviet forces by moving them to SHAEF control.⁷⁴ In actuality, Alexander wanted to “clear the decks”⁷⁵ in the area, by repatriating those who were liable for return, and sending everyone else to the American zone under SHAEF. Tolstoy assumes Alexander knew some of the Cossacks were not liable for repatriation and was sympathetic to their unique position. He then uses this assumption to shade his understanding of Alexander’s motivations. Tolstoy even goes so far as to list among his “surface facts” of events that “Alexander consistently opposed the return of any Cossacks... all his actions being designed to prevent such an action.”⁷⁶ Based on this characterization of Alexander as a “hero,” Tolstoy states that his purpose in writing *The Minister and the Massacres* was to clear Alexander of allegations of wrongdoing and “bring some residue of justice to victims.”⁷⁷ Tolstoy believes his “villains” had falsified evidence to shift blame to Alexander. In an attempt to rectify this, he sought to blame those whom he perceived to be the correct people.⁷⁸ Tolstoy’s goal is problematic because it assumes the policy was intentionally applied incorrectly and that some singular figure was to blame.

Tolstoy’s narrative of a “Klagenfurt conspiracy” relies on a number of assumptions that cannot be sustained in a more thorough reading of evidence. Since he, with a Russian émigré

⁷³ Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres*, 217.

⁷⁴ Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres*, 334, 127.

⁷⁵ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 199.

⁷⁶ Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres*, 334.

⁷⁷ Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres*, xxii.

⁷⁸ Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres*, 328.

background, recognized the names of the famed Civil-War generals, he believes everyone in the military at the time would have known them and realized that they were not Soviet citizens. He then extends this idea to assume that the presence of non-Soviets among the Cossack groups was well known at the time, and that the failure to mention them in communications must be a deliberate attempt to hide their existence from higher commands. Once Tolstoy began on this skewed interpretation of events, the chaotic nature of the time allowed him to force evidence into a much more sinister narrative than can be sustained. After establishing a distorted view of the main “villains,” his narrative discredits any evidence that counters his arguments by alleging that such evidence was somehow part of a secondary conspiracy, enacted to hide the first.

Tolstoy’s allegations that Macmillan and Low’s actions amounted to war crimes led businessman Brigadier Anthony Cowgill to create an informal committee devoted to examining these charges. This group included Thomas Brimelow, a junior official at the Foreign Office during the formation of the policy of repatriation; Brigadier Edward Tryon-Wilson, the senior surviving member of Keightley’s staff (after Toby Low, now known as Lord Aldington); and journalist Christopher Booker.⁷⁹ The group sought to come to a fuller understanding of the context surrounding the repatriations from southern Austria, and what was in the minds of British commanders making decisions at the time.⁸⁰ A libel trial ran concurrent to their investigation in which Lord Aldington fought accusations Tolstoy made in a pamphlet entitled “War Crimes and the Wardenship of Winchester College” which questioned the suitability of Aldington to be considered for a position at Winchester College.⁸¹ The trial, which in 1989 found Tolstoy guilty, resulted in what was then the largest libel settlement in British history: £1.5 million. While the Soviet Union had undergone de-Stalinization, and Germans were debating

⁷⁹ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 95.

⁸⁰ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 97.

⁸¹ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 340.

Historikerstreit (how to understand Nazi Germany as part of Germany's past), this settlement signalled that Britain would not engage in any similar re-evaluation of wartime actions, and certainly not to the extent of recognizing even partial complicity in war crimes. In 1990, the "Cowgill Group" published their final report of the repatriations, written by Booker, finding that Tolstoy's version of events had been entirely misleading.⁸² They argue no "Klagenfurt Conspiracy" had taken place, Macmillan had served admirably, and the actions of 5 Corps were known and approved up the chain of command all the way to Allied Forces Headquarters.⁸³

Booker, in *A Looking-Glass Tragedy: The Controversy over the Repatriations from Austria in 1945*, further expanded on the report's findings while also examining the controversy thirty years later. Booker argues vehemently against Tolstoy's interpretation of events by pointing out several points at which Tolstoy did not account for the surrounding context and what was actually known at the time by British decision makers. This includes expounding on British responsibility for a massive number of POWs and refugees in the area, as well as concern for a growing number of Titoist Partisans claiming southern Austria and northern Italy as part of Yugoslavia.⁸⁴ By tracing awareness of the émigré minority among various Cossack groups and the shifting definition of "Soviet citizen," Booker argues against Tolstoy's idea that the émigré presence was well known by British commanders. Booker disagrees with Tolstoy's understanding of the end of repatriations from Austria as well. While Tolstoy believes Alexander had personally put an end to repatriations, Booker discovered that the origin of the orders halting operations were actually the direct result of Red Cross intervention. Booker concludes that based on the circumstances in southern Austria as they were understood at the time and the limited knowledge of the presence of émigrés among the Cossack groups, the British military acted

⁸² Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 415.

⁸³ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 121-122, 134.

⁸⁴ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 46.

correctly and in accordance with allied policy.⁸⁵ He argues that Tolstoy came to a completely misguided conception of this policy by failing to understand the context in southern Austria.

In countering Tolstoy's argument, Booker maintains that the most critical issue facing the British military in the region was not the Cossacks, but the logistical nightmare caused in large part by the significant and growing presence of Titoist Partisans occupying the area and claiming parts of southern Austria and northern Italy as part of a Greater Yugoslavia. This problem influenced every decision made at the highest levels, and governed their approach to repatriations.⁸⁶ Despite an agreement with the USSR dividing Austria into zones of occupation, British commanders feared the potential of a military conflict with Tito in which his Partisans might be supported by Stalin and the Red Army.⁸⁷ Preparation for any armed conflict with Tito was further complicated by the massive numbers of civilian refugees and surrendered enemy personnel in the area who needed to be cared for and fed. Furthermore, this all needed to be done using a narrow supply line running from Italy on roads clogged with more people fleeing northwards.⁸⁸

Booker recognizes that southern Austria had become a clearing house of sorts, as various military and civilian groups were pressed into a smaller and smaller area. Encircling southern Austria were units from the British military, the American Army (under SHAEF control), and the Red Army. Within these confines there were French, Belgian, English and South African prisoners; Italian, Hungarian and Spanish refugees; and a steady flow of civilians and German POWs fleeing northwards out of Yugoslavia. There existed no single organization capable of

⁸⁵ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 175.

⁸⁶ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 149.

⁸⁷ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 169.

⁸⁸ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 46.

dealing with them all.⁸⁹ At one point, 5 Corps was expecting to feed and shelter over a million refugees and POWs. The situation was, in short, an administrative nightmare, into which various Cossack formations unfortunately fell. Booker notes that Keightley had only 25,000 men controlling an area fifty miles wide and 100 miles long.⁹⁰ This situation was untenable, and British commanders recognized the need to clear the area in order to be militarily effective. It was under the shadow of these much broader concerns that the story of Cossack repatriations took place. Without a full understanding of this crisis, Tolstoy painted the issue of Cossacks among those captured as dominating the mindsets of British commanders. Booker recontextualizes this period in order to place Macmillan's meeting with Keightley in Klagenfurt within its proper historical setting: one in which a political advisor met with a military general to discuss the logistical crisis facing the latter. Tolstoy, without knowledge of the broader context of repatriations, assumed this meeting could only have had a sinister and secret purpose.

Booker also rejects Tolstoy's assumptions regarding the extent and timing of the British military's knowledge that émigrés were amongst the Cossacks. Tolstoy believed that mention of "White Russians" in Macmillan's diaries meant Macmillan was aware of the presence of émigrés in southern Austria, but Booker argues that the term was used at the time to denote anti-Soviet Russians in general and was only found to explicitly refer to the Civil-War émigrés in one instance: a letter written in May by a Red Cross worker in Italy, and not connected to the Cossacks in southern Austria.⁹¹ Once Tolstoy equated the two meanings, every mention of White Russians who, understood to be Soviet citizens, and following the Yalta Agreement, had to be returned to the Soviet Union, could be twisted to suggest a more sinister interpretation that deliberately included émigrés. Booker believes that more than anything else the inclusion of

⁸⁹ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 163, 180.

⁹⁰ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 167.

⁹¹ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 173, 174.

émigrés amongst repatriated Cossacks allowed the story of repatriations to become a scandal.⁹² Booker also argues that Tolstoy viewed the famous émigré generals as household names and therefore refused to believe that British commanders at the time did not recognize their obvious émigré status.⁹³ When Tolstoy discovered military messages referring to Cossack groups without mentioning the émigré status of their prominent leaders, he believed this omission was the result of purposeful subterfuge on the part of some British 5 Corps commanders to include people not strictly liable for repatriation.⁹⁴ There had been discussions among British military units regarding who exactly was liable for repatriation, and exceptions were made, but Tolstoy assumed émigrés were the subjects of these discussions. Booker sought to rectify this by addressing the shifting definition of Soviet citizen and arguing that the real purpose of finding a workable definition was actually to exclude non-Soviets coming from territories the Soviet Union took over at the beginning of the war.

Tolstoy discovered messages between British military units discussing who among captured formations were to be classed as Soviet citizens and sent (back) to the Soviet Union, but based on his theory that émigrés were included counter to the existing policy, he believed these orders setting out exclusions to repatriation were actually meant to apply to émigrés.⁹⁵ Specifically, Tolstoy, using references in other documents to a “6 May” letter, posited that this message from AFHQ to Eighth Army stated unequivocally that émigrés were to be exempted from repatriation. Booker, however, found this actual letter and realized that the date “6 May” had actually been corrupted from “6 Mar” and applied months prior to the discovery of Cossack

⁹² Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 432-433.

⁹³ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 326.

⁹⁴ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 326.

⁹⁵ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 98-99.

groups in southern Austria.⁹⁶ Booker explains that this letter made no mention of émigrés at all, and only explicitly excluded from repatriation people who came from areas seized by the Soviet Union in 1939-1940.⁹⁷ This letter defined Soviet citizens as “all persons coming from within USSR boundaries as constituted before outbreak of the current war. All persons coming from West of that border had Baltic or Polish nationality unless there is evidence in particular cases that they have acquired Soviet citizenship by their own voluntary act.”⁹⁸ So rather than excluding émigrés, as Tolstoy thought, Booker argues that this initial definition of a Soviet citizen was only meant to exempt other groups (i.e., Poles, Balts, and western Ukrainians) from repatriation. Booker also recognized that this was not the final definition of a Soviet citizen used by the British military in southern Austria. From 6 March 1945 to the repatriations themselves, this definition went through several iterations, none of which explicitly excluded émigrés.

While the Yalta Agreement bound the British to return Soviet citizens to the USSR, it did not specify who qualified as a Soviet citizen. Since Britain did not recognize Soviet claims to territorial gains made at the outset of the war, this greatly complicated repatriation operations. Contrary to Tolstoy’s assertions that the definition of a Soviet citizen explicitly excluded émigrés from return to the Soviet Union, Booker notes that the shifting definition only ever explicitly excluded certain other nationalities. A 19 February instruction to Macmillan, which was later used as the basis for the 6 March letter noted above, used a definition that only excluded people from annexed areas from repatriation and stated that people with undoubted Soviet citizenship were to be repatriated irrespective of their individual wishes.⁹⁹ According to a supplement to the 6 March letter sent a day later: “It is not the policy of the British Government to encourage any

⁹⁶ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 133, 98.

⁹⁷ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 99.

⁹⁸ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 98-99.

⁹⁹ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 219.

of these people who become a British responsibility to put forward claims that they are NOT Soviet citizens.”¹⁰⁰ So rather than excluding émigrés as Tolstoy thought, this letter actually made it easier for non-Soviets of any type to be included among those slated for repatriation. On 21 May 1945 Brigadier Low called a conference at 5 Corps HQ to decide who was liable for repatriation. The resulting decision labelled four groups and formations “Soviet citizens” for the purpose of repatriation (including Cossack groups and German officers).¹⁰¹ Booker argues this order shows that decisions were made in very broad terms, and meant to apply to groups, rather than to individuals.¹⁰² If individuals did press their case, the definition that was to apply was that “any individual who, at the time of joining the German forces or a formation fighting with the German forces was living within the 1938 borders of the USSR would be treated as a Soviet national for the purpose of transfer.”¹⁰³ Here again, Booker notes that even this definition (seemingly using 1938 to denote “prewar”) does not explicitly refer to émigrés or what to do with such people. The same order, however, included the caveat that “[a]ny individual, although of Russian blood who, prior to joining the German forces had not been in the USSR since 1930 will not, until further orders be treated as a Soviet national.”¹⁰⁴ Booker attempts to explain this away by arguing this denotes some knowledge at the Corps level of émigrés being ruled out of the definition of a Soviet citizen, but that there was no evidence to suggest absolutely everyone in 5 Corps was aware of the presence of émigrés amongst the Cossacks.¹⁰⁵ Yet the commanders who decided who was liable for repatriation, on at least some level, had to have been aware of this. The exemption of people who had been out of the Soviet Union since 1930 suggests that

¹⁰⁰ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 133.

¹⁰¹ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 222.

¹⁰² Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 226.

¹⁰³ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 223.

¹⁰⁴ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 223.

¹⁰⁵ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 223, 224.

these commanders realized there were émigrés in 5 Corps' area who were not liable for repatriation. There was no reason to include this clause otherwise. Booker also notes the complicating role these imprecise definitions of who was liable for repatriation played in the end of repatriations because of the involvement of the Red Cross.

While Tolstoy argues Alexander ended repatriations from southern Austria, Booker found evidence that the Red Cross was the primary instigator in ending broadly interpreted repatriation operations. The arrival in Peggetz of a member of the Displaced Persons branch of the Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories (AMGOT)¹⁰⁶ on 3 June sparked the intervention of the Red Cross. Enid Pearce, a Red Cross official, was disturbed by her discovery of inmates of the camp, still injured from violent repatriations two days earlier and lamenting their forceful separation from family members. This was equalled by her horror that prisoners were marched off to transports without even a basic check of nationalities and identities.¹⁰⁷ Pearce sent a message to her supervisor, Joan Couper, who herself was mortified to discover an army order that required the return of Russian civilians to the Soviet Union, despite obvious evidence that there were non-Soviets among those repatriated.¹⁰⁸ Couper's protests rose through the Red Cross and the British military, ultimately reaching McCreery at Eighth Army HQ. Upon hearing these concerns, McCreery sent a letter to 5 Corps HQ saying hardships had occurred during repatriations because of the inclusion of non-Soviets and the separation of family members. McCreery stated that 5 Corps had "handled their task with skill and competence given the difficulties involved, but that no more repatriations were to occur without full classification

¹⁰⁶ AMGOT was responsible for governing and administering the inhabitants of occupied territories once the military had secured the area. This included collecting taxes, administering justice, stabilizing infrastructure, and maintaining order. Lord Rennel of Rodd, "Allied Military Government in Occupied Territory," *International Affairs* 20, no. 3 (July 1944): 315.

¹⁰⁷ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 268.

¹⁰⁸ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 269.

of displaced persons within camps still under Corps control.”¹⁰⁹ This resulted in the retention of more than 2000 prisoners originally slated for repatriation.¹¹⁰ Booker argues that it was this, rather than a visit from Alexander, that ended the indiscriminate repatriations in southern Austria, but maintains that prior to Red Cross involvement, no one had considered any kind of complete check of the nationalities of repatriates.¹¹¹ While Booker re-evaluates Tolstoy’s narrative regarding the end of the broad interpretation of repatriation as it was applied in southern Austria, he still argues that throughout this time period the British military, having limited knowledge of the groups it held, acted completely within the bounds of the repatriation policy.

Booker consistently opposes Tolstoy’s interpretation of events regarding repatriation as it was applied in southern Austria. Where Tolstoy saw conspiracy and scandal, Booker sees a challenging situation handled expertly by military command and a policy correctly enacted as it was intended. In particular, Booker points to the meeting between Macmillan and Keightley which Tolstoy had made so much of and believes that “[w]ithin the terms of what anyone present knew, their conclusions as to what should be done were entirely correct and in strict accord with allied policy.”¹¹² This belies a critical nuance though; Booker argues the military acted correctly within an interpretation of repatriation without fully grappling with the multiple ways in which this interpretation could be understood. Strictly speaking, émigrés were most certainly not within any definition of a Soviet citizen utilized by the British military, but many were still sent to the Soviet Union. Booker attempts to justify the inclusion of émigrés among repatriates based on the idea that there was nothing to suggest that absolutely everyone at 5 Corps was aware of the

¹⁰⁹ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 271, 272.

¹¹⁰ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 272.

¹¹¹ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 279.

¹¹² Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 175.

émigré contingent.¹¹³ Booker adds critical context to the story of repatriations by describing the chaotic situation at the time, but he does not acknowledge that those circumstances led to an equally chaotic interpretation of the policy of repatriation itself.

While Tolstoy largely ignored the context of repatriation, Booker emphasizes it in order to justify the actions of the British military. Neither approach fully accounts for the way in which the chaos of the time affected the interpretations of the policy as it was enacted. Tolstoy used evidence selectively in order to craft a narrative of scandal and conspiracy. Booker counters much of this with a fuller approach to evidence in order to craft his own narrative (purposefully in opposition to Tolstoy), to show how, based on what was known at the time, the British military acted correctly. Booker, seeking to vindicate the men Tolstoy viewed as “conspirators,” does not recognize the divergent orders issued by 5 Corps, and the inconsistent ways in which those orders were subsequently enacted. Booker rejects Tolstoy’s idea that Alexander brought about the end of broad-brushed interpretation of repatriation by describing the involvement of the Red Cross, but does not emphasize the fact that the Red Cross, without the responsibilities of the military, interpreted repatriation in a vastly more individual sense. Booker notes many of the more general flaws in Tolstoy’s understanding of the policy of repatriation, though he seeks to justify British actions as proper within the policy itself.

The work of these writers influenced several other scholars who have touched on the subject of repatriations in their own work. Prior to the creation of the “Cowgill Group,” Tolstoy, by virtue of his extensive research at the time, was the leading authority on repatriations. As a result, the literature written between 1977 and 1990 tends to side with his interpretation of events. Mark R. Elliott, in his book *Pawns of Yalta: Soviet Refugees and America’s Role in Their Repatriation*, agrees with Tolstoy’s assertions that the British military handed over repatriates to

¹¹³ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 224.

the NKVD, and had against policy included émigrés.¹¹⁴ Douglas Botting, in *The Aftermath: Europe* also agrees with Tolstoy's arguments that the British military knew that Soviet authorities were killing repatriates, but continued to send them to their deaths. He villainizes the British troops involved for the violence and deception used against the Cossacks in an effort to depict the British in the most negative light possible.¹¹⁵ After Booker's work entered the historiography, subsequent writers have tended to fall into either his, or Tolstoy's camp. Modris Eksteins, writing in 1999, follows Tolstoy's suggestion that Alexander wanted to help the Cossacks and was particularly bothered by their situation because he had fought among them in the Russian Civil War.¹¹⁶ Katy Long discusses the repatriations briefly in *The Point of No Return: Refugees, Rights, and Repatriation*, and notes the work of Bethell, Epstein, and Tolstoy, but fails to mention or cite that of the "Cowgill Group," or Booker.¹¹⁷ On the other side of the debate, Ben Shephard, writing in 2011, follows Booker's interpretation of events. He notes the importance of the Red Cross in meeting McCreery and ending repatriations, and directly criticizes Tolstoy's theory of a conspiracy involving Macmillan and Low.¹¹⁸ Similarly, Alice Hills, writing in 2000, notes that there was no conspiracy as Tolstoy believed, and the proper chain of command had been followed.¹¹⁹ Unfortunately, neither writer, nor their camps has recognized the extent to which military constraints dictated the very broad interpretation that was then haphazardly enacted.

¹¹⁴ Mark R. Elliott, *Pawns of Yalta: Soviet Refugees and America's Role in Their Repatriation* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 104, 201.

¹¹⁵ Douglas Botting and the Editors of Time-Life Books, *The Aftermath: Europe* (Chicago: Time-Life Books, 1983), 87.

¹¹⁶ Modris Eksteins, *Walking Since Daybreak: A Story of Eastern Europe, World War II and The Heart of Our Century* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 141.

¹¹⁷ Katy Long, *The Point of No Return: Refugees, Rights, and Repatriation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 65.

¹¹⁸ Ben Shephard, *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 82, 83, 422n.

¹¹⁹ Alice Hills, *Britain and the Occupation of Austria, 1943-45* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000), 153.

There was no grand conspiracy as Tolstoy alleges, and repatriation was not applied as consistently or properly as Booker envisions. Based on the trying conditions at the time, the British military did what they felt was necessary to maintain control, and in doing so they interpreted the policy in a way that caused undue suffering among people who strictly speaking were not liable for repatriation. While Booker recognizes the chaotic circumstances facing the British military, he does not fully account for the extent to which these circumstances affected the way in which repatriation was enacted. Booker argues despite the chaotic situation in southern Austria, the policy was loosely, though correctly, applied. I argue it was because of the chaotic situation that the policy was applied in an equally chaotic way. This confusion more than coloured the background of the repatriations; to the British military, it necessitated them.

Chapter Two: Chaos and Confusion

As the Second World War ended in Europe, British authorities encountered several broad concerns that affected their approach in planning for the occupation and administration of the Austria. Soviet forces had been first to arrive in the country, capturing Vienna on 13 April 1945, and British planners feared they may attempt to dominate allied administrative efforts.¹ The allies had agreed upon a tripartite occupation of Austria, and the principle that Austria was to be treated as a victim of German aggression, and liberated rather than defeated.² Despite these general agreements, the country lacked a solidified and detailed occupation plan. British strategies to address this issue were hindered by the unknown position Soviets would take on specific occupation matters.³ Prior to arriving in Austria, British military authorities also had no knowledge of the extent of the physical war damage in Austria, further limiting their ability to plan their occupation.⁴ Adding to concerns was the fact that before the end of the war, British civil administrators were entirely devoted to Italian concerns. As a result, they were divided across the two countries with a mountain range between them, leading to an initial staff shortage in Austria.⁵ Once they arrived in Austria, British troops found problems in southern Austria were particularly acute.

When the war in Europe came to an end, a large number of people found themselves compressed into relatively undamaged areas in southern Austria. They included soldiers, civilians, and refugees representing numerous nationalities who had fought on all sides of the

¹ F.S.V. Donnison, *Civil Affairs Military Government North-West Europe 1944-1946* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1961), 286-287.

² Alice Hills, *Britain and the Occupation of Austria, 1943-45* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd.), 1.

³ Hills, *Britain and the Occupation of Austria*, 68-69, 148.

⁴ Hills, *Britain and the Occupation of Austria*, 107.

⁵ Hills, *Britain and the Occupation of Austria*, 149-150.

conflict. On the day the war ended, 8 May 1945, men of 5 Corps, which was part of the British Eighth Army, arrived in southern Austria.⁶ Within a month they would oversee repatriation efforts in the midst of Yugoslav Partisan's infiltration, with overstretched administrative responsibilities and the looming threat of conflict with at least one ally. The chaotic and confused atmosphere they encountered greatly affected their application of repatriation policies. In southern Austria the situation for 5 Corps was complicated by the presence of Titoist Partisans, who had traversed the mountains into Austria from the Italian region of Venezia Giulia, and claimed both territories as part of a Greater Yugoslavia. 5 Corps' concerns were further exacerbated by a lack of cooperation from Britain's two allies, with the Soviet Union supporting Tito's claims and the United States initially refusing to get involved in Balkan affairs. The proximity and number of Partisans in the area compounded several considerable administrative problems for the British. 5 Corps operated with limited supply lines, and lines of communication which were already clogged with soldiers and civilians alike. This limited occupation force was responsible for administering hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war and refugees across a large area. Adding to this chaos was the presence of a number of anti-Soviet "Russian" groups that contained Soviets citizens who, in keeping with the Yalta Agreement, needed to be repatriated to the Soviet Union. The heterogeneous composition of these groups created significant problems for the already overstretched 5 Corps, resulting in a great deal of difficulty defining who exactly was liable for repatriation and who was exempt. Only after AFHQ issued conflicting orders, and varying levels of the British military held multiple conferences to sort out the confusion, did the British military arrive at a working definition of who was to be handed over to Soviet authorities. The outcome of this process was a uniquely broad interpretation of

⁶ Christopher Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy: The Controversy over the Repatriations from Austria* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Limited, 1997), 149.

repatriation than had been enacted elsewhere. Previously, American and British authorities had formed screening boards to decipher on an individual basis who was liable for compulsory repatriation.⁷ In southern Austria though, this more broad understanding of repatriation resulted in a number of non-Soviets being sent to the Soviet Union who, strictly speaking, were exempt from this treatment. The administrative nightmare began for 5 Corps as soon as they arrived in southern Austria.⁸

On 9 May 1945, Harold Macmillan reported to the Foreign Office that Tito's men had traversed from northern Italy (Venezia Giulia) into southern Austria with the intention of claiming the territory through *de facto* possession of the Klagenfurt area.⁹ He stated that the situation had become embarrassing for local British commanders, who felt it best not to use force, but were concerned that incidents may occur or be provoked. Macmillan believed Field Marshall Alexander at AFHQ was nearing a time when he would have to decide whether or not to "close [the] Austrian frontier to Yugoslavs and eject them from the positions into which they [had] infiltrated."¹⁰ The possibility of military action against a supposed ally clearly demonstrates the seriousness with which Macmillan viewed their unwanted presence. Furthermore, Macmillan asked that the Foreign Office contact the Soviet government to alert them to the fact that Tito's incursions into the area contravened the joint Russian, Italian, French,

⁷ Jason Kendall Moore, "Between Expediency and Principle: U.S. Repatriation Policy toward Russian Nationals, 1944-1949," *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 386.

⁸ Most sources presented here come from Foreign Office (FO) and War Office (WO) records at The National Archives of the UK in Kew, London. All sources have been reproduced in facsimile in a volume of "Key Papers" accompanying the Cowgill Report (authored by Christopher Booker). Anthony Cowgill, Thomas Brimelow, and Christopher Booker. *The Repatriations from Austria in 1945: The Documentary Evidence Reproduced in Full from British, American, German, and Yugoslav Sources*. London: Sinclair-Stevenson Limited, 1990. For specificity, and where appropriate, I have included both an archival reference and where each source can be found as a "Key Paper" in Cowgill's sourcebook.

⁹ The National Archives (TNA): FO 371/48813. Key Paper 58.

¹⁰ TNA: FO 371/48813. Key Paper 58.

British occupation of Austria as agreed upon at the European Advisory Commission.¹¹ This issue needed to be addressed at the highest level of diplomacy. It worsened further as British troops in the area reported more worrying actions taken by the growing number of Partisans in and around Klagenfurt.

5 Corps' position was increasingly unstable due to Partisan activity which undermined British attempts to administer the area. On 10 May, 5 Corps reported to the Eighth Army the problems they faced as Partisans continued to infiltrate Klagenfurt, the administrative centre of Carinthia (southern Austria). 5 Corps reported that while they were currently holding public services and the airfield in Klagenfurt they expected to be overrun by considerable numbers of Partisans who would "brush aside British sentries then assume control."¹² Partisans had already seized local police weapons and taken over the main printing press in the town, which 5 Corps had left unattended due to a lack of available troops. The report goes on to state that "as Yugoslavs gain confidence that we will not shoot [,] active infiltration grows easier and our authority weakens."¹³ They argued that if they were not allowed to shoot at Partisans who categorically disobeyed orders from British commanders they would not be able to effectively occupy the area.¹⁴ By 11 May, 5 Corps was in a weakened position and only tenuously held a few tactical and administrative locations. They fundamentally lacked adequate strength to occupy every such location in Klagenfurt. The situation was sufficiently worrying to British commanders on the ground that they felt military force would be necessary to deal with Partisans in order to establish and maintain authority over the area. This deep concern heightened over the course of the following days.

¹¹ TNA: FO 371/48813. Key Paper 58.

¹² The National Archives (TNA): FO 1020/42. Key Paper 59.

¹³ TNA: FO 1020/42. Key Paper 59.

¹⁴ TNA: FO 1020/42. Key Paper 59.

The anxiety over the Partisan presence in southern Austria reached the highest levels of the British military and government. In a 12 May letter to Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Macmillan likened Tito's territorial claims to the uncontrolled land grabbing tactics of Hitler and Japan. Macmillan recommended the British take a hard line approach with Tito in order to encourage his withdrawal. Macmillan noted that Alexander had "lost patience with Tito's latest moves" and was prepared to go ahead with plans to effect Tito's removal from the area.¹⁵ The following day, 5 Corps reported to the Eighth Army that Partisans in Klagenfurt were spreading out from the city. They now held the hospital, the labour exchange, and the printing press, among other buildings in town, and seemingly intended to remain in those positions.¹⁶ Macmillan recorded in his War Diary on 13 May (the day he met General Keightley in Klagenfurt) that the Partisans, in claiming Carinthia as their own, were a source of trouble and anxiety. He stated that despite arriving in Klagenfurt a few hours before the Partisans, the British did not have enough sentries to guard every place, a problem made worse by the rapidly increasing number of Titoists entering the area.¹⁷ 5 Corps lacked sufficient manpower to occupy every important position, and the growing Partisan presence took those areas as their own. Macmillan stated that British troops have been told not to provoke an incident, and as a result were left to look on helplessly as Partisans freely looted and arrested so called "Fascists."¹⁸ The Partisans also frustrated efforts to administer the area by pulling down notices written by the British and replacing them with their own.¹⁹ These actions greatly diminished 5 Corps' capability to adequately direct civilian life in Klagenfurt and the surrounding area. The hindering presence of Partisans continued to grow over the following days, increasing the challenge to British troops attempting to stabilize the area.

¹⁵ The National Archives (TNA): FO 371/48815. Key Paper 80.

¹⁶ The National Archives (TNA): WO 170/4241. Key Paper 86.

¹⁷ Extract from Harold Macmillan's War Diary. Key Paper 92.

¹⁸ Macmillan's War Diary. Key Paper 92.

¹⁹ Macmillan's War Diary. Key Paper 92.

Both Macmillan and the men of 5 Corps expressed their anxiety regarding the increasing number of Partisans across Carinthia and Styria in southern Austria. On 15 May, 5 Corps reported that, at St. Veit, Partisan numbers had grown from forty to 200, and there were now 1500 Partisans to the Southeast of the town of Villach.²⁰ These Titoist troops provided their British counterparts no indication that they intended to withdraw from Austria.²¹ On the same day, Macmillan's report on his meeting with 5 Corps' General Keightley reached London. In it, Macmillan informed the Foreign Office that Keightley, despite occupying the best buildings in Klagenfurt, was unable to control the Partisans or stop their looting, which he called a "minor reign of terror."²² Keightley instructed Macmillan that militarily he could only maintain his uneasy current position until his forces were "strong enough to clear up the whole area."²³ In the interim though, Keightley could not run the risk of clashes with the Partisans and was therefore unable to take adequate steps to halt their disruptive actions.²⁴ Macmillan summarized the conditions in southern Austria by stating that the "[w]hole situation in Styria and Carinthia is confused."²⁵ The following day, 5 Corps alerted the Eighth Army that Partisan strength around Klagenfurt had doubled to 2000 men. They then reported that a random grenade had gone off during the day and they had prevented a hanging by the Partisan troops.²⁶ This "minor reign of terror," as Keightley called it, had grown from disruptive to downright dangerous. The actions of these Partisans was evidently cause for significant concern, as the issues facing 5 Corps resulted in very high level discussions within the allied forces.

²⁰ TNA: FO 1020/42. Key Paper 111.

²¹ TNA: FO 1020/42. Key Paper 111.

²² The National Archives (TNA): WO 106/4059, FO 371/48816. Key Paper 120.

²³ TNA: WO 106/4059, FO 371/48816. Key Paper 120.

²⁴ TNA: WO 106/4059, FO 371/48816. Key Paper 120.

²⁵ TNA: WO 106/4059, FO 371/48816. Key Paper 120.

²⁶ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 127.

Field Marshal Alexander conveyed the increasingly alarming situation in southern Austria to General Eisenhower at SHAEF, as well as to the British Chiefs of Staff in London. On 17 May, Alexander told Eisenhower “[t]he situation in V Corps area in Austria has deteriorated further owing to the behaviour of the Yugoslavs [*sic*] who are endeavouring to set up their own Government.”²⁷ He expressed his concern that he was unable to stop these activities without the use of force which, for political reasons, was not possible. Alexander stated that open hostility may break out at any moment and 5 Corps was in a weak position due to their administrative commitments (guarding and administering prisoners). To help resolve this issue, Alexander requested Eisenhower move SHAEF men to take control of 5 Corps’ northern front (facing the Russians) to relieve some of the widespread pressure on 5 Corps.²⁸ On the same day, Alexander sent a message to the British Chiefs of Staff to report the conditions in southern Austria. He said the situation was “most unsatisfactory and has deteriorated.”²⁹ Alexander was increasingly concerned, as the Yugoslavs had posted proclamations and were attempting to set up their own government. Due to their looting of shops and private houses, and their maltreatment of local inhabitants, Alexander considered them a disruptive force.³⁰ Clearly, Partisan actions created issues, not only for the British military, but for the local civilian population as well. Alexander’s apprehension concerning problems the Partisans posed to British interests in southern Austria reached the governmental level in Britain and brought Britain’s allies into the matter.

The British military’s approach to Tito’s unwanted presence in southern Austria was complicated by the respective opinions of its American and Soviet allies. In an 11 May message to the Foreign Office regarding the likelihood of conflict with Tito, Macmillan noted that

²⁷ TNA: FO 1020/42. Key Paper 156.

²⁸ TNA: FO 1020/42. Key Paper 156.

²⁹ TNA: FO 1020/42. Key Paper 157.

³⁰ TNA: FO 1020/42. Key Paper 157.

American President Harry Truman did not want to see “United States troops involved in the Balkan Arena.”³¹ The American military was initially hesitant to get involved in what they viewed as a very complex conflict in Yugoslavia. Only after they were briefed on the full extent of Tito’s infiltration into the agreed upon British zone in Austria did they reluctantly support British efforts to force Tito’s withdrawal. On 14 May, Truman sent a message to Churchill to support a hardline approach to Tito’s claims on Carinthia and make diplomatic strides to effect Partisan withdrawal from the area.³² Once the British had the support of the American government they had to reckon with the potential fallout from their other ally, the Soviet Union. On 13 May, Tito told British officials in Belgrade that as the Soviet government agreed to allow Tito to occupy part of Austria he was confident the British government would permit “Yugoslav units to remain on that Austrian territory which they have already captured.”³³ He also noted that much had changed since the Moscow Agreement of 1943 which divided Austria into three zones of occupation (American, British, and Soviet), and claimed it would be “unjust to deny the Yugoslav Army the right to...occupy the territory liberated from the enemy.”³⁴ This refusal to abide by the Moscow Agreement was echoed by Lieutenant Colonel Hocevar of the 4 Yugoslav Army on 15 May. On that date, 5 Corps Brigadier General Staff Toby Low met with Hocevar and made notes of their discussion. During this meeting, Hocevar stated that based on his orders it was his understanding that Carinthia was part of Yugoslavia, despite Low’s argument that Britain was “the Allied Military in control.”³⁵ To Hocevar’s mind the area was rightfully part of Yugoslavia, and therefore not subject to the Moscow Agreement which only divided *Austria* [my

³¹ The National Archives (TNA): FO 371/48814. Key Paper 74.

³² TNA: FO 371/48815. Key Paper 99.

³³ The National Archives (TNA): FO 371/48819. Key Paper 90.

³⁴ TNA: FO 371/48819. Key Paper 90.

³⁵ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 115.

emphasis] between the three main allied powers.³⁶ It is not clear whether or not Tito was supported by Stalin in his claims in Carinthia, though Stalin's feelings on Venezia Giulia (not bound by the Moscow Agreement) are evident. In a letter to Churchill on 23 May 1945, Stalin argued that because the Yugoslav Partisans had

expelled Germans from area...it would be unjust and an undeserved insult to the Yugoslav army and people to refuse Yugoslavia the right to the occupation of territory conquered from the enemy when the Yugoslav people has made so many sacrifices in the struggle of national rights of Yugoslavia and for the common cause of the United Nations.³⁷

It is not unreasonable to suggest that were it not for the Moscow Agreement, Stalin might have supported Tito to remain in Carinthia too. Nonetheless, Tito believed Stalin would support his claims, and British commanders approached the situation without knowledge of how Stalin might respond if they were compelled to forcefully eject Tito's Partisans. In addition, the British military was not only concerned by what the reaction of their allies might be in the event of a military operation against the Partisans, they were also worried about what their own men might think.

As Partisans continued to flow into southern Austria and northern Italy from Yugoslavia, British commanders faced an increasing likelihood that they would have to resort to forceful military measures to clear Titoists from these regions. There was concern among these commanders that their own men would be hesitant to battle a supposed ally. On 11 May, Macmillan reported to the Foreign Office his own unease regarding this anticipated reluctance. Macmillan stated that it was "more than doubtful if either British or American troops would, after so many years of weary warfare, embark on a new campaign except with extreme

³⁶ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 115.

³⁷ Birch Grove Archives (UK). Key Paper 234.

reluctance.”³⁸ The fear was that a hesitant fighting force would be less effective in a conflict against a group that had previously been considered an ally. Macmillan also feared that after so many months of pro-Tito propaganda commending his great service to the allied cause, it would be difficult to convince British and American soldiers that Tito was not the honourable leader they had portrayed.³⁹ This concern extended to Alexander, who on 16 May sent a message to the British Chiefs of Staff saying that Tito’s aggressive land claims should be made well known to the men in the relevant areas. He believed that in

the event of armed conflict[,] it is most important that our soldiers are made fully aware of the true state of affairs. If these and the wider moral issues involved are made known to them[,] I am confident that they will play their part as wholeheartedly as they have always done in the past.⁴⁰

The relatively unknown ardour of the British military to fight against a supposed ally complicated the decision making process regarding a potential conflict with Titoists in southern Austria. Partisan presence grew from a frustrating administrative issue to one that took up significant resources to prepare for a potential military operation. 5 Corps Brigadier General Staff Toby Low designed this action, codenamed “Operation Beehive,” to clear Austria of Partisans and push them back towards Yugoslavia.

As Titoist presence continued to grow and wreak havoc on 5 Corps’ attempts to occupy and administer southern Austria, the likelihood increased that a military action would be needed to remove them from this region. On 16 May Alexander sent a message to the British Combined Chiefs of Staff to alert them to the fact that operations may need to be carried out against Tito’s Partisans to eject them from Carinthia and Venezia Giulia. He states that the purpose of these operations was to “make Marshal Tito realise that his attempts to establish by force and military

³⁸ TNA: FO 371/48814. Key Paper 74.

³⁹ TNA: FO 371/48814. Key Paper 74.

⁴⁰ TNA: FO 371/48816. Key Paper 137.

occupation his claims to certain territories beyond the present frontier of Yugoslavia [*sic*] will not be tolerated.”⁴¹ For troops in Austria, this plan became manifest in 5 Corps instructions issued on 18 May. On that date, 5 Corps Brigadier General Staff set out his secret plan for “Operation Beehive,” military actions with an overall goal to “secure complete military control of the Corps area.”⁴² Phase II of this operation involved forcefully establishing posts at border crossings to Italy and closing them to Yugoslav troops. 5 Corps would then capture Yugoslavs within the Corps area and treat them as prisoners of war under close guard.⁴³ On the same day as Low issued those instructions, Alexander sent a message to the War Office saying plans to eject Partisans from Austria were well in hand but that “maintenance difficulties[,] especially in southern Austria [were his] main concern.”⁴⁴ As a result, Alexander said he would be ready for full scale operations by 1 June and preferred to not take action until that time unless forced to do so.⁴⁵ Under unified British and American diplomatic pressure and wanting to comply with their demands and not jeopardize his territorial claims in the final settlement of the Austrian frontier, on 19 May, Tito told British and American authorities that he would withdraw his forces by 21 May, as soon as they could evacuate booty which had fallen into their hands.⁴⁶ While the military plan to eject Partisans was not needed, their departure only temporarily lessened the probability of 5 Corps engaging in a military conflict with Tito. Partisan presence in Carinthia overlapped much of the decision making process regarding who was to be handed over to Soviet hands and who was not. The immediate crisis in Carinthia was mitigated by Tito’s withdrawal, but it still

⁴¹ TNA: FO 371/48816. Key Paper 138.

⁴² TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 164.

⁴³ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 164.

⁴⁴ The National Archives (TNA): WO 214/42. Key Paper 172.

⁴⁵ TNA: WO 214/42. Key Paper 172.

⁴⁶ TNA: FO 371/48819. Key Paper 181.

influenced the repatriation discussions at 5 Corps and by no means did it solve their problems completely.

While Tito agreed to withdraw from southern Austria, he was not to leave Venezia Giulia for several more weeks and his presence there still necessitated 5 Corps to be prepared to intervene militarily. In fact, Macmillan was particularly worried about Tito's involvement in northern Italy. Macmillan reported to the Foreign Office that he and Alexander both felt Venezia Giulia was in a different category from Carinthia, based on the lack of an established agreement on occupation as there was in Austria.⁴⁷ Without an international agreement to rely on, Macmillan and Alexander agreed that removing Tito from Venezia Giulia would be much more challenging. As noted above, Stalin supported Tito's claim on northern Italy, which only added to concerns regarding the possibility of military conflict over that region. The importance of the settlement of Partisan presence in Venezia Giulia can be seen in a 2 June letter from Churchill to Truman which said "the news from Yugoslavia is not good."⁴⁸ While considering a military operation to eject Tito from Italy, Churchill informed Truman that "[i]f we once let it be thought that there is no point beyond which we cannot be pushed about, there will be no future for Europe except another war more terrible than anything that the world has yet seen."⁴⁹ Only on 9 June did Tito agree to withdraw to Yugoslavia by 12 June, at which time repatriation operations under the broad based interpretation of who was to be returned had been over for several days.⁵⁰ The entire process of determining who was liable for repatriation and enacting those operations occurred under the spectre of a pronounced Partisan presence in Carinthia itself or a fear that military force would be required to eject them from Austria or neighbouring Venezia Giulia.

⁴⁷ TNA: FO 371/48813. Key Paper 58.

⁴⁸ TNA: FO 371/48819. Key Paper 281.

⁴⁹ TNA: FO 371/48819. Key Paper 281.

⁵⁰ The National Archives (TNA): FO 371/48830. Key Paper 294.

However, Partisans were only part of the problems facing 5 Corps. They also had to manage hundreds of thousands of refugees and prisoners with limited logistical support and clogged supply lines and lines of communication.

Aside from Partisan infiltration into southern Austria, 5 Corps was also responsible for housing and feeding an enormous number of refugees and prisoners with minimal provisions. Decisions on what to do with these groups were informed by the limitations of tenuous supply lines. On 14 May, 5 Corps reported to Eighth Army that there were already 300,000 surrendered enemy personnel and refugees in the area with an additional 600,000 expected to arrive from Yugoslavia.⁵¹ Given the continued pressure of arriving refugees, they were rightly concerned that the Corps area was becoming a “clearing house for all stragglers[,] straggling formations[,] and refugees of all nationalities who require food and shelter.”⁵² In another report from the same day 5 Corps alerted Eighth Army that a force moving northward to Austria included 300,000 Germans and 200,000 Croats fleeing Yugoslavia. If this immense group were to reach Austria, the Corps would have rations for only forty eight hours.⁵³ Given the conditions in southern Austria, the work of guarding and feeding this vast population was beyond the capabilities of 5 Corps. Simultaneously, if 5 Corps were to refuse to accept the surrender of this massive force as formed bodies, it felt that large numbers would “force their way across [the] border as individual bandits[,] plunder the country[,] disorganise economic life [in] our zone[,] and threaten our security.”⁵⁴ To accept this surrender would further undermine 5 Corps’ ability to administer the area, while refusing to do so could ultimately prove to be even more disruptive to security. On the same day, Eighth Army reported to 15th Army Group (their immediate superior in the chain

⁵¹ TNA: FO 1020/42, WO 170/4241. Key Paper 93.

⁵² TNA: FO 1020/42, WO 170/4241. Key Paper 93.

⁵³ TNA: FO 1020/42. Key Paper 95.

⁵⁴ TNA: FO 1020/42. Key Paper 95.

of command) that the surrendered personnel and refugee “situation in 5 Corps area [was] becoming unmanageable on account of numbers [and m]aterially deteriorating from the operational capacity of the Corps.”⁵⁵ The substantial number of people in southern Austria who needed to be housed and fed became increasingly unwieldy, and prejudiced 5 Corps ability to function as a military force. The following day, the aforementioned 200,000 Croats reached the Austrian border at Bleiburg, and engaged in a parley seeking to enter Austria.⁵⁶ Only two days later did Eighth Army inform AFHQ that this force had not surrendered to the British and had in fact been turned back before they crossed the Austrian border.⁵⁷ Even without having to administer this group, 5 Corps was saddled with huge responsibilities in terms of the sheer number of surrendered personnel and refugees in their area. This was further complicated by narrow and fragile supply lines and lines of communication.

5 Corps in southern Austria was supplied by a narrow line of communication running from the port of Trieste on the Yugoslav-Italian border through the Karawanks mountain range into Carinthia. This vulnerable, yet essential component of 5 Corps’ efforts in southern Austria added to the chaos of the Partisan advance. Macmillan, recognizing the threat, passed Keightley’s concerns regarding his line of communication to the Foreign Office in a 14 May report. Keightley had bluntly informed Macmillan that he could not risk clashes with Partisans and his “lines of communication [were] very vulnerable.”⁵⁸ On 15 May, their fears were realized as 5 Corps sent word to Eighth Army that they had lost their line of communication, and requested Eighth Army to “hasten pronto” to rectify the situation.⁵⁹ On 16 May, 15th Army Group HQ sent a message to AFHQ regarding problems supplying Eighth Army. Their battle

⁵⁵ TNA: FO 1020/42. Key Paper 97.

⁵⁶ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 112.

⁵⁷ The National Archives (TNA): WO 204/1358. Key Paper 153.

⁵⁸ TNA: WO 106/4059, FO 371/48816. Key Paper 120.

⁵⁹ The National Archives (TNA): WO 170/4184. Key Paper 123.

stores could not be stockpiled because they were already experiencing difficulties meeting daily supply requirements.⁶⁰ Recognizing the immediate peril, they recommended defensive positions be set up along the line of communication from Trieste into Austria to push other military forces outside artillery range in order to strengthen this line.⁶¹ This would be necessary until such time that the port of Venice was opened for supplying troops in Austria, an action which 15th Army Group estimated on 12 May would take four to six weeks.⁶² The supply line and line of communication reaching 5 Corps was evidently very fragile and liable to attack from outside forces. With the potential for conflict with Partisans in Austria, Alexander expressed further concern for the operational effectiveness of a minimally supplied force. In a 17 May letter to Eisenhower asking for support from American forces, Alexander stated that “[w]ith the possibility of hostilities in Austria against Jugoslavs [*sic*] it is essential to free my L[ine] of C[ommunication].”⁶³ This was particularly important because his operational efficiency was already “gravely prejudiced” due to huge numbers of surrendered personnel and general congestion in the area.⁶⁴ Alexander was also unable to move surrendered personnel to Italy because this too would paralyze his line of communication.⁶⁵ The same day, an additional letter from Alexander to Eisenhower re-iterated the fact that the military disposition of 5 Corps in particular was “very weak owing to their widespread commitments and long L[ine] of C[ommunication]...which is open to attack by raiding forces.”⁶⁶ Still on 17 May, Alexander repeated his concerns to the British Chiefs of Staff. He described his line to Austria as “very

⁶⁰ The National Archives (TNA): WO 170/4183. Key Paper 135.

⁶¹ USNA Kirk Papers. Key Paper 133.

⁶² USNA Kirk Papers. Key Paper 133. ; TNA: FO 1020/42. Key Paper 77.

⁶³ TNA: WO 106/4059. Key Paper 146.

⁶⁴ TNA: WO 106/4059. Key Paper 146.

⁶⁵ TNA: WO 106/4059. Key Paper 146.

⁶⁶ TNA: FO 1020/42. Key Paper 156.

exposed and open to attack by raiding parties if Yugoslavs [*sic*] so choose.”⁶⁷ This concern for a restricted line of communication was particularly poignant, given the fear that a military operation against Tito was still very much a possibility. This weak line of communication, alongside “widespread commitments and responsibility for prisoners of war and refugees” weakened 5 Corps’ military disposition.⁶⁸ The need to house and feed these massive groups of refugees and surrendered personnel was exacerbated by the fact that these diverse collections of people were heterogeneously organized.

The disparate nature of the groups held in southern Austria further compounded existing obstacles for 5 Corps, adding yet another barrier to stabilizing the region. In addition to the Partisans, 5 Corps faced an influx of a massive and diverse collection of people of varying nationalities into southern Austria. The assorted members of these groups maintained varied affiliations, for several of which it was unclear as to which side they had even fought. On 14 May, Lieutenant General J.B. Taylor at 5 Corps sent a message to Eighth Army regarding personnel held in 5 Corps’ area. He emphasized that the list was only preliminary and provisional because communication problems and general conditions at the time.⁶⁹ Nationalities represented in the area include British, Russian, Yugoslav, French, Dutch, Italian, Hungarian, German, and Romanian, as well as a Greek and an Egyptian General.⁷⁰ The following day, Taylor sent an update to Eighth Army listing German and Italian surrendered personnel, Russians, Croats, Slovenes, and Hungarians totalling more than 221,000.⁷¹ On 18 May, the 6 Armed Division (under 5 Corps) published a list of personnel under its control which included Germans, Russians, Croats, Slovenes, and Serbs, as well as “a miscellaneous collection of Turks,

⁶⁷ TNA: FO 1020/42. Key Paper 157.

⁶⁸ TNA: FO 1020/42. Key Paper 157.

⁶⁹ The National Archives (TNA): WO 170/4243. Key Paper 108.

⁷⁰ TNA: WO 170/4243. Key Paper 108

⁷¹ TNA: WO 170/4243. Key Paper 122.

Armenians, Rumanians [*sic*], Bulgars, Dutch, Hungarians, Poles, French, Lithuanians, Belgians[,] and Greeks.”⁷² The diversity of these formations and the need to sort through who had been fighting for whom added to the administrative workload for 5 Corps. In addition to these varied groups, 5 Corps held several collections of nominally Russian soldiers and their camp followers whom the British ultimately repatriated. The sheer volume of people who needed to be dealt with was staggering, and caused a great deal of consternation at 5 Corps. Eighth Army, increasingly alarmed, sought answers from AFHQ on 21 May to urgent questions regarding what was to be done with various collections of people, both military and civilian.⁷³ The situation, Eighth Army explained, was complicated further by several claims of diplomatic privilege. The problems were such that they requested AFHQ send a representative to answer specific questions so they could organize a conference and decide what course of action to take in regards to these groups.⁷⁴ This confusion was a common theme, and particularly relevant to groups that were eventually handed over to Soviet authorities. In this regard, there was significant consternation in classifying who exactly was and was not liable for repatriation.

The problem of discerning who among the numerous groups of refugees and surrendered personnel was subject to repatriation caused a great deal of confusion in southern Austria. This lack of clarity originated in the text of the Yalta Agreement itself which required the return of all Soviet citizens to the Soviet Union, but did not actually define “Soviet citizen.”⁷⁵ On 19 February 1945, the Foreign Office sent a message to Macmillan saying that Great Britain had not “recognized the Soviet incorporation of the Baltic States and Eastern Poland[,] and persons

⁷² Diary of 3rd Bn Grenadier Guards. Key Paper 177.

⁷³ TNA: FO 1020/42. Key Paper 208.

⁷⁴ TNA: FO 1020/42. Key Paper 208.

⁷⁵ Text of the Yalta Agreement found in: The National Archives (TNA): FO 371/56716. Key Paper 332.

coming from these territories are...not Soviet citizens under British law...”⁷⁶ This message defined Soviet citizens as “all persons coming from places within the boundaries of the Soviet Union as constituted before the outbreak of the present war.”⁷⁷ The Foreign Office warned that some people from West of that border may have actively attained Soviet citizenship, but merely serving in the Red Army was not a way of doing so.⁷⁸ On 13 March, Eighth Army passed orders to its Corps that all Soviet citizens (following the same definition laid out by the Foreign Office), including soldiers and civilians who had or had not served in the German Army, were to be separated from German POWs and would be repatriated regardless of their individual wishes.⁷⁹ Due to local factors and the generally chaotic conditions in southern Austria, this working definition of Soviet citizen was to change between this initial interpretation and the one that was eventually enacted.

On 21 May 1945, 5 Corps held a conference to address liability for repatriation after doubt was raised as to which formations under their authority ought to be repatriated. That same day, 5 Corps notified its Divisions and Eighth Army of its decisions regarding who was to be classified as Soviet nationals and handed over to Soviet authorities. This order stated that the Ataman Group (Domanov’s men and camp followers held at Peggetz), the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps (under von Pannwitz), reserve units under “Chkouro” (General Shkuro), and Caucasians were to be treated as Soviet nationals, while the Schutzkorps (including Russians in that formation) would not.⁸⁰ Individual cases were not to be heard unless “particularly pressed” and in those instances, 5 Corps issued its own definition of a Soviet citizen. This interpretation stated that “[a]ny individual now in our hands who, at the time of joining the German forces or joining

⁷⁶ The National Archives (TNA): WO 32/11119. Key Paper 22.

⁷⁷ TNA: WO 32/11119. Key Paper 22.

⁷⁸ TNA: WO 32/11119. Key Paper 22.

⁷⁹ The National Archives (TNA): WO 204/10449. Key Paper 25.

⁸⁰ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 206.

a formation fighting with the German forces, was living within the 1938 boundary of the USSR, will be treated as a Soviet national for the purpose of transfer.”⁸¹ This definition then explicitly excluded “[a]ny individual although of Russian blood who prior to joining the German forces had not been in USSR since 1930.”⁸² If there was any doubt as to an individual’s nationality, they were to be treated as a Soviet citizen and sent to the Soviet Union. This definition treats several units as formed bodies to be repatriated or excluded en masse. Individual appeals were to be limited and the onus was on each person to prove they were not Soviet. The exclusion of people who had not been in the Soviet Union since 1930, strictly speaking, exempted émigrés from repatriations, but only on the individual level and this determination was quite distinct from the decision to return entire formations. Given the increasing instability in southern Austria and a situation they could barely sustain, British commanders proceeded with repatriations plans in an effort to maintain a modicum of control. Within this context, defining exactly who was required to be handed over to the Soviets was important and needed to be done quickly due to plans at the time to clear Austria through repatriation and evacuation.

The British military sought to simplify the chaotic situation in southern Austria by repatriating some people to the Soviet Union and passing control of others to SHAEF. On 15 May, AFHQ sent a message to SHAEF saying the refugee and prisoner situation in 5 Corps area was negatively affecting 5 Corps operational efficiency and requesting that SHAEF take over control of an unknown number of people, thought to be up to half a million.⁸³ The next day, Alexander sent a message to Churchill concerning a substantial administrative problem caused by the presence of roughly a million prisoners held in the area around Klagenfurt and Villach.⁸⁴

⁸¹ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 206.

⁸² TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 206.

⁸³ TNA: FO 1020/42. Key Paper 114.

⁸⁴ TNA: WO 106/4059. Key Paper 131.

A frustrated Alexander noted he was trying to get SHAEF to accept them, but without any luck thus far.⁸⁵ On 17 May, Alexander sent a letter directly to Eisenhower asking for his assistance in southern Austria by accepting surrendered personnel into SHAEF's area.⁸⁶ Alexander suggested that if this was not possible he would have to disband these groups as a matter of "operational and administrative necessity," which would "produce confusion in contiguous German territory under [Eisenhower's] command."⁸⁷ Eisenhower accepted this proposal, as evidenced by a letter he sent to Churchill on 19 May in which he stated SHAEF was doing "everything [they] can to help out Alexander, including an offer to take over some of his prisoners"⁸⁸ While this action was intended to solve some of the problems 5 Corps faced, it actually created further disorder. This course of action caused more confusion in the area because there were now conflicting orders from AFHQ regarding what was to be done with Russians in the area. On 21 May, Eighth Army sought clarification on this point from AFHQ. They had received orders that all Russians were to be handed over to Soviet forces while at the same time, a request for 12th Army Group (under SHAEF) to accept Cossacks had been approved.⁸⁹ Eighth Army requested information on "whether [the] approved policy is to despatch to SHAEF or to endeavour to secure direct return to Russians by Eighth Army negotiations."⁹⁰ These divergent orders prompted two conferences, one at 5 Corps and another at AFHQ to sort out which groups and individuals were to be handed over to Soviet authorities.

5 Corps and AFHQ both held conferences in an attempt to classify who exactly was liable for repatriation and who was not. 5 Corps held the first such conference on 21 May at 5

⁸⁵ TNA: WO 106/4059. Key Paper 131.

⁸⁶ TNA: WO 106/4059. Key Paper 146.

⁸⁷ TNA: WO 106/4059. Key Paper 146.

⁸⁸ TNA: WO 106/4059. Key Paper 187.

⁸⁹ USNA Kirk Papers. Key Paper 213.

⁹⁰ USNA Kirk Papers. Key Paper 213.

Corps HQ in Klagenfurt. This aforementioned conference ruled that certain units were to be returned as formed bodies and appeals by individuals were not to be heard. The second of these conferences was organized by AFHQ Deputy Adjutant General M.W.M Macleod from 25 to 27 May so that every branch of AFHQ could meet and discuss how to deal with liberated allied personnel, enemy prisoners and surrendered personnel, and Displaced Persons.⁹¹ On 24 May, representatives of several branches of AFHQ, including Colonel D.S. Jackling of G-5 Branch, met prior to the larger conference with Eighth Army in order to “reconcile the two signals on displaced persons policy.”⁹² The following day they flew to Eighth Army HQ in Udine, Italy to meet with Eighth Army leaders to settle the matter. Eighth Army was in need of direction as evidenced by a signal sent to AFHQ asking whether surrendered Soviet citizens were to be handed over to the Russians or retained and treated as prisoners of war.⁹³ After the close of this conference, Jackling sent a summary of decisions to G-1 Branch of AFHQ on 29 May. In this summation, he noted that “Cossacks will be treated as Soviet Nationals and will be returned to Russian hands. Other Soviet nationals including SS troops and other arrestable categories will be treated the same way.”⁹⁴ The end result of these conferences and decisions made at varying levels of the British military was a very broad interpretation of who was required to be repatriated. 5 Corps continued on with a plan to repatriate several formations in their entirety based on the determination that they consisted mainly of Soviet citizens, including Cossacks groups and their German officers.⁹⁵ The need for multiple conferences to attempt to clarify contradictory orders emanating from AFHQ shows the chaotic and confusing issues facing AFHQ in general and 5 Corps in particular.

⁹¹ USNA Kirk Papers. Key Paper 232.

⁹² USNA G5 Reel 473c. Key Paper 238.

⁹³ USNA Kirk Papers. Key Paper 250.

⁹⁴ USNA Kirk Papers. Key Paper 269.

⁹⁵ The National Archives (TNA): WO 170/4352, Key Paper 257. ; WO 170/4241. Key Paper 244.

As the war in Europe ended and 5 Corps entered southern Austria, it faced manifold problems with both local and much more far reaching concerns. On a local level, it was poorly supplied, yet had to administer hundreds of thousands of refugees and surrendered personnel. In a more expansive sense, 5 Corps was at the forefront of geopolitical tensions, with Yugoslavs attempting to claim the area, and Soviets seeking the repatriation of their citizens as part of the Yalta Agreement. As 5 Corps arrived in southern Austria, Titoist Partisans infiltrated this area and Northern Italy, and claimed these regions as part of Yugoslavia, despite an agreement among the allied powers that this part of Austria was to be occupied by Britain. The reactions of Britain's allies further complicated the situation. The United States wanted to avoid getting entangled in Balkan affairs, and initially refused to involve themselves with the Partisan problem. Stalin approved of Partisan presence in Venezia Giulia, and the British were unclear as to whether or not he would do the same in Carinthia. 5 Corps had to take into account this variable when organizing its occupation of the area. Partisans added to significant administrative problems for the British military in southern Austria. 5 Corps' lines of communication and supply over the mountains to Italy were fragile and clogged with refugees and prisoners. These hundreds of thousands of people, heterogeneously organized and spread across a large area, needed to be fed (with limited supplies) and administered (with limited manpower). Among these groups, in varying proportions were Soviet citizens who, according to the Yalta Agreement had to be handed over to Soviet authorities. 5 Corps, already overstretched and facing the possibility of military conflict with Partisans, was then tasked with sorting who exactly was to be repatriated and who should be retained. The lack of a standardized definition of Soviet citizen, due to British non-recognition of territorial gains made by the Soviet Union from 1939-1940 further complicated this issue. In an attempt to make 5 Corps operationally effective, AFHQ

sought to hand over control of some prisoners and refugees to SHAEF. In doing so, they inadvertently issued conflicting orders on what was to be done with several groups, including the Cossacks. In order to sort out this confusion, 5 Corps and Eighth Army (including AFHQ representatives) hosted separate conferences to solidify exactly which course of action to take. The result was a very broad conception of who was liable for repatriation. As a result of the chaotic circumstances in southern Austria at the time, non-Soviet minorities amongst groups of Soviets were handed over to the Soviet authorities despite the fact that on an individual level they were not liable for this treatment. Some individuals slated for transport to the Soviet Union managed to get themselves exempted, but these exceptions were afforded haphazardly and only based on individual circumstances rather than a unified decision. A chaotic and confusing situation in southern Austria resulted in an equally chaotic and confusing application of the policy of repatriation in that area.

Chapter Three: Irregular and Inconsistent Application

The chaotic circumstances in southern Austria led to an equally confused understanding and enactment of the policy of repatriation. Lacking sufficient manpower to cope with the administrative nightmare in southern Austria and manage hundreds of thousands of refugees and prisoners, 5 Corps issued repatriation orders which interpreted liability for repatriation in a broad and uneven fashion. These orders judged several groups to consist of Soviet nationals and required that members of these formations be repatriated en masse. Simultaneously, these orders included a definition of a Soviet citizen to be applied on an individual level in the event that persons pressed their case to be retained. 5 Corps, however, failed to provide direction regarding the specific circumstances required for the individual definition to apply. The imprecise division of who was liable for repatriation, and who was not, allowed for a very irregular and inconsistent application of the policy in the field. This haphazard enactment of repatriation created a fragmented set of incidents in which some non-Soviets were wrongly repatriated while others were exempted due to fortunate individual circumstances rather than a unified policy. The Schutzkorps and the newly renamed Ukrainian Division were both exempted as entire groups, despite the fact that some of their members were in fact Soviet citizens. More worryingly for those repatriated was the fact that the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps (including their German officers), a collection of ethnic Caucasians, and several Cossack groups, including soldiers and their families held at Peggetz, were all deemed to be Soviet citizens, despite the fact that a minority among them were not at the time Soviet citizens or had never been Soviet citizens. Among these groups, there were limited exemptions to repatriation, but these were accorded haphazardly and with no regularity across 5 Corps. Exemptions were given based on individual

circumstances, and in most cases, little more than mere chance. 5 Corps' military preparedness in the area took precedence over ensuring that repatriation was applied evenly and consistently. This sentiment is evident in the correspondence of a number of military commanders including General Richard McCreery at Eighth Army, and several figures from AFHQ including Field Marshall Harold Alexander himself. While 5 Corps prioritized military effectiveness over individually screening out non-Soviets, the inclusion of those people among the repatriated, from Peggetz in particular, brought about Red Cross involvement in the matter.

In southern Austria, Red Cross intervention on behalf of several thousand refugees and prisoners put a halt to the indiscriminate interpretation of repatriation employed by 5 Corps. Red Cross administrators discovered that repatriations from Peggetz had occurred without any attempt to classify the camp inhabitants, and sought to clarify why this had taken place. Their concerns were brought through several intermediaries to a meeting with General McCreery at Eighth Army HQ on 13 June. McCreery admitted that due to the situation in southern Austria, and the need to clear the area, regrettably, mistakes were inevitable. Later that same day, Eighth Army issued orders that ended the indiscriminate interpretation of repatriation and ensured that no one else was repatriated without a full classification by Military Government officials. The Red Cross, operating outside many of the restraints the military faced, took over administration of several camps previously controlled by 5 Corps. As a result of these actions, more than 2000 non-Soviets among groups initially ordered to be repatriated were properly screened, sorted, and retained. This put an end to the broad interpretation of repatriation which originated at 5 Corps more than three weeks prior.

The inconsistent application of the policy can be traced to the order 5 Corps issued on 21 May defining who was liable for repatriation and who was not. This order judged several

formations as a whole as consisting of Soviet nationals, including the “Ataman group” (Cossacks held at Peggetz), Caucasians, and the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps.¹ This order also included another definition which was to be used only if particularly pressed by individuals. In this case, an individual who “at the time of joining the German forces...was living within the 1938 [boundary] of USSR, will be treated as a Soviet National for the purposes of transfer.”² The order further declared that “[a]ny individual although of Russian blood who, prior to joining the German forces had not been in USSR since 1930, will NOT until further orders be treated as a Soviet National.”³ The result of issuing both a collective and an individual definition of Soviet nationals allowed for varied interpretations of who exactly was liable for repatriation. While Christopher Booker argues that 5 Corps correctly returned entire groups and retained other individuals in accordance with this order, this belies a critical nuance regarding non-Soviets who were repatriated as part of those groups. This order judged entire formations to be treated as Soviet nationals, and seemed to still offer exceptions to individuals who pressed their case, though it did not define exactly what that might entail. As a consequence of this imprecise definition, exemptions from repatriation were based solely on individual circumstances and not a coherent and consistent policy. This ambiguity created a situation in which, depending on specific circumstances and varying interpretations, non-Soviets could either be retained or handed over, with both courses of action seemingly in keeping with this order.

A key issue in repatriation was the problematic administrative evaluation of whole groups rather than an individual’s identity. The Schutzkorps and the Ukrainian Division, for example, were both judged by 5 Corps to be predominantly non-Soviet and were therefore exempted in their entireties from repatriation. 5 Corps, in a 21 May message to its Divisions clarified that the

¹ The National Archives (TNA): WO 170/4241. Key Paper 206.

² TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 206.

³ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 206.

Schutzkorps would not be treated as Soviet nationals until further notice.⁴ The British military considered them ostensibly Yugoslavian, but they were actually a varied group made up of White Russian émigrés who had lived between the World Wars in Yugoslavia, as well as Germans, and Red Army deserters, fighting under German commanders in Yugoslavia.⁵ While German soldiers and officers may have been exempt from repatriation, there were certainly Soviet citizens among the Russian-speaking soldiers of the Schutzkorps. An 11 March 1946 report from British occupation forces in Austria to the War Office stated that 65% of this group was made up of Russians who had fled Russia, some as early as 1918, and settled in Serbia.⁶ The same report stated that 27% were from Bulgaria or Romania with another 8% of doubtful origin.⁷ This 8% was most probably Red Army deserters and soldiers recruited from southern Russia during the German occupation, and would have been very much liable for repatriation in 1945.⁸ The Ukrainian Division, based on the initial understanding that they were Ukrainians from Galicia, which had been part of Poland until 1939, and therefore not Soviet citizens, were similarly exempted from repatriation. They were eventually relocated to Italy where an effort was later made to discern their provenance. On 18 June 1945, British commanders from District One (northern Italy) sent a message to AFHQ which stated that 70% of this group was believed to come from within pre-1939 Soviet boundaries but had almost universally disclaimed Soviet citizenship.⁹ While this number may be heavily inflated, there were at least some Soviets in this group, nearly all of whom feared a return to the Soviet Union. Screening to decipher who was a Soviet citizen and who was not would take a great deal of time, and according to this message,

⁴ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 206.

⁵ Christopher Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy: The Controversy over the Repatriations from Austria* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Limited, 1997), 30, 218.

⁶ The National Archives (TNA): FO 371/56713. Key Paper 331.

⁷ TNA: FO 371/56713. Key Paper 331.

⁸ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 221.

⁹ USNA Kirk Papers. Key Paper 302.

would take longer than the current repatriation programme from Italy allowed.¹⁰ To varying extents, both the Schutzkorps and the Ukrainian Division included Soviet citizens who, strictly speaking, should have been repatriated to the Soviet Union. 5 Corps, however, applied a sweeping evaluation, deemed them ostensibly Yugoslavian and Polish respectively, and ruled that as groups they were to be retained. This decision to label entire groups as either Soviet or non-Soviet also affected minorities within four large groups which were slated for hand over to Soviet authorities.

In southern Austria, 5 Corps' blunt interpretation of repatriation deemed an entire collection of ethnic Caucasians to be Soviet citizens, despite a small minority among them who were actually non-Soviets. Only some of these non-Soviets managed to clarify their citizenship and avoid repatriation, but these exemptions were without any consistent application. This whole group, consisting of the 3 North Caucasian Brigade and its accompanying camp followers, surrendered to the 36th Infantry Brigade of 5 Corps as soon as they entered Austria and were subsequently concentrated in an area between Dellach and Oberdrauburg in Carinthia.¹¹ There were an estimated 4800 Caucasians in this group, but there was no way to be sure because, according to the 36th Infantry Brigade Report, it was "not possible to hold a physical check of numbers."¹² These thousands made it clear that they were opposed to any transfer to the Soviet Union even "before it was known that they were to be returned."¹³ They made frequent petitions that some other course of action be taken with them.¹⁴ One such written petition stated they had had no place in Russia for twenty five years and declared the Caucasians would prefer to be shot

¹⁰ USNA Kirk Papers. Key Paper 302.

¹¹ The National Archives (TNA): WO 170/4389, p 1. Document included as Appendix A to Key Papers in Anthony Cowgill, Thomas Brimelow, and Christopher Booker. *The Repatriations from Austria in 1945: The Documentary Evidence Reproduced in Full from British, American, German, and Yugoslav Sources*. London: Sinclair-Stevenson Limited, 1990.

¹² TNA: WO 170/4389, p 1. Appendix A to Key Papers.

¹³ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 2. Appendix A to Key Papers.

¹⁴ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 2. Appendix A to Key Papers.

by the British rather than return to Russia.¹⁵ These Caucasian groups included émigrés from the Civil-War period and people who had not been in the Soviet Union for some time, but they were nonetheless judged to be Soviet nationals and slated for repatriation.

On 21 May, 5 Corps ordered its Divisions to treat the group of Caucasians, in its entirety, as Soviet nationals and return them directly to Soviet authorities.¹⁶ 5 Corps stated that if pressed by individuals, its Divisions were to treat anyone of Russian blood who had not been in the USSR since 1930 as a non-Soviet national.¹⁷ The broad interpretation of repatriation was reiterated on 27 May by a 36th Infantry Brigade order to its battalions and regiments administering the Cossacks and Caucasians in southern Austria. This order clarified that “[i]n accordance with an agreement made by the Allied Government[,] all Allied Nationals are to be returned to their country. This means that the Cossacks and Caucasians now in the Bde [Brigade] area will be returned to Russia.”¹⁸ This order then outlined the plan for how these operations were to take place. In a similar manner to the Cossacks, who were told their officers were going to a conference in Oberdrauburg, all Caucasian officers were to be told they were going to a conference in Dellach.¹⁹ In reality, both groups were to be sent to a caged camp in Spittal and held there for one night before being routed to Judenburg on the Soviet occupation boundary and handed over to Soviet authorities.²⁰ Civilian Caucasians and camp followers were to remain in their camps between Oberdrauburg and Dellach until they too could be repatriated en masse.

Once again, 5 Corps employed a sweeping interpretation of repatriation policy by labelling Caucasian officers as Soviet nationals and slating the entire group for repatriation.

¹⁵ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix G. Appendix A to Key Papers.

¹⁶ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 206.

¹⁷ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 206.

¹⁸ The National Archives (TNA): WO 170/4461. Key Paper 263.

¹⁹ TNA: WO 170/4461. Key Paper 263.

²⁰ TNA: WO 170/4461. Key Paper 262.

Exemptions for this group were also limited and given without any consistent policy. Like their Cossack counterparts, these Caucasian officers were separated from other ranks and camp followers before they were told of their impending handover to Soviet authorities. They were only informed upon their arrival at Spittal on 28 May that rather than attending a conference, they were actually to be sent to the Soviet zone.²¹ When alerted to this plan, one Caucasian officer was able to show that he was in fact an Albanian citizen and was granted an exemption from repatriation.²² This was the only known Caucasian officer to avoid repatriation of the 170 held in Spittal on the night of 28-29 May.²³ Among the 1600 combined Cossack and Caucasian officers held in Spittal that night, three attempted suicide, two of whom were successful.²⁴ The following day, Cossack and Caucasian officers protested their hand-over to the Soviets and refused to board trucks that would take them to Judenburg. The British responded by attaching bayonets to their weapons, and dragging men to trucks, despite the last minute pleas of the officers, one of whom claimed he had lived in France for the previous twenty five years.²⁵ Only after force rendered some of these officers “semi-conscious” did they reluctantly proceed onto the trucks to be handed over to the Soviets.²⁶ While on 28 May, an Albanian citizen successfully made his case to avoid repatriation, the following day, no individual cases were heard and instead, despite suicides and protest, every other Caucasian officer was repatriated. This inconsistent approach to repatriation and exemptions was also applied to the remaining Caucasian soldiers and civilians still encamped between Dellach and Oberdrauburg.

²¹ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 4. Appendix A to Key Papers.

²² TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix C. Appendix A to Key Papers.

²³ The National Archives (TNA): WO 170/4388. Key Paper 265. ; TNA: WO 170/4389, annex C. Appendix A to Key Papers.

²⁴ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 5. Appendix A to Key Papers.

²⁵ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix D. Appendix A to Key Papers.

²⁶ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix C. Appendix A to Key Papers.

On 28 May, after the Caucasian officers departed for Spittal, the remaining Caucasian soldiers and camp followers learned that these officers would not be returning and that they themselves would be handed over to Soviet hands in the near future.²⁷ Opposition grew among the remaining Caucasians, leading to a petition the following day asking that the British shoot them rather than send them to the Soviet Union.²⁸ On 30 May, the first group of Caucasians were to be moved by 5 Buffs Battalion (serving under the 36th Infantry Brigade) on trucks to Dellach train station in preparation of a train journey to Judenburg.²⁹ The men of 5 Buffs were met with “considerable resistance of a passive nature,” on the part of the Caucasians.³⁰ A group of roughly 200 Caucasians with no intention of leaving, protested by forming themselves into a circle, putting up black flags, chanting, and wailing.³¹ Major B. McGrath, the commanding officer of D Company of the 5 Buffs, stated in the 36th Infantry Brigade Report that as he and his men attempted to put these people onto trucks the wailing increased and several indicated they would sooner be shot than sent to the Soviet Union.³² A few Caucasians were forced onto the open trucks, but with nothing to contain them, they immediately jumped out again. McGrath identified a few apparent ringleaders of the sit-down protest and had his men attempt to force one onto a truck.³³ This ringleader created such a disturbance that McGrath struck him on the head with an entrenching tool handle, with which many men of 5 Buffs were armed.³⁴ This action had a sobering effect on the remaining Caucasians. Cowed, they soon dispersed and a contingent was quickly moved to Dellach.³⁵ The following day, 31 May, 1737 Caucasian men, women, and

²⁷ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 5. Appendix A to Key Papers.

²⁸ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix G. Appendix A to Key Papers.

²⁹ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 6. Appendix A to Key Papers.

³⁰ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 6. Appendix A to Key Papers.

³¹ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix J. Appendix A to Key Papers.

³² TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix J. Appendix A to Key Papers.

³³ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix J. Appendix A to Key Papers.

³⁴ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix J. Appendix A to Key Papers.

³⁵ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix J. Appendix A to Key Papers.

children were dispatched from Dellach station to Judenburg. Two trainloads carried another 1442 Caucasians from Dellach on 1 June.³⁶ Of the 3570 Caucasian soldiers (non-officers) and 1060 Caucasian camp followers held in the area, 3179 were sent to Judenburg and handed over to Soviet authorities without any kind of screening.³⁷

There were some exemptions to the generally indiscriminate repatriation of Caucasians from southern Austria, though there was no consistency in how these were accorded and there were almost certainly non-Soviets among those repatriated. While there were no efforts made at the time of the first days of repatriation to separate non-Soviets from Soviet citizens, the 36th Infantry Brigade Report noted that there were “a number of displaced persons of nationalities other than Soviet, included in the Caucasian forces. Some two hundred were eventually segregated and sent to the appropriate collecting centres.”³⁸ These 200 people came from Caucasians left in their camps and were exempted much later, after the Red Cross became involved³⁹ and the majority of Caucasians had already been handed over to the Soviet authorities. Based on the estimate of 4800 Caucasians in southern Austria (170 officers, 3570 soldiers of other ranks, and 1060 camp followers), a considerable minority of those handed over at Judenburg were non-Soviets. If 200 non-Soviets were segregated from the 1451 Caucasians remaining after operations on 1 June, and a similar proportion of non-Soviets were among those handed over indiscriminately, then over 400 Caucasians of the more than 3300 that were repatriated were not liable for this treatment. Several groups of Caucasian civilians and soldiers were repatriated en masse despite the presence of a non-Soviet minority among them. The men of 5 Corps met their protests with force rather than any initial effort to segregate non-Soviets.

³⁶ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 6. Appendix A to Key Papers.

³⁷ TNA: WO 170/4388. Key Paper 265.

³⁸ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 2. Appendix A to Key Papers.

³⁹ Red Cross involvement in southern Austria is discussed in more detail below.

Eventually, after the intervention of the Red Cross, non-Soviets were exempted from repatriation, but only after a considerable number were already wrongly repatriated. While British commanders in the area may not have realized the extent of the presence of non-Soviets among the Caucasians slated for repatriation, they were fully aware of the non-Soviet status of a minority among another group: the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps.

The 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps, predominantly made up of German and Soviet citizens, was another group in southern Austria which was subjected to the British military's inconsistent and irregular application of repatriation. Much of this group was transferred to Soviet control without any kind of determination of their individual liability for repatriation. While some non-Soviets managed to avoid repatriation by pointing out this status, many others, including officers known to be German, were not so fortunate and were handed over nonetheless. The 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps, under the command of German General Helmuth von Pannwitz began to enter Austria on 15 May and were concentrated near Klagenfurt by the British 6 Armoured Division.⁴⁰ Under the 5 Corps definition order of 21 May, this group was included among those to be treated in its entirety as Soviet nationals and handed over to Soviet authorities.⁴¹ On 24 May, an Eighth Army sitrep noted that the Cossack Corps (except one brigade which was retained under 6 Armoured Division) was moved to 46 Division area and negotiations for their handover were ongoing.⁴² The same day, 5 Corps issued a plan for moving Cossacks to the Soviet zone. This plan re-iterated the definition of a Soviet citizen from 21 May, and stated that the return of Cossacks was to include Soviet nationals, as well as their camp followers and German cadre.⁴³ Throughout this order and several communications that followed, this distinct German

⁴⁰ The National Archives (TNA): WO 204/972. Key Paper 126.

⁴¹ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 206.

⁴² The National Archives (TNA): WO 170/4183. Key Paper 242.

⁴³ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 244.

contingent was specifically mentioned several times, and German officers were even segregated from other Cossack officers. Even though the British military recognized that they were not Soviet citizens, and a distinct minority within the Cossack Corps, they were always included among those slated for repatriation.

In a 21 May instruction to its Divisions, 5 Corps specified that after all Cossacks were disarmed by 28 May, Cossack officers were to be segregated from other ranks, and German officers would be separated from other Cossack officers.⁴⁴ Handovers were to begin between 29 May and 1 June and continue for an as yet undetermined length of time.⁴⁵ On 26 May, after the British 46 Division took over control of much of the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps, it sent out an order clarifying what was to be done with this group. This order re-iterated the 5 Corps decision to treat several groups, including the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps, in their entirety, as Soviet nationals. It also provided numbers of people in different categories within the Cossack Corps, including “Russians” (136 officers, 10,999 soldiers of other ranks, and 245 camp followers) and Germans (170 officers, and 973 soldiers of other ranks).⁴⁶ On 26 May, 139 Brigade were to segregate the German cadre from the rest of the Cossack Corps, with German officers and German soldiers of other ranks going to Griffen and Wolfsberg (both in Carinthia), respectively.⁴⁷ 136 Brigade were to organize the transfer of these German groups to the Soviets the following day (27 May) as soon after 11:30 am as possible.⁴⁸ Once agreed to by Soviets, this tentative plan was clarified in a 5 Corps order on 27 May which listed 140 German officers and 800 German soldiers of other ranks to be handed over by 46 Division on 28 May.⁴⁹ A 5 Corps

⁴⁴ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 244.

⁴⁵ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 244.

⁴⁶ The National Archives (TNA): WO 170/4352. Key Paper 257.

⁴⁷ TNA: WO 170/4352. Key Paper 257.

⁴⁸ TNA: WO 170/4352. Key Paper 257.

⁴⁹ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 261.

sitrep sent to Eighth Army on 29 May reported that von Pannwitz, along with part of the German cadre of the Cossacks, including 139 German officers and 645 Germans of other ranks were transferred to Russians the previous day.⁵⁰ A further fifty German officers and seventy Cossack officers had been sent to Judenburg to be handed over that morning.⁵¹ British military units consistently made the distinction between Germans and Russians in communications at the time. Not only were 5 Corps and its Divisions aware of the difference between Germans and Russians within the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps, they actively segregated this minority of non-Soviet Germans from the rest of the Corps. Once physically separated, however, both the German minority and Russian majority were handed over to the Soviets, regardless of their status. Driven by the administrative pressures in southern Austria, the known presence of Germans did not prevent 5 Corps from ordering that the entirety of the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps be “repatriated.” In the application of this policy however, there were exceptions. While Germans of the Cossack Corps were “repatriated” despite their non-Soviet status, a small group of other non-Soviets within the Corps were exempted.

The men of the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps were treated inconsistently by the British troops into whose hands they fell. When the majority of the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps was sent to 46 Division, one brigade was retained by the 6 Armoured Division. On 28 May, these 4000 Cossacks, including 105 officers were transferred to an area near the small town of Weitensfeld.⁵² The following day, the officers were slated to be transferred to Soviet hands in Judenburg. A group of officers protested this move, saying they were political refugees and would be treated particularly harshly by Soviet authorities. British officers engaged in a tense discussion with these alleged refugees, eventually reaching the brink of using force to move

⁵⁰ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 270.

⁵¹ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 270.

⁵² Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 251.

Cossacks onto trucks, when two more British officers arrived to settle the matter.⁵³ Lieutenant Colonel Howard, commander of the 1st Kings Royal Rifles, stated that 5 Corps' order (the 21 May order defining Soviet citizens) contained a clause which seemed to exempt these émigrés from repatriation.⁵⁴ While these men were part of a unit that was ordered to be repatriated, on an individual level, according to the same order, they fell into the category of non-Soviets; someone who had not been in the Soviet Union since 1930.⁵⁵ These Cossacks, who had been outside of the USSR since 1920, were seemingly exempt from repatriation. British officers delayed the transport and interrogators questioned the Cossacks, eventually determining that fifty Cossack officers were Civil-War era émigrés, not Soviet citizens, and therefore exempt from repatriation.⁵⁶ The following day, 30 May, 6 Armoured Division reported that a total of sixty Cossack officers were found to be non-Soviets and had been retained, while the remainder were repatriated without incident.⁵⁷ These Russian émigrés among the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps were exempted based on their non-Soviet status by the British 6 Armoured Division, despite the fact that elsewhere, other non-Soviets from the same Corps were treated completely differently.

After the removal of Cossack officers to Dellach on 28 May and their subsequent handover to Soviet authorities the following day, there still remained thousands of Cossack soldiers and camp followers in camps along the Drau River between Oberdrauburg and Lienz. They too were subjected to an inconsistent application of repatriation that resulted in thousands of people being repatriated without any screening to check their nationalities. Like the Cossack officers, they protested and were met with violence from the British troops charged with repatriation operations. The broad interpretation of repatriation that 5 Corps disseminated to its

⁵³ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 252.

⁵⁴ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 252.

⁵⁵ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 206.

⁵⁶ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 252.

⁵⁷ The National Archives (TNA): WO 170/4337. Key Paper 274.

Divisions meant that these groups were treated as a single block and collectively slated for repatriation. This indiscriminate repatriation meant that a minority of non-Soviets among the Cossacks were repatriated despite the fact that they were not strictly liable for this treatment. After the Red Cross discovered these Cossack groups had been repatriated without any check of nationalities, they intervened and took over administration of Cossack camps. Only after Red Cross involvement was screening conducted, resulting in more than 2000 Cossacks being retained who would otherwise have been handed over to Soviet control. Forcible repatriation of these Cossack groups took place in several camps between 1 June and 7 June, with the most violent events taking place on the first days.

On 27 May, 5 Corps issued instructions to its Divisions regarding treatment of the various Cossack groups currently under their control. Members of the 6th Battalion of the Royal West Kents under the 36th Infantry Brigade were charged with repatriating several such groups camped along the Drau River via Oberdrauburg.⁵⁸ The following day, after Cossack officers had been taken to Spittal, the remaining Cossacks were told that their officers were not returning and that they themselves would be handed over to Soviet authorities.⁵⁹ This caused a great deal of objection among the Cossacks, who refused rations from the British on 31 May as a form of protest. On the morning of 1 June, members of the Royal West Kents arrived at the first camp along the Drau, intending to repatriate the Cossacks within.⁶⁰ The leader of the remaining Cossacks was summoned and told to prepare to move, but he refused to do so and informed the British troops that he would sooner be shot than moved.⁶¹ This leader was forcefully removed

⁵⁸ TNA: WO 170/4241. Key Paper 261.

⁵⁹ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 5. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁶⁰ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 6. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁶¹ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix K. Appendix A to Key Papers.

and put on the train to be sent to Judenburg.⁶² As the Royal West Kents entered the camp, it was clear that no preparations had been made for the transfer. The remaining Cossacks were bunched together at one end of the camp, with the outer ring of people locking arms in an attempt to prevent British troops from removing anyone.⁶³ Lieutenant E.B. Hetherington, commander of B Company of the 6th Royal West Kents, ordered a platoon to “fix bayonets in an attempt to rouse the Cossacks into surrender.”⁶⁴ The Cossacks responded by removing their shirts and demanding that the British soldiers stab them. In a continued deterioration of order, the subsequent British threat of force was met with Cossack cheers.⁶⁵ The order was given to remove the most undesirable Cossacks from this tightly formed group. Hetherington noted that it took between four and six British soldiers to force even a single Cossack onto a truck for transport.⁶⁶ In order to remove individuals, these troops used entrenching tool handles, rifle butts and pick helves to break the outer ring of Cossacks.⁶⁷ British troops made progress in embussing this group only after many Cossacks were struck by these tools.⁶⁸ When a group of Cossacks attempted to escape, British troops shot two men as they fled.⁶⁹ After three hours, 300 Cossacks had been taken to the train. Once the perceived troublemakers had been forcibly taken away and two attempted escapees were shot (they later died), the remaining Cossacks begrudgingly made their way to the train station.⁷⁰ After these violent actions at the first camp, when the Royal West Kents went to the next camp, they called in a company of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers to enforce repatriation.

⁶² TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix K. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁶³ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix K. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁶⁴ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix K. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁶⁵ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix K. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁶⁶ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix K. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁶⁷ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 6. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁶⁸ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix K. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁶⁹ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 6-7. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁷⁰ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 6-7, appendix K. Appendix A to Key Papers.

When the Royal West Kents and Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers arrived at the second Cossack camp to be cleared, they met with similar resistance as at the previous camp. Once again, the Cossacks presented an organized opposition. They formed themselves into a group, sat down, linked arms, and refused to move.⁷¹ As in other camps, some demanded that the British shoot them, rather than send them to the Soviet Union.⁷² Once again, British troops used force in an attempt to move the Cossacks onto trucks to go to the train station. Soldiers attached bayonets and began ruthlessly breaking the main body of Cossacks into smaller sections. After ten minutes of beating with sticks, rifle butts and bayonet points, the British resorted to firing weapons in front of and over the heads of the mass of Cossacks.⁷³ While some Cossacks were moved by force to the trucks, the majority remained defiant, despite what Shields referred to as a “really rough handling they had received.”⁷⁴ The perceived ringleader of the resistance was dragged to a truck with his clothes in tatters and bleeding from the blows he had endured.⁷⁵ As in the previous camp, a group of about 200 attempted to escape, but the majority were halted by a burst of automatic gunfire. Several others were shot, two died immediately and another shortly thereafter from his wounds.⁷⁶ Shields reported that after the removal of the protest leader, and Bren gun fire halted the escape attempt, the rest of the job was easy. Within two hours, British troops cleared the camp, and more than 800 Cossacks were embussed, entrained, and headed for Judenburg.⁷⁷ This violent and indiscriminate enactment of repatriation of Cossacks continued on the following day near Nikolsdorf, in the Drau Valley.

⁷¹ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix M. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁷² TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix M. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁷³ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix M. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁷⁴ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix M. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁷⁵ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix M. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁷⁶ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 7. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁷⁷ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 7, appendix M. Appendix A to Key Papers.

On 2 June, the Royal West Kents were once again charged with removing a collection of Cossacks from three camps at Nikolsdorf, with similar results as the previous day. As in other camps, they were met with immediate protest. Cossacks resisted being handed over to Soviet authorities, and the majority refused to move to transports.⁷⁸ When British troops entered the first camp, they found a thousand people kneeling, praying and singing hymns. Some voluntarily moved to the transports, but the remainder rejected this move.⁷⁹ Once again, British troops struck Cossacks with pick helms and rifle butts in order to force them onto trucks to go to the Nikolsdorf train station.⁸⁰ After this show of force, many more reluctantly followed, and approximately 1750 Cossacks from three camps were loaded onto trains headed for the Soviet zone.⁸¹ As in previous camps on the previous day, British troops conducted no screening or sorting of any kind. Every member of the various Cossack groups was treated, as per 5 Corps instructions, as a Soviet citizen, regardless of their specific circumstances. 5 Corps, by judging entire formed bodies of Cossacks as non-Soviet, undoubtedly handed over a minority of non-Soviets among these groups. The inconsistent treatment of one particular group of Cossacks, the “Lienz Cossacks” in a camp at Peggetz, shows the irregularity in this interpretation of repatriation and the violence used to enact it.

At former barracks in Peggetz (just outside Lienz) in southern Austria, the 8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were charged with repatriating the “Ataman Group” of Cossacks, led by Generals Timofey Domanov and Petr Krasnov, and their camp followers. Like the Caucasians and other Cossack groups, the “Ataman Group” was treated as a homogenous entity under the 5 Corps order of 21 May and ordered to be repatriated. The Argylls were dispatched to transport

⁷⁸ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 7. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁷⁹ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 7. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁸⁰ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 7. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁸¹ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 7. Appendix A to Key Papers.

the Cossacks to Judenburg and transfer them to Soviet authorities. They attempted to move the first batch of Cossacks from Peggetz on 1 June, but encountered stiff opposition. The Cossacks, fully understanding the implications of being sent to the Soviet Union, met the Argylls' efforts with organized resistance. Left with few options and frustrated by Cossack opposition, the Argylls responded with some of the most violent acts of the repatriation process. Despite a warning the previous evening to be prepared to leave, on the morning of 1 June the Argylls found that no such preparations had been made. In the main square of the camp, roughly 4000 Cossacks had gathered, with women and children in the center, ringed by the men.⁸² A group of fifteen to twenty priests converged and at 7:30 am, they began to lead the larger crowd in a religious service. Lieutenant Colonel A.D. Malcolm, the commanding officer of the Argylls, ordered Y Company (led by Major W.R. Davies) to separate a small group of roughly thirty Cossacks from the main crowd and load them onto trucks bound for the train station so they could be sent to Judenburg.⁸³ When these troops approached, the crowd nearest to them tightened together and grabbed hold of one another. British troops used axe helms, rifle butts and bayonets to pull individuals from the mass, often needing three or four soldiers to drag a single Cossack to a truck.⁸⁴ The brutal efforts of Davies' men allowed them to split off from the main crowd a section of about 200 Cossacks. The Argylls quickly encircled them and bludgeoned them into submission. As individuals were pulled away from this group, those who remained compressed tightly in order to get away from British troops and began clambering over one another.⁸⁵ Several people were trapped underneath the resulting pyramid of hysterical Cossacks. British troops, alert to the predicament of those trapped, renewed their efforts and freely used pick helms and

⁸² TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix N, appendix O. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁸³ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix N. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁸⁴ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix N. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁸⁵ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix O. Appendix A to Key Papers.

rifle butts to submit the crowd in an effort to save the lives of the trapped Cossacks. After every one of this group of 200 was dragged to trucks, the Argylls discovered that a man and a woman, smothered by the crowd, had suffocated in the melee.⁸⁶

Tension in the camp rose as this first group was beaten and pulled away, and the remaining Cossacks continued their resistance in the face of forceful British actions. After the men under Davies' command brutally dragged the entirety of this first group to the trucks, he pleaded with the chief priest to settle the Cossacks and go peacefully to the transports. The priest declared that even with the threat of continued force, he would not help.⁸⁷ Davies engaged in another raid on the crowd and when the Cossacks saw British soldiers among them, they panicked. This panic spread to British soldiers who, feeling threatened, were forced to use their rifle butts to keep from being overwhelmed.⁸⁸ A distraught Cossack clutched at the rifle of a British soldier and pulled the trigger in an attempt to commit suicide, but instead, the bullet struck and killed a young Cossack nearby. This gunshot immediately caused a brief stampede and another Cossack was trampled to death.⁸⁹ Through further forceful efforts, Davies' men sectioned off another 200 Cossacks from the main crowd. In an act of desperation, members of this group threw themselves on the ground and, in Davies' words, begged "to be bayoneted or shot to death as an alternative to loading."⁹⁰ The Argylls managed to load the entirety of this separated group, but as with the last load, every Cossack had to be forcibly carried to the waiting trucks.⁹¹ The remaining mass of Cossacks broke into a neighbouring field and continued to chant hymns, encouraged by the priests. British troops cordoned them off and began searching huts in

⁸⁶ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix O. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁸⁷ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix O. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁸⁸ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix O. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁸⁹ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix O. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁹⁰ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix O. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁹¹ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix O. Appendix A to Key Papers.

the camp for stray Cossacks to take to trucks.⁹² As they pulled people from the huts, individuals from the neighbouring field began returning to the camp to find family members and children. Davies stated in the 36th Infantry Brigade Report that this “gradual trickle of “volunteers” provided sufficient numbers to complete our first train load.”⁹³ Malcolm noted that only 1252 Cossacks were loaded onto the train, instead of the planned 1750, but he “decided not to continue the forcible methods in view of the inevitable injuries inflicted.”⁹⁴ After the abject violence of the first day of repatriations, Cossack resistance was largely broken, and several more train loads of Cossacks from Peggetz were loaded much more peacefully on 2, 3, and 4 June.⁹⁵ As was the case in other camps in southern Austria, and following 5 Corps instructions, the British troops did not monitor who exactly was being repatriated and performed no screening for non-Soviet citizens.

The broad interpretation of repatriation from southern Austria, in which entire groups were judged to be treated as Soviet nationals, ended on 7 June. By this date, more than 1600 Cossack and Caucasian officers, 3161 Caucasian soldiers and their families, and 17,282 Cossack soldiers and their families had been repatriated from the Drau River valley.⁹⁶ Because of the 5 Corps order stating that members of these groups were to be treated as Soviet nationals, there were no formal screenings conducted and non-Soviets were repatriated. While 5 Corps enacted these operations under the constraints of military requirements in a time of chaos and confusion, the Red Cross was essentially free of these restraints. The intervention of the Red Cross and the Displaced Persons Branch of the Allied Military Government in southern Austria saved more

⁹² TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix N. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁹³ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix O. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁹⁴ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix N. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁹⁵ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 7. Appendix A to Key Papers.

⁹⁶ TNA: WO 170/4389, appendix P. Appendix A to Key Papers. More than 1600 Cossack and Caucasian officers had been repatriated through Spittal, 3161 Caucasian soldiers or other ranks and their families through Dellach, 3407 Cossack soldiers of other ranks and their families through Oberdrauburg, 5317 Cossack soldiers of other ranks and their families through Dölsach, and 5397 Cossacks soldiers of other ranks and their families from Peggetz.

than 2000 people from being handed over to Soviet authorities who, under 5 Corps orders, were slated for repatriation. Operating parallel to the military in the area, these two organizations' intercession caused 5 Corps to halt repatriations until proper sorting of individuals could be performed.

On 3 June, a representative of the Displaced Persons Branch of the Allied Military Government arrived at Peggetz "by the merest chance"⁹⁷ and suggested that the AMG take over administration of the camp, an offer which was "graciously accepted."⁹⁸ An AMG officer named Captain Martyn became camp Commandant and worked with the Argylls, who were still under orders to continue taking camp inhabitants to the Soviet zone.⁹⁹ The Allied Military Government had been working with Joan Couper,¹⁰⁰ the Senior British Red Cross supervisor in the area, on Displaced Persons, and they contacted her regarding Peggetz. Couper then sent a member of her own staff, Enid Pearce, to the camp to investigate the situation.¹⁰¹ Pearce was disturbed by the state of the camp and the conditions of Cossacks still there, many of whom were still injured from the violence of 1 June. She was further distressed to hear that no effort had been made by British soldiers to create a registry of camp inhabitants or check the names and nationalities of those put on trains.¹⁰² In response, Pearce urged Couper to come to Peggetz so she could evaluate the situation for herself.

Couper's involvement brought the Red Cross and Allied Military Government into the issue and raised several questions regarding the inclusion of non-Soviet among the repatriates. Couper arrived in Peggetz on 7 June and spoke with Captain Martyn and the Adjutant of the

⁹⁷ British Red Cross Report. Appendix C to Key Papers.

⁹⁸ British Red Cross Report. Appendix C to Key Papers.

⁹⁹ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 268.

¹⁰⁰ Booker describes Couper as "a redoubtable example of British upper-middle-class womanhood," Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 451.

¹⁰¹ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 268.

¹⁰² Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 268-269.

Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. She was told that for several days prior to repatriation operations, the Cossacks had been under the control of the Argylls, but during this time, no attempts had been made at registering the inhabitants or ascertaining their nationalities.¹⁰³ The Adjutant told Couper that he knew nothing of the categories of people who were to be repatriated, only that his orders were to send back the entire camp.¹⁰⁴ In an 8 June letter to John Selby-Bigge, the senior British Red Cross representative in Austria and Assistant Commissioner for the AMG in Klagenfurt, Couper noted that the first train load, including women and children, had been sent away without even a cursory investigation into their names or nationalities.¹⁰⁵ Because the military made no administrative effort to record who had been sent to the Soviet zone and who remained, it was impossible to know exactly how many non-Soviets were wrongly handed over. Couper understood that an order existed requiring the return of all Russian civilians, but told Selby-Bigge there was clear evidence that “many people who are not ‘Soviet citizens’ ...are being forcibly sent into Russian territory,” and “families are being split and force used on women and children.”¹⁰⁶ This information bothered Selby-Bigge, who presented his concerns, through several intermediaries in the Allied Military Government and the British military, at a meeting with General McCreery.¹⁰⁷ After reading Couper’s report on the conditions at Peggetz and taking these concerns to several colleagues, Selby-Bigge met with McCreery at Eighth Army HQ in Udine, Italy on 13 June. In an unpublished memoir,¹⁰⁸ Selby-Bigge recorded the general course and outcome of the meeting. He stated that they argued for forty minutes, during which McCreery explained that “the difficulty of the military situation...had necessitated

¹⁰³ British Red Cross Report. Appendix C to Key Papers.

¹⁰⁴ British Red Cross Report. Appendix C to Key Papers.

¹⁰⁵ British Red Cross Report. Appendix C to Key Papers.

¹⁰⁶ British Red Cross Report. Appendix C to Key Papers.

¹⁰⁷ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 270-271.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted here from Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*.

the clearance of a certain area without delay.”¹⁰⁹ Under such circumstances, McCreery believed injustices were “bound to occur,” though he regretted these errors.¹¹⁰ McCreery agreed with Selby-Bigge’s main point and promised that “there would be no more forcible repatriation, and no repatriation at all without proper screening by qualified Military Government officers.”¹¹¹ Orders to the same effect were issued to 5 Corps shortly thereafter.

Later on the same day as Selby-Bigge’s meeting with McCreery, Eighth Army HQ sent 5 Corps a message regarding how repatriations were to be conducted going forward. This message informed 5 Corps that Eighth Army had received reports that hardship had occurred in some cases during the evacuation of Soviets and Displaced Personnel. They blamed this hardship on the inclusion of non-Soviet men, women, and children among the repatriates.¹¹² McCreery recognized the magnitude of the problems the men of 5 Corps faced and commended them for their great skill and competence in the face of these challenges.¹¹³ He then stated that cases of “hardship or irregular repatriation were chiefly due to the impossibility of accurately classifying the inmates of the camps before repatriation commenced.”¹¹⁴ Due to concerns regarding hardship during handovers, Eighth Army put an end to the broad interpretation of repatriation, and ordered that “no repatriation takes place in future of anyone without full classification by the Displaced Persons Branch of AMG.”¹¹⁵ Eighth Army instructed 5 Corps to apply for additional personnel for the purpose of classifying Displaced Persons still held within the Corps’ area.¹¹⁶ Eighth Army noted that the classification of individuals was especially important in areas where Displaced Personnel were still mixed up with surrendered personnel. This classification was to “ensure that

¹⁰⁹ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 271.

¹¹⁰ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 271.

¹¹¹ Booker, *A Looking-Glass Tragedy*, 271.

¹¹² The National Archives (TNA): FO 1020/2838. Key Paper 298.

¹¹³ The National Archives (TNA): FO 1020/2838. Key Paper 298.

¹¹⁴ The National Archives (TNA): FO 1020/2838. Key Paper 298.

¹¹⁵ The National Archives (TNA): FO 1020/2838. Key Paper 298.

¹¹⁶ The National Archives (TNA): FO 1020/2838. Key Paper 298.

no men, women or children [were] repatriated to the Soviet [Union] who [were] not Soviet citizens.”¹¹⁷ Addressing another concern of Red Cross administrators, Eighth Army concluded by ordering that on “no account is force to be used in connection with any repatriation scheme.”¹¹⁸ This order put a halt to the indiscriminate interpretation of repatriation as it was enacted in southern Austria. It was only after the Red Cross and the Allied Military Government became involved that the policy in the area changed. These organizations, focussing on humanitarian concerns, and operating largely without the constraints of the military, were able to devote efforts to screening those remaining Cossacks in a way that the British military could not. As a result of the efforts of the Red Cross, more than 2000 former prisoners and Displaced Persons among groups originally meant to be handed over were found to be non-Soviets, retained, and sent to collection centres for Displaced Personnel.¹¹⁹ When operations were within the purview of the military, repatriations occurred without screening, based on a broad interpretation of who was liable to be treated as a Soviet national. Once the Red Cross and AMG took over, they ended repatriations based on that loose understanding and took over responsibility for non-Soviets who would have been repatriated by the military. This action allowed the British military to focus on more pressing concerns in the region. Up until this point though, the British military applied repatriation haphazardly and without regularity throughout the Corps area.

The inconsistency with which 5 Corps applied repatriation was inextricably linked with the broad interpretation of repatriation they utilized, which itself was a result of the chaotic circumstances they faced. 5 Corps’ interpretation, manifest in instructions on 21, 24, and 27 May 1945 ordered several groups to be repatriated in their entirety, while still offering an individual

¹¹⁷ The National Archives (TNA): FO 1020/2838. Key Paper 298.

¹¹⁸ The National Archives (TNA): FO 1020/2838. Key Paper 298.

¹¹⁹ TNA: WO 170/4389, p 1. Appendix A to Key Papers.

definition of Soviet citizens. This meant that some groups, despite their obvious non-Soviet status (i.e. the German cadre of the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps) were repatriated, while other individuals (i.e. sixty Cossack officers from the same Cossack Corps, but held by a different Division) were exempted from repatriation. There was no regularity in how exemptions were accorded; rather, they were based entirely on individual circumstances. There was no consistency in how the policy was applied and this irregular process based on the broad interpretation of who was liable for repatriation came out of the chaotic circumstances facing 5 Corps. McCreery's statement to Selby-Bigge, that the military situation necessitated the clearance of southern Austria was not the only one that connected the chaotic circumstances in the area with the inconsistent application of repatriation. AFHQ Chief Administrative Officer General Brian Robertson, Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean Field Marshal Harold Alexander, and AFHQ Deputy Adjutant General M.W.M Macleod all expressed similar sentiments at several points throughout the repatriation process.

The effect of the circumstances in southern Austria on the way 5 Corps broadly interpreted repatriation is evident in the correspondence of several important figures within the British military. On 14 May, Alexander Kirk, the American political representative at AFHQ (Macmillan's American counterpart) reported to the State Department in Washington details of a conversation on the same day between himself and AFHQ Chief Administrative Officer General Brian Robertson. Kirk stated that Robertson requested Kirk's concurrence with a draft telegram to Eighth Army authorizing the return of Cossacks in southern Austria.¹²⁰ Kirk responded that without referring the matter to his own government, he could not concur with this course of action, which had already been recommended by Macmillan. Robertson replied that he was "faced with a grave administrative problem with hundreds of thousands of German POWS on his

¹²⁰ USNA Diplomatic State Dept Control Italy. Key Paper 107.

hands and could not bother at this time about who might or might not be turned over to the Russians...to be shot.”¹²¹ As a result, Robertson would send the telegram in spite of Kirk’s non-concurrence.¹²² Clearly, from Robertson’s perspective, the issue of managing and administrating the hundreds of thousands of prisoners in the area far outweighed a careful consideration of who exactly was liable for repatriation. This telegram to 5 Corps authorizing the return of all Cossacks in the area, as recommended by Macmillan when he was at Eighth Army and 5 Corps, furthered the process that led to 5 Corps orders to repatriate entire collections of people. Two days later, Harold Alexander expressed similar thoughts regarding the crisis in southern Austria. On 16 May, Alexander sent a message to Churchill to update the Prime Minister on the refugee and prisoner situation in southern Austria. The situation was deeply concerning as Alexander stated his “administrative problem [was] a big one as we have about one million prisoners in [the] Villach-Klagenfurt area to look after.”¹²³ Alexander recognized the tenuous hold his troops had in the area, and prioritized his military readiness over other concerns. Alexander told Churchill quite simply that he “must clear the decks in this area.”¹²⁴ While still having to manage the administrative disaster in southern Austria, Alexander’s primary concern was clearing the area so that his troops could be militarily effective. This shows the general sentiment of those at AFHQ who were more focussed on being militarily capable than creating any kind of strict definition of who was liable for repatriation and enacting it consistently throughout the area. The words of Deputy Adjutant General M.W.M Macleod though, most directly connect the administrative problems facing 5 Corps and the resulting policy of repatriation.

¹²¹ USNA Diplomatic State Dept Control Italy. Key Paper 107.

¹²² USNA Diplomatic State Dept Control Italy. Key Paper 107.

¹²³ The National Archives (TNA): WO 214/42. Key Paper 131.

¹²⁴ TNA: WO 214/42. Key Paper 131.

At a conference of several branches of AFHQ regarding the movement of different nationalities held on 25 May, General Macleod clarified the current AFHQ policy. Macleod explained that initially “no movement of nationals should be allowed to any country other than their own.”¹²⁵ This had apparently always been the policy until “there was a possibility of operations in Austria, when it was imperative that Austria be cleared.”¹²⁶ This strongly links the possibility of returning people to a country that may not be their own with the need for Austria to be cleared. British troops, facing logistical problems and an administrative nightmare, had to be prepared to militarily counteract Tito’s actions in southern Austria and northern Italy. As a result, there was openness among members of the AFHQ to changing the existing policy and sending individuals to a country other than their own. Macleod then said that he “would take up this point with Eighth Army.”¹²⁷ This discussion occurred in the following days during the conference at Eighth Army HQ. Those present at this conference approved of 5 Corps’ initial direction and agreed that “Cossacks will be treated as Soviet Nationals and will be returned to Russian hands.”¹²⁸ The British military used this broad interpretation of repatriation until the Red Cross intervened and halted these indiscriminate actions.

The conditions in southern Austria were an administrative disaster, and the interpretation of repatriation that came out of these conditions was ultimately applied haphazardly and without consistency. This broad interpretation which judged several entire groups to be Soviet nationals, but also gave an individual definition for a Soviet citizen, was created due to the lack of manpower needed to properly screen people on an individual basis. The result of this interpretation was an inconsistent application of this policy. The Schutzkorps and Ukrainian

¹²⁵ USNA Kirk Papers. Key Paper 249.

¹²⁶ USNA Kirk Papers. Key Paper 249.

¹²⁷ USNA Kirk Papers. Key Paper 249.

¹²⁸ USNA Kirk Papers. Key Paper 269.

Division were entirely exempted, despite the fact that some of their members were Soviet citizens. Thousands of people from the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps, and Cossacks and Caucasians were all judged to be liable for repatriation despite the recognized existence of a minority among them that were not Soviets. This recognition is evidenced in a 46 Division order from 26 May which refers to these groups as “consisting *mainly* [my emphasis] of Soviet nationals.”¹²⁹ Even clearer was the acknowledged presence of Germans among the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps, who were physically segregated from other Cossacks but were repatriated nonetheless. Exemptions for members of these groups were accorded irregularly as well. While the German minority of the 15th Cossack Cavalry Corps were repatriated by one unit of the British military, other non-Soviets in the same Corps were retained by a different British military unit. Cossacks in camps like Peggetz were initially repatriated without any kind of screening, but once the Red Cross took over administration, they found more than 2000 people to be non-Soviets, and exempted this group from handover to Soviet authorities. The military, operating with constraints that did not affect the Red Cross, prioritized military effectiveness over a consistent policy of repatriation, as evidenced by the words of General McCreery and several figures at AFHQ. The irregular enactment of this policy allowed for numerous instances in which non-Soviets were repatriated while others were exempted due to individual circumstances rather than a consistent and unified policy.

¹²⁹ TNA: WO 170/4352. Key Paper 257.

Conclusion

Based on an examination of military and government communications I have argued that the British transfer to the Soviets of the “Lienz Cossacks” and associated groups resulted from a combination of complex circumstances. At the cessation of hostilities in Europe in May of 1945, British military units in southern Austria found themselves in a tense and difficult situation. Upon arrival, they experienced extraordinary administrative challenges in addition to the potential conflict with Titoist Partisans who had infiltrated the area and claimed it for Yugoslavia. These challenges, and several accompanying complications regarding British occupation of Austria, as well as a lack of sufficient manpower for more specific screening of prisoners and refugees, led 5 Corps to issue orders on repatriation that interpreted in very general terms who was liable for return to the Soviet Union. These orders classified entire formations as either non-Soviet or Soviet, but also included a definition for singular persons which could be utilized if individuals pressed their case to be retained. Without an explanation regarding how one might “press their case,” British units under 5 Corps interpreted these orders inconsistently. Soviet citizens within two groups were retained, even though according to the individual definition of a Soviet citizen they should have been repatriated. Among three other groups, Russians who had never been Soviet citizens were handed over to Soviet authorities despite the fact that on an individual level, they were not liable to be treated in this way. There were exemptions to these broad repatriations, but they were granted without any regularity across 5 Corps’ area. The chaos and confusion in southern Austria led to a disjointed repatriation policy, which itself led to an irregular and inconsistent application of repatriation. This convoluted and

haphazard interpretation was only brought to an end after the British Red Cross intervened on humanitarian grounds.

For many years after the war, these events were known only to those directly involved, but this changed as non-Soviet survivors of the repatriations were released from the Gulag in 1955. After Nikita Khrushchev's Amnesty Decree, a number of these survivors settled in the United Kingdom and brought their harrowing stories of repatriation with them. Writers such as Peter Huxley-Blythe and Julius Epstein engaged with these survivors and British soldiers involved in repatriation, but their narratives were sparse and limited by a lack of archival records. This changed once the British archives made material from the Second World War available in the early 1970s. Nicolas Bethell and especially Nikolai Tolstoy were now able to fill in gaps left by previous authors writing on repatriations. Tolstoy, having an affinity with White Russians and by extension many of the non-Soviet émigré survivors, favoured their understanding of events. He accused several British figures of betraying the Cossacks and intentionally including non-Soviets among those repatriated, probably at the behest of Soviet authorities. Tolstoy's allegations escalated to the point that he suggested that former Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and Lord Aldington (called Toby Low when he was at 5 Corps) were war criminals. Writing during the Cold War, Tolstoy blamed these men for the suffering of repatriates at the hands of Soviet authorities, and failed to recognize the importance of the fact that at the time of repatriations, Britain and the Soviet Union were still close allies. Tolstoy's allegations led to a libel trial (which he lost) which ran concurrent to the work of the "Cowgill Group," an informal commission in Britain that sought to understand the entirety of the repatriations within a fuller context than Tolstoy had comprehended.

Christopher Booker, a journalist and member of the “Cowgill Group,” used the research and work done by the group to write a book of his own which outlined where and how Tolstoy had gone astray. This became part of a contentious disagreement which separated journalists and commentators into two diametrically opposed camps. Tolstoy and his followers believed that British authorities, by deliberately repatriating Soviets and non-Soviets had committed a war crime and were as responsible as Soviet forces for the hardships of repatriates. Booker and his supporters believed that despite challenging circumstances, the British had nobly and correctly enacted a policy in keeping with an international agreement made at Yalta. Neither group was willing to acknowledge that their interpretation was deficient.

By re-examining archival evidence, and operating outside the divisive camps of both writers, I have restored proper historical context and corrected the lack of nuance in previous narratives. Tolstoy’s conspiracies were without merit, but his belief that non-Soviets were incorrectly repatriated was, in essence, accurate. Booker recognized, to an extent, the chaos of the conditions facing 5 Corps, but failed to appreciate the ways in which those conditions led to an inconsistent application of repatriation. 5 Corps, under immense pressure and facing multiple potentially disastrous obstacles, issued divergent orders which allowed for non-Soviets to be retained or handed over, depending on one’s interpretation of the orders. The result of this was the inconsistent allocation of exemptions from repatriation, and the unfortunate handover of people who were not liable for such treatment.

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