The Vlasov Case

History of a Betrayal

Volume 1

1942–1945

Edited by
Federal Archival Agency of Russia
The Russian State Archive of Social and Political History

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Preface

Marlene Laruelle
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This two-volume book is a translation of *General Vlasov: a History of Betrayal*, a three-volume compilation of documents from Russian, Belarusian, and German archives.[1] This translation would not have been possible without the enormous amount of work put in by Andrey Artizov, Andrey Sorokin and Tatiana Tsarevskaia-Diakina at RGASPI, as well as by translators and editors Amanda Blasko, Alexei Sobchenko, Kirill Savinski, and Ellen Powell. They are all gratefully thanked here. Translating into English Soviet archives that were themselves often translations from German texts mentioning places and people from the huge territories of what are today Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine runs up against multiple challenges, especially—but not only—because of the plurality of languages used simultaneously in the region. As often in such a massive work, some inconsistencies may remain, and we apologize to readers for these.

Why is it important to translate into English the Soviet archives documenting the Vlasov case? General Andrey Vlasov (1901-1946) is known to epitomize collaborationism with Nazi Germany. A famous Red Army general, he changed sides after being captured by Nazi troops in July 1942 during an attempt to break the encirclement of Leningrad. In prison, he met Captain Wilfried Strik-Strikfeldt, a former White officer who had circulated memos trying to convince the Wehrmacht of the need to support a collaborationist network inside Russia as they had in other countries. Associated with this project and under the protection of the Wehrmacht's propaganda department, Vlasov worked in the occupied territories in order to recruit Soviet prisoners of war to the Russian Liberation Army (RLA). Vlasov expected that this army made of Soviet POWs could fight along with the Wehrmacht against Stalinism. Vlasov's idea began to work only by the end of the war, in the fall of 1944.

[1] *General Vlasov: istoriia predatel'stva. V dvukh tomakh, trekh knigakh* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2015).

After the German defeat, Vlasov was repatriated to the Soviet Union, where he was executed as a war criminal and traitor on August 1, 1946. Every European country had collaborationist figures and partisans, but Vlasov is a particularly strong symbol because the Soviet Union paid the highest price in terms of deaths while fighting against Nazism. The archives selected here show in detail all the ideological and logistical articulations involved with building a collaborationist movement. However, in this preface we want to focus the reader's attention more on Vlasov's long-term legacies than on the history of collaboration itself.

One of these crucial legacies relates to the complex relationship between Vlasov and the White movement. Like Vlasov, the majority of Vlasovite military corps were former Red Army officers and soldiers: some of them were anti-Communist and especially anti-Stalinist, but it is unclear how many were also convinced monarchists who desired the re-establishment of a tsarist regime. The Russian emigration was divided into several ideological branches, ranging from monarchists to social-democrats, but those ready to cooperate with Nazi Germany to overthrow the Soviet regime mostly belonged to the monarchist group, while the small number of social-democrats had pinned their hopes on the Western Allies.

Once Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, the main émigré movement ready to cooperate with Berlin was the National Alliance of Russian Solidarists (NTS). Born in 1931 among the younger generation of émigrés as the youth branch of the Russian All-Military Union (ROVS) led by White General Piotr Wrangel, NTS promoted a muscular ideology inspired by Italian fascism, which it saw as the only ideology able to fight against Bolshevism. NTS therefore joined forces with the Nazis not only with the goal of overthrowing the Soviet regime, but also because it shared many of the latter's fascist and national-socialist ideological beliefs. In the late 1930s, NTS tried unsuccessfully to court Nazi leadership; it was not until after the 1941 invasion of the USSR that several NTS figures took up employment in the Nazi ranks on the Eastern Front.

Despite multiple efforts, Vlasov had to wait until 1944, when the German defeat was already looming, to secure the support of the Nazi leadership in launching a Russian army. He then became the highest-ranking Russian officer in the service of the Third Reich, emerging—with the support of SS leader

Himmler—as head of the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia (*Komitet osvobozhdeniia narodov Rossii*, CLPR). The CLPR was solemnly established as the official political arm and sponsor of the RLA in Prague on November 14, 1944, with Vlasov surrounded by decorated leaders of the Nazi military and SS.

This officialization pushed Vlasov to search for the support of the main figures among Russian émigrés. For instance, he sent emissaries to Paris and Zurich to meet with the Russian philosophers Ivan A. Ilyin and Boris P. Vysheslavtsev. The former refused to cooperate, while the latter agreed to join CLPR. This bifurcation would be replicated across NTS, with some figures joining Vlasov and others refusing to do so—although the higher echelons of the organization's leadership followed Vysheslavtsev's line, seeing Germany as their only hope of destroying the Soviet regime. Several ROVS figures, among them General Fedor F. Abramov, Alexsei A. von Lampe, and Vasilii V. Biskupskii, representative of *Russische Vertrauensstelle*, the Nazi government body dealing with the Russian émigré community, also met with the Vlasov team to discuss how ROVS' goals of restoring monarchism in Russia could be incorporated into the CLPR program—the transcript of Vlasov's interrogation, published in the second volume, provides much detail on these meetings. Several White officers and representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church abroad, as well as Nicholas I's grandson and NTS founder Sergei N. Leikhtenbergskii, attended another CLPR meeting in Berlin in November 1944.[2]

With the Nazi defeat in May 1945, NTS had to readjust its ideological line and look for another powerful patron. The movement's leadership turned toward the United States and United Kingdom, both of which were interested in developing strategies to contain communism in Europe. For the NTS ideologists, the doctrinal challenge was to cleanse "solidarism" of its fascist colors and move to a pro-democracy language that would speak to the Western powers.[3] To do this, it was necessary to

[2] The most detailed account of Vlasov-NTS interactions has been studied by Vladimir Cherniaev, "Belaia emigratsiia i plan 'Novoi Rossii' v Manifeste CLPR," *Nansenovskie chteniia* (St: Petersburg, 2016), pp. 238-280, available at http://beloedelo.com/researches/article/?850.

[3] More in Benjamin Tromly, "Émigré Politics and the Cold War: The National Labor Alliance (NTS), United States Intelligence Agencies and Post-War Europe," *Contemporary European History* (2019).

minimize *a posteriori* the connections created between NTS, on one side, and the Nazi administration and openly collaborationist movements such as Vlasov's, on the other. In late 1945, adapting himself to the new *Zeitgeist*, Viktor Baidalakov, chairman of NTS, criticized the Vlasov army for its incompetence and collusion with Nazism.[4] In the Cold War decades, a significant proportion of NTS memory activities focused on dissociating the organization's goals of "liberating Russia" and insisting on a Christian conservative interpretation of solidarism from any trace of national-socialism; yet many NTS publications continued to promote Vlasov's memory. A large part of the White movement was also divided between those who recognized Vlasov as a partner in restoring the Romanov dynasty and those who considered it impossible to cooperate with a former Red Army officer.[5]

While doctrinal and memory conflicts inside NTS continued for decades, the organization succeeded in leveraging its new patrons and selling the competencies acquired during Nazi collaboration for a new wave of anti-Soviet covert operations. U.S. intelligence agencies and their British counterparts indeed saw in wartime collaborators a unique source of information on, and cadres for subversive operations against, the Soviet Union and co-opted a number of them, both from the Vlasov army and from NTS. Reinhard Gehlen, the chief of Nazi military intelligence on the Eastern Front, who had surrendered to the US, was brought to Washington in September 1945 to become one of the liaisons working out the basic mechanics of Nazi post-war collaboration with the Americans, including connecting the latter with Russian émigré communities and the Vlasovites.

If the ability of NTS and the Vlasovites to operate on Soviet territories after 1945 appeared quite limited, they could work more easily in satellite countries and in Western European states. Yet their main role in the 1950s was not so much in undercover operations as in the propaganda field: they played a critical role in helping the US to launch, in 1950, the American Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia (the name bears a striking similarity to that of Vlasov's 1944 project), one of the main agencies

[4] See A.V. Okorokov, *Fashizm i russkaia emigratsiia* (Moscow: Rusaki, 2002), p. 501.
[5] More in Benjamin Tromly, "Reinventing Collaboration: The Vlasov Movement in the Postwar Russian Emigration," in G. Grinchenko and E. Narvselius (eds.), *Traitors, Collaborators and Deserters in Contemporary European Politics of Memory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 87-111.

for fighting communism, which brought together not only Russians, but also Ukrainian, Balts, Poles, and other diaspora communities. The American Committee funded the creation, in 1953, of Radio Liberty, which merged in the 1970s with Radio Free Europe, part of the vanguard of the U.S. ideological front against the Soviet Union.

The Vlasov-NTS legacy also took root in Russia itself. NTS was one of the most active émigré communities distributing forbidden literature to Soviet dissidents and helping the latter's samizdats to exit the country. Upon the collapse of the Soviet Union, NTS moved back to Russia and transferred its small publishing house, Posev, to Moscow. Although quite inactive compared to the many other conservative movements that emerged in Russia at that time, the NTS nevertheless succeeded in securing a long-lasting legacy by inspiring a pro-White and sometimes pro-Vlasov literature.

Attempts to rehabilitate Vlasov emerged in the 1990s but gathered force in the following decade. In 2001, the small monarchist movement "For Faith and Fatherland" (*Za veru i otechestvo*) submitted a claim to the Main Military Procuracy asking for a revision of Vlasov's death sentence, stating, "Vlasov was a patriot who spent much time re-evaluating his service in the Red Army and the essence of Stalin's regime before agreeing to collaborate with the Germans."[6] The Military Procuracy concluded that the 1991 law "On rehabilitation of the victims of political repressions" did not apply to Vlasov, and the case was closed. In 2009, the Federation Council (the Russian Senate) took a stance against the rehabilitation of Vlasov, which was then under consideration by the Synod of Bishops, the governing body of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR). In *Russia's Tragedy* (*Tragediia Rossii*, 2009), archpriest Georgii Mitrofanov asked for Vlasov to be considered not a traitor but a Russian patriot who defended his homeland against Stalinism.[7] The same line of defense has been advanced by former Moscow mayor Gavriil Popov, one of

[6] Valeria Korchagina and Andrei Zolotov, Jr., "It's Too Early to Forgive Vlasov," *St. Petersburg Times*, November 6, 2001, http://web.archive.org/web/20070928003436/http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=5830.

[7] Adzhar Kurtov, "Byl li general Vlasov predatelem? Pravovaia otsenka popytok reabilitatsii," *Perspektivy*, November 11, 2009, http://www.perspektivy.info/history/byl_li_general_vlasov_predatelem_pravovaja_ocenka_popytok_reabilitacii_2009-11-11.htm.

the famous proponents of reforms during late perestroika and now dean of a private university, the International Moscow University. In his book, *Summoning the Spirit of General Vlasov* (2007), Popov, who does not hide his ideological proximity to NTS, considers that Vlasov did not betray Russia but on the contrary embodies an anti-Stalin vision of Russia that will shape the future of the country and should be rehabilitated.[8]

More academic debates also surrounded the interpretation of the Vlasov case. Andrei Zubov, a professor at MGIMO (Moscow State Institute of International Relations), supervised the publication, in 2009, of a two-volume *History of Twentieth-Century Russia* (*Istoriia Rossii XXogo veka*). The 2,000-plus page compilation involved about 40 contributing authors; a fourth edition was released in 2016. Originally, Alexander Solzhenitsyn was part of the editorial board; the Nobel laureate later retracted his support for the project, but it continues to be known as the "Solzhenitsynian" version of Russian history. Zubov's *History* advances a very anti-Soviet narrative on Russia's history and offers a sympathetic treatment of all those who collaborated with Nazi Germany to defeat Stalinism. Zubov claims that Nazis and Bolsheviks both wanted to destroy the Russian peasant world; thus, Stalin, too, can be called a fascist. He considers the term "Great Patriotic War" to be a product of Soviet propaganda and proposes renaming the conflict more straightforwardly as the "Soviet–Nazi war."[9]

His interpretation drew sharp criticism from the rest of the historian community,[10] and this opprobrium only increased following his opposition to the annexation of Crimea—for which he was fired from MGIMO—and his decision to join the anti-Putin liberal party PARNAS (People's Freedom Party). Zubov's interpretation of the war is embedded in a broader conception of Russia: he is a fervent Orthodox Christian, a member of several Synodal Commissions, and one of the authors of the Moscow Patriarchate's Social Concept.[11] His opinion reflects the views of

[8] See the English version: Gavriil Popov, *Sumoning the Spirit of General Vlasov* (New York: Vantage Press, 2009). The Russian original dates from 2007.
[9] Andrei Zubov, "Andrei Zubov o termine 'sovetsko-natsistskaia voina,'" *LiveJournal* (blog), May 12, 2010, http://russia-xx.livejournal.com/92043.html.
[10] "7 glavnykh mifov o voine. S kommentariiami istorikov," *The Insider*, May 8, 2015, http://theins.ru/history/7421.
[11] Al'bert Naryshkin, "Professor Zubov kak ideolog novoi vlasovshchiny," *Politicheskaia Rossiia*, September 1, 2016, http://politrussia.com/control/parnas-ve

many of the Church's high-ranking members on twentieth-century Russian history.

These historiographical debates sprung up again in 2016–2017 around the Ph.D. thesis of Kirill Aleksandrov at the St. Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences.[12] Aleksandrov, known for being an NTS sympathizer, has published several books justifying Vlasov's actions as an example of social protest against Stalinist violence. In his main book, *Russian Soldiers of the Wehrmacht: Heroes or Traitors?*, he insists that the Vlasovites had won the support of the population and were fighting for Russia's statehood and national identity against the destructive goals of both Nazism and Stalinism. His Ph.D., about Vlasov's officer corps, was validated by the defense committee in 2016, but it gave rise to several critiques within the historian community and among veterans' associations.[13] Andrei Artizov, director of the Russian State Archives, requested that a new committee conduct a second review of the thesis, in the hope of getting the argument debunked.[14] That hope was fulfilled, and Aleksandrov was ultimately refused the title of doctor of history.[15]

As we can see from this brief sketch, Vlasov's legacy, partly blended with memory of NTS, has had a long-lasting but understudied impact on views of twentieth-century Russia. It has contributed to developing an alternative line of interpretation of major historical events that, even if it is far from gaining majority support, has been able to secure a growing audience in the past thirty years, with the Russian Orthodox Church and groups around it now becoming more vocal in promoting this vision of the past. It is our hope that the following documents will contribute to understanding of the phenomenon of collaboration as such and of Vlasov case particularly.

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[12] Kirill Aleksandrov, "Generalitet i ofitserskie kadry vooruzhionnykh formirovanii Komiteta osvobozhdeniia narodov Rossii v 1943-1946 gg." (PhD diss., St. Petersburg Institute of History, Russian Academy of Arts, 2015). See the story of the defense at "Porokhovaia bochka istorii," *Novaia Gazeta Sankt–Peterburg*, March 25, 2016, http://novayagazeta.spb.ru/articles/10243/.

[13] See Mark Edele, "Fighting Russia's History Wars: Vladimir Putin and the Codification of World War II," *History & Memory* 29, no. 2 (2017): 90-124.

[14] Sergei Aksionov, "Rosarkhiv likvidiruet vlasovshchinu," *Russkaia Planeta*, April 18, 2016, http://rusplt.ru/society/rosarhiv-likvidiruet-vlasovschinu-23743.html.

[15] "Ekspertnyi sovet VAK ne podderzhal dissertatsiiu o vlasovtsakh," *Fontanka*, June 2, 2017, https://www.fontanka.ru/2017/06/02/004/.

Introduction

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The German war against the Soviet Union was conducted under the battle cry of "racial cleansing" and the physical annihilation of those persons undesirable to the Third Reich. The Nazis never hid their contempt for the Slavs who made up the majority of the USSR's population, nor for representatives of other "non-Aryan" ethnicities. In formulating their own Ostpolitik, Berlin strategists recognized and took into account the multi-ethnic composition of the population in the occupied territories. Even in the pre-war period, the Nazis searched the national and ethnic populations of the USSR for those who were prepared to accept the ascendant role of fascist Germany in Europe and the world—people who were capable of unfailingly carrying out the orders of their subjugators as to the exploitation, pacification, and mobilization of the Soviet population for military ends.

Such searches were prompted by the Nazis' experience in territories they had previously occupied. During the Second World War, puppet regimes dependent entirely on Berlin were in place in Holland, Norway, France, and other European countries. These accessories to Nazism were called "quislings," after Vidkun Quisling, the minister-president of occupied Norway. Later, the French concept of "collaborationism" gained a foothold. Those labeled collaborationists (collaborators) in France were not only the members of the pro-German Vichy government, but everyone who cooperated with the Germans.

A central figure of the collaborationist movement in the Soviet Union was General Andrei Vlasov. This fact was evidenced by the existence of the broadly popular term *vlasovtsy*, which was used to denote supporters of the fascists, even if they were not members of the Russian Liberation Army (RLA) commanded by Vlasov.

The story of Vlasov's betrayal, from the moment he became a prisoner, to his service under the Germans, and up through the trial in Moscow in 1946, is the subject of this collection, which for the first time brings together all the most important documents on this theme, drawing on the archives of Russia, Belarus, Germany, and the U.S.

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Collaborationism in Western Europe has been fairly well covered in modern historiography. The situation in Eastern Europe is somewhat more complicated.

The long ideological and military confrontation between the socialist and capitalist systems heavily influenced the perception of Soviet collaborationism. Trying to survive and avoid blame, many who cooperated with the occupiers fled to the West, where they presented themselves as tragic warriors against communism who had no choice but to stand under the flag of Nazi Germany. The context of the Cold War helped many of them find employment. Great Britain, Canada, the U.S., Australia, Brazil, Argentina, and later West Germany issued them passports. The State Department and U.S. special services even did this under false pretenses: in order to avoid publicity and public protest, the names and biographies of these individuals were changed, allowing them to evade American laws, enter the country, and receive special benefits. Such loyalty on the part of the government can be explained in part by decidedly pragmatic considerations: the newly-arrived immigrants were to help the West in the event of a military conflict with the Soviet Union.[16]

Western governments' political sympathy with the Soviet collaborators has affected the study of this question in foreign historiography, which can be divided for the purposes of this discussion into two groups: literature coming directly from

[16] NARA. Discussion of Vlasov and psychological warfare. Case 7. Part IA. RG 319. See also: NSC. 10/12. RG 273; U.S. Army P&O Hot Files. Box 10. RG 319.

participants in the events (vlasovtsy, nationalists, emigrants, etc.) and the works of professional scholars.

Like the memoirs of the German officers who worked with them, the memoirs and other publications produced by supporters of the Nazis are generally of a single type, with many authors taking the same approach. They present themselves, as a rule, in the image of heroes or victims of circumstance who turned out to be too naïve and tragically underestimated Nazism. Moreover, not a shadow of a doubt is expressed as to the correctness of their choice. The recurring theme is regret that the Germans conducted an ill-advised and incorrect policy in the East; if only they had been smarter and treated the local populations and POWs (prisoners of war) better, then the outcome of the war would have been different for the USSR. Therefore, almost all post-war memoirs and literature produced by former collaborators are of a predominantly justificatory character. Their value lies in the introduction of factual evidence into scholarly circles, but this evidence still demands critical analysis and comparison with other sources of information.

From this standpoint, the most significant works are those of two vlasovtsy, Mikhail Shatov (Kashtanov) and Vladimir Pozdniakov. Both worked under the leadership of Vlasov for a time, and after the war, living in the West, they began to assemble their own archives. Pozdniakov, who served as Vlasov's adjutant for operational matters and an organizer of one of the units of the Russian Liberation Army, witnessed many events. From a factual standpoint, his work on Vlasov is one of the best, but it is worth remembering that the author's service in U.S. intelligence and military agencies affected his framing of events.[17]

Between 1952 and 1957, a number of academic works on the topic appeared in the U.S. The first book, Soviet Opposition to Stalin, was written by George Fisher, a former U.S. military counterintelligence officer. The second, German Rule in Russia,

[17] It would not be feasible to discuss in detail every aspect of historiographical debate in an introduction. So, we would like to draw your attention only to the most important works and to the trends in the current historiography. See: Shatoff, Michael, "*Bibliografia ODNR v gody Vtoroy Mirovoy voiny (1941 -1945)*" (New York, 1961); Pozdniakov, V. V, "*Andrey Andreyevich Vlasov*" (Syracuse, 1973)