

The Stalinist Political Culture of the Second Wave of the Russian Diaspora: A Case Study*

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This article examines the career of Vladimir Vasilevich Pozdnyakov during the Second World War and the early Cold War. A lieutenant colonel in the Red Army who was arrested during the Great Terror, Pozdnyakov was captured on the Eastern front in October 1941. He collaborated with the Germans, first serving as the head of camp police in 1942, then becoming a propagandist in the system of POW camps, and finally serving as a high-ranking officer in the short-lived Russian army under General A. A. Vlasov. He escaped repatriation to the USSR after the war and worked as an intelligence agent in the Gehlen Organization and the CIA while also taking part in anti-communist groups in West Germany. Pozdnyakov also acted as an amateur historian of the Vlasov movement. Pozdnyakov's career provides a window on the actions of one individual across the upheavals of war, occupation, and Cold War. Pozdnyakov's actions were shaped by the political culture of the Stalinist 1930s. Like other members of the Soviet party-state and military elite, Pozdnyakov was opportunistic, suspicious, and dogmatic – all qualities that were crucial for advancement and mere survival in the Stalinist 1930s. The political culture of the 1930s helps to explain his activities during a time of unprecedented chaos and violence: his willingness to collaborate diligently with the Nazis and then with Germany's Western conquerors, his constant battles within circles of collaborators and the Russian diaspora, and his hagiographic writing of the history of the Vlasov movement while in postwar exile. Pozdnyakov's example suggests a new approach to the study of the political culture of the second wave of Russian emigration. Due to the historical context of the formation of the second wave – captivity on the Eastern Front, life and sometimes collaboration during the Nazi occupation and flight from repatriation – its members had no other source of public identity other than the continuing devotion to Vlasov's semi-fictional Russian liberation army.

Keywords: Vlasov, Russian Liberation Army, collaboration, Second World War, Russian emigration, espionage

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Статья посвящена жизни и деятельности Владимира Васильевича Позднякова в годы Второй мировой войны и начала холодной войны. Подполковник Красной армии, арестованный во время Большого террора, Поздняков попал в плен на Восточном фронте в октябре 1941 г. Он сотрудничал с немцами: сначала занимал пост начальника лагерной полиции в 1942 г., потом стал пропагандистом системы лагерей для военнопленных и, наконец, служил высокопоставленным офицером под командованием генерала А. А. Власова. После войны он избежал репатриации в СССР и работал агентом разведки в организации «Гелена» и ЦРУ, а также принимал участие в антикоммунистических организациях в Западной Германии. Поздняков также был активным историком власовского движения в послевоенные годы. Его карьера дает возможность проследить действия одного человека в период войны, оккупации и холодной войны. На основе источников можно утверждать, что Поздняков был человеком амбициозным, подозрительным и догматичным – все качества, которые отражали его прошлое в элитах сталинской системы 1930-х гг. Сосредоточив внимание на политической культуре 1930-х гг., можно осмыслить действия Позднякова в данный период: его готовность к коллаборации с нацистами, а затем и с западными завоевателями Германии, его постоянные склоки в кругах коллаборационистов и послевоенной русской диаспоры, а также его усилия обелить историю власовского движения в послевоенные годы. Пример Позднякова предлагает новый подход к изучению политической культуры второй волны русской эмиграции. Из-за исторического контекста формирования второй волны – пленение на Восточном фронте, жизнь и иногда коллаборация при нацистской оккупации, бегство от репатриации – у ее членов не было другого источника общественной идентичности, кроме демонстрации преданности полувывымышленной Русской освободительной армии Власова.

Ключевые слова: Вторая мировая война, русская эмиграция, Русская освободительная армия, генерал Власов, коллаборация, шпионаж

In 1950, Vladimir Vasil'evich Pozdniakov sat down in a room in Munich to be interviewed for the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System (HPSSS), a massive oral history project conducted by Harvard University researchers and funded, in part, by the US Air Force. The forty-eight-year-old made a strong impression on his interviewer: he had good manners and was well-spoken, perhaps a result of his upbringing in a family of pre-revolutionary elites. Pozdniakov told of his hatred of the Soviet order and his experience of being arrested and tortured during the Great Terror of the 1930s. He also recounted the remarkable events he had experienced in the previous decade. After being released by the NKVD in 1939, he was sent to the front in 1941 and captured by the Germans on the battlefield. He survived the prisoner of war in camps where Red Army men were deliberately starved in their thousands and collaborated with the Germans as a Russian-language propagandist. He then became a close associate of

the turncoat Soviet general A. A. Vlasov, who sought to create a Russian Liberation Army (ROA) under Nazi auspices. Pozdniakov's postwar years were just as tumultuous. After war's end, he escaped mandatory repatriation of Soviet nationals to the USSR that was enforced by the US and British military governments in West Germany. Living under a false identity, he became active in anti-communist politics and espionage.

Pozdniakov's extraordinary life experiences involved serving different political regimes during a period of historical upheaval. However, his political views across the period seem to have been basically consistent. Pozdniakov was unreservedly hostile to communism. And yet his ideological perspective bore the strong imprint of his Soviet background. Consider his uncompromising answers to a standard HPSSS question: what would he maintain or change in a new Russia should Soviet power fall? On the one hand, Pozdniakov thought that Soviet social and welfare institutions should be maintained in a post-Soviet Russia. On the other hand, he declared that a future Russia would have to have a political police: "As long as the world is in disorder, as long as there are spies and as long as there is sabotage, there must be a political police." He also envisioned a purge of former communist party members to examine their loyalty to the new system [HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 22. Case 433. P. 34–38]. While attacking Soviet rule, then, Pozdniakov continued to support many aspects of it.

This article examines the paradox of Pozdniakov's Soviet style of anti-Soviet politics by examining his experiences during the war and after (ending with his immigration to the United States in 1956)¹. Pozdniakov's biography is of interest due to his position on the front lines of Russia's major conflicts of the period. Indeed, Pozdniakov's career fits into several major topics in twentieth-century Russian history: the purge of the officer corps in the 1930s, Operation Barbarossa and combat on the Eastern front, Russian wartime collaboration [cf.: Мартынов]; and the postwar Russian diaspora, especially the so-called "second wave" of Soviet citizens who did not return to their homeland after the war [Tromly, 2019, p. 32–40]². Studying a single life in these different frames allows one to search for continuities and discontinuities across the different political worlds of Stalinism, Nazi occupation and the Cold War.

What emerges is a striking trend. Pozdniakov's actions across the 1940s and into the 1950s underscore the formative influence of his past as a member of the Soviet elite (specifically, the officer corps of the 1930s). Pozdniakov was opportunistic, suspicious, and dogmatic – all qualities that were crucial for advancement and even mere survival in the Soviet elite in the 1930s. Stalinist political culture shaped Pozdniakov's actions outside

¹ I benefit from a previous effort to write Pozdniakov's biography, albeit one from a very different perspective [Александров, 2011].

² Russians who left Soviet territory during the war are often grouped together as the "second wave" of emigrants, a moniker that distinguishes them from the first wave of "White" émigrés who fled the revolution and the postwar third wave that exited the USSR from the 1960s until its collapse.

of the Soviet Union: his collaboration with the Germans, his postwar political activities, his career in espionage, and his roles in articulating the history of the Vlasov Movement. And while the Pozdniakov example cannot be extrapolated mechanically to other people with similar life trajectories, the tenacity with which Stalin-era habits and ideas shaped his behavior suggests new directions for understanding the second wave of the Russian diaspora and its experiences of collaboration and exile³.

From Stalin's Elite to Hitler's New Europe

Pozdniakov was born in 1904 in St. Petersburg to a merchant family. His entry point to the tumultuous conflicts of Russia's twentieth century began at a ripe age. At fifteen years of age, he ran away from home to join the Red Army during the Civil War (adding two years to his age in his papers to meet the minimum age for recruitment) [Александров, 2011, c. 153]. A few years later, Pozdniakov took up study in military courses in the area of chemical warfare – a promising choice of profession given the role chemical agents had played in WWI. Pozdniakov rose through the ranks as a teacher in a series of military educational institutions, attaining a position of considerable privilege for the time; he earned a high salary and lived in an apartment with his “own kitchen and bathroom” [HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 22. Case 433. P. 4–5]. In short, Pozdniakov was a socially mobile and well-connected member of Stalin's elite.

Then everything came crashing down, as often happened for members of the Soviet elite under Stalin. In 1937, Pozdniakov was arrested on falsified charges of counter-revolutionary activities, perhaps coming under suspicion due to his class origins and the fact that he was related to Russians living abroad [Александров, 2011, c. 158]. In his Harvard interview, Pozdniakov described the torture to which he was subjected to by the NKVD: being forced to stand against a wall for six days straight, starvation, and beatings [HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 22. Case 433. P. 15]. Although he was released in 1939 during a partial undoing of the terror and was returned to his previous position, Pozdniakov was surely physically and mentally shattered by the experience.

The ideological impact of arrest on Pozdniakov is harder to establish. In his postwar interview, Pozdniakov claimed that he had been critical of the collectivization of agriculture in the early 1930s and then came to reject the communist system *in toto* after his arrest, but other sources do not exist that verify his claims [Ibid. P. 45]. Moreover, Pozdniakov fought loyally in 1941 rather than defecting to the German army; his officer training as well as what he called a “confusion” of the concepts “Russia” and “Soviet Union” prevented him from taking such a step [Александров, 2011, c. 161]. Pozdniakov entered the war, one might posit, with both a personal grievance against and a basic sense of loyalty toward the Soviet state.

³ This approach has been attempted in a limited way in: [Александров, 2015, c. 538–556].

As was the case for many second-wave exiles, controversy surrounded Pozdniakov's wartime activities after he was captured by the Germans in the Kyiv pocket in August or September 1941. After passing through a few transit POW camps – and experiencing the forced marches of the prisoners – he survived the winter of 1941–1942 in Officer Camp no. 57 in the Wehrmacht's Königsberg Military Region [Александров, 2011, с. 161]. According to both Soviet authorities and some fellow postwar displaced persons, Pozdniakov held a position dealing with internal security in the camp – this during a time in which POWs were deliberately starved to death by German authorities [Chuikov; Нерянин]. Hearsay in Vlasovite circles later in the war had it that Pozdniakov had tortured POWs who had got into trouble with the camp administration, pouring cold water over them in the winter [Власов: история предательства, т. 2, кн. 2, с. 63]. His fellow POW M. M. Samygin confirmed that Pozdniakov held a position of power in the camps. In a postwar letter to B. I. Nikolaevskii, Samygin recalled that Pozdniakov played a major role in the creation of an anti-partisan detachment in the POW camp. More striking still, he claimed that Pozdniakov had been in a position to decide which of the starving POWs would survive or perish [Петров, 2013]. In fact, Pozdniakov himself admitted as much by mentioning in a letter that he saved Samygin's life twice in this period [Поздняков, 15 ноября 1948 г.; Поздняков, 24 ноября 1948 г.].⁴

Pozdniakov's position of power in the camps set the pattern for his further collaborationist activities in Nazi-occupied Europe. When Pozdniakov, Samygin and P. O. Voronov wrote a report to the camp administration expressing willingness to take part in the fight against Soviet power, Pozdniakov was sent to Stalag III D Berlin-Schlieffenufer, a camp for Soviet POWs who posed interest to intelligence agencies [Александров, 2011, с. 160]. Pozdniakov soon rose in the ranks of the Russian propagandists working for the Nazis in the POW camps, being posted first to a camp in Wuhlheide and then appointed head Russian propagandist at Stalag I-B Hohenstein. From there he entered the circle of former Red Army officers surrounding A. A. Vlasov. Although Vlasov was little more than an instrument for German propaganda on the Eastern front at that time, Pozdniakov took up a leadership position in the one institution under the general's control: the so-called Dabendorf propaganda school for the Russian Liberation Army (technically the "Special Department for Eastern Propaganda")⁵. When Vlasov received permission from Himmler's SS to form the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia in late 1944, Pozdniakov was appointed head of the Command Division at its Headquarters, which gave him considerable powers to recruit, attest and promote soldiers and officers in Vlasov's forces.

⁴ I thank Igor Petrov for making this section of the Pozdniakov collection in the Bundesarchiv available to me.

⁵ Pozdniakov was Russian camp commander at Stalag-3-A in Lückenwalde, the largest POW camp in the Berlin-Brandenburg region, where he selected POWs for admission to the Dabendorf courses [HPSSS. Schedule B. Vol. 11. Case 433. P. 5].

Pozdniakov's responsible positions reflected the remarkable degree of trust he had earned among German military and security officials. In 1945, a group of Pozdniakov's fellow officers alleged that he was a "direct henchman (*stavlennik*) of the Germans," who was "tied to their intelligence and counter-intelligence organizations through the SD and Gestapo" [Нерянин, с. 27]. While the details of Pozdniakov's intelligence work is lacking – and Pozdniakov always denied spying for the Germans⁶ – it seems almost certain that he was active in this sphere, perhaps working as an agent of the Abwehr⁷. Moreover, it is plausible to suggest that Pozdniakov's activities in Nazi intelligence were instrumental for his appointment in the Vlasov enterprise. Significantly, Pozdniakov's trusted position under the Nazis drew the ire of many of his fellow Vlasovites. Under interrogation by the Soviet secret police, Vlasovite A. A. Rtishchev commented that Pozdniakov "often praised the German command, saying that the Red Army will be defeated" [Власов: история предательства, т. 2, кн. 2, с. 18]. Pozdniakov himself admitted that some interned POWs at Lückenwalde mistrusted him for being too close to the German leadership, a fact he attributed to his German officer uniform [Поздняков, 1973, с. 35]. Pozdniakov was willing to serve the Germans just as he had served Stalin, probably driven by his ambition as well as a desire for revenge against the Soviets who had tormented him during the Terror.

Another enduring characteristic of Pozdniakov's political persona became apparent during the war: his suspiciousness and willingness to denounce his political opponents. For instance, Pozdniakov accused A. I. Tavantsev in KONR of having worked for the Gestapo, an allegation that led to the latter's arrest [Власов: история предательства, т. 2, кн. 1, с. 245]. Even if Pozdniakov's allegations had been accurate, a deep suspicion of others in his immediate milieu would become a constant in Pozdniakov's career. While much remains unclear about Pozdniakov's wartime record, then, a picture emerges of an ambitious man who was willing to follow any orders and to destroy others in order to get ahead – a set of habits that characterized the Stalinist elite.

From Wanted Man to Cold Warrior

The advance of the Red Army into Central Europe in 1945 placed the Vlasovites and other Soviet collaborators in grave danger. The Vlasov forces in Bohemia turned to the Western allies, with Pozdniakov and another officer delegated to the US forces to negotiate surrender in early May [Власов: история предательства, т. 2, кн. 1, с. 288]. After surrender, Pozdniakov and other Vlasovites found themselves interned in a camp in

⁶ Pozdniakov blamed the 1945 accusations against him on the machinations of his rival, A. F. Chikalov, whom he accused of being a Soviet agent [Гофман, с. 36]. See below on Chikalov.

⁷ [Власов: история предательства, т. 2, кн. 1, с. 209]. After the war, Pozdniakov wrote a detailed study of Nazi intelligence on the Eastern front for the US Army Historical Research Institute [Pozdniakov].

Landau, Bavaria. He fled the camp a few months later out of fear that he would be extradited to the USSR and then lived underground for a time in West Germany. Quite literally, he hid to save his life, as he was tried in absentia for counter-revolutionary crimes by the Military Tribunal of the Group of Soviet Occupation Forces in Germany in October 1945. Two years later, he was registered with the Frankfurt police under the fictitious identity of Vladimir Anderson, a supposed Russian émigré and former resident of interwar Latvia [Александров, 2011, с. 177–178].

Even while living as a stateless fugitive, Pozdniakov found his feet in the chaotic world of postwar Germany. In particular, he marshalled his wartime émigré and German contacts to eke out a living. First, he turned his hand to espionage, taking advantage of a situation in which the Western powers were eager to derive reliable information on their recent ally-turned-adversary. In 1946–1947, he worked as an intelligence agent for the Gehlen organization, a spy service initially funded by the US Army that consisted of the holdovers from Hitler's intelligence organization on the Eastern Front, *Fremde Heere Ost* (Foreign Armies East). Pozdniakov was soon dismissed from the Gehlen organization due to “over-evaluation of information and excessive expenditures” [Pyle, p. 2]. In all fairness, Pozdniakov's espionage record was hardly an exception for postwar exiles in West Germany, where destitute displaced persons sought to peddle often fraudulent information for material gain [Tromly, 2019, p. 54–57].

Pozdniakov also entered the political life of the postwar Russian diaspora. Soon after forced repatriation of the Soviet DPs ground to a halt amidst the tensions between the wartime allies, survivors of the Vlasov forces in Germany set about reorganizing their movement in anticipation of a new anti-Soviet crusade. Pozdniakov was a controversial player in the nascent postwar Vlasov movement from its inception. Appearing at a 13 March 1948 meeting of anti-Soviet organizations in Munich – to which he, tellingly, was not invited – Pozdniakov aggressively supported an opposition faction and “started several attacks” against K. G. Kromiadi, the head of Vlasov's chancellery who was now aspiring to leadership of the Vlasovites [Pyle, p. 3]. Pozdniakov was consistently involved in political intrigue. At a meeting just a week later, Pozdniakov submitted a memorandum declaring that “Political Advisors of the United States Military Government had initiated negotiations with him” as a representative of the Russian anti-communist forces. No such talks seem to have occurred, however. Likely, Pozdniakov was simply bluffing or had deluded himself about the degree of influence he had in American circles [Memorandum, p. 3].

Pozdniakov's aggressive political tactics were a product of his hunger for power, which he had already demonstrated under German occupation. According to an émigré informant for the American Counter Intelligence Corps, Pozdniakov was “a very ambitious person” who attempted to “get control” of the postwar Vlasov Movement [Pyle]. Pozdniakov joined the main Vlasovite organization of the postwar period, the Union for the Struggle for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia (*Soiuz Bor'by za Osvobozhdenie*

Rossii, or SBONR). Moreover, he helped to create a SBONR-allied military organization, the Union of Warriors of the Liberation Movement (*Soiuz Voinov Osvoboditel'nogo Dvizheniia*) in 1948, a project aimed at cementing the influence of the Vlasovites among veterans in exile. Yet persistent conflict with fellow exiles was the leitmotif of Pozdniakov's involvement in émigré politics. In 1952, he was expelled from SBONR on the justification that he had a "difficult character" and was impossible to work with [Материалы, с. 42]⁸. Pozdniakov's military mindset made him adept at giving and following orders, as his record in serving both the Germans and the US showed. However, his self-confidence, chronic mistrust, and harsh tactics proved divisive and even destructive in the émigré political milieu.

Pozdniakov's political toxicity, as well as his Soviet-style political habits, were especially clear in his holding of grudges. An example of Pozdniakov's scheming against political rivals was his longstanding political conflict with A. F. Chikalov-Almazov, the head of a counterintelligence unit under Vlasov. In March 1945, Chikalov complained to his superior in KONR that Pozdniakov, as head of cadres in KONR, was hampering counterintelligence work [Власов: история предательства, т. 2, кн. 1, с. 336]. A few years later, Pozdniakov and Chikalov found themselves in the US occupation zone of Germany working for the Gehlen organization. According to one exile, the two émigrés used their intelligence assets against each other, with Pozdniakov fearing that Chikalov wished to "liquidate" him [Newton]. Later that year, Chikalov was arrested by US counterintelligence on suspicion that he was seeking to penetrate US intelligence networks for the Soviets but was later released for lack of evidence. Curiously, Chikalov then ended up in the USSR, where he was tried for treason and executed [Петров, 2016]. While there is no direct evidence of Pozdniakov's role in the arrest of his rival by the Americans, one can posit a pattern – so reminiscent of Stalinism – of grudges and fears of "liquidation" leading to mutual denunciation.

Pozdniakov's possible role in discrediting Chikalov was part of a broader phenomenon of feuds and denunciation that plagued émigré politics. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to speculate about the specific origins of Pozdniakov's behavior. In psychological terms, it is tempting to connect Pozdniakov's mentality of threat and conspiracy to his traumatic experiences of Stalinist terror, combat, and the POW camps. Whether such recourse to psychology is valid or not, Pozdniakov's hyper-suspicion was clearly characteristic of Stalinist political culture. Asked at his Harvard interview to comment on one former member of the Vlasov army, Pozdniakov offered a striking indictment: "he has the peculiar eyes of a Chekist" [HPSSS. Schedule B. Vol. 11. Case 433. P. 2a]. Indeed, Pozdniakov showed a generalized suspicion of others, what one of the Harvard interviewers called his inclination to "run people down" [Ibid. Case 147. P. 2].

⁸ For Pozdniakov's own story of his supposedly voluntary exit from SBONR, see: [Позд-
няков, 1956].

In addition to his personal adversaries, Pozdniakov tended to see entire political ideologies through the prism of threat and treachery. He accused the émigré group National Labor Alliance (*Narodno-trudovoi soiuz* or NTS) of betraying the Vlasovites in 1945 by convincing the latter not to flee the US and British POW camps (an unproven theory), and he questioned whether some Russian monarchists were secretly in cahoots with Soviet spies (again, relying on conjecture) [Поздняков, 18 мая 1949 г.; Поздняков, 12 января 1950 г.]. In these judgments, Pozdniakov perceived politics as a field for hidden threats, much in the way that Stalinist culture dictated. And as his constant struggle against the NTS suggests, he actively sought to neutralize these dangers.

Although he would remain engaged in émigré polemics, Pozdniakov withdrew from the poisonous world of Russian anti-communist politics to try his hand at intelligence again. This was a shrewd move for the ambitious Pozdniakov. The postwar Vlasov movement remained weak, as the stigma of collaboration hampered its political possibilities, especially in the United States. In contrast, intelligence offered the possibility of a profitable career and eventual immigration to the United States, the country to which many DPs hoped to migrate. Opportunities for espionage increased by the end of the 1940s, when panicked American military and intelligence officials sought out members of Vlasov's forces as sources of intelligence and as operatives against the new Soviet opponent. As at previous points in his career, Pozdniakov managed to pursue self-interest through navigating systems of power.

Despite his short stint in the Gehlen Organization – and the fact that, apparently, he was vocally critical of the United States after the war – Pozdniakov soon entered the world of US intelligence [Postwar members]. In 1949, Pozdniakov was recruited by the CIA to take part in a project to recruit displaced persons for spy missions to the USSR – true, an enterprise that ended in failure when the Vlasovites proved unable to procure suitable candidates⁹. Pozdniakov had more success as an analyst than as an intelligence operative. In 1949, he was employed by “Detachment R,” the US Army Russian institute in Bavaria where former Soviet citizens lectured to US officers about Soviet realities [Hoffman]. In 1952, he authored a major study on wartime German counter-intelligence for the US Army Historical Research Institute [Pozdniakov]. To be sure, Pozdniakov's ego outstripped objective reality on occasion, such as when he sent an elaborate proposal to the US intelligence establishment on how to fight the Cold War (it went unanswered) [Поздняков, 11 апреля 1950 г.]. Nevertheless, Pozdniakov's career in intelligence benefitted from what one fellow Vlasovite called his “masterful” ability to “enter the confidence” of those he served – surely, a skill he had developed when he was climbing a dangerous career ladder under Stalinism and then demonstrated in his relations with the Nazis during the war [Нерянин, с. 27].

⁹ Confirmation of Pozdniakov's involvement in this operation – documentation of which is still classified – comes from Pozdniakov's son Nicholas [Efimenko]. A CIA case officer involved in this project states that the Vlasovites did not have a solid organization and failed to recruit agents [Coffin, p. 94–100].

From Political Activist to Vlasovite Historian

Even while fighting émigré political battles and spying, Pozdniakov turned to an activity that absorbed much of his energies: documenting and writing the history of the Vlasov movement. In the years after the war and until his death in 1973, Pozdniakov took up a mission to gather and publish the recollections of his fellow participants in the wartime Vlasov saga. He approached this task with near-fanaticism, believing that the creation of a sympathetic image of the Vlasovites' wartime actions would serve the movement in the long run. In pressing his fellow Vlasovites to contribute their recollections of wartime events, he stressed that it was "the duty of all of us, workers of the Russian Liberation Movement, to write about our past affairs and those comrades and leaders who perished" [Поздняков, 6 ноября 1951 г.]. Perhaps more than anyone else in the Vlasov ranks, Pozdniakov helped to shape a historical narrative for the postwar Vlasov movement, one that would influence public opinion not just in the Russian diaspora but also in the countries of the Cold War West.

Especially important for Pozdniakov's historical work was his connection to B. I. Nikolaevskii, the Menshevik and amateur archivist and historian. In the postwar years, Nikolaevskii established ties to a wide range of second-wave exiles. Drawing on his contacts among the Vlasovites, Nikolaevskii wrote a series of controversial articles which depicted Vlasovism as a democratic movement that had arisen from moods of "defeatism" in the Red Army during the early stages of the war. In generating these ideas, Nikolaevskii drew on insider information about the Vlasov episode garnered from his correspondence with Pozdniakov. Indeed, through his exchanges with Nikolaevskii, Pozdniakov helped to solidify a new pro-democratic discourse on Vlasov that would help bring the surviving members of the general's forces into the orbit of American power [Tromly, 2019, p. 72–94].

Pozdniakov's work of Vlasovite history was a propagandistic endeavor. Rather than depicting the unvarnished past, he attempted to embellish, distort, and otherwise shape it to fit a predetermined image: that of a virtuous national movement that was largely independent of German influence and wholly disconnected from the crimes committed by the Axis side on the Eastern front. The no-doubt conscious work to shape the past comes through in Pozdniakov's published writing on the Vlasov movement, where he made several claims that were to varying degrees misleading: that Vlasov and his companions were in a constant struggle with their German overseers, especially their erstwhile patrons in the SS; that the wide masses of Vlasov's followers were driven by high-minded national goals and remained confident in their cause throughout the war; and that all anti-Semitic references in Vlasovite publications were forced on them by the Germans [cf.: Волгин]. Nikolaevskii was happy to receive first-hand evidence to confirm his stance on the Vlasovites, but also understood the limitations of the information provided by Pozdniakov. At one point in their correspondence, Nikolaevskii objected to Pozdniakov's tendency to edit the documents he was sending to him, commenting that he "needed

to know the negative sides of the movement” as well as the positive [Николаевский]. Pozdniakov’s careful control of information about the Vlasov Movement draws obvious parallels to the Stalinist propaganda state.

If Pozdniakov was writing a deeply politicized and rigid narrative of the Vlasov movement – perhaps a Vlasovite equivalent of Stalin’s “Short Course” on the Soviet Communist Party – he also struggled to silence its potential detractors. One discordant voice was that of his old dependent from the POW camps, M. M. Samygin, who wrote an explosive book on the ROA that flatly contradicted many parts of the Vlasov narrative being pushed by Pozdniakov and others. Most scandalously, Samygin took to task the deceased leader of the movement, whom he portrayed as being a “marionette” of the Germans, a power-hungry operator, and a lecher who took up with prostitutes sent from Army headquarters [Петров, Мартынов, с. 70–76]. Pozdniakov and others prevented Samygin’s book from being published until 1970 – and when it eventually was, the section on Vlasov was excised [Там же, с. 33–34]. Pozdniakov also sought to discredit Samygin through personal attacks, alleging that he had published anti-Semitic articles during the war (which was true), that he was tried for fraud after the war (an exaggeration), and even that he might be connected to Soviet intelligence (a totally unsubstantiated claim) [Поздняков, 12 января 1950 г.; Summary of Information]. While it is impossible to know if Pozdniakov actually believed these accusations, one can conclude that he saw denunciation as an appropriate tool to protect his narrative on the Vlasov movement.

A further challenge to Pozdniakov’s narrative on Vlasov emerged among the Russian diaspora in the United States. After Nikolaevskii published his articles hailing the Vlasov movement, several of his companions in Menshevik circles pushed back, accusing the Vlasovites of having been either blind tools of the Nazi powers or perhaps even sympathetic to Nazi ideology [Антошин]. Pozdniakov met the challenge to the Vlasov narrative with his characteristic fury and paranoia. For instance, when Menshevik B. L. Dvinov published a book highly critical of the Vlasovites, Pozdniakov responded in a letter to Nikolaevskii with a full gamut of basically tendentious accusations redolent of Stalinist rhetorical strategies: guilt by association (Dvinov had levelled the same charges against Vlasov as Russian monarchists had), the deployment of populist anger (“honest émigrés of all kinds” rejected Dvinov’s account), and insinuation about hidden forces at work (who financed Dvinov’s book, anyhow?) [Поздняков, 11 октября 1950 г.]. Although Nikolaevskii himself was angry over Dvinov’s book, he gradually soured on Pozdniakov, whom he accused – along with other SBONR members – of having no “tolerance” for opposing views and a fanatical hatred of Marxists [Поздняков, 4 февраля 1950 г.].

Despite pushback from the Mensheviks, Pozdniakov and other Vlasovites had considerable success in upholding the reputation of Vlasov in the Russian diaspora. To some extent, his historical revisionism also influenced public opinion in the wider Cold War West. In the immediate postwar years, Pozdniakov was frustrated by his failure to publish for a non-

Russian audience. He complained in 1949 that he had been writing in vain, as “Europeans want to read crime novels more than they want to know the truth about the USSR” [Поздняков, 27 июня 1949 г.]. However, the US intelligence and military establishment took interest in the Vlasovites, seeing in their wartime anti-Soviet propaganda a prototype for how to carry out psychological warfare against the USSR, especially in the event of a “hot war” [Tromly, 2019, p. 102–105]. Moreover, Pozdniakov’s efforts to shape the history of the Vlasov movement were consequential in the longer term. He left his considerable archive on the ROA to the Federal Archives in West Germany. The Pozdniakov collection would be a major source base for future historians of the Vlasov movement, including those who would offer a basically sympathetic view of the collaborationist enterprise. In particular, Joachim Hoffman, the controversial right-wing scientific director of the German Armed Forces Military History Research Office, drew heavily on Pozdniakov’s files in writing his sympathetic history of the Vlasov movement [Гофман]¹⁰.

* * *

This paper has argued that Pozdniakov’s political practices derived, in part, from his Stalinist background. The opportunism, suspiciousness and dogmatism Pozdniakov inherited from the Stalinist elite help to explain his actions during a time of unprecedented chaos and violence: his diligent service for the Nazis and then Germany’s Western conquerors, his constant battles within circles of collaborators and the Russian diaspora, and his hagiographic writing of the history of the Vlasov movement while in postwar exile.

The case of Pozdniakov also suggests a wider approach to understanding the second wave of the Russian diaspora. V. V. Pozdniakov was an exceptional individual in the Russian diaspora, a figure whose tendencies toward conflict and defamation were well-known among exiles in the postwar period. Nevertheless, his political instincts and practices were not unique, especially for the second wave exiles. Like him, many of the political activists of the postwar diaspora were opportunists, desperate people (usually men) willing to take risks in desperate times, especially by serving foreign powers. Like Pozdniakov, many of them were suspicious of each other and willing to resort to denunciation to remove competitors and threats. And while Pozdniakov clashed with his fellow Vlasovites on many questions, they were virtually united in the belief that their wartime actions had constituted a noble effort to create a better Russia – or, at least, this was the script they stuck to and defended [Tromly, 2019, p. 16, 101]. In short, Pozdniakov’s differences from his fellow postwar Vlasov activists were a matter of degree rather than kind.

Insofar as Pozdniakov was a somewhat representative figure, we can suggest that his story sheds light on the Vlasovites and on the “second wave”

¹⁰ For a wider critique of the scholarship on Vlasov, see: [Tromly, 2021].

more broadly. In particular, the Pozdniakov case helps to explain why the public identity and collective memory of the second wave has been closely bound up with the Vlasov cause [В поисках истины]. To be sure, not all second-wave exiles were associated with Vlasov's movement – many were POWs who did not collaborate or forced laborers brought to Germany – and some supported different political causes. Nevertheless, a distinctive trait of the second wave was its near-total attachment to a single political movement, and the cult-like status of its deceased leader. Indeed, the close association of the second wave with a core political allegiance distinguished it from other cohorts of Russians abroad, for whom ideological and political divides were the norm.

Pozdniakov's career in politics, espionage and amateur history offers some clues as to the second wave's attachment to Vlasovism. The second wave left the USSR mostly involuntarily, displaced as a result of the unprecedented death and destruction brought by the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. In contrast to the other waves of émigrés, the second wavers were forced to survive in conditions of extreme danger: capture and occupation, incarceration or slave labor in German-dominated Europe, and the DP camps after the war. Facing these circumstances, the second wave exiles had few opportunities to develop political or social identities, at least beyond rival totalitarianisms [Tromly, 2021, p. 295–297]. And as Pozdniakov's case suggests, many second-wave exiles had to take extremely difficult choices in order to survive, such as collaboration, spying and hiding one's identity. Given all of this, it should hardly surprise that the second-wavers fell back on Stalinist political culture by adopting a dogmatic and cult-like attachment to Vlasov. For a generation of Russian émigrés shaped by war, genocide and collaboration, the only source of collective identity remained a mythologized recounting of an army fighting to liberate Russia.

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