Within hours of the launch of Operation Barbarossa on June 22, 1941, the Wehrmacht inflicted tremendous casualties on the Red Army, and as the invading forces progressed deeper into Soviet territory, within 200 miles of Moscow by mid-July, they also destabilized the institution that many Soviet citizens relied upon for their everyday survival – the family.¹ As the Wehrmacht captured territory that was home to over 70 million Soviet citizens, or over 35% of the Soviet population, millions of Soviet citizens were separated from their relatives who remained in Soviet-controlled territory.² The Wehrmacht’s unanticipated invasion in late June also caught many citizens away from their usual place of residence and their immediate family members as many citizens were travelling on summer vacation and children were attending summer camp or visiting distant relatives.³ The subsequent Soviet military mobilization and the wartime evacuation of industries and the civilian labor force further displaced millions of Soviet citizens and caused many of them to lose contact with their relatives, as over 5 million Soviet citizens were conscripted into the Soviet armed forces within the first eight days of the war and an estimated 10 million Soviet

¹ Larry E. Holmes, *War, Evacuation, and the Exercise of Power: The Center, Periphery, and Kirov’s Pedagogical Institute, 1941-1952* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 10. Within the first hours of the conflict, over 1,000 airplanes were destroyed, many without even taking flight, the 319 Soviet units that were mobilized to fight had been decimated, and almost 60% of the military stockpile points were captured as the Wehrmacht quickly seized territory. Richard Overy, *Russia’s War: A History of the Soviet War Effort: 1941-1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 76-77. For more on the Soviet family as a safety net see: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 142.


citizens evacuated into the Soviet interior by the end of 1941. The deportations of ethnic groups whom Soviet authorities suspected would collaborate with the invading forces also contributed to this crisis of war-torn Soviet families in the early days of the conflict.

A couple of decades earlier, Bolshevik revolutionaries do not appear to have perceived a similar phenomenon of mass displacement and war-torn families caused by the upheaval of World War I as a dire crisis requiring the state’s concerted intervention. Their imperial Russian predecessor had contended with the approximately six million refugees of the conflict by establishing the Central All-Russian Bureau for the Registration of Refugees (bezhentsy) under the Tatiana Committee, which helped refugees regain contact with their family members and provided them with general humanitarian aid. From September 1915 to April 1916, the Central All-Russian Bureau for the Registration of Refugees traced over 76,700 people. Soon after gaining power, the

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4 Elena Nikolaevna Bole, “Mobilizatsiia liudskikh resursov na front v godakh Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny, 1941-1945 gg. (Dissertation, Ural’skoe otdelenie RAN, 2004), 8. At the beginning of the conflict, 4,826,900 individuals were already serving in the army and navy, and during the conflict, an additional 31,822,220 individuals were conscripted.


6 Pavel Polian, Against Their Will: The History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 115-180.

7 Ivan Petrovich Shcherov, Voennaia migratsiia v Rossii (1914-1922 gg.) (Dissertation: Smolenskii Gosudarstvennyi Pedagogicheskii Universitet, 2001), 93.
Bolshevik revolutionaries established the Central Collegium for Prisoners of War and Refugee Affairs (Tsentroplenbezh) to resolve the legacies of World War I-era population displacement. While Tsentroplenbezh inherited the Tatiana Committee’s records concerning refugees, it did not inherit its entire agenda and primarily facilitated the exchange of prisoners of war in accordance with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, rather than help refugees trace their missing family members. 8

The relative inattention to the fate of families torn apart by World War I was likely due to the multitude of challenges the fledgling regime had to contend with, as well as the Bolshevik revolutionaries’ vision that the new state they would create would ultimately obviate and supplant the family. By the mid-1930s, the regime had repudiated the Bolshevik revolutionaries’ earlier, more radical vision of the obsolescence of the family and actively promoted the Soviet family as an institution that could stimulate population growth. Yet as Golfo Alexopoulos has argued, “the party's campaign to promote the family did not overshadow suspicions of private loyalties and family ties.” 9 Considering the ambiguous position that the family occupied in the Soviet Union on the eve of World War II, this chapter explores how Soviet officials perceived and responded to the predicament of Soviet families torn apart by the war, especially in light of the broader existential crisis the regime faced following the Wehrmacht’s invasion.

As Lisa Kirschenbaum’s analysis of World War II-era issues of the prominent newspapers Pravda and Komsomolskaia Pravda illustrates, the Soviet press romanticized Soviet kinship ties

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8 I. P. Shcherov, Tsentroplenbezh v Rossii (1918-1922 gg.) (Smolensk: SGPU, 2000). As Mikhail Zasypkin explains, Tsentroplenbezh was established to facilitate the exchange of POWs and the return of refugees to their pre-war place of residence. After the Russian Civil War, the re-named Tsentroevak focused on fulfilling international agreements concerning the return of POWs and refugees to their original residence; controlling internal population movement precipitated by drought and famine; and arranging for the return of refugees to the RSFSR. While local representatives of the Tsentroplenbezh provided some assistance to help refugees regain contact with their relatives who remained in their pre-war place of residence, this appears to have been a minor dimension of their overall work. Mikhail Aleksandrovich Zasypkin, Organizatsionno-pravovye osnovy deiatel’nosti NKVD RSFSR po resheñiu problem bezhentsev (1918-1923 gg.) (Dissertation, Akademiia Upravleniia MVD RSFSR, 2008), 12-14, 28, 95-96.

during the war in an effort to mobilize Soviet society and boost wartime morale. While during the
Russian Civil War, Soviet citizens were expected to forsake one’s family to defend the revolution,
during the Great Patriotic War, the Soviet press conflated fighting for one’s family and defending
the Motherland. As Kirschenbaum explains, representations of mothers were especially
prominent in the wartime press, since they “functioned in Soviet propaganda both as national
symbols and as the constantly reworked and reimagined nexus between home and nation, between
love for the family and devotion to the state.” Also, as Anna Krylova has noted, in the immediate
postwar period, popular magazines celebrated the durability of the Soviet family and portrayed the
postwar reunions of war-torn relatives as a symbol of the broader return to postwar normalcy that
-awaited Soviet society as a whole. By analyzing Soviet officials’ management of the crisis of
war-torn Soviet families, this chapter explores whether this recognition of the centrality of the
Soviet family was merely a symbolic measure confined to the pages of newspapers and magazines
or whether it also manifested in concrete measures to help Soviet citizens trace their lost family
members.

Soviet Wartime Propaganda and Reconnecting War-torn Families

As the following analysis of a specialized wartime radio program reveals, Soviet officials’
response to the crisis of war-torn Soviet families was partly dictated by Soviet citizens’ own efforts
to trace their relatives. While many Soviet citizens successfully reestablished contact with their
lost relatives through their own personal networks of extended family and friends, within the first
weeks of the conflict, thousands of Soviet citizens had already begun appealing to Soviet state

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10 Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, “‘Our City, Our Hearths, Our Families’: Local Loyalties and Private Life in Soviet World
11 Ibid., 825.
12 Anna Krylova, “‘Healers of Wounded Souls’: The Crisis of Private Life in Soviet Literature, 1944-1946,” The
Journal of Modern History 73, no. 2 (June 2001), 307-331. On the elusive nature of “postwar normalcy” see: Sheila
institutions for assistance to trace their relatives. By early July 1941, the Soviet Radio Committee had already received thousands of letters, mostly from Soviet citizens who were trying to establish contact with their relatives serving at the front. With the wartime evacuation of civilians into the interior, the Radio Committee also received inquiries from front-line soldiers (frontoviki) who were struggling to determine if their relatives managed to flee occupied territory and if so, their specific location in evacuation. As their letters exemplify, Soviet citizens expected that despite the wartime upheaval, the Soviet regime would be able to help them locate their relatives. Their appeals for aid shaped the regime’s response to their predicament, since as officials reported, with the arrival of such a vast quantity of letters, “the Radio Committee was faced with a fait accompli.”

To help their supplicants regain contact with their family members, the Radio Committee’s military department organized broadcasts which read out the names from the letters. However, this practice of simply broadcasting names was repudiated, and in accordance with a resolution from the Party Central Committee, in early August 1941, the Radio Committee established a new department, Letters to and from the Front, to create a new type of radio broadcast based on these letters.

As Karl Berkhoff has argued, “in the battle against Nazi Germany, mobilization of the entire population, soldiers and workers in particular, became the Soviet media’s paramount official goal. Mobilization was not defined well, but it was essentially getting people to do what they were

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13 Manley, *To the Tashkent Station*, 180-182.
14 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 2.
15 Ibid.
told, while allowing them a small measure of initiative.” 17 Due to the scarcity of basic materials necessary for printing newspapers and the challenges in distributing newspapers throughout the USSR, as Stephen Lovell has argued, during the war, the radio became “the most important channel by which the government transmitted information and ideas to the population.” 18 As the radio became the most important means for mobilizing the population, Letters to and from the Front was not established merely to help war-torn Soviet families reestablish contact, as the military department’s simplistic method of just broadcasting names could have fulfilled that goal. Rather, as Radio Committee reports make clear, the Letters to and from the Front broadcasts had two fundamental aims: to function as a substitute postal service to reconnect frontoviki with their relatives in the home-front whom they had lost contact with, as well as to serve as propaganda. 19

In order to fulfill these goals, the staff of the Letters to and from the Front department processed citizens’ letters, which in the fall of 1941 averaged 5,000 to 6,000 letters daily and sometimes even reached 8,000. From this influx of correspondence, the staff selected letters and arranged them into separate broadcasts of letters addressed to the front and letters coming from the front; these broadcasts aired nine times a day for a total of two and half hours. 20 The radio program’s popularity persisted as the war continued, and in 1942 the Letters to and from the Front department was receiving approximately 30,000 letters a month, sometimes as high as 60,000-70,000. 21 Due to this high volume of correspondence, the radio department was only able to broadcast a fraction of the letters that it received. In 1943, out of the 357,697 letters received, only 39,958, or a little over 10%, of them were transmitted on the air. 22

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18 Lovell, *Russia in the Microphone Age*, 107.
19 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 70, l. 5.
20 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 3.
21 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 70, l. 5.
22 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 82, l. 76.
Along with broadcasting Soviet citizens’ letters to the relatives they had lost contact with, the radio committee also invited Soviet citizens to appear on the broadcasts and personally convey their messages to their loved ones. In 1943, over 150 Soviet citizens appeared on the program to update frontoviki with developments in their family life occurring in the home-front.\(^{23}\) At the request of colonel Ivan Rudenko, who was wounded at the front and was recuperating in an army hospital in Tbilisi, his daughters appeared on the broadcast to perform his favorite melody on the violin.\(^{24}\) Letters to and from the Front thus also transmitted the messages of Soviet citizens who already knew their family members’ whereabouts. For them, communicating via the radio was a means to share messages, such as the sound of a beloved melody, that could not be communicated via paper and pen.

Tuning into the Letters to and from the Front broadcasts was a challenge due to the Politburo’s decision in late June 1941 ordering the confiscation of all personal radio sets, the relatively low number of public radio loudspeakers given the size of the USSR, and the lack of a consistent schedule so citizens would know in advance when a broadcast would be transmitted on the air.\(^{25}\) Despite these challenges, the Radio Committee reported that the Letters to and from the Front broadcasts were popular throughout the Soviet Union. From the establishment of the department to mid-1944, Letters to and from the Front received approximately 1.5 million letters from various battle fronts and from all corners of the Soviet Union, including locales as far-flung as Sakhalin, Kamchatka, Chukotka, and Tiksi. The staff of the department boasted that “listening to the letters on the radio has become a part of everyday life (voshlo v byt).”\(^{26}\) The actor Vladimir

\(^{23}\) GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 82, l. 81.
\(^{24}\) Ibid.
\(^{26}\) GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 82, l. 76 and f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 2.
Iakhontov, testifying to the centrality of the radio during the difficult wartime years, explained that the “radio informed, signaled, directed us, connected families and close friends.”

*Fulfilling the Postal Function*

According to the Letters to and from the Front department reports, the broadcasts’ primary goal was to serve as “a means of communication between the front and the rear.” While only a small percentage of the letters the radio department received were broadcast, the staff claimed to prioritize airing the letters from citizens who were trying to regain contact with their relatives. In 1943, the broadcasts helped a reported 5,291 individuals trace their family members, and by May 1944, the radio broadcasts had helped over 23,000 families regain contact since the program’s establishment. The Letters to and from the Front department officials were satisfied with this achievement and cited the many letters of gratitude they received from citizens, who having given up their loved ones as dead, learned that they were still alive and reestablished contact with them due to the Letters to and from the Front broadcasts. For instance, commander Martsyniuk of a partisan division in the Belorussian SSR, heard his wife’s letter on the radio and learned that she and their three children had managed to escape occupied territory and evacuate to the Urals. Due to such accomplishments in helping families regain contact, the staff of the department affirmed that, “we have not for nothing eaten Soviet bread.”

In order to help war-torn families regain contact, the Letters to and from the Front department also maintained a card catalogue (*kartoteka*) of all of the original letters that were included in the broadcasts. The department staff boasted that the card catalogue was so well-

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27 Lovell, *Russia in the Microphone Age*, 114.
28 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 70, l. 5.
29 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 11.
30 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 82, l. 86 and f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 10.
31 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 82, l. 86.
32 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 82, l. 87.
33 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 10.
organized that if they were asked to retrieve a letter broadcast years earlier, they would be able to locate the letter in mere minutes. \textsuperscript{34} Promptly finding these original letters was a crucial task since the department received thousands of appeals from citizens who believed they heard their family member’s letter on the air but wanted to confirm the author’s identity or address. Within a year, the radio staff responded to more than 40,000 such inquiries. \textsuperscript{35} One of the department supervisors prided the department in promptly responding to such inquiries, asserting that “in our apparatus there is no place for workers who do not remember that behind each letter are real (zhivie) people who have been separated by the war. We have a law – to answer each telegram on the same day it was received, or in any case, no later than the next day.”\textsuperscript{36}

\textit{Serving as Propaganda}

While the staff of the Letters to and from the Front department claimed that the broadcasts’ fundamental goal was to help war-torn families reestablish contact, the radio program also conveyed vital propaganda messages to Soviet citizens. As a Letters to and from the Front department report explained, “agitation is not the fundamental function of the department of letters, but the letters practically are agitational material.”\textsuperscript{37} By virtue of the fact that the letters came from a broad swath of Soviet society, the radio department staff considered that the letters would be particularly effective at resonating with and inspiring the Soviet population as a whole.\textsuperscript{38}

During the early days of the war, the mere existence of the program conveyed a crucial propaganda message by reassuring citizens of the durability of the Soviet state which, when faced with an existential threat, still cared for its citizens’ well-being and attempted to alleviate the strains

\textsuperscript{34} GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 11.
\textsuperscript{35} GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 10.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 70, l. 5.
\textsuperscript{38} GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 82, l. 77.
that total war placed on their family life. As member of the Radio Committee Aleksei Puzin proclaimed:

During the difficult years, when the Germans attacked Moscow, when the enemy approached the Volga, in the difficult months of the war, the letters played a huge role. They created faith in the power of our government. Our state cared to connect (zabotilos’ sviyat’) people who were located in evacuation with the front, and the radio maintains this connection, and the people have faith (vera) in the state, which cares about people.  

Demonstrating the state’s commitment to the civilian population was intended to bolster morale at the front, since as Marina Potemkina has argued in her work on wartime evacuation, “every soldier fighting for his country imagines that his relatives are behind him . . . he needs to be certain that they are alive and healthy and that the state is caring for them.”

According to the Letters to and from the Front department reports, the broadcasts helped reassure soldiers that their family members in home-front were alive and well cared for by the state and liberated them from their worries about their family, so they could wholly devote their energy to repulsing the invading forces. For example, Red Army soldier Ivan Nosarev thanked the radio department staff for helping him reestablish contact with his family after the Red Army’s liberation of the Smolensk oblast. He wrote that thanks to the radio program he learned that:

[M]y two little boys (synishki) have started to go to school. Soviet power has surrounded them with care and has found everything: a house and a place for them to study. Before I was worried that they did not have a place to live, but now I can go into battle with a calm soul (s spokoinoi dushoi). And I will mercilessly beat (besposhchadno gromit) the enemy.

Along with boosting front-line morale, the radio broadcasts also fostered a sense of citizens’ obligation and indebtedness to the state for helping them regain contact with their family members. The radio broadcasts signaled that Soviet citizens could best convey their gratitude to

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39 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 73.
40 Potemkina, Evakuatsiia v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny, 50.
41 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 82, l. 77.
42 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 82, l. 90.
the state by fighting the enemy or working in the home-front with even greater zeal and dedication. According to *frontovik* Ivan Pavlov, after having no word from his family for two years, he finally regained contact with them thanks to the radio program. Pavlov explained that this, “even further obligates me to smash the German bastards (*gromit’ fashistskikh gadov*)” and he recounted how his division recently destroyed three German bunkers and six machine-gun points and asserted that he “personally killed three Fritzes – this number will grow (*schet rastet*).”

As Karl Berkhoff has argued, the wartime press conveyed to citizens their indebtedness to the state for its care and that “even though there was a right to undefined ‘care,’ the families had to show that they were deserving of it.”

The broadcasts also included letters which conveyed in an intimate, personal manner the extent of the invading forces’ cruelty towards the Soviet civilian population and could thereby help stoke audience members’ fury at the enemy and desire for vengeance. This theme of the enemy’s barbarousness became more prevalent as the Red Army moved westward and liberated Soviet territory and the composition of the letters that the radio program received changed, with 66% of them arriving from formerly-occupied territories. While such letters expressed the authors’ hopes that they would be able to regain contact with their relatives at the front and in evacuation whom they had been unable to communicate with since falling under occupation, they were also litanies

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43 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 82, l. 89. Another *frontovnik* Pavel Zaskal’no also wrote a letter of gratitude to the radio program for helping him reestablish contact with his mother who had been hospitalized and evacuated into the Soviet interior. In his letter, Zaskal’nno asserted that “this could only happen in our great socialist country,” and that the state’s care for *frontovniki*, “inspires us to do an even better job to destroy the Hitlerite barbarians.” The partisan Zinaida Terekhova also reported that thanks to the radio program’s efforts which helped her reestablish contact with her brother, she could face and “take revenge on the Germans with even greater strength.” GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 82, l. 88.


45 As Lisa Kirschenbaum has argued, the theme of familial suffering and the need to gain retribution appeared in the wartime press. Kirschenbaum, “‘Our City, Our Hearths, Our Families’,” 844.

46 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d.82, l. 78.
of the violence, abuse and hardship they endured under occupation.\textsuperscript{47} For instance, following the liberation of Krasnodar, a resident of the city, Ekaterina Shvetsovaia, spoke on the radio addressing her son-in-law, Vasilii, who was fighting at the front. In her address, Shvetsovaia informed Vasilii that, “the German monsters (izvergi) have taken from us my beloved daughter and your wife, Smina,” and described in detail the Gestapo’s arrest of her daughter, her futile efforts to determine what happened to Smina following her arrest, and the death of one of Vasilii’s children from malnutrition and illness. Since Shvetsovaia believed that Smina had mostly likely died while in prison, she tried to find her daughter’s body among the occupying forces’ other victims, describing how, “Krasnodar was practically entirely surrounded by anti-tank ditches and in these ditches, the Germans collected the bodies of those they had killed and tortured. The top was filled in every which way (koe-kak): here legs protruded, here an arm is twisted and here is a head. People came here to search among the dead for their loved ones (blizki).”\textsuperscript{48} Despite these desperate efforts, Shvetsovaia never did find her daughter’s body. She concluded her message to Vasilii declaring her confidence that he will make the German “monsters” pay for what they had done and asking that he write to her and his surviving child.\textsuperscript{49} The inclusion of Shvetsovaia’s message on the radio presented the Soviet regime as helping survivors of the German occupation regain contact with their loved ones, even though citizens who remained in occupied territory tended to be objects of suspicion, rather than pity. More crucially, in order to mobilize the population, such testimony conveyed to the rest of the population in an intimate and heart-wrenching manner the horrors that

\textsuperscript{47} For more examples of the tragic family news that Soviet citizens would share on the radio following their liberation from occupation see: GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 82, l. 82.

\textsuperscript{48} GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 82, l. 94.

\textsuperscript{49} In this parting message to her son-in-law, Shvetsovaia conformed with the typical representation of Soviet women in wartime propaganda who, as Lisa Kirschenbaum has argued, “challenged men to meet their obligations as husbands, fathers, and sons.” Kirschenbaum, “‘Our City, Our Hearths, Our Families’,” 833. For a similar example of a woman’s letter which described her wartime suffering under occupation to her son and beseeched him to defeat the German forces see: GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 82, ll. 95-96.
Soviet citizens endured when they were temporarily beyond the protection of Soviet state and under Nazi German control.

While the radio program reflected the centrality of kinship ties for Soviet citizens, including such messages was most likely intended to assure all Soviet citizens, mothers as well as fathers, that they could temporarily relinquish their familial responsibilities to the state, so they could better defend the Motherland. This notion was most clearly articulated in the broadcast of frontovik Grigori Pereviazko’s letter to his wife and children. In his letter, he assured his “dear, little boys (synochki),” that while they have lived for a year and a half without their parents and must believe that they are both dead, they are in fact “at our post to do what the Motherland has bid,” and promised that he “will take revenge on the German invaders because they tore you, my dear sons, from your mother and father, and they ruined our nest (rodnoe gnezdo).”  

Addressing his wife who was separated from the children and working in a mine in the Urals, he consoled her that, “I know that it is not easy for your mother’s heart to bear the separation with your beloved chicks (ptentsami). But do not worry about our children, dear. They are in reliable, faithful (vernykh) hands, and the Motherland (rodina) lovingly cares for them.”

“We are not simply postmen”

The staff of the Letters to and from the Front department initially imagined that the program would be able to convey these propaganda messages as a natural consequence of broadcasting Soviet citizens’ letters to their family on the air. However, as the transcripts of the department’s meetings reflect, broadcasting citizens’ personal letters to help citizens reestablish contact with

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50 GARF, f. 6903, op. 19, d. 135, ll. 93-93ob.
51 As the radio program transcripts include handwritten edits and marginalia, it is not clear what was in fact transmitted on the air. While the typed transcript stated Pereviazko as saying that “the Party lovingly cares for them,” this was crossed out with pen and altered to, “the Motherland (rodina) lovingly cares for them.”
52 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 52.
their family members and to mobilize Soviet society overall were in fact two distinct goals that were frequently in tension with each other. While the department staff asserted that they prioritized broadcasting letters from citizens who were trying to locate their lost relatives, the broadcasts frequently transmitted letters that were not intended for family members and purely served as propaganda. For instance, in 1943, the broadcasts include 1,500 collectively-written letters from members of factories and kolkhozes addressed to their comrades serving at the front.\(^{53}\)

The manner in which the radio department staff selected the letters to be included in the broadcasts reveals how the staff’s priority was to create entertaining and compelling broadcasts that would resonate with and mobilize the population. Even when citizens explicitly asked for aid to find their family members, the editors frequently disregarded letters that they considered too brief. According to a staff member, “a great quantity of letters consist of three to five words – I ask that you transmit my address – or the letter contains the request to convey to his mother that he, her son, is located at the front, or in a letter to the front, especially from evacuees, that they live somewhere (tam-to). This type of letter predominates. I cannot say if they compose 90.95% or 60%, but they are a great number . . .”\(^{54}\) Another broadcast editor claimed that this type of letter actually formed 95% of the letters that they received and that the broadcasts could not only include such letters due to “the millions of listeners, who want to listen to interesting letters.”\(^{55}\)

Unsurprisingly, the staff also edited the letters for grammatical errors and to excise any sensitive military information and “ambiguous and politically incorrect formulaics.”\(^{56}\) As Stephen

\(^{53}\) GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 8.
\(^{54}\) GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 53. One staff member speculated that citizens’ letters were so brief because they believed that this increased the chance that their letter would be aired. GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 55.
\(^{55}\) GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 58. As a radio staff member asserted, “there is an enormous quantity of letters that are laconic that it is not possible to broadcast them.” GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 55. However, as some of the transcripts reflect, the broadcasts did sometimes include citizens’ brief messages to their family members. GARF, f. 6903, op. 19, d. 135, l. 14OB and l. 25.
\(^{56}\) GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 70, l. 7; GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 59 and Lovell, Russia in the Microphone Age, 125.
Lovell has noted about the radio program, “on the one hand, broadcasts were to transmit the authentic voice of the people, on the other hand, this voice was not allowed to violate Stalinist norms of cultural and political propriety.”57 However, the staff also edited the letters purely to make them sound more distinctive since according to the broadcast editors, many of the letters were so similar that they were practically “twins.”58 As a broadcast editor explained, “the broadcasts need to be diverse in theme and style, so careful selection and a literary processing (literaturnaia obrabotka) of the letters is necessary.”59

However, the degree to which the department editors altered the letters provoked a heated debate among members of the Soviet Radio Committee.60 At a meeting held in May 1944 a member of the Radio Committee, comrade Arbuzov, critiqued how the Letters to and from the Front department did not faithfully broadcast the original letters. Underscoring how the staff’s disregard towards maintaining the integrity of the letters could impede the program’s purported primary goal of helping Soviet citizens reestablish contact with their family members, Arbuzov noted that the last names and addresses of the letters’ authors were often changed in the broadcasts.61 Arbuzov also complained that radio department editors contravened their orders “to not pervert or muddle the facts, to maintain the author’s style, to truthfully and correctly convey the mood of the person, who wrote the letter . . .”62 As Arbuzov explained, the editors frequently embellished the letters and sometimes even fabricated parts of them.63 For instance, one of the

57 Lovell, *Russia in the Microphone Age*, 124.
58 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 35.
59 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 35 and f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 5.
60 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 17.
61 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 32.
62 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, ll. 6-7.
63 In his critique of how the radio program staff altered the letters, Arbuzov also described how a semi-literate Soviet woman’s letter expressing her gratitude to the defenders of her native city, Stalingrad, was embellished to include quotations from one of Vladimir Mayakovskii’s poems. According to Arbuzov, the editors sometimes even fabricated entire letters. Based on a letter from a Soviet woman in the home-front to a frontovnik, informing him that his wife had been killed by the Germans and that she has taken his son into her care, the editors crafted a letter in the
editors of the broadcasts, comrade Beliaeva, altered a letter in which Soviet citizens thanked the commander of their son’s division for informing them of their son’s death in battle and for organizing his burial. Instead of preserving the parents’ simple letter, Beliaeva embellished it and added the following section:

We received the photographs of the memorial service and of the grave marked with a granite monument. We were especially touched by the fence, that was caringly done by the hands of Ivan’s comrades-in-arms. Thank you, dear ones (rodnye). This small patch of land is not far from us in Zaporozh’e. And when the war is over, we will hurry over there, so that we can kneel on our son’s grave and kiss the earth on which he fought and died.\textsuperscript{64}

In response to Arbuzov’s critique, the editors justified altering the letters. For instance, defending how she edited the letter from the parents of the fallen soldier, Beliaeva asserted that many parents whose children died at the front probably heard the letter and that in its edited form, the letter “touched them, and maybe even sustained (podderzhalo) and comforted (sogrelo) them.”\textsuperscript{65} Beliaeva thus championed editing the letters so that they would resonate with and mobilize a broader swath of Soviet society. Beliaeva was not unique in conceiving of the program’s work in this way, since as one of her colleagues explained, “the principle of our work is not to pervert (izvrashchat) the facts but to try to seek out (vyiskivat’) in the facts, that which can be vividly conveyed to the listeners.”\textsuperscript{66}

As the heated discussion following Arbuzov’s critique reveals, most members of the Radio Committee were not concerned with the fact that altering the letters obstructed the department’s ostensible primary goal of helping war-torn Soviet families reestablish contact. Rather, they were predominantly concerned that altering the letters would diminish, rather than bolster, the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{64} GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 28.
\textsuperscript{65} GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l.35.
\textsuperscript{66} GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 37.
\end{footnotesize}
program’s effectiveness as propaganda. Other members of the radio broadcast concurred with Arbuzov’s assessment that “in the efforts to be sure to adorn (obiazatel’no razukrasit’) the letter, to make it more beautiful, more literary (oliteraturit’), the editor inadvertently descends (skatyvaetsia) to fabricating of the image of Soviet people. . .” 67 Editing the content of the letters could also compromise the program since audience-members might begin to suspect that the letters were not authentic. 68 Radio Committee member Puzin warned that audience members could sense that the letters had been edited and that they would start to feel that they had been deceived. He cautioned that this could have dire repercussions on the overall effectiveness of Soviet radio because it could undermine Soviet citizens’ confidence in the veracity of the Soviet press. 69

However, some Radio Committee members persisted in defending the practice of editing the letters. As one of the staff members avowed: “we are not simply postmen. We are not simply the transmitters of any letters. No, before us is the task of relaying letters from the front and to the front. And not letters in general, but letters with a particular political significance and in doing so, fulfill the task that was placed before us by the Central Committee of the party, while connecting (i sviazivaia) soldiers and commanders with their relatives and close ones.” 70 In the early days of the war, Soviet officials effectively marshalled its propaganda apparatus to create a radio program that served a humanitarian purpose and helped over 23,000 war-torn Soviet families regain contact. However, assisting war-torn families remained subordinated to the program’s principal goal of serving as effective propaganda, to reassure citizens of the state’s continued commitment to their

67 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 28.
68 Radio Committee member Aleksei Puzin claimed that members of the intelligentsia were already convinced that the letters broadcast were edited. GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, op. 87, l. 73.
69 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, ll. 71-72.
70 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 87, l. 52.
personal well-being and to convince them to relinquish their familial responsibilities to the state and wholly devote themselves to the defense of the Motherland.

**Soviet State Surveillance and Reuniting War-Torn Families**

Approximately five months after the establishment of the Letters to and from the Front radio department, in early January 1942, *Pravda* published the informational article “How to Receive Information (*Spravky*) on the Whereabouts of Evacuated Citizens.” In the brief article, Konstantin D. Pamfilov, the head of the Administration for the Evacuation of the Population (*Upravlenie po Evakuatsii naseleniiia, UEN*) under the Evacuation Council of the Sovnarkom, discussed the work of the Central Information Bureau (*Tsentralnoe Spravochnoe Biuro, TsSB*). Located in the town Buguruslan, in the Chkalovskoi oblast, the TsSB maintained a centralized card catalogue with personal records on evacuees and entertained citizens’ inquiries concerning the whereabouts of their family members or acquaintances who had evacuated into the Soviet interior. Pamfilov informed citizens that they could send their tracing inquiries directly to the TsSB, or if they knew the specific region where their relatives were located, they could write to the regional representative of the UEN. In either case, Pamfilov reminded supplicants that the inquiries, “should be written concisely, clearly, legibly,” and must include the full name of the individual to be traced and his or her year of birth, residency prior to evacuation, and place of work prior to evacuation.\(^\text{71}\)

Like Letters to and from the Front, the establishment of the TsSB illustrated the Soviet regime’s commitment to relieving the strain total war placed on Soviet families. Yet, unlike the radio broadcasts which only accommodated a fraction of the inquiries it received and relied on the happenstance that individuals heard their family members’ messages on the air, Pamfilov

\(^{71}\)“Kak poluchit’ spravky o mestozhitel’stve evakuriovannykh grazhdan,” *Pravda*, January 11, 1942.
presented the TsSB as a reliable information bureau that could systematically locate citizens’ relatives. The TsSB thus reflected the durability of the Soviet state by conveying that even in the context of wartime upheaval and mass population displacement, the Soviet Union retained its ability to surveil and monitor its citizens’ movements in the Soviet interior. However, this semblance of control and order belied the haphazard and disorderly nature that characterized the initial management of the TsSB.\footnote{Some of the Russian-language publications on the TsSB also eschew the institution’s fraught origins and present a more celebratory image of the institution. Viacheslav Riabov and Vikro Sharbin, \textit{Chkalovtsy v dni surovikh ispitanii i velikikh svershenii} (Orenburg: Pechatnyi dom “Dimur”, 2013), 178-191 and D. Iu. Bekhterev, “Tsentr’noe spravochnoe biuro (1941-1945) – sozdanie i funktsionirovanie,” in \textit{Pravookhranitel’nye organy Iuzhnogo Urala: istoriya i sovremennost’} (Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii 2 aprelia 2000 g.) (Orenberg, 2000) 152-155.}

\textit{The Institutional Origins of the TsSB}

Within a few days of the Wehrmacht’s invasion, and approximately six months before the informational article on the operations of the TsSB appeared in \textit{Pravda}, the highest echelons of the Soviet leadership recognized the need to evacuate key industries and labor power into the Soviet interior. The Sovnarkom thus established the Evacuation Council, which included representatives of the People’s Commissariat for Transportation, the All-Union Council of Trade Union, Gosplan, and the NKVD to oversee this mammoth task.\footnote{Manley, \textit{To the Tashkent Station}, 27.} The Evacuation Council entrusted the Resettlement Administration with maintaining records on the location of all citizens in evacuation, as well as entertaining citizens’ inquiries concerning the whereabouts of their family members and acquaintances who evacuated.\footnote{Dubson, “Toward a Central Database of Evacuated Soviet Jews’ Names,” 97.} While the Resettlement Administration was responsible for organizing the resettlement of agricultural migrants in the 1930s, maintaining records on millions of wartime evacuees was well beyond its realm of expertise.\footnote{Kristen Elizabeth Edwards, “Fleeing to Siberia: The Wartime Relocation of Evacuees to Novosibirsk, 1941-1943,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1996), 130. While the NKVD sometimes appealed to the Resettlement Administration for assistance in tracing wanted persons, such tracing experience would not have}
officials explained, “the Resettlement Administration, without any prior experience, is conducting registration and reference work (uchetnuiu i spravochnuiu rabotu) for the first time.”

Despite this lack of experience, the Resettlement Administration and the Central Statistical Administration of Gosplan of the USSR, promptly issued in early July 1941 directives concerning how local authorities would collect information on the arriving evacuees and share it with the central apparatus of the Resettlement Administration. Along with helping citizens trace their relatives, this data was collected to ensure that the Statistical Division of Gosplan maintained accurate demographic records, to facilitate evacuees’ job placement in their sites of resettlement, and to allow for the more efficient allocation of resources for evacuees. In their detailed directives, the Resettlement Administration and Gosplan did not evoke any precedents, despite the Soviet Union’s and its imperial Russian predecessor’s past experiences contending with mass population displacement. As this absence highlights, Soviet officials conceived World War II-era evacuation as wholly distinct from the earlier waves of population displacement that had beset the USSR and they imagined that they could orchestrate the orderly evacuation of citizens and maintain control over the movement and placement of evacuees in the Soviet interior. As historian Rebecca Manley has argued, following the German invasion, Soviet authorities abjured the term “refugee” (bezhents), which was associated with the chaotic flood of individuals who moved into the interior of the Russian empire during World War I and instead preferred the term “evacuee.” According to Manley, “from the perspective of the state authorities who oversaw and organized the operation, the change in terminology was not simply a matter of semantics. It was meant to

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76 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), RG-22.027M, Original source: GARF, f. A327, op. 2, d. 36, l. 56.
signify a radical reorientation with regard to wartime population displacement. Explicitly rejecting the notion of 'voluntary refugeeedom', authorities elaborated an alternative vision whereby civilians would be designated by the state for displacement and transferred in an organized fashion to the rear, where they would become productive participants in the war effort. . .”78 While the state thus viewed evacuees as vital contributors to the wartime labor force, and not as indigent refugees, the Resettlement Administration’s plan to entertain tracing inquiries illustrates how Soviet officials also recognized evacuees as victims of total war and aimed to reduce the strain that displacement and family separation placed on them.79

Some Soviet citizens were confident that state authorities would be able to maintain records on evacuating citizens and help them find their relatives. In a letter addressed to the secretary of the TsK KP(b) of the Kirgiz SSR, lieutenant Nikolai Ziabkin, described how after being wounded at the front, he was evacuated and was recuperating in a hospital in Tashkent. He was searching for his wife and infant child who had evacuated from Bessarabia to the Kirgiz SSR, but he did not know their specific address. He asked for the party officials to help him find his wife and child, since as he explained, “I believe that there are party members in each oblast, district, and village and therefore through the oblast party committee, district party committee and primary party organizations, it is possible to know each and every one [my italics] who is in Kirgiz. I think that the search will not be that difficult.”80


79 Soviet officials also organized the evacuation of individuals who could not contribute to the labor force, such as hundreds of thousands of children. As Anastas Mikoian explained, children were evacuated from Moscow, “with the aim of securing their safety and with the aim of relieving pressure on the provision of goods to the capital’s several million inhabitants.” Manely, To the Tashkent Station, 37-38. Also, as Kiril Feferman has argued, Soviet officials' tolerance and accommodation towards the women, children and elderly who evacuated to the North Caucasus on their own accord, “resembled a humanitarian action to no small extent.” Kiril Feferman, “A Soviet Humanitarian Action?: Centre, Periphery and the Evacuation of Refugees to the North Caucasus, 1941-1942,” Europe-Asia Studies 61, no. 5 (July 2009): 829.

80 USHMM, RG-82.001, Original Source: TsGA RK, f. 56, op. 17, d. 49, ll. 122-122ob.
However, both Resettlement Administration officials and citizens like Ziabkin, were disappointed by the regime’s ability to collect information on “each and every one” in evacuation and to efficiently respond to tracing inquiries. The Resettlement Administration was unable to collect reliable data since it did not have representatives at the local level and even in some republics and oblasts, there were no representatives of the Resettlement Administration present. The Resettlement Administration thus depended on the city or district ispolkom to record the biographical information of arriving evacuees. However, as the Resettlement Administration reported “many ispolkomy and SNK republics underestimated the significance of recording evacuees . . .” Due to this shortcoming, the regional departments of the Resettlement Administration only possessed information on a fraction of evacuees. In the Novosibirsk oblast, Resettlement Administration officials had records on approximately 170,000 out of the estimated 350,000 evacuees, or 48.5%, in the region. This information was never organized into a card catalogue, so in order to process a tracing inquiry, the staff had to peruse lists of un-alphabetized names. Unsurprisingly, out of the 15,300 tracing inquiries received, the staff only established the whereabouts of 400, or 2.6%, of them. Similarly, in the Sverdlovsk oblast, local officials received 48,486 tracing inquiries from August 1941 to April 1942 and were only able to provide information on the whereabouts of 849, or 2%, of them. This dismal response rate was likely exacerbated by

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82 USHMM, RG-22.027M, Original source: GARF, f. A327, op. 2, d. 36, l. 56
83 The establishment of the information bureaus under the regional offices of Resettlement Administration was only confirmed by the Sovnarkom in mid-November 1941. While the UEN ultimately gained control of the Resettlement Administration’s central apparatus, the regional offices of the Resettlement Administration continued to manage the regional information bureaus until January 1942. Edwards, “Fleeing to Siberia,” 141.
84 Edwards, “Fleeing to Siberia,” 141-142.
85 Potemkina, Evakuatsiia v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny na Urale, 61.
the fact that the staff of three could only process about 150-170 tracing inquiries a day, when an average of 400 inquiries were arriving daily.  

These deficiencies with tracing evacuees at the Resettlement Administration’s regional offices were magnified at the Resettlement Administration’s central apparatus in Moscow. As reported in August 1941 to the then head of the Evacuation Council Pamfilov, the state of affairs concerning maintaining records on evacuees is “extremely grave (kriane tiazhelo).” While the central apparatus had received lists with biographical information on 515,600 evacuees, only 250,800, or 48.6%, of them had been organized into the centralized card catalogues. Resettlement Administration officials warned that, “this situation with this work will be even worse when the lists reach 3 to 4 million people,” and also confessed that the central organ’s work responding to tracing inquiries was “utterly catastrophic.”  

As of late August 1941, the Resettlement Administration had received 151,300 inquiries and had only responded to 22,000, or 14.7%, of them. The central apparatus was also so overwhelmed with unanswered tracing inquiries that officials anxiously projected that, “if on August 10, there were 15,000 unanswered letters, and on August 15, there were 35,000, then on August 20, they will increase to 130,000??”  

The report to Pamfilov concluded that, “it is necessary to quickly interfere in the work of the Resettlement Administration and to take radical measures to ensure the improvement of reference work.” “Radical measures” were adopted; however, they did not improve the Resettlement Administration’s work but instead transferred responsibility for maintaining records

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86 Ibid.  
87 USHMM, RG-22.027M, Original source: GARF, f. A327, op. 2, d. 36, l. 52.  
88 Ibid. This state of affairs was still an improvement from the data cited in an early report which stated that the central apparatus of the TsSB only had information on 130,000 out of an estimated 2 million evacuees and that out of the 23,310 tracing inquiries received, it only responded to 6,936 of them and was only able to provide the individual’s location for 371, or 5.4%, of them. USHMM, RG-22.027M, Original source: GARF, f. A327, op. 2, d. 36, l. 57.  
89 USHMM, RG-22.027M, Original source: GARF, f. A327, op. 2, d. 36, l. 52.  
90 Ibid.
on evacuees and responding to tracing inquiries to a different apparatus, the Administration of the Evacuation of the Population (Upravlenie po Evakuatsii naseleniia, UEN) which was created by the State Defense Committee (GKO) on September 26, 1941 and directly subordinated to the Evacuation Council.\(^{91}\) Shortly thereafter, in mid-November 1941, the Central Information Bureau (Tsentralnoe Spravochnoe Buro, TsSB), was established under the UEN, and it was briefly entrusted with responding to tracing inquiries concerning evacuees before the UEN, was dissolved by the end of January 1942, and the TsSB was transferred to the passport division of the Main Police Administration (Glavnoe Upravlenie Militsii, GUM) of the NKVD.\(^ {92}\)

\textit{The NKVD Takes Over}

In many ways, the NKVD’s assumption of control over the TsSB was a continuation of pre-war trends of the 1930s when due to the weakness of the civil arm of the state, the police, “expanded operational and administrative authority to take over institutions and problems of social governance, one after another – illegal migration and trade, indigence, the unemployed, civil and residence registration and census taking, orphan children and related problems of juvenile delinquency, and a massive wave of petty criminality.”\(^{93}\) Also, the NKVD had been tasked with monitoring evacuees’ movements even prior to gaining formal control over the TsSB. A Sovnarkom resolution signed by Stalin and Chadaev in early August 1941 required the police to maintain the passport system that had been established in 1933 and to continue to register all new arrivals and to prevent evacuees from settling in strategically important cities.\(^{94}\) Some local

\(^{91}\) Snegireva, ed., \textit{Vo imiia pobedy}, 20.

\(^{92}\) Dubson, “Toward a Central Database of Evacuated Soviet Jews’ Names,” 97.


\(^{94}\) USHMM, RG-82,001, Original Source: TsGA RK, f. 1415, op. 1, d. 6, ll. 9-10. This order was reinforced by a GKO resolution dated September 26, 1941. Snegireva, ed., \textit{Vo imiia pobedy}, 298..
authorities had already relinquished to the NKVD sole responsibility for recording evacuees’ biographical information even prior to the TsSB’s formal transfer to the NKVD. As the Plenipotentiary of the Evacuation Council in the Kirgiz SSR explained to Pamfilov in early January 1942, “in connection with the fact that the police administration is simultaneously maintaining a card catalogue on all those arriving, we gave our card catalogue to them, and all tracing of the families of evacuees is now done through the passport bureau of the police administration.” In relinquishing responsibility to the NKVD, rather than asserting their authority, local officials suggested that the NKVD was better equipped to collect data on arriving evacuees and help Soviet citizens reestablish contact with their relatives.

When the NKVD gained custody of the TsSB records in March 1942, the deputy chief of the GUM NKVD claimed that it was “absolutely impossible” for the NKVD to respond to tracing inquires in the first half of 1942 because the TsSB possessed information on only approximately 22% of the total number of evacuees and had inherited 568,554 unanswered tracing inquiries. NKVD officials alleged that due to the “bulkiness and complexity” of the three card catalogues that it inherited, the staff of 450 would only be able to answer approximately 4,000 inquiries each day and would never be able to cope with the approximately 12-15,000 inquiries they were receiving daily.

While the Resettlement Administration and the UEN had not been able to fulfill their orders to create a functioning tracing apparatus, the NKVD was able to rectify situation it inherited from its predecessors. Along with reorganizing the three card catalogues into one fully centralized card catalogue, the NKVD also ordered its local forces to re-register all evacuees by conducting a

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95 USHMM, RG-82.001, Original Source: TsGA RK, f. 1415, op. 1, d. 6, l. 87.
96 As of March 12, 1942, when the GUM of the NKVD received the TsSB records, there were 613,000 unsorted letters. GARF, f. 9415, op. 3, d. 1407, l. 3.
97 GARF, f. 8300, op. 11, d. 13, ll. 97-98 and f. 9415, op. 3, d. 1407, l. 3.
systematic door-to-door sweep and interviewing each evacuee personally.\textsuperscript{98} Recording data on newly-arriving evacuees was also integrated into the NKVD’s pre-existing passport registration system, and rather than sending to the central apparatus of the TsSB lists with evacuees’ information, local police officials were entrusted with filling out the personal information card (\textit{kartochka}) on each evacuee and sending these completed cards to the TsSB, where they would be integrated into the centralized card catalogue. NKVD officials also took measures to encourage evacuees’ cooperation with the registration process since many evacuees tried to avoid registration or would give a false name.\textsuperscript{99} Local police officials were instructed to “explain through the local press and in conversation with evacuees that the registration of evacuees is being conducted solely for the goal of providing relatives and acquaintances information about their location.”\textsuperscript{100}

Despite this claim, the NKVD did \textit{not} collect information on evacuees purely for the purpose of helping war-torn Soviet families reestablish contact. The passport division of the NKVD was also entrusted with maintaining the passport regime and uncovering deserters and other “enemy elements,” and as one of its reports explained, “especially in the conditions of war, the residency of citizens without passports, without registration (\textit{propiska}), and with expired passports must not be allowed.”\textsuperscript{101} In February 1943, the head of police in the Molotov oblast was explicitly instructed to “connect these measures [concerning recording evacuees] with uncovering those who are breaking the passport regime and the rules of military registration.”\textsuperscript{102} While both the press and the NKVD local officials presented the TsSB as a mechanism to help Soviet citizens

\textsuperscript{98} GARF, f. 8300, op. 11, d. 13, l. 146. Another recount of evacuees was ordered in January 1943 due to the persistent concern that not all evacuees had been recorded. GARF, f. 9415, op. 3, d. 1405, l. 16.
\textsuperscript{99} GARF, f. 8300, op. 11, d. 13, ll. 140-141.
\textsuperscript{100} GARF, f. 8300, op. 11, d. 13, l. 149ob.
\textsuperscript{101} GARF, f. 9415, op. 3, d. 1405, l. 19 and Iu. N. Kirichenko, \textit{Reorganizatsiia i razvitie pasportnoi sluzby sovetskoi militsii, ee mesto i rol’ v ukreplenii obschestvennogo poriadka v SSSR v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny i poslevoennyi period} (Kursk: Iugo-Zapdanyi gosudarstvennyi universitet), 41.
\textsuperscript{102} GARF, f. 8300, op. 11, d. 13, ll. 136-136ob.
regain contact with their relatives, the TsSB also entertained tracing inquiries from other state institutions and enterprises. For instance, in 1942 and in January and February of 1943, the TsSB received 24,674 inquiries from state institutions and enterprises concerning evacuees, including from military tribunals, military units, and other organs of the NKVD.\textsuperscript{103}

It is not clear whether administering the TsSB and reassuring evacuees that its work was merely to help war-torn Soviet families actually facilitated the NKVD in its broader efforts to maintain the passport regime and catch deserters and other “enemy elements.” However, the NKVD’s experience surveilling the domestic population appears to have facilitated its management of the TsSB. While the Resettlement Administration and the UEN failed to establish an operational system for tracing evacuees, the NKVD was able to mobilize its preexisting surveillance system to greatly improve upon its predecessors’ administration of the TsSB and ultimately help millions of Soviet citizens regain contact with their lost relatives. The police had ample experience collecting information on the domestic population following the introduction of the passport system in 1933 which “provided police with a surveillance tool, potentially, of the entire population.”\textsuperscript{104} With this expertise in collecting and organizing information on citizens, the NKVD was able to substantially increase the number of evacuees included in the centralized card catalogue. By the beginning of 1943, the TsSB possessed data on the whereabouts of 5,303,718 evacuees, and by the beginning of 1946, that number increased to 6,459,025 evacuees.\textsuperscript{105} And while in March 1942, the NKVD inherited 613,000 unsorted letters, by the beginning of 1943, they

\textsuperscript{103} GARF, f. 8300, op. 11, d. 13, l. 77 and 103.
\textsuperscript{104} Shearer, \textit{Policing Stalin’s Socialism}, 162. According to David Shearer, since the 1920s, the police developed sophisticated techniques for collecting and organizing information on specific groups of the Soviet populace. As Shearer explains, “both civil and political police maintained an extensive and increasingly complicated system of kartoteki. The number of people registered (\textit{na uchet}) in police surveillance and operational kartoteki at any one time is unclear, although by the late 1930s, the political police kept surveillance information on some 1.2 million people.” Shearer, \textit{Policing Stalin’s Socialism}, 161.
\textsuperscript{105} GARF, f. 9415, op. 3, d. 1407, l. 3 and f. 9415, op. 3, d. 1419, l.24.
had managed to respond to all of these letters, as well as improve the system of processing the incoming correspondence, so that the staff could keep pace with the daily influx of mail.\textsuperscript{106} By the end of 1942, the NKVD reported that the TsSB was able to provide evacuees’ whereabouts for 18-20\% of the inquiries it received.\textsuperscript{107} This figures appears to be a slight exaggeration, since according to their own data for 1942, the TsSB received 3,652,235 inquiries concerning the whereabouts of 11,127,306 people and were able to give information on the whereabouts of 1,749,134, or 15\%, of them.\textsuperscript{108} However, as the chart below reflects, by the time the TsSB ceased operations in June 1948, it had processed 6,581,643 inquiries concerning the whereabouts of 17,159,529 people of whom they were able to provide the location of 3,084,076, or 18\%, of them.\textsuperscript{109} As Rebecca Manley has argued, the number of inquiries that the TsSB responded to “was a considerable number, and it is all the more impressive given that many of the inquiries received by the Bureau related to people who never made it into evacuation.”\textsuperscript{110}

The NKVD TsSB’s Processing of Tracing Inquiries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>The Number of Inquiries Received</th>
<th>The Number of People Sought</th>
<th>The Number of People Whose Location was Established</th>
<th>Rate of Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>3,941,489</td>
<td>11,690,910</td>
<td>1,806,833</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>1,857,269</td>
<td>3,934,452</td>
<td>885,136</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>422,925</td>
<td>956,284</td>
<td>255,071</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>130,037</td>
<td>276,557</td>
<td>79,347</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>168,896</td>
<td>214,667</td>
<td>42,971</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>51,499</td>
<td>71,755</td>
<td>12,689</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From GARF, f. 9415, op. 3, d. 1424, ll. 15-16

\textsuperscript{106} GARF, f. 9415, op. 3, d. 1407, l. 3.  
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{109} GARF, f. 9415, op. 3, d. 1429, l. 21.  
\textsuperscript{110} Manley, \textit{To the Tashkent Station}, 185.
Despite these accomplishments, Soviet officials and citizens were disappointed with the NKVD’s administration of the TsSB. According to a 1943 report by Vasilii Popov, the deputy of the People’s Commission of State Control of the USSR, the TsSB staff frequently made mistakes in responding to tracing inquiries. Citing a particularly egregious example, Popov cited how, “citizen Cherkasovaia was informed that the TsSB did not have information on her wife (!!)”\textsuperscript{111} And in response to a Red Army lieutenant’s tracing inquiry concerning his wife and children, he received three different replies, all of them reporting different locations as his family’s whereabouts. When he inquired to the TsSB about the discrepancies, he was informed in late 1942, that the TsSB did not have any information on his family at all. Only in response to a subsequent letter did a staff member apologize for the errors and provide him with the “actual” address of his wife and children in evacuation.\textsuperscript{112}

However, such mistakes were trivial since, according to Popov, the fundamental shortcoming of the TsSB was that, “it does not have personal information cards on all of the evacuated population and many of those in the card catalogue are filled in incorrectly, with misinformation (iskazhenia) and therefore the informational material is useless (neprigodny).”\textsuperscript{113} Popov, as well as authorities within the NKVD, were convinced that the TsSB’s card catalogue was incomplete due to the discrepancies between the estimates of evacuees and the number of evacuees recorded in the card catalogue. For instance, more than 30% of the evacuees living in the city Chkalov were not recorded in the TsSB.\textsuperscript{114} Popov blamed the inconsistencies on the local police who were not sufficiently vigilant in recording data on each evacuee. Frequently, citizens who self-evacuated were not recorded, and police officials would sometimes ask evacuees to fill

\textsuperscript{111} GARF, f. 5446, op. 44, d. 602, l. 13.  
\textsuperscript{112} GARF, f. 8300, op. 11, d. 13, l. 104.  
\textsuperscript{113} GARF, f. 5446, op. 44, d. 602, l. 18.  
\textsuperscript{114} GARF, f. 8300, op. 11, d. 13, l. 86.
out the personal information cards themselves and return them to the police at a later time. Unsurprisingly, many of the evacuees, “would carry off the form and not return.”\textsuperscript{115} Even for the evacuees that were included in the centralized card catalogue, their personal information cards were often filled with mistakes. In the information cards compiled by police officials in the Yaroslav and Sverdlovsk oblasts, 10-15\% of them had some type of error.\textsuperscript{116}

Despite the NKVD’s improvements upon the work of its predecessors, popular discontent with the TsSB’s performance was so high that it found expression in the wartime press. An article in the satirical journal \textit{Krokodil} caustically critiqued the TsSB by relaying a story in which a mannequin from the shop window of a hairdressing salon comes to life and winds up working at the TsSB. As the article detailed, the mannequin received a letter from the wife of a front-line soldier, Iraida Dorofeeva, who evacuated to the Urals in the beginning of the war. As she had lost contact with her husband, Dorofeeva wrote to inquire if the TsSB could include her information in their card catalogue in case her husband turned to the TsSB, inquiring about her whereabouts.

“With wooden indifference, the mannequin responded to Iraida Dorofeeva that: ‘the TsSB does not have information about the location of the individual, Iraida Dorofeeva, whom you are seeking.’ The mannequin responded and must have been delighted with its efficiency (\textit{v vostogre ot svoei operativnosti}).”\textsuperscript{117}

Another issue of \textit{Krokodil} included a letter to the editor, in which the author explained that after waiting a month to receive a response to his tracing inquiry, he received the TsSB’s standard reply that the TsSB did not possess any records on his relative. Serendipitously, on the same day that he received this notice, he met on the street the family member that the TsSB had been unable

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{115} GARF, f. 8300, op. 11, d. 13, l. 68.
\item \textsuperscript{116} GARF, f. 9415, op. 3, d. 1405, l. 16.
\item \textsuperscript{117} E. Vesenin, “4 manekena 4,” \textit{Krokodil}, #33, 1944.
\end{itemize}
to trace. As he explained, “the relative has already been living in the same city as me for a few months. As expected, she was registered in the local evacuation bureau, so Buguruslan undoubtedly (besuslovno) had information about her.” He thus concluded his letter by comparing the staff of the TsSB to “trained parrots who incessantly repeat one and the same standard phrase,” and criticized them for not sharing the information on his relative which they “undoubtedly” possessed.  

While these articles presented Soviet citizens’ dissatisfaction with the work of the TsSB, their portrayal of the TsSB’s shortcomings quite strikingly differs from Soviet officials’ reports on the TsSB. The press presented the indifference and incompetence of the bureaucrats who staffed the TsSB and robotically processed the tracing inquiries as the TsSB’s fundamental flaw. Just as bureaucrats were blamed in the cases when the families of Red Army soldiers did not receive the aid they were entitled to, the press presented the bureaucrats that manned the TsSB as culpable for not sharing the information with citizens.  

While the internal reports noted instances of staff members’ incompetence, they reported that the TsSB’s fundamental flaw was not that its staff intentionally or otherwise withheld information from citizens, but rather that it did not in fact possess information on every citizen in evacuation.

Even though the evacuation of industries and civilians into the interior was hastily planned within the early days of the conflict, Soviet officials believed that wartime evacuation would be an orderly process and that they would be able to maintain full control over citizens’ movement into the interior. While the NKVD’s work was a substantial improvement upon its inexperienced predecessors, the challenges that the NKVD faced in collecting accurate information on each and every evacuee highlighted the regime’s inability to wholly maintain control over the home front.

119 Berkhoff, Motherland in Danger, 111.
As David Shearer has argued, “mass surveillance and policing methods of the 1930s were based largely on an increasingly complex system of passport and residency laws enacted in the early part of the decade. That system had almost completely broken down during and after the war.” Even while acknowledging some of the TsSB’s shortcomings in the press, the Soviet press still tried to maintain the conceit that the Soviet state not only cared about its citizens’ personal well-being and aimed to relieve the strains that total war placed on kinship ties, but that the regime retained its ability to surveil and maintain control over the domestic population, even in the context of wartime upheaval and mass displacement.

Conclusion

On the eve of World War II, the Soviet family had an ambiguous status as both a locus of autonomous authority and private loyalties that could undermine the state and as a crucial institution for raising new generations of Soviet citizens. By moving beyond the vantage point of Soviet family law and analyzing the politics of family reunification, my research reveals how Soviet officials also recognized the centrality of the Soviet family, deemed the phenomenon of war-torn families as a crisis that required the state’s intervention, and adopted concrete measures to mitigate this crisis. Appealing to the significance of Soviet kinship ties was thus not confined to the realm of representation in the wartime and postwar press. It also manifested in the establishment of a specialized radio program and a tracing bureau to help war-torn Soviet families reestablish contact.

Through these efforts, the Soviet regime attempted to convey to its citizens both dimensions of its paternalism – its commitment to its citizens’ personal well-being and its capacity to surveil and maintain control over its domestic population. As this chapter has illustrated, the

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120 Shearer, Policing Stalin’s Socialism, 412.
Soviet regime was able to provide this crucial humanitarian aid to Soviet citizens and establish Letters to and from the Front and the TsSB by marshalling its pre-existing propaganda and state surveillance apparatuses. Humanitarianism and state control were thus highly interwoven during the war, since due to the weakness of the civil arm of the state, reuniting war-torn families would not have been as effective without the state’s pre-existing systems for disseminating propaganda and surveilling its domestic population.