

Veterans and the Welfare State: World War II in the Soviet Context

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RESÜMEE

Dieser Aufsatz untersucht den Schnittpunkt zwischen dem entstehenden und sich wandelnden sowjetischen Wohlfahrtsstaat einerseits, und gesetzlicher Privilegierung von ehemaligen Soldaten des Zweiten Weltkrieges andererseits. Es wird gezeigt, dass – im Kontrast zu anderen Gesellschaften wie den USA oder Australien – kein kausaler Zusammenhang zwischen Veteranenversorgung und wohlfahrtsstaatlicher Entwicklung besteht. Wohlfahrtspflege für die breite Bevölkerung und Veteranenversorgung standen vielmehr in Konkurrenz zueinander. Der Aufsatz beginnt mit einem Überblick über die sich wandelnde Terminologie, die im sowjetischen Kontext die Kriegsveteranen beschreibt, sowie die mit diesen Konzepten verknüpften, sich ebenfalls wandelnden gesetzlichen Bestimmungen. Der zweite Teil skizziert sodann die Geschichte des sowjetischen Wohlfahrtsstaates, und zeigt auf, dass dieser nicht von der Veteranenversorgung angetrieben wurde. Erst in den späten 70er Jahren konvergierten die getrennten Entwicklungslinien der Veteranenversorgung und des Wohlfahrtsstaates. Seit 1978 können wir von Kriegsveteranen als einer „avant garde“ in der Altenversorgung sprechen.

- 1 I tried a first stab at the intersection of veterans' policy and broader welfare development in a paper entitled "Veterans as the Avant Garde of the Soviet Welfare State?", which was presented at the Annual Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, New Orleans, 18 November 2007. The thought process started in this paper developed in a slightly different direction in "Warfare and Welfare: The Soviet Union in the Twentieth Century," a paper presented at the Biennial Conference of the Australasian Association for European History (AAEH), Adelaide, 6-9 July 2009. The calculations of demobilization numbers were first presented as part of a paper entitled "The Cold War and Soviet Troop Reductions, 1945-1960," at the Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University 2008 Summer International Symposium Northeast Asia in the Cold War: New Evidence and Perspectives (26-27 June 2008). An earlier draft of the current version was discussed at the workshop "Veteranen und Kriegsgeschädigte in Osteuropa (20. Jahrhundert)," 16 February 2010, Lehrstuhl für Geschichte Südost- und Osteuropas, Universität Regensburg, and WIOS, Regensburg. I thank all participants in the resulting discussions for their often thoughtful, frequently helpful and only sometimes angry reactions.

War making produces veterans as potential political actors and warring nations have several options for accommodating their demands. Reintegration can either be monopolized by the state or left to the non-state sector and the goal can either be the complete transformation of the soldiers into civilians (“demobilization”) or their metamorphosis into a status group. The resulting combinations are illustrated in table 1. Germany and Britain after the Great War are examples of societies where the complete reintegration into civilian life was the aspiration. Germany focused on state action, while Britain leaned on the non-governmental sector to achieve the same end. In the same period, France is a prominent example for the other strategy – to reintegrate soldiers by forging them into a civilian status group. Government policy and legislation played a large role in this process, but self-organization was equally central in creating the compact between former soldiers and the state.² Hence, table 1 locates the French example at the intersection of the two right boxes.

Table 1: Regimes for the Accommodation of Veterans

Main actors:

State	Soviet Union 1945–1948 Germany after World War I	Soviet Union after 1978 <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">France after World War I</div>
Non-governmental sector	Great Britain after World War I	Soviet Union 1948–1978
Main goal:	Demobilization	continuation of status

Ever since World War II, the Soviet authorities claimed that no other government cared so much for former soldiers as that of the first socialist state. The subjects of such pronouncements, however, knew better. In a letter to the authorities in 1978, one veteran put the record straight. Quoting Brezhnev’s remark, that Party and government “have already done quite a bit” for veterans, he wrote that in real life “there are absolutely no ... privileges” (*A l’got etikh ... nikakikh net*).³ That this former soldier was right does not

2 Antoine Prost, *Les anciens combattants et la société française: 1914–1939*. 3 vols., Paris 1977; Michael Geyer, *Ein Vorbote des Wohlfahrtsstaates. Die Kriegsofferversorgung in Frankreich, Deutschland und Großbritannien nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 9 (1983): 230-77; Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home. Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914–1939*, Berkeley / Los Angeles / London 2001.

3 For Brezhnev’s remarks see his speech of 4 October 1977, in: *Izvestiia*, 5 October 1977: p. 2-3. Report of A. N. Vasil’enko to Propaganda Department of CC CPSU, on letters to the newspaper *Trud* in April 1978 (28 April 1978), RGANI f. 5, op. 75, d. 250, l. 48-52, here: 50.

prevent the myth of the caring Soviet state to reappear, again and again, not only in the publications of the Russian veterans' movement dreaming about a golden past, but also in academic literature critical of the current state of affairs. In this discourse, the present is juxtaposed with the alleged "upward mobility" of World War II veterans, and the "impressive set of privileges" supposedly granted to them by a regime which considered "provision of support for the needy ... a top state priority."⁴

The reality is that between 1947 and 1978 there were few real advantages for those who had fought in the war. Somewhat schematically, we can summarize the Soviet pattern to move from a totalitarian version of the German or British pattern (where the goal is complete reintegration into civilian life) to an authoritarian version of the French model (where a new corporate group is created through a combination of organization and status ascription), via a period where veterans were largely ignored by legislation and welfare provision (table 1). Between 1947 and 1978, most veterans only had "informal privileges," a problematic category as I shall argue below. This notion does, however, capture the continued existence of a social entity of former soldiers despite the attempts of the authorities to declare the problem solved. After 1948, veterans continued to exist as an "entitlement group," a collectivity which shared, if not always a sense of itself as a unit, the conviction that war service entitled to a better life – and many other citizens agreed, irrespective of official policy or the letter of the law.⁵ By the 1980s, this new social entity mutated again, this time into a legally constituted status group.

This transformation was a slow process which took three decades to mature. First came the rise of the war cult as a new legitimizing myth of the regime, particularly from 1965 onwards;⁶ second came the elevation of *uchastnik Otechestvennoi voiny* ("participant of the patriotic war") to a new status from 1978 and its both gradual and partial broadening

4 For challenges of the myth see Elena Zubkova, *Russia after the War. Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945–1957*. Translated by Hugh Ragsdale, Armonk/London 1998, esp. chapter 2; Beate Fieseler, *Stimmen aus dem gesellschaftlichen Abseits. Die sowjetrussischen Kriegsinvaliden im ‚Tauwetter‘ der Fünfziger Jahre*, in: *Osteuropa* 52, no. 7 (2002): 945–62; id., *Die Invaliden des ‚Grossen Vaterländischen Krieges‘ der Sowjetunion – Eine Politische Sozialgeschichte 1941–1991*. Habilitationsschrift, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 2003; id., *Arme Sieger. Die Invaliden des Grossen Vaterländischen Krieges*, in: *Osteuropa* 55, no. 4–6 (2005): 207–17; id., *The Bitter Legacy of the ‚Great Patriotic War‘. Red Army Disabled Soldiers under Late Stalinism*, in: *Late Stalinist Russia. Society between Reconstruction and Reinvention*, ed. Juliane Fürst, London/New York 2006, 46–61. Most recently, see also Robert Dale, *Rats and Resentment: The Demobilization of the Red Army in Postwar Leningrad, 1945–50*, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 1 (2010): 113–33. For a more positive evaluation of the immediate postwar years see Kees Boterbloem, *Soviet GIs or Decembrists? The Reintegration into Postwar Soviet Society of Russian Soldiers, POWs, Partisans, and Civilians Who Lived under German Occupation*, in: *War & Society* 25, no. 1 (2006): 77–87. For celebrations of Soviet welfare for Second World War veterans see Ethel Dunn, *Disabled Russian War Veterans: Surviving the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, in: *Disabled Veterans in History*, ed. David A. Gerber, Ann Arbor 2000, 251–70; Natalia Danilova, *The Development of an Exclusive Veterans' Policy: The Case of Russia*, in: *Armed Forces & Society* XX, no. X (2009): 1–27, esp. 12–13 (quotations); and Joonseo Song, *Rule of Inclusion: The Politics of Postwar Stalinist Care in Magnitogorsk, 1945–1953*, in: *Journal of Social History* 43, No. 3 (2010): 663–680, here: 663 (quotations).

5 Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans as an Entitlement Group, 1945–1955*, in: *Slavic Review* 65, no. 1 (2006): 111–37.

6 Nina Tumarkin, *The Living & the Dead. The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia*, New York 1994; Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941–1995. Myth, Memories, and Monuments*, Cambridge/New York 2006; Denise J. Youngblood, *Russian War Films. On the Cinema Front, 1914–2005*, Lawrence 2007.

to all “veterans” (*veterany*) of this conflict; and third came Gorbachev’s organization of all of the latter in the new veterans’ organization in 1986. Underlying the entire process was a veterans’ movement, which since 1956 was partially organized but, more importantly, took much of its strength and dynamism from a widespread sense of entitlement, a notion that war service had created a claim to special treatment and a better life.⁷

In order to clarify these developments, we first have to survey the terms used in the Soviet context to describe veterans and the changing legal meaning they acquired. Section I will also give estimates of the sizes of the various groups of former soldiers. The second section will then sketch the history of the Soviet welfare state in order to establish the wider context in which these changes took place. I will argue that, until 1978, the development of veterans’ welfare ran counter-cyclical to the overall growth of the welfare state. Whenever the latter was put on the back burner, the former profited; once veterans were ignored, the welfare state grew. Only from 1978 onwards we see a reversal of this process. Now, “war participants” took the lead in the creation of welfare legislation for the older generation more generally. The final section turns to the question of “social mobility” of veterans, demonstrating that the notion of preferential treatment of Soviet veterans and their supposed elevated status in postwar society relies on a projection of the post-1978 regime to earlier decades – an anachronism which universalizes the experience of a minority.

1. Legal categories and legal history

Following the Latin meaning of the term, a “veteran” is either an experienced soldier or a demobilized participant in an armed conflict. There were maybe 25 million veterans in this sense of the word at the end of World War II, not counting surviving underground fighters and other irregulars.⁸ They comprised about 15 percent of the population. The calculation of these numbers is tentative, not only because postwar population totals rely on somewhat controversial reconstructions, but also because there is no exact Soviet equivalent to the Latin meaning of the term and hence no archival data on this category of citizens.⁹ The primary sources (both archival and published) instead use five other terms with partially overlapping semantic fields – *invalid voiny*, *uchastnik voiny*, *frontovik*, *demobilizovannyi*, and, yes, *veteran*. While the same words reappear in the context of other wars, I will focus here on their meanings with regards to World War II, or, more

7 For a detailed account of the legal and organizational history see Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War. A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society, 1941–1991*, Oxford 2008, chapters 7 and 8.

8 Calculated from G. F. Krivosheev, *Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses in the Twentieth Century*, London 1997, 91; id., *Poteri vooruzhennykh sil SSSR*, in: *Liudskie poteri SSSR v period Vtoroi mirovoi voiny: Sbornik statei*, St. Petersburg 1995, 27. For a tabulation see Edele, “Soviet Veterans as an Entitlement Group,” 120, table 2. On irregulars see Kenneth Slepyan, *Stalin’s Guerrillas. Soviet Partisans in World War II*, Lawrence, Kansas 2006.

9 Most historical demographers assume a total population of 171 million by early 1946. See, for example, Nasele-
nie Rossii v XX veke. *Istoricheskie ocherki*, vol. 2: 1940–1959, Moscow 2001, 134.

precisely, the German-Soviet war, dubbed the “Great Patriotic War” (*Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina*) in Soviet parlance.

The first of these terms is the oldest legal status of (some) veterans in the Latin meaning of the word. Since 1940, an increasingly complex legislation regulated the rights and duties of disabled servicemen, soon termed Invalids of the Patriotic War, who were classified by work ability into three groups: I for the most severely injured, III for those with most labor power remaining. Their number repeatedly changed due to death and re-classification, but in the immediate postwar years hovered somewhere around two percent of the overall population and between ten and 15 percent of all war veterans. During the entire war, some 3.8 million service-personnel were “invalided out” of the fighting forces; by early 1946, the official tally was down to 2.8 million, while only 2.6 million continued to be recognized as “permanently disabled.”¹⁰ Despite such efforts at limiting their number, this was not an insignificant share in regional comparison. In relative terms, for example, the Soviet Union acknowledged more war invalids after 1945 than, for example, Czechoslovakia in the interwar years (1.4 percent of the population – see contribution by Stegmann in this volume). As we will see below, the institutionalization of “war participants” as a status group in the late 1970s would privilege a very similar share of the population – three percent.

Notwithstanding such comparisons, the disabled were a minority among those who had seen service in the war. For this larger group two main terms circulated in public discourse: “frontline soldier” (*frontovik*) and “Participant of the Patriotic War” (*uchastnik Otechestvennoi voiny*). The former was not a legal term, but frequently used; the latter was a legal term, but used infrequently at the time. This was the category which came closest to encompassing all veterans in the understanding of this essay: According to the Soviet veterans’ organization, there were about 20 million “war participants” in 1945 (or twelve percent of the population).¹¹ This word rose to prominence in the 1970s, in tandem with the term *veteran*, which played little role immediately after the war. As we shall see below, the most important legal term in 1945–1948 besides war invalid was “demobilized soldier” (*demobilizovannyi*).

In different periods, then, different terms were at the center of veterans’ welfare.¹² Until 1945, and again from 1948 to 1978, the major term was *invalid Otechestvennoi voiny*, a status emerging out of the 1940 legislation regarding military pensions. In addition to pensions (stratified by group of invalidity, pre-war income, and military rank), war invalids could in theory (if not always in practice) receive a variety of material benefits (for more on their situation see the contribution of Beate Fieseler in this volume). These included preferred access to food, fuel, consumer goods, and housing, exemptions from tuition payment in higher education, tax privileges, special labor regulations and better

10 Krivosheev, *Soviet Casualties*, 92; Catherine Merridale, *Ivan’s War. Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939–1945*, New York 2006, 363.

11 Victor Stepanovich Nechaev, *Sila Veteranakh – v edinenii*, in: *Veteran. Gazeta sotsial’noi zashchity*, no. 31 (320), October 1994, p. 1.

12 Edele, *Soviet Veterans*, 84–89.

conditions for housing construction loan repayments. Between 1948 and the 1960s, changes to this privilege system were slow, and confined largely to some adjustments of pension regulation and size of payments. The 1960s saw a growth of privileges with regards to housing, public transport, labor regulations, medical care, and scarce consumer goods – a legislative activity which gathered further steam in the 1970s. The end point of this development were the 23 February 1981 Statutes on Privileges of Invalids of the Patriotic War and the Families of Fallen Servicemen, which systematized the legislation in one legal act.¹³ From this date onwards, the status of Invalid of the Patriotic War began to grow into the new and developing category of “war participant,” which would also give a ride to the “veteran.”

The “participant of the Patriotic War” (*uchastnik Otechestvennoi voiny*), which became the central term of positive legal discrimination from 1978 onwards, had a somewhat subterranean history until that date. The term had already emerged during the war to designate experienced fighters.¹⁴ After the war, it became a symbolic status, connected to the Victory medals of 1945. The medal *For Victory over Germany in the Great Patriotic War 1941–1945* was awarded to all soldiers who had served at least three, and to civilian personnel with a service record of at least eight months during the war. The medal came with a legal document (*udostoverenie*) which included the words „to the war participant“ (*Uchastniku voiny*).¹⁵ In terms of legal privileges, the category entitled to easier access to stipends, preferred admission to preparatory courses, technical colleges, institutes and universities. It did not free from entrance exams, as is sometimes suggested, nor did it give exemption from tuition payment or better stipends. The rights were much more modest, allowing students who had finished school with distinction before the war (*otlichniki*, a mark of high academic achievement which allowed admission without exams) to take advantage of this status despite the time lag caused by the war. Everybody else did have to sit and pass exams, but were then admitted outside of the ranking system (*vne konkursa*).¹⁶ The category of war participant re-emerged during the growing war cult as a term of praise, especially from 1965 onwards, and was finally instituted in the 1978 landmark decree creating the basis for the fully blown privileges system of the final decade of Soviet history.¹⁷ Central Committee and Council of Ministers Resolution No. 907 of 10

13 Sобрание постановлений правительст ва СССР (= SP SSSR), 1981, No. 12, st. 71, p. 315-26.

14 See, for example, the order of the 147th Rifle division of 31 May 1942. Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BA-MA; Freiburg im Breisgau) RH 26/297/100.

15 G. M. Shirshov, Oni stali osnovnym kontingentom Sovetskoi Armii, in: Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal, No. 3, 2008: 34-35, here: 35. On the political struggles about the boundaries of this category see also Tat'iana Vladimirovna Chertoritskaia, Dorogie moi veterany: Iz istorii razrabotki i priniatiia zakonodatel'stva vo veteranakh, St. Petersburg 1995.

16 Mark Edele, A 'Generation of Victors?' Soviet Second World War Veterans from Demobilization to Organization 1941–1956. Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 2004, 122-23.

17 Edele, Soviet Veterans, 9-10, 202-207. For a quick overview over the definition of the category and the associated privileges by the time of the 40th anniversary of Victory see Uchastniki voiny, in: Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina, 1941–1945: Entsiklopediia, Moscow 1985, 751.

November 1978 gave special rights with regards to travel, holidaying, recreation leave, housing loans, medical care, gardening cooperatives, and private telephones.¹⁸

During mass demobilization, the term war participant was less important, and most of the struggle between veterans and the state of the immediate postwar years – delivery of promises always was a problem – focused on either the status of war invalid, or that of the person “demobilized from the Red Army” (*demobilizovannyi*).¹⁹ This group’s privileges were regulated in the demobilization law of 23 June 1945, which was applied to subsequent demobilization waves in 1946 and 1947, when many millions were released to reduce the armed forces to peacetime strength. It promised a uniform and a pair of shoes (no civilian clothes, although these were sometimes distributed from trophy funds), transport back home and food during the journey, a lump sum payment stratified by rank and length of service, help in reestablishing housing and placement into a job commensurate with skills and pre-war occupation. It also announced preferred access to heating fuel upon arrival, and more generally “utmost help” from local authorities.²⁰ How many veterans were in principle eligible for these benefits cannot be determined with precision. The standard histories of demobilization speak of 8.5 million demobilized soldiers between 1945 and 1948.²¹ The latest archival data we have, by contrast, are from 1 January 1947, when a total of 7.6 million demobilized soldiers had arrived in the localities.²² Searching for an original source for the higher number leads the historian either into blind alleys or to a speech by N. S. Khrushchev on troop reductions of 1960.²³ The Soviet leader mentioned the troop strength of the victorious army as 11.4 million by May 1945, adding that “towards 1948” (*k 1948 godu*) this number had fallen to 2.9 million.²⁴ The difference between these two levels – the famous 8.5 million – cannot be the total number of demobilized soldiers, because mobilization of younger cohorts and re-mobilization of specialists continued as older soldiers were released.²⁵ Moreover, by early June 1945, just before demobilization commenced, the troop strength had increased to

18 SP SSSR, 1978, No. 27, st. 164, p. 540-42.

19 The classical study of this group and its postwar fate is V. N. Donchenko, *Demobilizatsiia Sovetskoi Armii i reshenie problem kadrov v pervye poslevoennye gody*, in: *Istoriia SSSR*, no. 3 (1970): 96-106.

20 Edele, *Soviet Veterans*, 34, 191. For an overview over the demobilization waves, complete with birth cohorts, time periods, and sources for the relevant legal acts see *ibid.*, 23 (table 1.1). For a booklet informing soldiers about their rights and benefits see *Pamiatka demobilizovannym riadovym i serzhantam Krasnoi Armii*, 2nd enlarged ed., Moscow 1946. An early study of this legislation is Carol Jacobson, *The Soviet G.I.’s Bill of Rights*, in: *American Review on the Soviet Union* 7, no. 1 (1945): 56-63.

21 For example: B. N. Ponomarev (ed.), *Istoriia SSSR s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei*, 12 vols., vol. 11, Moscow 1980, 56; or the article on demobilization in the authoritative handbook: *Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina, 1941–1945: Entsiklopediia*, Moscow 1985, 237-38, here: 238.

22 Statistical report by Committee for registration and distribution of labor under Sovnarkom, *Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF) f. r-9517, op. 1, d. 56, l. 1*.

23 For a documentation of such chasing of historical geese see Edele, *A Generation of Victors*, 41, fn. 5.

24 *Pravda*, 15 January 1960, 1-5, here: 3.

25 In May 1945 the birth year 1928 was prepared for the draft, which might explain the rise of the numbers between then and June. See the protocol of closed party cell meeting in Gorkii gorvoenkomat, 21 May 1945: *Gosudarstvennyi obshchestvenno-politicheskii arkhiv Nizhegorodskoi oblasti (GOPANO) f. 4968, op. 3, d. 4, l. 16*. And in early 1947, demobilized airmen were re-drafted. See Peter Pirogov, *Why I Escaped. The Story of Peter Pirogov*, New York 1950, 245.

12.8 million²⁶ – implying a contraction of the army by 9.9 million during mass demobilization. Table 2 summarizes these data.

Table 2: Reconstruction of number of demobilized soldiers, 1945–1948

	Date	Strength of Armed Forces (mio)	Number demobilized (mio)	Source
A	May 1945	11.4	xxxxxxxxx	Khrushchev
B	June 1945	12.8	xxxxxxxxx	Krivosheev and Filimoshin
C	early 1948	2.9	xxxxxxxxx	Khrushchev
D	1945–1948	xxxxxxxxx	8.5	Standard Soviet histories, also implied by comparing Khrushchev's numbers for 1945 and 1948 (D=A-C)
E	June 1945 – 1 January 1947		7.6	Archival
F	June 1945 – early 1948		9.9	F = B-C

Another category, “veteran” (*veteran*), became central only in the process of extending much of the privileges of *war participants* to more or less the entire older generation between 1978 and the mid-1980s. *Veteran* had been a term used infrequently in the immediate postwar years, and if used it referred to experienced soldiers within the armed forces, rather than people who had returned to civilian life. It had no legal meaning.²⁷ In 1956, the term received a new lease on life, when the regime attempted to join the World Veterans Federation (*FMAC*), and hence needed its own front organization, the Soviet Committee of War Veterans (*Sovetskii komitet veteranov voiny* – SKVV). Against the original intentions, the SKVV became extremely popular among veterans, was appropriated by them as a lobbying organization, and flowered organizationally from 1965, before being cut back to size by decree in 1976. As instituted in the SKVV, the term *veteran* referred to former combat personnel; subsequently, the concept became more inclusive, denoting anybody who had made a contribution to the war effort. Institutionally, this enveloping of the entire war generation was realized in the 1986 foundation of the “All-Union Organization of Veterans of War and Labor” (*Vsesoiuznaia organizatsiia veteranov voiny i truda*), which absorbed the SKVV in a somewhat uneasy settlement as well.²⁸ In Gorbachev’s explanation of the necessity of the new institution, “veterans” became a “strata” within the population (*sloi naseleniia*), which the leader described as made up of

26 G. F. Krivosheev and M. F. Filimoshin, „Poteri vooruzhennykh sil SSSR v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine,” in: *Naselenie Rossii v XX veke. Istoricheskie ocherki*, vol. 2: 1940–1959, ed. V. B. Zhiromskaia, Moscow 2001, 26.

27 See, for example, *Vstrechi veteranov s molodimi voynami*, in: *Krasnaia zvezda*, 8 May 1947, p. 2.

28 Edele, *Soviet Veterans*, 16–17 and chapter 7. Also compare the entries for “veteran” in *Sovietskaia voennaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 2, ed. A. A. Grechko, Moscow 1976, p. 121; with the same item in *Voennaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 2, ed. P. S. Grachev, Moscow 1994, 80.

“the working class, the kolkhoz peasantry, the intelligentsia, women and men, veterans and youth, ... nations and nationalities.”²⁹ Hence, veterans had finally found their sociological place – as an organized, legally privileged generation.³⁰

Not all terms for war veterans were unambiguously positive. Like in Czechoslovakia or Yugoslavia (see the contributions by Natali Stegmann and Heike Karge in this volume), the status of war invalid and war participant were defined explicitly as referring to those who had fought on the Soviet side. Those who had served in anti-Soviet formations were thus excluded.³¹ A liminal position between these two groups was occupied by former POWs (*byvschie voennoplennnye*) who had been repatriated to the Soviet Union after the war's end (*repatriirovannnye grazhdane*).³² Notwithstanding popular views to the opposite, they were not all sent to the Gulag or shot, but rather screened in a complex and nearly discriminate process (given what one might expect from Stalin's regime according to the precedents of the 1930s and the legal definition of captivity as treason).³³ Once cleared of wrongdoing, the welfare provisions for these 1.8 million returnees were similar to those of demobilized soldiers, although they were subject to some residency restrictions. They were also vulnerable to re-arrest throughout the years of Stalin's rule and their legal position remained problematic even after their somewhat silent rehabilitation in the 1950s.³⁴

Table 3 summarizes the legal categories and the approximate group sizes in the immediate postwar years, when legal privileges were ubiquitous for veterans. It is noteworthy, that this reconstruction shows only 62 percent of veterans covered by welfare legislation, if we disregard the minor advantages for war participants at the time. This is obviously not an exact number, as the tally of demobilized soldiers is still not more than an educated guess, and the total number of veterans is a reconstruction. The share of the privileged would also rise if we use “war participants” (row E) as the base-line, but even then we would speak only of 78 percent.

29 M. S. Gorbachev, speech at the CC Plenum, 27 January 1987, in: Pravda, 28 January 1987, pp. 1-5, here: 2, 3.

30 Stephen Lovell, Soviet Russia's Older Generations, in: Generations in Twentieth-Century Europe, ed. Stephen Lovell, Houndsmills/Basingstokes 2007, 205-26.

31 There is some limited discussion of this issue in the veterans' press in the late Soviet years. See, for example, S. Kazimir, Bylo, da ne splylo, in: Veteran, No. 9, 1988, 11; and reactions by readers: Chitateli prodolzhaui razgovor. Proshchenie net i ne budet!, in: Veteran, No. 15, 1988, 6. On those who served in anti-Soviet units see A. V. Okorokov, Antisovetskie voinskie formirovaniia v gody Vtoroi Mirovoi voiny, Moscow 2000.

32 See, for example, Pavel Polian, Deportiert nach Hause. Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im „Dritten Reich“ und Ihre Repatriierung, Munich/Vienna 2001, or Ulrike Goeken-Haidl, Der Weg zurück. Die Repatriierung sowjetischer Zwangsarbeiter und Kriegsgefangener während und nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg, Essen 2006.

33 Katrin Boeckh, Stalinismus in der Ukraine. Die Rekonstruktion des sowjetischen Systems nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg, Wiesbaden 2007, 303, 318, 541.

34 Edele, Soviet Veterans of the Second World War, chapter 5. For the number repatriated: 102. On the silent rehabilitation see also Beate Fieseler, Innenpolitik der Nachkriegszeit 1945–1953, in: In Handbuch der Geschichte Russlands. Vol. 5: 1945–1991. Vom Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs bis zum Zusammenbruch der Sowjetunion. 1. Halbband, ed. Stefan Plaggenborg, Stuttgart 2002, 36-77, here: 48.

Table 3: Overview of Categories and Group Sizes for Veterans in Late Stalinist Years

#	Category	Approx. size (mio)	Share (in %)	Date	Notes
A	Veterans (in the Latin meaning of the word)	25	100	1945	Not a legal category
B	Invalid of the Patriotic War (invalid Otechestvennoi voyny)	3.8	15	1941–1945	Covered by legislation beginning in 1940
C	'''	2.8	11	1946	
D	'''	2.6	10	?	Official number of permanently disabled
E	War participant (uchastnik Otechestvennoi voyny)	20	80	1945	Only a minor legal status until 1978
F	Demobilized soldier (demobilizovannyi)	8.5	34	1945–1948	lower limit, standard number in the literature
G	Demobilized soldier (demobilizovannyi)	9.9	40	1945–1948	number reconstructed in table 2 above
H	repatriated POWs	1.8	7	data as of 1956	similar privileges as for demobilized applied in parallel with discrimination
I	maximum number covered	15.5	62		$I = B+G+H$

However we turn to the available data, then, they do not imply complete coverage of veterans during the immediate postwar years. One group self-evidently not privileged were those who found themselves in Stalin's Gulag after their return. Others were less unlucky, but still outside of the system of special provisions. Soldiers who had been demobilized during the war, those who stayed in the army, and those who had been "invalided out" but were subsequently categorized as healthy, fell through the net of legislation. Many

within this excluded group, however, might have been among those holding high-level decorations, which gave the right to an additional set of privileges until those were abolished in late 1947.³⁵

Overall, then, the legal history of veterans can be summarized thusly: During and immediately after the war, a large share of veterans were covered under the overlapping legislations for demobilized soldiers, war invalids, repatriated citizens and war participants more generally (see table 3). Recipients of higher decorations were covered under an additional set of advantages, which were dismantled at the end of 1947. This year marks the transition to the second period in this history, where special provisions were largely absent, leaving only war invalids as a legally recognized group. The category of recipients was consistently kept as small as possible through restrictive definitions and humiliating examinations. During this period, veterans did not cease to feel entitled to special treatment and many other citizens basically agreed. However, the state only started to recognize these entitlements through a legal status during the third phase, which began in 1978. In this year, “war participants” became a status group with special provisions, which were subsequently broadened to more and more of those who had survived World War II. 1986 can stand as an end-point in this transformation of veterans into a legally defined and organized war generation.

The history of Soviet veterans as a corporate group thus has a clear historical rhythm. An original status group was forged during the period when the wartime emergency and the postwar problems engendered welfare legislation for various subgroups, which converged to a considerable degree between 1945 and 1947. It survived as an entitlement community after most of the privileges (except provisions for war invalids) were dismantled in 1947 and 1948, to re-emerge in 1978 as a new status group of “war participants,” whose privileges were subsequently broadened to more and more “veterans” of the “war generation” in the 1980s.

2. The Soviet welfare state and the veterans

How does this periodization relate to the history of the Soviet welfare state? From the very beginning, the Soviets competed with the “capitalist” countries in caring for the population. At times, this welfare state building was suspended and often even rolled back in order to deal with perceived emergencies and actual wars, but overall, the claim always was that this was a fairer, better, and more equal society than any other. While in practice often better understood as a warfare state, the Soviet leadership had other aspirations, too. In order to outperform the developing welfare states outside its borders, the Bolsheviks instituted, in October 1918, social insurance for all toilers. This universal system was fated to exist mainly on paper, and was dismantled in the 1920s and 1930s, to be replaced by highly stratified provisions. In this Stalinist version, welfare became

35 Edele, *Soviet Veterans, 191-192*.

a means of mobilization to labor and war, and, hence, extremely unequal. Sick leave, for example, differed according to profession, length of service, branch of industry, and personal work discipline. Pensions, where available, followed the same logic of hierarchy and meritocracy. The war further dismantled parts of the welfare structure (the social security system and child protection services, for example), while adding the new provisions for soldiers and war invalids referred to above. Vigorous attempts to build a more universalized health-care system in particular from the late 1930s onwards, continued to be thwarted by the demands of mobilization for war, followed by the costs of the atomic weapons program.³⁶

While thus already the 1936 Constitution had promised “the right to material security in old age, as well as in case of illness or loss of the ability to work”, it took into the 1950s that such claims were slowly realized, not least because the example of “Western” welfare democracies forced the authorities’ hands somewhat. A landmark was the pension reform of 1956, which universalized and systematized the chaotic legislation which had developed since the 1920s. In 1965, even collective farmers – always the step-children of Soviet politics – were brought into the pension system. By now, the Soviet welfare state had become a central part of the regime’s claims to legitimate rule. No wonder, then, that the old article, which had promised material security in the 1936 constitution (art. 120) became longer (now art. 43) in the new constitution of 1977.³⁷

We can thus see two phases in the interconnection of the veterans’ benefits system and the Soviet welfare state after World War II. First, the two developed independently from each other. Indeed, the state was extremely reluctant to institute veterans’ benefits, which after 1948 were restricted to war invalids’ care, which constituted a better system than what non-military disabled had to contend with.³⁸ Until 1978, however, this parallel universe did not play a leading role in welfare state formation. Unlike in the United States, where provisions for returning soldiers of the Civil War were slowly broadened to

36 Pavel Stiller, *Die sowjetische Rentenversicherung 1917–1977*, Cologne 1979, 10–12, 15–16, 66; id., *Sozialpolitik in der UdSSR 1950–1980. Eine Analyse der quantitativen und qualitativen Zusammenhänge*, Baden-Baden 1983; Bernice Q. Madison, *Social Welfare in the Soviet Union*, Stanford, Calif. 1968, 45, 51–53; Susan Zimmermann, *Wohlfahrtspolitik und die staatssozialistische Entwicklungsstrategie in der ‘anderen’ Hälfte Europas im 20. Jahrhundert*, in: *Sozialpolitik in der Peripherie. Entwicklungsmuster und Wandel in Lateinamerika, Afrika, Asien und Osteuropa*, ed. Johannes Jäger, Gerhard Melinz and Susan Zimmermann, Frankfurt a. M. 2001, 211–37; Christopher Burton, *Medical Welfare During Late Stalinism. A Study of Doctors and the Soviet Health System, 1945–1953*, Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 2000 (see esp. his overview of the health system in chapter 1); A. A. Danilov/A. V. Pyzhikov, *Rozhdenie sverkhderzhavy. SSSR v pervye poslevoennye gody*, Moscow 2001, 101–102, 114; Dorena Caroli, *Bolshevism, Stalinism, and Social Welfare (1917–1936)*, in: *International Review of Social History* 48 (2003): 27–54.

37 F. J. M. Feldbrugge (ed.), *The Constitutions of the USSR and the Union Republics: Analysis, Texts, Reports*, Germantown, Maryland 1979, 96–97; Stiller, *Die sowjetische Rentenversicherung*, 10–12, 15. For a study of the historical development of the Soviet pension system and its transformation after the breakdown of the Soviet Union see Andrea Chandler, *Shocking Mother Russia. Democratization, Social Rights, and Pension Reform in Russia, 1990–2001*, Toronto 2004.

38 Bernice Madison, *Programs for the Disabled in the USSR*, in: *The Disabled in the Soviet Union. Past and Present, Theory and Practice*, ed. William O. McCagg and Lewis Siegelbaum, Pittsburg 1989, 167–98, here: 185–8; Fieseler, *Die Invaliden des ‘Grossen Vaterländischen Krieges’*, 164, 472–75.

more and more citizens, and unlike Australia, where the care for the obviously deserving poor of the World War broke open barriers for welfare provisions more generally, in the Soviet Union the growing welfare sector developed partially from ideological sources and partially as a result of the “peaceful competition” with the capitalist world.³⁹ It was only from 1978, when war participants were integrated into a newly created status group, that the causal nexus developed which made war veterans into the *avant garde* of the Soviet welfare state, their privileges becoming the blueprint for provisions for the entire older generation.

3. Social mobility

The central distinction between entitlement claims and actually instituted privileges, which underwrites the analysis presented here, is obscured in much of the literature.⁴⁰ Some authors suggest that the absence of formal rights mattered little, as “informal privileges” were ubiquitous in Soviet society, leading to “upward mobility for many soldiers.”⁴¹ This thesis is half correct, but also empirically imprecise. “Informal privileges” did exist and in individual cases helped veterans to get ahead in life, but they could not compensate for the lacking legal privileges and their administrative implementation; they could not, and did not, lead to social mobility of veterans *as a group*. The Soviet Union was not France, at least not before 1978.

Legal and institutional histories thus matters. It is true that the sense of entitlement veterans felt after the war was accepted as legitimate by many Soviet citizens, including many local and regional officials with decision making powers over access to scarce resources, in particular housing.⁴² Returned Slavic servicemen could also take advantage of resources (houses, agricultural land, etc.) that the wartime ethnic cleansing had freed up in the Caucasus. In what used to be Eastern Prussia as well as in the Karelian Isthmus, special settlement schemes intended to “improve” the ethnic composition of these borderlands, favored demobilized soldiers and their families.⁴³ In the Baltics, the understaffed Communist Party was in parts filled with demobilized soldiers, many of them Russians, who often were promoted into leading positions as well.⁴⁴ In the other “Western borderlands” (Ukraine, Belorussia) the postwar cleansing of the elite of those

39 Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers. The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States*, Cambridge, Mass. 1992. On Australia see, inter alia, Stephen Garton, *The Cost of War. Australians Return*, Melbourne 1996, William De Maria, *Combat and Concern: The Warfare-Welfare Nexus*, in: *War & Society* 7, no. 1 (1990): 71-86.

40 For example: Amir Weiner, *The Making of a Dominant Myth: The Second World War and the Construction of Political Identities within the Soviet Polity*, in: *The Russian Review* 55 (1996); and id., *Making Sense of War. The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution*, Princeton/Oxford 2000.

41 Danilova, *The Development of an Exclusive Veterans' Policy*, 12-13.

42 This point becomes particularly clear if veterans are compared to re-evacuees. See Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station. Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War*, Ithaca/London 2009, 260-62.

43 See Edele, *Veterans and the Village*, 169-70.

44 Elena Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml'. 1940–1953*, Moscow 2008, 149-50, 155.

who might have “collaborated” with the enemy also advantaged veterans, who could draw on their war-service as proof for their loyalty.⁴⁵ Within the unoccupied heartland, too, we can list many examples of invented rights which were realized at the local level, as well as instances of informal affirmative action for returned combat personnel.⁴⁶ As a result of all of these processes, veterans did move up in the world.

This upwardly mobile group, however, did not constitute a majority. The peasant soldiers entering the Communist Party at the frontline and moving on to higher education and a career in politics and administration were a small minority, both among war participants as a whole and among peasant-soldiers in particular. Only one percent of demobilized soldiers were students by early 1947 and a large share of these would have entered higher education with or without the war. Ninety-nine percent did other things. The Party-men dominating postwar politics on all levels were veterans, it is true, but they, too were a minority, as the majority of war survivors – at least 79 percent – were *not* Party members. Pre-war trends in party admissions were continued at the front, which meant that the educated remained more likely than the uneducated to become comrades; workers and employees continued to join far above their share in the population; while the obverse tendency continued for peasants. Officers joined more than the ranks and more specialized units had more party members.⁴⁷ Much of the visibility of veterans in administration and politics, then, was an effect of men (and some women), who had served in the army, returning to their prewar life trajectories. In terms of political generation, Stalin’s promotees of the 1930s (whether they later became *frontoviki* or not) dominated the Soviet polity until the 1980s, not the wartime generation.⁴⁸

As far as the majority of returnees are concerned, they did eventually leave the village, but whether or not the move from collective farmer to unskilled factory hand constitutes “upward mobility” remains a matter of judgment. Moreover, a close examination of the now available data indicates that veterans (like everybody else) were fleeing the exploitation in agriculture rather than seeking the bright light of the city. Originally, most returned to “mud and cockroaches” (Catherine Merridale), only to leave once postwar dreams of a better village turned out to be hollow. No informal esteem for the defenders of the motherland could compensate for the economic exploitation of the mass of Soviet veterans after the war – the returned peasant-soldiers who had made up the ranks of Stalin’s army.⁴⁹ As far as the sometimes celebrated “Stalinist care” (*Stalinskaia zabota*) for disabled veterans is concerned, it might be sufficient to point out that 70 percent of

45 On Ukraine see Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, chapter 1.

46 Edele, *Soviet Veterans*, 133, 195-96.

47 *Ibid.*, 134-38, 142, and chapter 6 (on social mobility).

48 John D. Nagle, *A New Look at the Soviet Elite: A Generational Model of the Soviet System*, in: *Journal of Political & Military Sociology* 3, no. 1 (1975). See also, with much more detail: Evan Mawdsley/Stephen White, *The Soviet Elite from Lenin to Gorbachev. The Central Committee and its Members, 1917–1991*, Oxford 2003.

49 Mark Edele, *Veterans and the Village: The Impact of Red Army Demobilization on Soviet Urbanization, 1945–1955*, in: *Russian History* 36, no. 2 (2009): 159-82; and Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, 362.

those rounded up as beggars during a campaign against “anti-social, parasitic elements” in 1951–53 were war or labor invalids.⁵⁰

Eventually, however, veterans did become a central status group in Soviet society, leading the way for welfare provisions and an elevated symbolic status for the entire “older generation.” Why this shift in 1978? Partially, this is a story of a contingent political event, of unintended consequences of the constitutional debate of 1977, of backroom politics, the lobbying of the veterans’ organization, and the letter-writing activities of rank-and-file veterans all over the Soviet Union.⁵¹ But there were longer-term transformations at play, too, which made 1978 and what followed possible in the first place. The original reluctance of the political leadership to reward returning soldiers with special privileges was partially of ideological origin: veterans were just citizens who had served in the army, they were not a social group in a Marxist understanding, and hence they did not exist “in themselves.” But the state’s resistance to the veterans’ entitlement claims was also motivated by hard-headed realism. In 1945, about 15 percent of the population were veterans, not counting irregulars of all kinds; a slightly smaller group, about twelve percent, were acknowledged as “war participants,” and about two percent of all Soviets were recognized as war invalids. These were significant shares, once spouses, children and dependents were added to these potential beneficiaries of a veterans’ benefits system. The leader of the country expected war with the United States in the not-so-distant future while having to contend with a destroyed economy they had to re-build without foreign aid. Privileges for returning soldiers would cost too much and lessen the incentives to go back to work and re-build Socialism in order to fight another day. By the late 1970s, money was still an issue for the decision makers, but the group of potential beneficiaries was much smaller. According to the data of the SKVV, there were eight million war participants in the country in 1979, at a time when the total population of the Soviet Union stood at 241 million.⁵² The share of all veterans, hence, was not much larger than the share of war invalids had been after the war. And while the country was still crippled by systemic shortages as well as the long-term consequences of the war, the crisis years were over and even something of a consumer society had taken shape.⁵³

50 Report by Minister of Interior S. Kruglov and Militia boss N. Stakhanov on struggle to liquidate begging (20 February 1954), available at <http://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/almanah/inside/almanah-doc/1007415> (accessed July 2010). On this campaign see also Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Social Parasites. How Tramps, Idle Youth, and Busy Entrepreneurs Impeded the Soviet March to Communism*, in: *Cahier du Monde russe* 47, no. 1-2 (2006): 377-408. For a wider perspective on the history of begging see Hubertus F. Jahn, *Armes Russland. Bettler und Notleidende in der russischen Geschichte vom Mittelalter bis in die Gegenwart*, Paderborn 2010.

51 Mark Edele, *Collective Action in Soviet Society: The Case of War Veterans*, in: *Writing the Stalin Era: Sheila Fitzpatrick and Soviet Historiography*, ed. Kiril Tomoff, Julie Hessler, and Golfo Alexopoulos, Palgrave 2011.

52 Shorthand report of 4th SKVV plenum, 19 September 1979, GARF f. r-9541, op. 1, d. 1520, l. 118 (the number refers to *uchastniki grazhdanskoi i Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny*, a number including the remaining survivors of the Civil War); and *Itogi Vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1979 goda*, vol. II: *Pol, vozrast i sostoianie v brake naseleniia SSSR, soiuznykh i avtonomnykh respublik, kraev i oblastei. Chast' I. Statisticheskii sbornik*, Moscow 1989, 32.

53 On normalization see Julie Hessler, *Postwar Normalisation and Its Limits in the USSR: The Case of Trade*, in: *Europe-Asia Studies* 53, no. 3 (2001): 445-71; Donald Filtzer, *The Standard of Living of Soviet Industrial Workers in the Immediate Postwar Period, 1945–1948*, in: *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 6 (1999): 1013-38; on the war’s long-term impact see Mark Edele, *The Impact of War and the Costs of Superpower Status*, in: *The Oxford Handbook of*

Clearly, it was much easier to accommodate three percent of the population during times of relative (if modest) prosperity than twelve or even 15 percent during a period of catastrophic wartime destruction. Simply put, the Soviet Union was not the United States of America, which could afford to extend veterans' benefits to about half of the population by the 1960s, while also investing heavily in armaments.⁵⁴ There had also been a cultural shift, which had replaced the Revolution with the Great Patriotic War as the major legitimizing myth. Brezhnev himself constantly claimed his own heroic past as central to who he was, and the bombastic war cult the leader helped instigate in the 1960s and 1970s had its own doing in transforming war veterans into part of the symbolic center of this society. The subsequent broadening of the group of the privileged to all who had participated in the wider war effort, while neither planned nor foreseen by policy makers in 1978, was also only logical in this context. The war had taken on a symbolic life of its own, a life which continues to this day despite the slimming of the ranks of the survivors.

Modern Russian History, ed. Simon Dixon, Oxford, forthcoming. On Soviet consumerism see Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People. Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia*, New York/Oxford 1989; Susan E. Reid, *Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev*, in: *Slavic Review* 61, no. 2 (2002): 211-52. Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile*, Ithaca 2008; Anne E. Gorsuch, and Diane P. Koenker (eds.), *Turizm. The Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism*, Ithaca/London 2006.

54 This share refers to veterans and their family members. See Kathleen J. Frydl, *The GI Bill*, Cambridge 2009, 358-59.