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Over There: War-Time Posters and Music of the European Theater during WW II

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Over There: War-Time Posters and Music of the European Theater during WW II

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Introduction

This study continues the research presented in Graphic Editorials, which looked at the visual dynamic of political cartoons as it related to the American response the two World Wars. Political cartoons and posters were often accompanied by songs of nationalism.

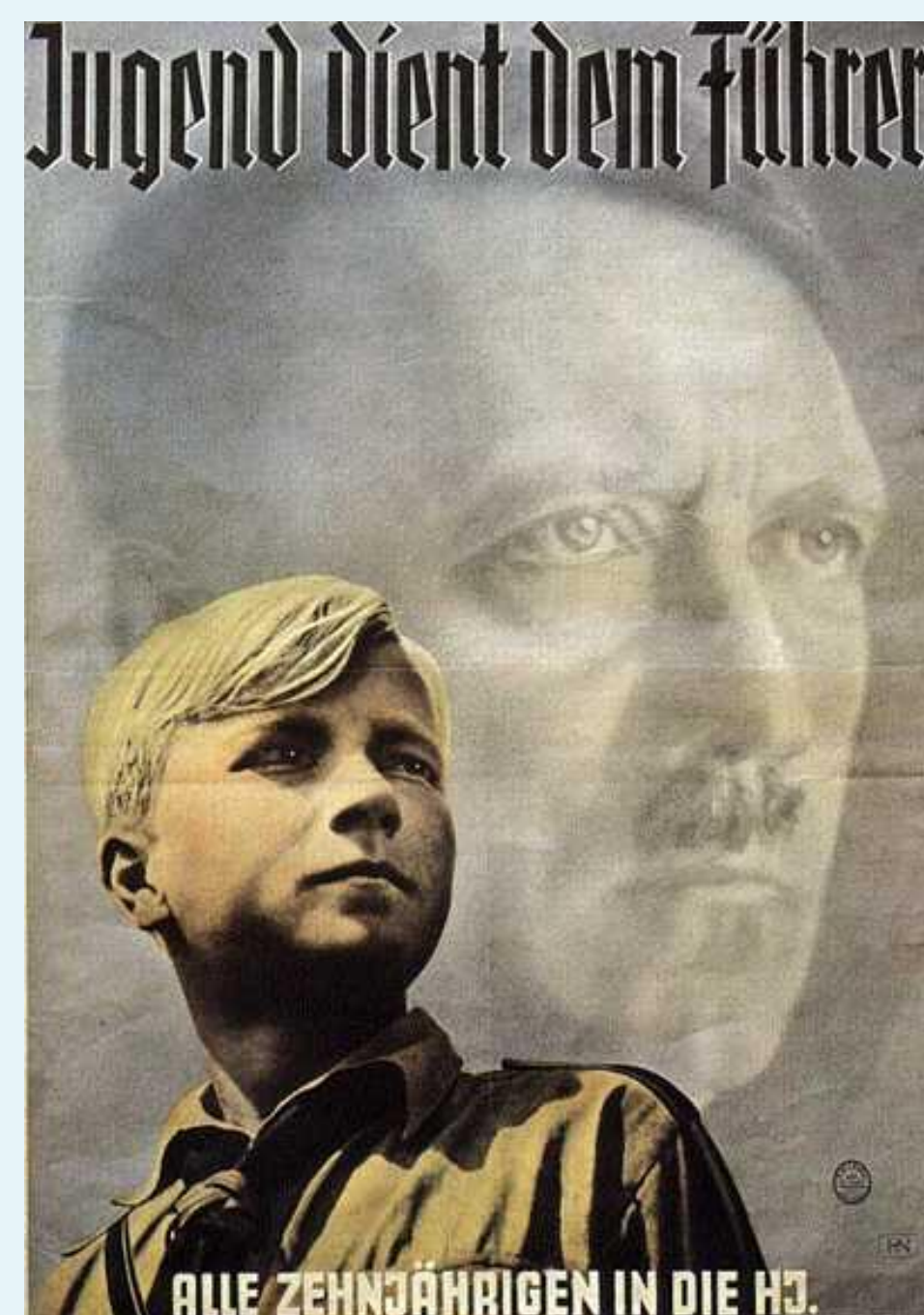
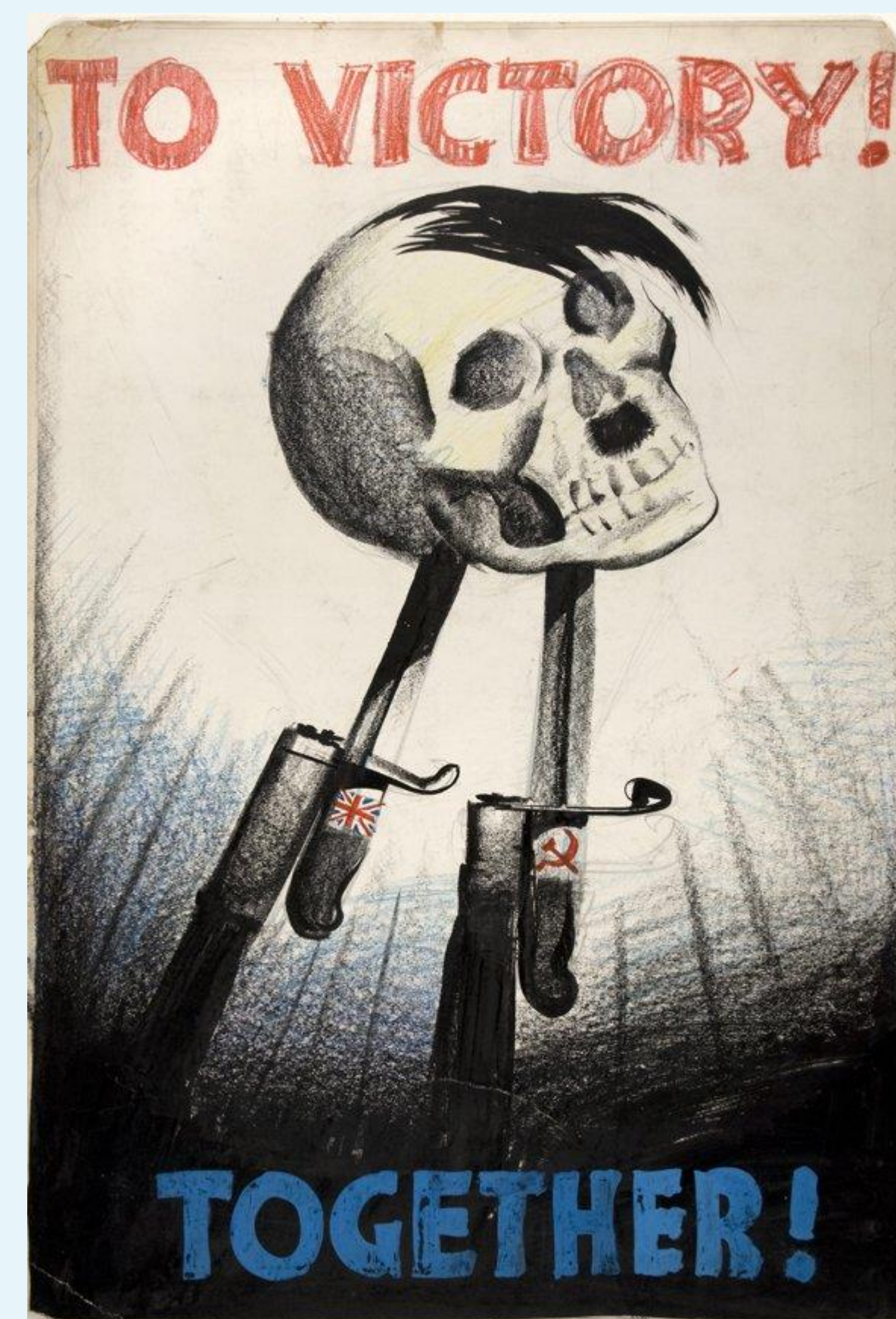
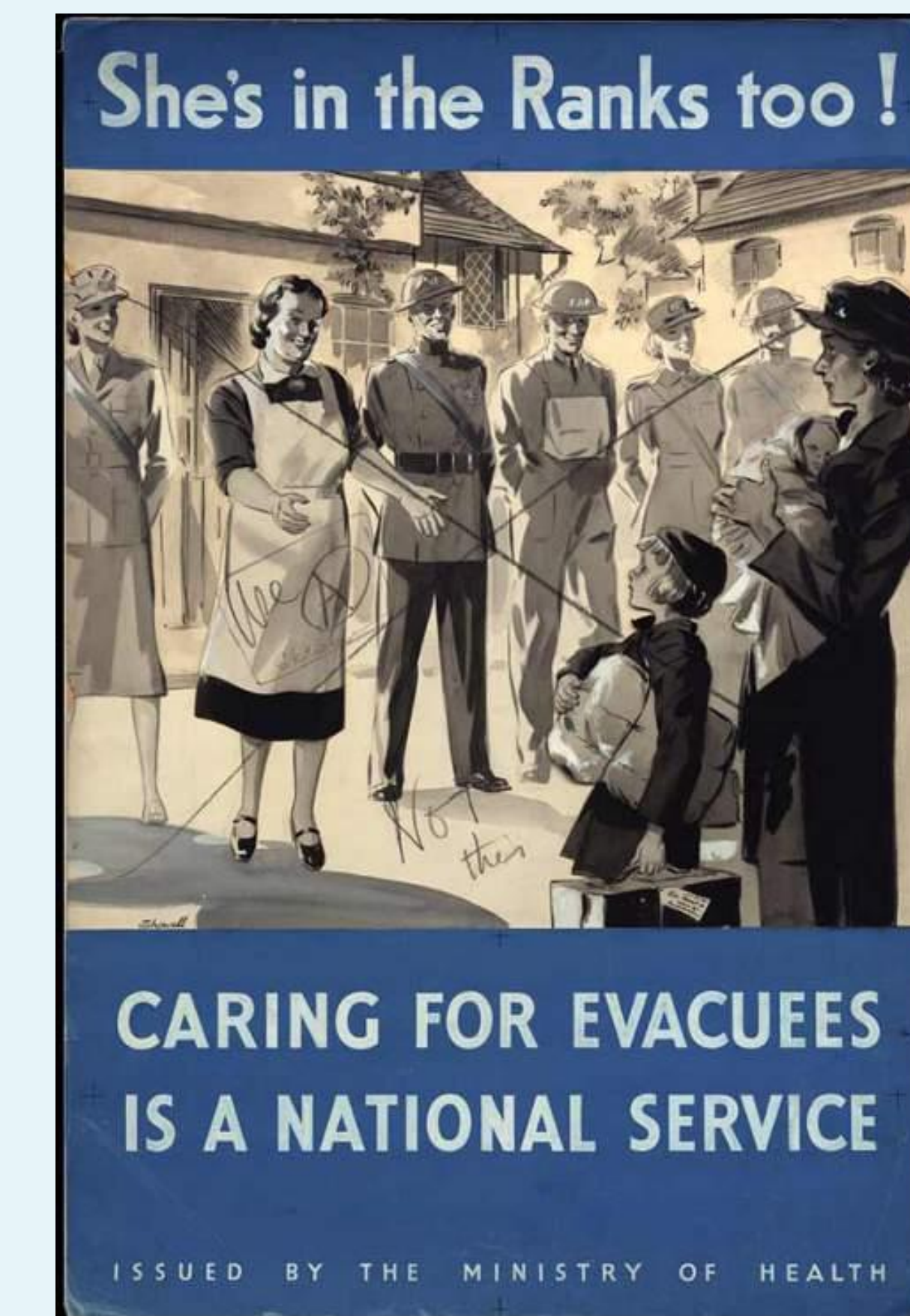
Art history is often viewed through the lens of historic events. Wars often needed art to promote the national sentiment of the government. Each faction believed that their cause was not valid but a righteous. One could hardly imagine that the Nazi cause was neither righteous nor valid, but to the German people the need to overcome the financial and emotional losses was vital. The vicious allies needed to be crushed. British posters stressed the need to stop at all cost the German danger. This sentiment was not just rhetorical, but also physical with the bombing of English cities. In addition to the British and the Americans, the Soviet Union played a vital role in the war effort. Their posters tell a story of triumph over the Germans. The songs that grew out the wars were catchy, almost playful tunes—not dirges. This study will look at the European response to World War 2 and the songs that were used to stimulate the people.



Great Britain: Keep Calm and Soldier On

The slogan of the poster on the left is seen almost everywhere in today's times, but "Keep Calm" with the royal crown originated during World War II in Britain. The British adage of the stiff upper lip was more than a trite saying, it was a necessary reality. This poster was commissioned by the British Ministry of War. Great Britain was hit heavily by German bombs. Big cities like London received the brunt of the *blitz krieg* or thunder war of the Nazi Luftwaffe. The royal crown symbolizes the fact that during the worst of the *blitz krieg*, the British Royal family stayed in London. There is video footage of the of Queen Elizabeth, the present Queen's mother walking through the still smoking rubble. Britons had to worry about German infiltration into the countryside as the enemy perpetrated clandestine night invasion—taking over farm houses and using farmland as landing fields. Like German women, British women were also participated in the war effort by housing refugees [as suggested in the poster on the right] and collecting clothing.

The British war tunes also reflected their poster counterparts. The music was not the marches which dominated German tunes. Instead, British war tunes sing of regaining pre-war Britain. The song "There will always be an England" speaks of an indomitable spirit that can't be snuffed out by German bombs. Hitler was also at the butt of the joke in "Run Adolf Run," which was originally called "Run Rabbit Run" before the war. It is rowdy pub song that suggests that British troops were going to rout Hitler out of their land.



The German War Machine: Propaganda

After World War I, Germany definitely felt the agony of defeat. There was a shortage of jobs for veterans and civilians alike. Riots broke out with the message that violent change was needed to make Germany great again! Jews and other foreigners were seen as the siphon of German's wealth. Their presence was believed to dilute and corrupt German culture. To counter these negative feelings, Hitler's ultimate war weapon was visual propaganda. Poster depicting young blond boys standing in the shadow of Hitler as well as a farm fresh blond housewife holding up her donation of shoes and clothes for the war cause were posted to rouse Teutonic patriotism. You can see the smiling and confident faces of the child and the woman. They represent German pride that their "superior" culture under Nazism will surely win this war.

German war songs also echoed this sentiment. The military march tune was the vehicle of audio propaganda. The crunch sound of German boots served as the background to songs with typical German *lied* style. The song presented here is not a song of blood and guts. It is instead a song that speaks of meadows and countryside, that is, the Germany countryside was a partner in the war effort. How? The song was meant to remind the soldier of his homeland and its beauty. That thought will keep will positive even in combat.

To hear the music, download the TINE app, then scan the stickers



Thunderbolt, by Kukrinsky (1943)

The Soviet Union: the Hammer and Sickle Attack the Eastern Front

When Germany invaded Eastern Europe, the Soviets were planning their counterattack. The Russian people were very passionate about keeping Hitler from their land. Stalin, no sweetheart himself, was not going to tolerate any other strong political entity in his Communist government. The poster on the right, which was commissioned by the Soviet Secret Police depicted Stalin's desire to eradicate any Fascist-Nazi thinking peoples in his country. As You can see the strong "red" arm strangles a small but poisonous snake. Though the Russians pounded the Nazis at the German Eastern Front, it became clear that the Soviets needed the British and Americans to weaken the German war machine. The poster on the left depicts how the Allies were going to "blitz" the Germans with their lightning bolt armed forces. This message is clear as we see the image of Hitler using an umbrella to ward off the Allies attack while a crumpled German plane lies in ruin.

The strong images from Soviet posters are in contrast to their war tunes, which were melodic, almost danceable. The most famous war song "Katyusha". Though the song is about a girl named Kathy, it also about all Russian women who were left behind. Katyusha is also a type of Russian missile. It would seem that this song had a double meaning.



We Will Eradicate the Agents of Fascism Sergei Igumnov, 1937

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Further information

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Conclusion

The European theatre was an intense fighting ground. Though German ambitions were met with weak resistance from France and Eastern European countries, they did not count on the fierce fight from Britain and Soviet Russia. Each of the posters presented here were visual propaganda for Germany, Britain, and Russia. Each poster appear to reflect the ideology not only of each government, but also of their people. Each poster depicts a confidence that their side win.

In addition to visual propaganda, the war tunes were audio propaganda. Like an ear worm, all of the songs were catchy and presented an optimistic confidence of victory.