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EDITOR'S LETTER

SACRED MAY



Berlin, Moscow and the Caucasus will become a front-line theatre of reports and essays...

The memoirs by Elena Tarakanova, the front-line nurse who carried 102 wounded soldiers from the battlefield and was wounded twice, will take a special place. Elena Filippovna (a native of Chervonaya Polyana of the Voroshilovgrad region) kept these records almost throughout the war, at considerable risk to herself: recording testimonies from the battlefield was strictly forbidden in the Red Army.

We will also tell readers about the significant role of the Russian Church in the war days, about the clergy patriots. In our Victory issue we will remember our compatriots, the Great Patriotic War heroes: famous and even more unknown ones.

Greetings on the 80th anniversary of the Great Victory, dear readers!

By Kirill Privalov



This year the jubilee medal, “Eighty Years of Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945”, was issued by 9 May. This award was conceived for veterans of the most terrible of wars – front-line soldiers, partisans and those who forged Victory in the rear. Unfortunately, there are only a handful of them left today, at most a few dozen...

We are celebrating the eightieth anniversary of the Great Victory in the new issue of the Russian Mind magazine. With war veterans and with our contemporaries alike. Among the authors are the remarkable front – line writer Yuri Bondarev, along with famous scholars, historians, publicists, and poets who wrote about the war. Most of these stories are deeply personal, as in the country that lost many millions of its sons and daughters in the fight against the invaders, the fate of the Motherland was the fate of every citizen – from the very first day of the war to the last.

Mikhail Myagkov, a PhD in History, Research Director of the Russian Military Historical Society, will talk about the historical context in which the Great Patriotic War broke out. And the Battles of the Dnieper and

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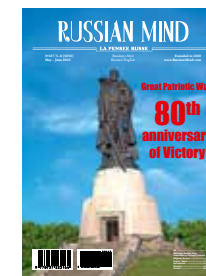
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The Monument to the Soldier-Liberator
in Berlin's Treptower Park



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MAIN TOPIC

ONE VICTORY FOR ALL

The memory of the Great Patriotic War lives in each one of us

By KIRILL PRIVALOV



Victory Day. Soviet pilots on Revolution Square in Moscow

Photo: RIA Novosti

According to scientific journals, the human brain can store 2.5 petabytes (2,500 terabytes or 2.5 million gigabytes) of information. I don't really believe in these statistics, but I understand

that it is very, very much. Even the largest libraries in the world do not contain such an enormous amount of information. The only problem is that almost everything is recorded by our minds, but only

partially reproduced. However, psychologists maintain that we digest a huge amount of information. We remember everything we have ever experienced in our lives: smells, sounds, situations, numbers and other

people with their names, surnames, addresses and phone numbers... So, it appears that we know much more than we even suspect. Scientists state that under hypnosis a person is able to reproduce all this. Is it so?

"The past no longer is, and the future is not yet," Blessed

the future. Such is the property of our memory... no matter what – personal, collective or family.

Some nations remember with their every cell the long-ago tragic exodus from their faraway native lands, which became deadly by the will of invading enemies. Other peoples remember the imperial grandeur of their mighty forefathers, which periodically appears like a fairy-tale mirage. And others – caricatural ambitious and disproportionately important ones – have no intelligible ancestral past, except for swamps, fog, and flimsy huts among scattered stones on a sparse shore, but still claim to be something in the contradictory modern world. Does the nation's genetic code work in this way? Maybe. But, despite the calls of the ancient Eastern sages, no one can "exist in this world without belonging to it." Time in the memory space has no units of measurement. Paradoxically (I've learned it for myself lately), we have much more vivid memories of the distant past than of more recent events. Both are now out of reach anyway.

Over the past century we Russians have walked a long path from the Gulag to Google and, admittedly, for various reasons we have not learned much. However, we have realised the most important thing: we must remember our past at least so that it should not repeat itself. This is why the memory of the Great Patriotic War lives – without exaggeration – in each one of us.

"History is a lie that everyone agrees with," argued Voltaire. That narcissistic French sage was mistaken. He understood the hardest thing in life is telling the truth, as well as telling lies. But he didn't realise that there are some things that don't fit into any evaluation categories. For these events were too terrible and long-lasting for posterity to take them light-heartedly. We, who live in the post-Soviet space, know perfectly

well what we are talking about. About the most terrible of the wars: it has lived in our memory for eight decades since its end. We judge by our common pain, to which nothing can be compared to this day.

The price for our Great Victory speaks for itself and suppresses the consumer mind. Judge for yourselves! If we were to honour each of the 27 million USSR citizens killed in the Great Patriotic War with a minute's silence (just one minute!), the world would be silent for over half a century... If the portraits of all those who fell at the front and in the rear were to be carried in the "Immortal Regiment" procession, the column would march for nineteen days! And there is not a single family in Russia and Belarus, Armenia, and Kazakhstan (the list of post-Soviet republics can go on!) who did not lose a close one in the most terrible of the wars in human history. How can we forget this!

To this day, faded photographs of people in military uniform, letters from the front written by an indelible pencil on rough and yellowed paper, military orders and medals received by our grandfathers and fathers for bravery are lovingly kept in every home. Those whose relatives returned from the war were incredibly lucky, but alas, they are a minority. And we remember the fallen soldiers too and we honour them. "Life is given for brave deeds," as a popular saying goes. And another says: "Victory over death gives birth to a hero." All those who returned and did not return, who defended our freedom in the struggle against fascism, are heroes. I am proud to say that there is such a wonderful person in my family too.

The "Fiery Captain"

I had already written about this man in the Russian Mind magazine. But



A monument with a plaque on the site of Boris Khigrin's fighting near Oslevka village

now a diary from the war years has come into my hands. An unkempt, raw and unfinished, but incredibly powerful document! And our entire country was the arena of events that unfolded in the first horrible years of the Great Patriotic War. My simple narrative is based on the facts from these notes.

Olga Petrovna Solovykh (an old Siberian surname; married name: Khigrina) was born in the Ryazan province and by the beginning of the most devastating of the wars at the age of thirty-five was a mother of three young boys. The youngest, Oleg, was just over a year old. The German invasion caught the family in Bobruisk (in Belarus), where the head of the family, Artillery Captain Boris Lvovich Khigrin, served as head of a regimental school and commander of the Second Division (122-mm cannons of the 1931-1937 model and 152-mm howitzers of the 1937 model). He, a native of Orsha, had to face the most important and final test of his life there, in his native Belarus.

On 5 July 1941 forty armoured vehicles from General Heinz Guderian's 2nd Panzer Group broke through to the banks of the quiet Kleva River. To stop them at a bridge next to the Mogilev–Minsk Road, which opened the way to Moscow, our troops placed a 122-mm cannon from the 2nd Division in a favourable firing position. Just one cannon! There were no more resources left – the task was to cover the withdrawal of the 1st and 2nd Red Army Divisions at all costs; they had to organise a defence near the Orlik River, on its elevated eastern bank.

After the main units had begun to fortify their position successfully on the new line, Captain Khigrin went by car to remove the cannon left by the Kleva. In addition to the driver, he took Ivan Tsupikov, who had been conscripted from Ukraine. As if the captain had sensed that he would need a reliable helper: very soon Tsupikov became a loader. Later he would tell everybody about the last battle of the one whom today's war

historians from Belarus to Russia call the "Fiery Captain".

Evening was falling. When Captain Khigrin drove up to the Kleva bank, he saw ten Fascist tanks firing at the cannon left in the barrier by Soviet gunners from guns, machine guns and from everything they could... Hurricane fire! And behind several dozen more armoured vehicles with spider crosses on their towers were huddled at the bridge, waiting for their turn to rush into battle. The forces were unequal, and the situation seemed to be hopeless. The gun-commander Lanchava and the gunlayer Bakharov were dead, and the platoon commander, Lieutenant Kozyr, seriously wounded...

Then Boris Khigrin himself stood up to the panoramic sight of the cannon: it was not in vain that two years earlier he had been one of the first to master the new guns designed by Fyodor Petrov, so loved by battery fighters. Confident and calculating movements, precise judgement of distance, and masterful shooting experience – and four Fascist tanks, shot at by the captain, were ablaze! Of course, having seen the artillery crew defeated in an unequal battle, he could have returned to his troops: "What can we do? You can't go against force! We must defend ourselves with the resources we still have..." How could he, a Red commander, have surrendered to the enemy?

The captain continued firing. The Germans couldn't stand it, moved back and began to retreat. Then Boris Khigrin's chest was fatally pierced by a shell fragment. You can't survive with a wound like this.

The fighting was drowned out... Silence reigned for a moment, broken only by the clanking of German caterpillar tracks. The enemy took heart and moved forward again. Next the main forces of the 2nd division began to be heard from high firing positions by the Orlik River.

Lieutenant Pavlovsky's howitzers completed the rout of a German tank column from Army Group Centre. The tanks of the famous Hitler's general, nicknamed "Heinz Hurricane", armoured monsters that had recently ruined the whole of Western Europe in a triumphal march, were turned into burning pieces of metal in a matter of minutes on the banks of a previously unknown river with the funny name of Kleva. At a nameless bridge in Belarus the Nazis lost over twenty tanks (almost a whole regiment). And they didn't cross!

The rest is in the funeral annals. The Red Army soldier Prokofy Anisimov carried the dying commander off the battlefield under heavy German fire. The chief of Staff of the 462nd Corps Artillery Regiment, Captain Grigory Khudoleev, buried Boris Khigrin by order of the regiment commander, Major Ivan Sobkalov, just outside the village of Belinichi, near the Minsk–Mogilev Road. The Korytnitsa village residents collected the bodies of all the killed Soviet soldiers and buried them in a mass grave near the same village on the edge of a pine grove. A peasant named Shepelevsky collected medallions with the names of all the fallen soldiers in order to inform their relatives about their burial place after the war. Alas, during the occupation he was blown up by a mine, adding to the number of soldiers who remained unknown forever...

However, you can find monuments to the "Fiery Captain" in Belarus. There are three of them: on the site of his death near the village of Oslevka where an artillery piece was frozen on a pedestal forever, and two monuments in Belinichi, namely a stele and a tombstone monument.

On 1 September 1941 the Pravda newspaper published a decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR "On Awarding

the Title of Hero of the Soviet Union to the Commanding Officers and Enlisted Red Army Personnel." And point no. 4 read: "To Captain Boris Lvovich Khigrin." However, his family did not receive any awards either then or after the Victory: according to the laws of that time, orders and medals were not given posthumously to the heroes' relatives. It was not until two years after her husband's death that Olga Petrovna Khigrina received a document conferring the title of Hero on the "Fiery Captain", signed by the Head of State of the USSR Mikhail Kalinin and Secretary of the Presidium Alexander Gorkin. Now its original is kept at the Central Armed Forces Museum, to which it was donated by the family.

Meanwhile, the hero's widow didn't care about any beautiful awards at that moment. Having miraculously escaped from the front line with her three young children (the oldest of them, Igor, turned nine on 23 June 1941), Olga Petrovna Khigrina first reached her native Skopin near Ryazan, and then Astrakhan, where her elder sister Nadezhda was living. But the Fascists broke through to the Volga and were deployed a few kilometres away from Astrakhan, so during the days of fighting for Stalingrad another evacuation began: to Kazakhstan.

An excerpt from Olga Petrovna Khigrina's reminiscences: "We lived on the shore of the Aral Sea for a whole year till August 1943... On the way to Aralsk we passed by the Baskunchak station and saw it had been bombed out. But the Germans did not bomb our train. The five of us lived in Aralsk: the four of us and Aunt Nadezhda. We were given a small house on the beach: with all kinds of insects and the sound of surf. Then we were given a room in the centre of Aralsk where Igor went to school together with Kazakh children. There were no exercise books to write in, so

he used pamphlets, writing between the lines..."

The Kazakhs came to the aid of refugees from Belarus, Ukraine and Russia. Hundreds of thousands of evacuees survived the war thanks to the hospitality and support of Kazakhstan. We can never forget it... By the end of 1943 the Germans were being driven from our land completely and decisively, and it became clear to the Khigrins that they could go to Moscow where most of their relatives lived at that time. However, people were not allowed to enter the capital without special passes. It was then that the Hero's star, received by the "Fiery Captain" posthumously, helped.

They temporarily moved to Koptino on the outskirts of the capital and lived with Olga's elder sister, while Olga sought a room in barracks for the family of a hero who had died at the front. There, in barrack no. 3 in the village of Karamyshevo (now the pretty Moscow neighbourhood of Khoroshevo-Mnevniki), built by prisoners who had dug the Moscow Canal in the 1930s, the Higrins lived for seventeen years without any basic amenities, next to the "cemetery" of captured aircraft till 1960... But it's already another and very different story.

Only the people know...

My grandfather Konstantin Petrovich Solovykh, Olga Petrovna Khigrina's elder brother, did not fight in the Great Patriotic War due to his advanced age. But he did labour for the Army in the rear, producing gas-masks near Moscow. One day, when I was a boy, I asked him, a very disabled veteran of the First World War (once called the "German War"), why he had never told me anything about his feats of arms. He only smiled sadly in response and inhaled his cigarette: "You don't talk about war for no



Eternal Flame at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Moscow, Russia

particular reason... And there's nothing to say here."

Many years later, having already become a journalist, I would ask the same question to representatives of my father's generation who had fought in the Great Patriotic War (my father was not conscripted because of his myopia, but wrote about the war and travelled to the war zone, contributing to the then popular Sovetsky Patriot newspaper). So what? All of them: writers and journalists, doctors and professional military men, unanimously confirmed what Mikhail Maximovich Vershinin, a poet and front-line soldier who took part in the liberation of Prague, once admitted to me: "War is not a thing you talk about for no apparent reason..."

Yes, the veterans and their close ones (and these are all of us) rarely spoke about fallen soldiers, save when they commemorated them. But they were always remembered. In the late 1970s, during a business trip I ended up in a peasant house near Yaroslavl. Instead of an iconostasis, there were photographs of sons and uncles who had been killed in the war. The hostess, Aunt Masha, noticing my curious gaze, began to explain: "This is my brother Yasha who fell near Rzhev... And this is Nikolai, my youngest, who was killed after the war in the Carpathians where we fought against the Banderites... And here is Vasya, my middle son, who fell during the liberation of Warsaw... And here is Sergei Ivanovich, my husband: we got married in 1920, and he was killed in Belarus..." The old woman enumerated her family members who had not returned from the Great Patriotic War in an even and quiet voice, with amazing calm, without anguish and tears, which would have been quite logical.

In the same way (in a low voice filled with dignity) a few years ago I told about the siege of Leningrad to

a lovely elderly lady at a French bar counter. I said that in the first three months of the siege the bread rations for Leningraders were reduced three times. Bread was almost the only food of the besieged inhabitants. Between 20 November and 25 December 1941 the bread rations reached critical levels: 375 grammes each for those who worked in hot workshops, 250 grammes for engineering and other workers, and 125 for the other categories. This amount was given for a day. And what bread! It was very raw, heavy, with oilcake, unrefined grain and other additives. Nevertheless, it was a daily ration: as a rule, it was impossible to get other food. Some ate their bread straightaway, often right at the shop counter. Those who did it usually starved to death faster than others. Some bit off small pieces of bread and sucked them the whole day. However, physicians recommended dividing a portion into exactly several meals...

The French woman, who was standing next to me with a glass of champagne, looked at me sympathetically: "It was a hard time in Paris during the German occupation too. Imagine: even croissants were sold stale at that time!" I don't think it was mockery on her part. These are just two different worlds. Our Victory is like a genetic code, it is our national obviousness... What can you explain to a foreigner? What else can you say?

Nevertheless, I am positive that we should talk about the war and the Great Victory, and as often as possible. After all, memory is our common heritage. The new, Victory issue of the Russian Mind magazine is dedicated to this. As I was told, shortly before his demise the wonderful poet Konstantin Simonov (a former front-line soldier), made his own the phrase that he had heard from the victorious soldiers: "Only the people know the whole truth." Let them talk!

HISTORY

ON THE EVE OF WAR

The USSR political leaders understood that a military conflict with Nazi Germany was inevitable

By ANATOLY DOKUCHAEV

The songwriters argued that the enemy would be defeated with small losses, with a mighty blow, and on his own territory. In fact, a very high price had to be paid for the victory, and the preparations had been carried out long before the war started.

Given its surprise, Hitler and his associates planned to finish the Eastern campaign in three or four months. However, the German Blitzkrieg began to stall on the very first day of the aggression. Pilots of the 123rd Fighter Aviation Regiment shot down thirty Fascist planes in the Brest Fortress area, and gunners of the 636th Anti-Tank Regiment southwest of Šiauliai burned down fifty-nine German tanks and assault guns during the day. The further the Wehrmacht advanced across Soviet territory, the stronger the resistance became. And this is despite the fact that by the beginning of the aggression the German troops had been fully mobilised, were in full combat readiness, had extensive experience in combat operations, and surprise gave them a huge advantage.

It was seemingly impossible to explain the “political blindness” of the Soviet leadership at that time. But there are such explanations. Very concrete strategic reasons had a deterrent effect on Soviet military preparations before the outbreak of the war. Moscow feared that if Hitler succeeded in making out that the Soviet Union was the initiator of the conflict, it could have stimulated rapprochement between Berlin and London. And then the USSR would have had to wage war against a broader coalition

of States. Even the US President Franklin Roosevelt, who supposedly sympathized with the USSR in the conflict with Germany, used cunning.

At a meeting of the chiefs of the staff in May 1941 he stated: “Unless Stalin provokes an attack by Germany, the United States will support the USSR, otherwise we will not interfere.” This is one more explanation why the Soviet leadership, while strengthening the western borders, sought not to give Berlin the slightest occasion to blame the USSR for unleashing the war.

In fact, the USSR had been preparing thoroughly to repel any possible large-scale aggression, which is why it succeeded in breaking the backbone of Nazi Germany and its numerous satellites. But, as Stalin believed, two years were not enough for the Red Army to become more combat-ready. Today Joseph Stalin’s phrase at the First All-Union Conference of Workers of Socialist Industry on 4 February 1931 is well-known: “We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we will do it, or else we will go under.” And the USSR walked this path successfully.

During the pre-war “five-year plan” periods 9,000 new large enterprises were built in the country. The second five-year period of 1933–1937 became that of a real boom in all spheres of State life. Over that time about 4,500 large industrial enterprises began operating throughout the country, including such industrial giants as the Uralvagonzavod,

the Kramatorsk Heavy Machine Tool Building Works, the Krivoy Rog Metallurgical Works, the Novotulsky Metallurgical Works, the Azovstal, the Zaporozhstal, etc. At the same time, duplicates of industrial giants were opened in the eastern regions of the country, which demonstrated the Soviet leadership’s foresight.

As a result, in 1940 gross industrial output increased by 7.7 times compared to 1913, by thirty-eight times compared to 1920, and the output of mechanical engineering and metalworking by 512 times. The USSR ranked first in Europe and second in the world in terms of machine-building products, oil extraction and tractor production. We even made use of the American Great Depression of the 1930s to modernise our industry. At that time the Soviet Government was buying up not only the best weapons at low prices, but also entire factories for the production of weapons and civilian goods. Thus, the Stalingrad Tractor Factory was built in the USA, dismantled, transported to Stalingrad and reassembled in six months. On 17 June 1930 the first STZ-1 tractor rolled off its assembly line. And during the war BM-13-16 Katyusha rocket launchers were installed on STZ-5 crawler tractors.

Now it is clear that there were enough realists among the USSR leadership who understood that fighting with small losses and only on the foreign territory does not always work. If there had not been such understanding, it would hardly have been possible to remove 1,523 industrial enterprises from the frontline to the rear areas in

a fantastically short span of time by late 1941. The unprecedented relocation of an entire country’s industry from the west to the east and the almost instant start of production of everything necessary for the front in new locations became possible only because the country had professional engineering and working personnel, as well as energy and technical infrastructure prepared in advance in many regions.

On 6 October 1941 the evacuation of the tank production of the Leningrad Kirov Factory to Chelyabinsk began. Units of the Stalingrad Tractor Factory, the Kharkov Motor-Building Factory and other enterprises were evacuated there as well. According to general estimates, every fifth vehicle produced for the front was made in Chelyabinsk: 18,000 tanks, 48,500 tank engines, 85,000 sets of fuel equipment, and 17.5 million pieces of ammunition. It is noteworthy that mass production of T-34 tanks was mastered in just thirty-three days.

This would not have been achieved without the creation of a fully-fledged defence industry in the pre-war years, which was ahead of the other sectors of economy in terms of gross output growth. During the three years of the third five-year period (1938–1940) the annual growth of the entire USSR industry averaged 13.2 percent, and the defence industry – thirty-nine percent. Between August 1940 and June 1941 the stock of military products and strategic raw materials almost doubled. Aviation and tank factories, enterprises for the production of artillery guns and small arms were built and provided with advanced equipment.

It enabled us to increase the production of military equipment significantly. Between January 1939 and June 1941 the USSR industry supplied the Red Army with 17,745 combat aircraft, over 7,000 tanks, including the legendary T-34 and



A poster from 1933. Artist: Alexander Maleinov

KV, about 30,000 field guns, and almost 52,400 mortars. The Navy received dozens of up-to-date ships that rivalled the enemy ones during the war.

These figures leave no doubt that the USSR political leaders understood that a military conflict with Nazi Germany was inevitable and were preparing the country for the upcoming war. The words “Ready for Labour and Defence of the USSR!” became the principal slogan.

A mobilisation system was created and started working in the country. All enterprises had mobilisation plans in case of war – a network of military commissariats covered the country’s whole territory. Aviation clubs conducted pre-prescription training for young people, with Osoaviakhim (the Society for the Assistance of Defence, Aircraft and Chemical Construction) and the Red Cross Society having particularly many members.



Soviet tank KV-1, installed in the museum-diorama "Breakthrough of the Leningrad Siege" near Kirovsk. Russia

In a word, the country was preparing on all fronts. But then it turned out that even this was not enough for a large-scale confrontation with virtually the whole of Europe.

Did the Germans have a chance?

Let's put the question another way: did Nazi Germany have the opportunity to win in the confrontation with the USSR? The answer was given by history itself. And yet... In terms of numbers, Germany's economy did not surpass

that of the Soviet Union, albeit Berlin took control of the economic resources of almost all European States. And Hitler, who, as we know, viewed the USSR as a colossus with feet of clay, believed that this would be sufficient. The war on two fronts did not bother Berlin either.

Back in early 1941, troops under the command of Erwin Rommel were sent to help the Italian units being defeated by the British. Hostilities between the Germans and

the British continued with varying success till May 1943. There was an active war at sea. On 11 March 1941 the US Congress passed the Lend-Lease Act, allocating \$7 billion to help the UK with weapons and other munition. So, Germany had to divert its military resources to fend off these threats.

Yes, in June 1941 Hitler and his close circles used the main trump card: surprise, and an insidious strike on Soviet military and

industrial facilities gave Germany a significant advantage. But Berlin was confronted by the enormous military potential of the USSR and a combat-ready army that did not waver before the Wehrmacht, whereas the Western armies surrendered to Hitler without much resistance. In order to justify themselves, the West started spreading myths about the supposedly insurmountable military advantage of the Nazis. It

was adopted by Soviet cinema, where the German Army is portrayed as the height of perfection: its soldiers are spick-and-span, each holding a Maschinenpistole – an MP 38/40 submachine gun, which became one of the symbols of the Nazi war machine. However, the MP 38/40 was never the Wehrmacht's main small arm.

They armed drivers, tankers, special forces detachments, rear guard detachments and junior officers of the ground forces with them.

The German infantry was armed for the most part with the Mauser 98k magazine carbine, which was superior to the Soviet Mosin magazine rifle of the 1891/1930 model in weight, but lost in aiming range. In addition, the German rifle was more expensive and more difficult to manufacture.

As for the MP 38/40 submachine guns, they were also in no way superior to similar Soviet weapons – the PPD-38 and especially the PPSH-41, which became a symbol of the Second World War. Between 1941 and 1945 about 6 million Georgy Shpagin submachine guns were produced. The conclusion of Christopher Chant, a Western expert in small arms, is worthy of note: "The PPSH is exceptionally reliable and durable. The PPSH was even a favourite weapon of the Germans who valued it for its reliability and magazine capacity. They would often throw off their MP 40 to take the Soviet PPSH."

As for the Wehrmacht's armoured vehicles, they were not superior to those of the Red Army. The best tank of the armoured forces of Nazi Germany at the beginning of the aggression (1,000 of them were produced) – Pz.Kpfw IV (T-4) – was inferior in many respects to the Soviet T-34 tank and the heavily armoured KV-1 tank with 76 mm guns. The German tanks Pz.Kpfw II (T-2) with 20 mm automatic cannon

and Pz.Kpfw III (T-III) with 37 mm and 50 mm guns were even weaker in many respects.

By the beginning of the war, the Luftwaffe fleet was generally superior in quality to the Soviet Air Force. Let's name only the most famous fighters: Messerschmitts Bf-109 (Me-109) and Bf-110 (Me-110), Focke-Wulf Fw-190, Heinkel He 111 bombers, Junkers Ju.87. German pilots had significantly more flight hours, and many had combat experience (Spain, Poland, France, the UK, etc.). Today some historians pay attention to this aspect. However, it is a well-known fact that in April – May 1941 a delegation of the German Industrial Commission headed by the Military Air Attache to Moscow Colonel Heinrich Aschenbrenner visited Soviet aircraft factories and gave quite high assessments to the Soviet aviation industry. And these were objective assessments. During the twenty-seven days of combat from 22 June to 19 July 1941 the German Air Force lost 1,284 aircraft of all types on the Eastern front, which is more than two months of fighting in the Battle of Britain.

But Hitler's Germany had a chance of success... If Soviet soldiers and officers, as on the Western front, had started to surrender all to a man, but this did not happen: most of the units fought steadfastly and even heroically; if the Soviet defence industry had stopped producing for the military in the first weeks, but the output of military equipment only increased; if the USSR had had no reserve armies by the beginning of December 1941, but they were there and struck the enemy near Moscow, after which the Wehrmacht formations retreated westwards and it became clear that the Blitzkrieg had failed... If... But history doesn't tolerate the subjunctive mood. 9 May 1945 is our great holiday.

BERLIN'S LAST DAY

On the night of 1 May the Victory Flag flew over the dome of the defeated Reichstag

By ANATOLY DOKUCHAEV



Soviet soldiers raised the Victory Flag over the Reichstag

Photo: Vladimir Grebnev (TASS)

In the annals of the Great Patriotic War 2 May 1945 is no less a symbolic date than Victory Day. On this day Berlin was taken. As they said at the time: “the lair of the Fascist beast.”

In the spring of 1945 the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union, the USA, the UK and France fought on the territory of Nazi Germany. The Red Army was sixty kilometres away from Berlin, and the advanced units of the Anglo-American troops reached the Elbe 100–120 kilometres away from the German capital. The main forces of the German Fascist troops were still concentrated against the Red Army.

The last frontier

The German Fascist command drew up the maximum possible forces and resources near Berlin. Troops were being redeployed from the interior of Germany, from the Western Front, and police and security units and subunits were being concentrated.

By 16 April there were 214 divisions on the Soviet-German front, of which thirty-four were armoured and fifteen motorised, as well as fourteen brigades. Against the Anglo-American forces the German command held only sixty divisions, of which five were tank divisions, which had only about 200 tanks. The Berlin line was defended by the 3rd Tank Army and the 9th Army of Army Group Vistula, the 4th Tank Army and the 17th Army of Army Group Centre. In total, forty-eight infantry, nine motorised,

six tank divisions and many other units and formations were involved. The total number of troops reached 1 million. In addition, there were eight divisions in the reserve of the general headquarters of the ground forces. In Berlin about 200 Volkssturm battalions were formed, and the total number of the garrison exceeded 200,000.

The order issued by the German leadership on 9 March demanded: “Defend the capital to the last man and to the last bullet... The enemy must not be given a moment’s peace: he must be weakened and robbed of vitality in a dense network of footholds and centres of resistance. Every lost house or every lost foothold must be retaken immediately by a counterattack... Berlin can decide the outcome of the war.”

The Soviet Headquarters of the Supreme High Command, assessing the difficulties of the final operation, believed that only a decisive blow and the defeat of the enemy in a short time could lead to a quick victory. The General Headquarters’ plan was to use powerful blows from the three fronts’ troops to break through the enemy’s defences along the Oder and Neisse Rivers, and then, developing an offensive inlands, surround his forces, break them apart and, destroying each one individually, capture Berlin. After this the troops were supposed to reach the Elbe, where they would join the Anglo-American troops.

In preparing for the assault on Berlin, the Soviet Headquarters of the Supreme High Command took into account that the leaders of the UK and the USA also sought to capture Berlin and send their troops there, forestalling the Red Army.

The troops of the 1st and 2nd Belorussian (the commanders: Marshals of the Soviet Union G.K. Zhukov and K.K. Rokossovsky) and 1st Ukrainian (the commander:

Marshal of the Soviet Union I. S. Konev) fronts, part of the forces of the Baltic Fleet (the commander: Admiral V.F. Tributs), 18th Air Army of Long-Range Aviation (the commander: Chief Marshal of Aviation A.V. Golovanov), three corps of the country’s Air Defence Forces and the Dnieper Military Flotilla (the commander: Rear Admiral V.V. Grigoriev). The group of Soviet troops consisted of twenty combined armies, including the 1st and 2nd armies of the Polish Armed Forces, four tank and four air armies, ten separate tank and mechanised and four cavalry corps. They consisted of 2.5 million people, about 42,000 guns and mortars, 6,250 tanks and self-propelled guns, and 7,500 combat aircraft. This ensured a 2.5-fold superiority over the enemy in troops, fourfold in artillery, 4.1-fold in tanks and self-propelled guns, and 2.3-fold in combat aircraft. In the directions of the main attacks of the fronts this superiority was even more significant.

The Soviet soldiers came to Berlin with valuable combat experience and the ability to crush the enemy according to all the rules of military science. The commanders of the fronts, armies, and formations led the troops skilfully and knew them well. Many military leaders with their armies had gone from Stalingrad, Leningrad and Kursk to the Oder and the Neisse. Soldiers, sergeants, officers and generals were driven by a great patriotic upsurge. Who among the soldiers and officers, even in the most difficult battles near Moscow and Stalingrad, did not dream of reaching Berlin where the most monstrous war in the history of mankind had begun?

On the “Motherland” signal

The troops of the 1st Belorussian Front were met by fierce enemy

resistance. At 1.50 p.m. on 20 April the long-range artillery of the 79th Rifle Corps, commanded by Major General S.N. Perevertkin, and of the 3rd Shock Army under the command of Colonel General V.I. Kuznetsov, opened fire on Berlin. It marked the beginning of the assault on the German capital. On 21 April units of the 3rd Shock Army, the 2nd Guards Tank Army and the 47th Army broke through to the outskirts of Berlin and engaged in battle in the city. Towards the end of the same day the 8th Guards Army and the 1st Guards Tank Army penetrated into the city defensive perimeter in the Petershagen and Erkner areas. And on 24 April they met with the 3rd Guards Tank Army and the 28th Army of the 1st Ukrainian Front southeast of Berlin in the Bonsdorf area and This completed the encirclement of the enemy’s Frankfurt-Guben group, and Berlin was encircled.

The Nazi command sought to unblock the troops encircled in Berlin. Hitler’s last hope to save Berlin was General W. Wenck’s 12th Army, which was fighting against Anglo-American troops. Wenck was ordered to deploy the troops eastwards, link up with General T. Busse’s 9th Army, part of the forces of the 4th Tank Army, and unblock Berlin’s encirclement. However, under heavy blows from the Soviet troops the German armies could not accomplish this task. The liquidation of the Berlin group right in the city was carried out from 26 April till 2 May by breaking up the defences and destroying the enemy in parts.

The Battle of Berlin was extremely fierce. Hitler kept demanding that the German capital be defended to the last man. And the deeper the Soviet troops penetrated into the city, the more fiercely the enemy resisted. The basis of the combat formations of the rifle and tank units during the fighting in the city were assault detachments and groups,

which included rifle, engineering, artillery and tank subunits.

As a rule, the basis of the assault detachment was a rifle battalion, attached by a tank company, 1–2 platoons of 76 mm guns, a battery of 120 mm mortars, 1–2 large-calibre guns (up to 203 mm inclusively) or self-propelled guns, up to a sapper company, and a flamethrower platoon. It was divided into several assault groups, a flamethrower group and a reserve. The assault group was a rifle company or platoon, usually attached by 2–3 tanks or self-propelled guns, 2 anti-tank guns, two divisional artillery guns (76 mm and 122 mm), up to a platoon of sappers, a squad of flamethrowers, and chemists (to set up a smoke screen). The assault group was divided into the capture and firing subgroups.

On 29 April units of the 79th Rifle Corps started storming the Reichstag, a massive building of the lower house of the German parliament in the north-eastern part of Berlin's central Tiergarten Park. The Germans had regarded it as the Third Reich's symbol and turned it into a powerful resistance hub. The approaches to it were blocked by deep ditches, various kinds of engineering defensive structures and numerous firing points. The defenders of the Reichstag (about 1000 in all) were armed with a large number of machine guns, panzerfausts and artillery pieces. In addition, there were large Wehrmacht forces near the Reichstag.

On 30 April the enemy defences were divided into four isolated parts. Communication between them was only through underground utilities. To prevent Soviet troops from using the underground railway Hitler reportedly ordered the floodgates on the Spree to be opened, though he must have known that the section of the underground between Leipziger Strasse and Unter den Linden, where thousands of Berliners

were hiding in the stations, would be flooded.

But for the Soviet troops the Reichstag building was very symbolic too. On 6 November 1944 in a report at a solemn meeting in Moscow dedicated to the 27th anniversary of the October Revolution the Supreme Commander J.V. Stalin set the task of hoisting the Flag of Victory over Berlin. His call was widely used in the media. However, it was unclear what the Victory Flag should be like, or where exactly it ought to be hoisted.

On the eve of the Battle of Berlin at a meeting of the heads of the political departments of the armies of the 1st Belorussian Front near the town of Landsberg the question was raised: which object in Berlin should be considered the main one? A member of the Military Council of the front, Lieutenant General K.F. Telegin, specifically asked Moscow for an explanation as to where to hoist the Victory Flag. The answer came: over the Reichstag. The decision was made by Stalin himself.

The Flag of Victory

By the evening of 30 April units of the 150th and 171st Rifle Divisions (commanded by Major General V.M. Shatilov and Colonel A.I. Negoda), as a result of repeated attacks, had overcome stubborn resistance and broken into the Reichstag building. The 756th (the commander: Colonel Z.N. Zinchenko), 674th (the commander: Lieutenant Colonel A.D. Plekhodanov) and 380th (the commander: Major V.D. Shatalin) Rifle Regiments participated directly in the storming of the Reichstag. They were supported by the 23rd Tank Brigade (the commander: Colonel S.V. Kuznetsov). On the night of 1

May a fierce fighting broke out inside the Reichstag. Battles were fought for each floor, and hand-to-hand fights ensued on the stairs and in the corridors. The storming fighters cleared the building of Fascists metre by metre, room after room. As they did it, the Soviet soldiers hoisted Red Flags in various places.

During the storming of the Reichstag soldiers and officers of the Rifle Battalions under the command of Captains S.A. Neustroev, V.I. Davydov and Senior Lieutenant K. Ya. Samsonov, the Tank Battalions by Major I.L. Yartsev and Captain S.V. Krasovsky, and a separate group under the command of M.M. Bondar, Captain V.N. Makov and Lieutenant R. Koshkarbaev, especially distinguished themselves. On the night of 1 May the Victory Flag flew over the dome of the defeated Reichstag.

In the past two or three decades, historians have been arguing fruitlessly over the priority of hoisting the Victory Flag over the Reichstag building in Berlin. But there has never been a secret here if you follow the path of the big truth, which has absorbed all the details of the very important historical fact. On 2 May the Red Flag No. 5 of the Military Council of the 3rd Shock Army, hoisted by Sergeant M.A. Yegorov and Junior Sergeant M.V. Kantaria, scouts of the 756th Infantry Regiment of the 150th Idritsa Infantry Division of the Order of Kutuzov, 2nd degree, on the night of 1 May was moved to the dome of the Reichstag. It became a symbol of the Victory of the Soviet Army over the Nazi Army. Incidentally, it was the fourth flag installed on the roof of the building. The first three flags had been destroyed by the night-time long-range German shelling of the Reichstag roof.

The fighting for the Reichstag continued till 1 May, with separate



Marshal of the Soviet Union Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov takes the Victory Parade. June 24, 1945

groups of Fascists holding up in basements and continuing to resist till the morning of 2 May. In the battles for the Reichstag the enemy lost over 2,000 soldiers and officers, and over 2,600 were captured. The storming of the Reichstag was the final chord of the Battle of Berlin. Most of Hitler's leaders, including Göring, Himmler, Keitel and Jodl, had fled Berlin in advance. Fearing punishment for his crimes, Hitler committed suicide on 30 April, and Goebbels did the same on 1 May. When Zhukov informed J.V. Stalin about Hitler's suicide and the new German Government's proposal to conclude an armistice, he replied: "You've had it, bastard. Pity we didn't take him alive."

On 2 May the mass surrender of the Nazi troops of the Berlin

garrison began. Fighting against the separate groups trying to break through to the west ended on 5 May. From 3 to 8 May the troops of the 1st Belorussian Front went out to the Elbe, finishing off separate enemy groups. The 1st Ukrainian Front set to complete the liberation of Czechoslovakia. The 2nd Belorussian Front, pursuing the remnants of the enemy's defeated 3rd Tank Army, reached the Baltic Sea and the Elbe line on 3–4 May, where it established contact with the British 2nd Army.

The resistance of the German Fascist troops was finally broken. On 8 May representatives of the German High Command signed the Act of Surrender of the Armed Forces of Nazi Germany

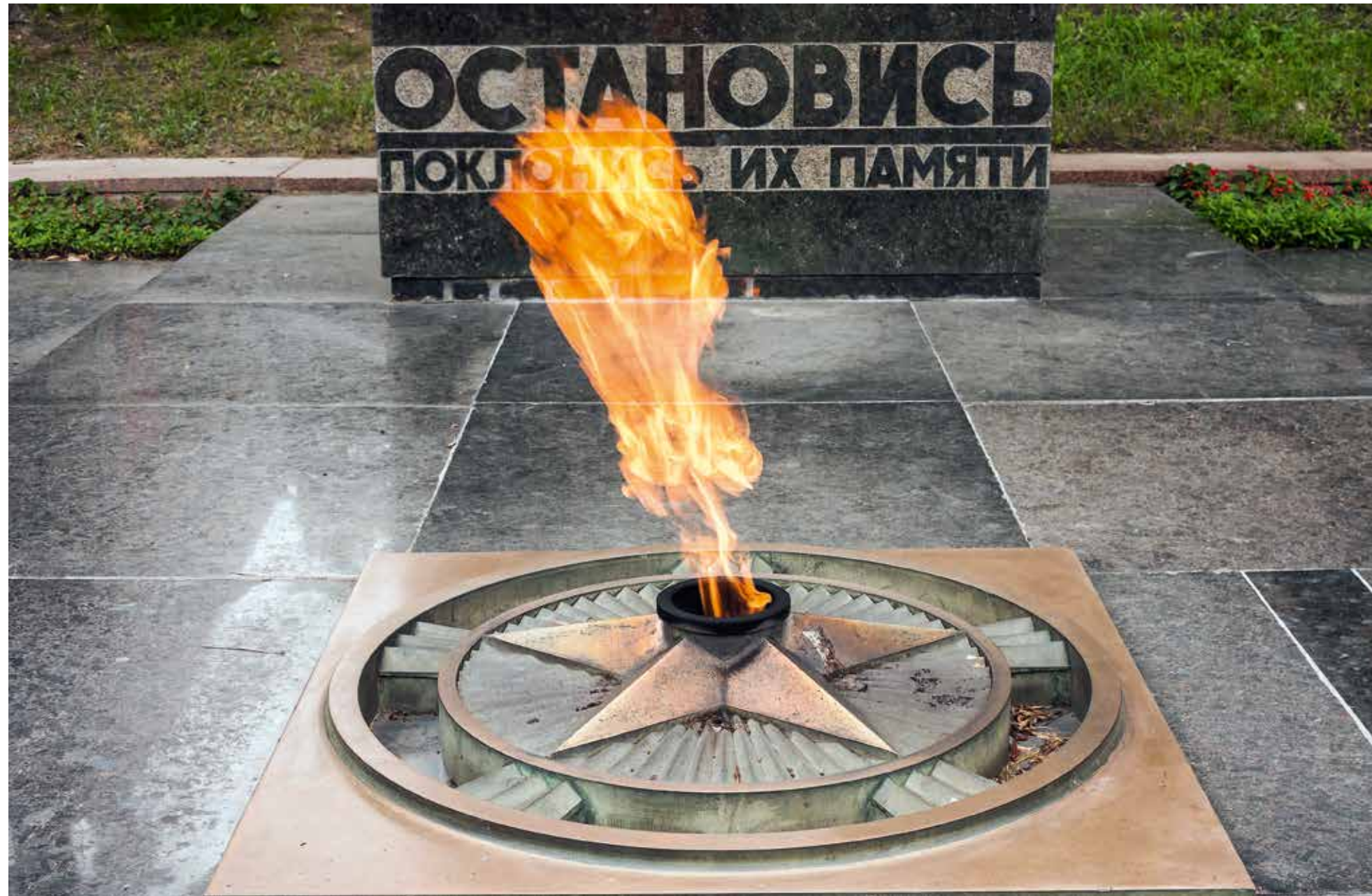
in Karlshorst. During the Battle of Berlin, the Soviet Army defeated seventy infantry twenty-three tank and motorised divisions, destroyed most of the Wehrmacht's aviation, captured about 480,000 people, captured up to 11,000 guns and mortars, over 1,500 tanks and assault guns, 4,500 aircraft and other equipment. The Battle of Berlin cost a lot to the Soviet Army as well: the irretrievable losses amounted to 78,291 people, and sanitary losses – 274,184.

After the Victory Day Parade, which took place on 24 June 1945 on Red Square in Moscow, on 7 September of the same year the Allied Victory Day Parade was held at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin.

NO ONE IS FORGOTTEN BY THE MERCIFUL GOD

Eternal memory to all veterans and heroes of the Great Patriotic War and to all innocent victims

By AUGUSTIN SOKOLOVSKI,
Doctor of Theology, priest



This year, people of good will and the Russian Orthodox Church commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Great Victory. For the Church, as the People of God, wandering in history, this historical remembrance takes on biblical contours. On the eightieth anniversary of the Victory, the sacred number forty is multiplied by two and becomes a double duty of remembrance and thanksgiving.

The Church thanks God for preserving our Motherland, this Earthly City, which, having overcome the incredible hardships and trials of the Great Patriotic War, stood firm, and was preserved for future prosperity. At the same time, the Church thanks God for the heroism and self-sacrifice of all those who participated in the nationwide feat.

On Victory Day, May 9, the Church prays for all the many victims of the War, and especially remembers the fallen soldiers, deceased veterans, home front workers and all those involved in the common cause. The Church remembers all our fellow citizens who lived in that incredibly difficult, tragic and heroic time.

“For the memory and remission of sins of all who have departed from this age, in the Orthodox faith: our ancestors, our grandmothers and grandfathers, our fathers, our mothers, our brothers, our sisters, our sons and our daughters; for all who have fallen asleep in the hope of resurrection and eternal life,” this is how the Church begins its prayer at the beginning of the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great, the rite of which is distinguished by its special solemnity. These initial prayers are part of the rite of preparation for the eucharistic liturgy, called the offering in the language of Orthodox worship, or, in Greek, the *proskomedia*.

In liturgical prayers, the dead are most often called the departed, that is, literally, those who have fallen asleep, or are in a temporary sleep.

Initially, memorial days were introduced by the Church so that it could remember all those who no one else can remember and for whom no one else can pray. This is the meaning of universal, that is, obligatory, memorial remembrances. For the understanding of the Western reader, we note that in Western Christianity these Orthodox

memorial days correspond to November 2, when the memory of all souls is celebrated. There are only two such universal obligatory memorial days: on Saturday nine days before Lent and on Saturday nine days before the Feast of All Saints in Orthodoxy, that is, on Saturday before Pentecost. There is always a special symbolism in biblical and liturgical numbers. These are two Universal Memorial Saturdays of commemoration in Orthodoxy.

There are also days of remembrance of fallen and deceased soldiers in the liturgical calendar. There are few such days, and they can be forgotten over time. Because human memory, even grateful memory, is unfortunately short.

The day of remembrance of the soldiers who took part in the Battle of Kulikovo Field, which took place on September 8, 1380, was originally St Demetrius Saturday. It is celebrated on the Saturday before the day of remembrance of the Holy Great Martyr Dmitry (October 26, or November 8, according to the modern Gregorian calendar). Hence its name. This is approximately the fortieth day after the historical date of the Battle of Kulikovo.

Let us recall that Kulikovo Field is in the southeast of the modern Tula region in the upper reaches of the Don River. Here, for the first time in history, the Russian army was able not only to resist, but also to defeat the army of the Mongol conquerors. This event is considered the beginning of the liberation of the Russian land from the Mongol yoke. It is comparable to the Iberian Reconquista.

It is quite remarkable that in the history of Christianity there were only two civilizations and two peoples, Russian and Iberian, Spanish, respectively, who were able to gain freedom after a long period of domination by Islamic conquerors.



It is remarkable that “both Reconquistas” took place in the West and East of Europe respectively and, having begun at completely different times, ended almost simultaneously. The completion of the Reconquista grew into the discovery of the New World for the Iberians, and Russia began to spread far to the East, to the very edge of the Eurasian continent right up to Russian America. In our time of general discord and confusion of nations (cf. Luke 21:25), it is very important to remember such amazing communities of historical destinies.

But let’s return to the commemoration. St Demetrius Saturday is named after the Holy Great Martyr Demetrius. According to his life, Saint Demetrius suffered for his faith in Christ as the proconsul of Thessaloniki around 306. In popular piety, he is considered the patron saint of pious rulers and Orthodox soldiers.

Such details are important for understanding the essence of church commemorations. They help us find the keys to a proper theological understanding of the memory

of the victorious and sorrowful events of modern times.

In the image of Saint Demetrius Saturday and so that the commemoration of the heroes and participants of the Great Patriotic War would continue for centuries and acquire the contours of prayerful remembrance, the Church, by the definition of the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church, decided to hold a special annual commemoration of deceased soldiers on Victory Day, May 9. We remember “the soldiers and all who gave their lives for the faith, the Fatherland and the people, and all who died in suffering,” the synodal definition says.

This was decided in the autumn of 1994, when many of the now deceased veterans were still alive. This decision, making the holiday a day of remembrance, was worldly wise and, at the same time, prophetic. The Church, as a Community of Interpreters, has a collective, in the language of theology, catholic or conciliar ability to look at the world and the course of events in history through the eyes of God.

Everything in the world is temporary, and every bright celebration eventually becomes a remembrance of those who were involved in it. Moreover, this decision to make Victory Day a remembrance would have been made much earlier if the Church in the Soviet Union had not been subjected to pressure from those in power and atheist ideology. The Church believes that through the prayers of the saints, especially those who lived in recent times and were partly our contemporary, she has gained freedom for the revival of Faith.

The Bible Book of Genesis tells how the brothers sold the righteous Joseph to the nomads. They handed him over to the Egyptians. On an unjust charge, he ended up in prison. “But the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison,” says the Scripture (Gen. 39:21). In the 20th century, something similar happened to the Russian Church. But with the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, Stalin, whom his parents once named after the biblical Joseph, and although he himself hardly came to faith, remembered the Church for the sake of saving the Fatherland. In the fall of 1943, the Russian Church was able to elect a Patriarch. The existence of the Orthodox Church in the eyes of the state became legal. Such are the inscrutable ways of God in history (Rom. 11:33).

According to the liturgical charter of the Orthodox Church, commemoration is not only possible at a memorial service, panikhida or litany, held at a cemetery, but is also necessary when the Church gathers in the temple at the liturgy to pray for all those who lived and died. The Church fervently commemorates all those whom we knew and whom we did not know, whom we sympathize with, whom we grieve for, but also those whom we never

knew, about whom, sometimes, we never heard in life, but on whose intercession and boldness before God we hope, for these people need to be commemorated together with the righteous. “With the saints give rest, O Christ, to the souls of Thy servants,” is the Church’s key prayer for the dead. It is a true hymn of Christian hope.

“Let us also pray for those who have been mown down by war, those who have been caught in earthquakes, killed by robbers or burned by fire; for those who have become prey to wild animals, birds, wild monsters or anything that lives in the sea; for those who have disappeared without a trace; for those who have been struck by lightning, caught in the cold in the mountains, on the road, in the desert or alone; for those who have been carried away by sorrow or joy; for those who have suffered, in good days and in misfortunes, in prison or in camps, for those who have been killed on the road, or whom hail, snow, torrential rains, rocks or earth have surrounded and covered and who have fallen suddenly; for those who have been poisoned or suffocated; for those who have received all kinds of injuries and wounds,” the Liturgy of Basil the Great continues its prayer. Reading the memoirs of Andrei Platonov, Viktor Astafyev and other front-line soldiers, we remember how great the malice of the Nazi invaders was and how many people they killed not by force of arms, but by treachery, cruelty, driven by hateful hostility. The Church prays for all the innocently killed.

The Lord Jesus “lives forever and has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is also able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” (Heb. 7:24–25).

This means that the memory of all those whom no one else

remembers – their names and faces, their eyes and smiles, their bodies and memories, their joys and sorrows, their disappointments and successes, their biography and life – is remembered by the Lord Jesus. By His prayer He grants them his redeeming grace. We, remembering those whom no one remembers, join in this life-giving power. Grace is communion, grace is communication. The Church believes that the Lord will never let go of those whom he himself loved.

“Let us pray for people of all ages: the old, the young, those in the prime of life, teenagers, children, those who have not seen the light of day, men and women; “Those whom we have not mentioned because we do not know them or have forgotten them, or because they are too many, remember them all, O God, You who know the name and age of each one,” the prayer continues. This prayer of the Church is supported by divine Scripture. “And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the heaven and the earth fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the Book of Life,” the Book of Revelation says (cf. Rev. 20:11–13). Remembering the slogan that once seemed simply sorrowful, but now, when we have come to faith in Christ, has turned out to be deeply biblical, we repeat the words: “No one is forgotten, and nothing is forgotten.” No one is forgotten and nothing is forgotten before the merciful God.

The expression “Eternal Memory” has several meanings. It sounds different in different circumstances. So, it is the memory of relatives and friends about the departed, which will continue from generation to generation. Descendants will remember their ancestor, or

ancestors. This memory will be very long, but after many generations it will still end. For nothing lasts forever under the sun.

In relation to heroes and veterans of the Great Patriotic War, the wish for eternal memory goes beyond the boundaries of a particular clan or family and becomes universal for all compatriots and people of good will. They will be remembered with gratitude. The human sea of remembering will never dry up. Because the community of memory will always make up for personal or family oblivion, eternal memory is overcoming the human tendency to forget.

Another meaning of the phrase “Eternal Memory” refers to the realm of the sacred. Although the heroic and the sacred often come into contact; to avoid turning Christianity into a civil religion, the Church tries not to identify these two spheres. As our contemporary, philosopher Giorgio Agamben (born 1942) writes, contrary to popular opinion, the etymology of the concept of “religious” is not, to connect the secular and the sacred, the human and the divine, but to separate them correctly and consistently. After all, the secular and everyday are valuable in themselves, and one comes to God by free will and in love for Jesus.

Finally, and this is the main thing, eternal memory is eternal life, real and full, it is life in Christ Jesus before God forever and ever.

Therefore, on Victory Day, and on all days of this jubilee year, when we celebrate the eightieth anniversary of the end of the Great Patriotic War, the Church asks God for eternal memory.

Eternal memory to all our relatives and friends, to all those we remember and forget, to all heroes of the Great Patriotic War, to all innocent victims, our dear brothers and sisters, eternal memory, Immortal Angelic Regiment!

THE SEARCH FOR HUMANITY

Boris Nemensky on War and Creative Work, Russia and Its Future

*The interview was conducted
By SERGEY VOLODIN*



The People's Artist of Russia Boris Nemensky is rightly reckoned as the patriarch of great Russian artists. He was born on 24 December 1922 in Moscow. After school he studied at the Moscow Academic Art College in memory of 1905. After graduating with honours during

the Great Patriotic War, he refused military deferment and, after being conscripted, was sent to the Studio of Military Artists named after M.B. Grekov. In the autumn of 1942, he was at the front and reached Berlin.

His famous painting, *Mother*, was immediately acquired by

the Tretyakov Gallery in 1945. Nemensky's works can be found at the most prestigious museums in the world and in private collections in Germany, Japan, France, the UK, etc. A member of the Russian Academy of Arts and of the Russian Academy of Education, he received many awards for his work, including the State Prize of the Russian Federation, the Order "for Merit to the Fatherland", and the Order of St Andrew the Iconographer. Educational activities have taken a special place in the artist's life. For over half a century he has been teaching painting at the Department of Art of the Gerasimov Russian State University of Cinematography (VGIK).

Nemensky's work is a classic of Russian fine art; many of the artist's paintings are living anthologies. The subjects of his paintings often reflect the impressions of his youth on the fronts of the Great Patriotic War, but their content is much broader and addressed to the present. We have talked with Boris Mikhailovich on the segment of the path of Russian art he has been following for so many decades.

– Many memories of people of your generation are associated with the Great Patriotic War. What does that war mean to you personally?

– War is always a tragedy. But at the same time, for me, as for everybody who fought in it and survived, it became a school of life and allowed us to grasp the main values of life better. The years at

the front developed me as a person, shaping my understanding of art. That twenty-year-old soldier-artist lives in me to this day. The most important thing is that at that time I discovered in myself many profound common points with our people, with those who were defending our right to continue life as was predetermined by our history, ancestors, and land. Despite all the twists of fate.

Obviously, this is why all my paintings (both about war and life during peace) in one way or another originated there. The theme of the war experience became the basis for my reflections. Good and evil, light and filth, joy and sadness are all the keener and stand out more at the front. Not only are life and death clearly opposed there, but also duty and cowardice, meanness, and honour... Then I realised that I viewed art as a search for humanity. And my memories of the events and people of the war turned into reflections on life.

– Boris Mikhailovich, please recall one or two memorable episodes from the war. Which of the friends and comrades of that time do you particularly remember?

– I went to the front as a soldier and a military artist at the same time. Our army had such a special military unit, set up before the war. It consisted of officers and soldiers who were professional artists. Their task was to depict the war chronicle, to make drawings and sketches directly on the battlefields, at the forefront. We made our own "special reports" from the theatre of military operations. There was not a single significant military operation in which military artists did not participate. Our front-line sketches went on their exhibition journey, working in a combat environment, so, unfortunately, quite many of them have not survived. I always remember my Studio mates:



Mother. 1945

interesting, bright people and wonderful artists. They are alive in my memory forever: Pyotr Krivonogov, Vladimir Gavrilov, Georgy Khrapak, Gennady Prokopinsky and Pavel Globa.

I served at many fronts. First, I was sent to Vyazma and Velikiye Luki, then to the Leningrad front, and next, together with units of our Army, I walked throughout Ukraine, and in April 1945 I entered Berlin.

Initially, I was attracted to the heroic spirit at the front: battles, assaults and victories. It seemed that the brighter and more spectacular, the more significant. Then it dawned on me that it was not so many actions of soldiers that mattered, as they themselves: ordinary people dressed in soldiers' overcoats who decided the fate of the whole world with their amazing tenacity. This later became the main content of my paintings. I depicted not so much battles as the fates and feelings of people through whose lives the war had passed.

It is hard to single out particular points. But probably the first days of my participation in hostilities and the experiences of Victory days are the most vivid memories. At the front I soon ended up in Velikiye Luki. Fierce fighting was going on there. The town was burned to the ground: not a single living person survived, not a single house remained intact there. Suddenly the soldiers found a little girl who looked like a faded, emaciated old woman. She didn't speak or ask for anything and didn't cry anymore, but just stared. The soldiers surrounded her, trying to feed and support that barely glimmering lump of life. And it seemed to me that they were warming up around her. Over the years that painful memory turned into my painting, *Soldier-Fathers*. All my paintings contain the source of a personal impression; they are reflections and a summary of real experience.

I mean, during the war everyone understood why I was painting.



Breath of Spring. 1955

Our sketches, perhaps too cursory, contained the full truth of the feelings of the direct participants in those events. I remember painting a sketch during a battle in Friedrichstrasse, a Berlin street engulfed in flames. There was constant noise, smoke was billowing into the sky in violent eddies, and I had to blow the ashes off the palette all the time. The houses were gradually collapsing. And the soldiers who were running past strove to move me away: "Look out, it's going to collapse on you!" But at the same time, they would add: "But you paint! Paint how Hitler's lair is being burned!" On Victory Day I climbed the Brandenburg Gate by scaling ladders, to the very top. There I got onto the triumphal chariot horse's croup, which had been badly damaged by shelling, and settled down to paint a sketch of a burning street. I was frantically working on a "monument of history". It is a pity that sketch has not survived.

– *After the disappearance of the USSR from the world map, attempts were made (in some cases successful and necessary, and in some cases futile and stupid) to revise Soviet literature and art. How do you assess the achievements in these areas during the Soviet era?*

– Very highly! Perhaps no other country has such a rich "self-portrait", such a level of awareness of its beauty, originality and its problems. At that period wonderful masterpieces were born in music, literature, cinema, theatre, and visual arts. This often happened in spite of officialdom, but not in defiance of people's real feelings and aspirations. If you erase this art from our lives and the life of the whole world (regardless of the circumstances), culture will become impoverished. Undoubtedly, our art is part of the European and world art, but we have our own unique path, and it became

especially evident in the twentieth century. Though it has always been obvious since the age of icon-painting. Russian art in all periods of history has been characterised by the search for spirituality. Russia is a country of complicated yet subtle spiritual culture, a country that has gone through numerous trials and tribulations with dignity. And it is expressed in the work of artists.

The best art of the Soviet era is about life with all its contradictions and various interpretations. This is its deepest essence. This reflects the need to express your joy or pain, doubts and the search for truth in the language of art. Those who strive to paint it in a single black or grey paint belittle not only Russian art, but also its entire history.

– *Its history has seen everything, and in different spheres of life. There were sad and tragic pages too. Though I agree with you: the black-and-grey approach is fundamentally flawed.*

– Of course, my "sphere" is closer to me. Yes, officialdom and repressions did their dirty work. True, there were a huge number of purely illustrative and bombastic paintings, but they provoked appropriate assessments, and sometimes even disgust, in both artists and viewers. Meanwhile, many artists of the older generation wholeheartedly shared the romance of the revolutionary years and believed in the beauty of everyday life of the common people. Their romantic, tragic and lyrical works expressed the dreams and concerns of those years. True, their dreams sometimes remained unfulfilled, or even deceived, and worries justified.

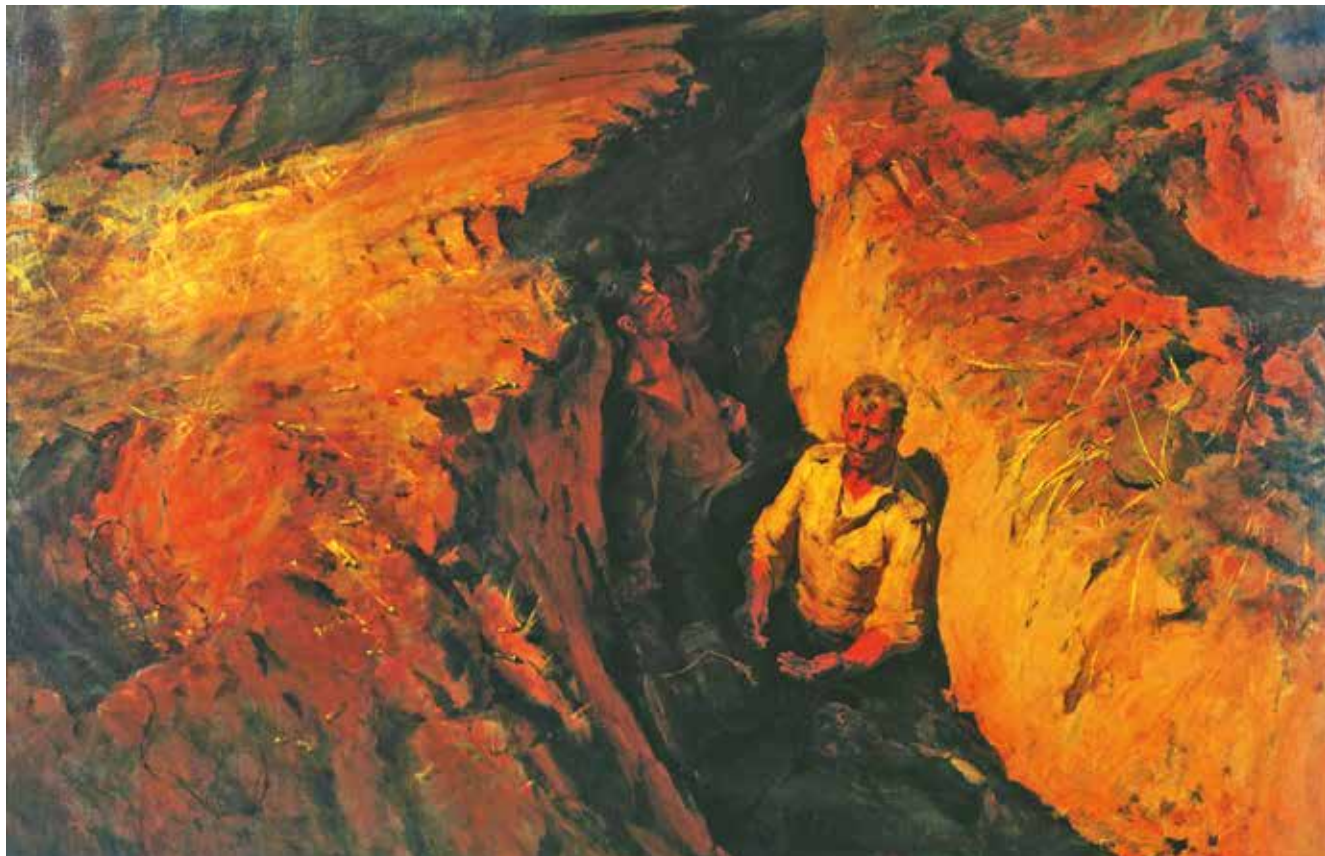
The style of the age, common to all European artists at that time, was revealed in art in our country and in the West in very different ways. And above all it was because of the difference in our fundamental values. It is very noticeable now how

different our moral origins and faith are. In Russia the art of complex thinking flourished, in defiance of officialdom and in parallel with it.

– *I think it is time to recall those you worked with, your like-minded people.*

– My older friends were wonderful artists: Pavel Korin, who was powerful and able to convey the tragedy of life masterfully; and the inspiring and dreamy Yuri Pimenov. Pavel Mikhailovich liked my paintings to be problematic, metaphorical and filled with drama; while Yuri Ivanovich considered my lyrical paintings to be my stronger side and encouraged it in every possible way. The work of my colleagues and friends in the Artists Trade Union, such different ones as Valentin Sidorov, Viktor Ivanov, Andrei Gorsky, Dmitry Zhilinsky and Takhir Salakhov (to name but a few), meant a lot to me...

On my mind, in the second half of the twentieth century we had a very vibrant and original art. I can't help but mention my pupils: among them are a wonderful colourist, People's Artist of Russia Vladimir Yelchaninov and another People's Artist Vyacheslav Samarin with his involved, deep paintings where every detail is meaningful. Before my eyes is a marvellous painting by Valery Balabanov, also a People's Artist: a black horse and a white horse rearing up confronting each other. The viewer is sure to find profound meanings in this work. And here is another People's Artist, Mikhail Abakumov. When he was my first-year student at VGIK, I painted his portrait, "Misha, the Sun and Flowers": a blond, strapping guy wearing a wreath of yellow dandelions; and a completely different image of a strong, resolute and tensely-thinking artist: I did it five years later, and this painting is now at the Tretyakov Gallery. Or



Scorched Earth. 1957

the lyrical landscape painter Viktor Braginsky! There are a whole host of such paintings.

All of them studied and worked during the Soviet era, and later they did not get lost in the modern world, albeit each of them has his own destiny. The artist is a child of his time, his generation, his country, a focus of its feelings, thoughts and attitudes. In this context, he paves his own ways of interpreting reality. I grew up in the traditions of Russian culture, I am a Russian artist, and I am convinced of this.

– *We can still hear mocking assessments of the term “Socialist Realism”. It is not clear to many. After all, there is no such term as “Capitalist Realism”.*

– Realism is an art in which an artist strives to express his personal attitude

to the reality of life. I’m a Realist. But I have never understood the concept of Socialist Realism, and it is unlikely that my work agrees with this concept. Despite the circumstances, I have always been a free and sincere artist and have never worked to order. I don’t have any ideological or political works, nor any official portraits. Though now many people say that it is impossible, that Soviet artists had to fulfill State orders. The first time I realised that any expression by an artist has a political content was when my painting *Breath of Spring* (it is currently at the Russian Museum) was initially not accepted. I was told that a soldier at the front should not think about spring and snowdrops. Yes, I was often criticised, and on several occasions my works were removed from prestigious exhibitions because of their content. Since I wanted to

finish the painting *Nameless Height*, I had to leave the Studio of Military Artists named after M.B. Grekov.

Now many say that everything that happened in those years was either officialdom (let’s call it Socialist Realism) or non-conformism. That is, in both cases it is vividly politicised creative work. But this is how the main line of its development is erased from our art. This is a desire for simplification and aesthetic determination for the sake of politics. And we often see this tendency both in those who pine for the vanished system and those who hate it. The poet Leonid Martynov aptly remarked: “The old and the little ones are moving, as though round museum halls, looking in insane arrogance at the values of modernity golden from maturity, as if they were fossils.”

Ceremonial art is always present in any age and under any

Government. This is also one of the functions of creative work. There is art that is sometimes very masterful, but superficial. There is also art that is primarily aimed at fellow artists, because the creative emphasis is on finding new forms of artistic expression. And, lastly, there are works that create a vision of the world, visually reflecting what is not expressed in words, but sensually significant.

– *Everything fades into the background when something truly talented breaks through, bringing people discoveries and something inexplicable and fascinating...*

– Yes, this is art. Apart from the political system and its demands, apart from the social system, Russian culture has always existed and still exists, and the main issues it raises and the main problems that concern it do not disappear. As an artist, I have always worked in the context of the Russian Realist school, and for it the themes of compassion, mercy and love have always been in first place. And this tradition did not die out in the Soviet era; on the contrary, it flourished. I was very privileged to see its heyday and work with it.

By the way, not only Russian art thrived. At that time Russia managed to transfer its cultural impulse to the artists of its republics and autonomous regions, nurturing very interesting national art schools from the Baltic States to Transcaucasia and Central Asia. They studied in Moscow and Leningrad, and then became brilliant original artists who created a special image of their national art. Artists, not artisans. They studied at our universities, and then developed in our houses of creativity, where a unique dialogue of cultures continued all the time.

And, most importantly: at that time the viewer looked at art as at spiritual food, not as a material value. This

formed a totally different creative environment than in the West. And it was the power of our art.

Viewers played a huge role. They were not indifferent; exhibitions were always accompanied by arguments and discussions. And there were heated disputes about my paintings. I keep letters from viewers, articles in newspapers and magazines, and books for feedback. They were arguing not just about paintings, but about the understanding of life.

I am positive that art is the most important tool for self-awareness and self-development of both people and society. For me a painting is not a mere wall decoration, but a reflection aimed at a conversation, a reflection together with the viewer.

The subjects of my paintings are always related to my personal experience. But then I work for a long time, analysing what happened and looking for a means of expression. It does not take me long to do a painting, but I prepare and look for a plastic image for a long time. There is a long way from my first sketch to a completed painting, and I make many plein-air studies. There are usually no images of specific people in my paintings, unless they are portraits. It is always a collective image and, I would say, symbolic in essence. It is present even in my first paintings: *Mother*, *Mashenka*, *Breath of Spring*; and certainly in later ones: *It Is Us*, *O Lord! The Parable of Dissent*; *Here Is Your Son...* I strive for each fragment on my paintings not to be accidental, but to bear a metaphor. So, my major paintings can be called “Symbolic” Realism (if you want some attribute).

But, of course, I like to paint portraits as well. There is nothing more interesting than a human face! But for me a portrait is not a copy of a model. It’s a model plus you. The purpose of a work is to reveal the understanding vision of

the one who is portrayed, the poetic interpretation of his personality.

– *I think you must be concerned about what is happening with Russian art today. Please share your observations.*

– There is no unequivocal answer to the question about modernity, including art. Unfortunately, nowadays the value of art is often associated with the successful sales of works. Then gallery owners rejoice that works of art are in high demand. What works? Of course, profitable ones. I am upset by the unjustified and senseless loss of genuine spiritual goals, ideals, and great traditions by art. Why are we foolishly revelling in our self-abasement and self-destruction? I have no answer to this question or full understanding of it. I agree with the Russian poet and philosopher Vyacheslav Ivanov: “The entire human culture still remains a protest against death and destruction.” At least it should...

The so-called modern art that is actively being imposed on us is about the opposite. It is the suppression of humanity in yourself and in others. Though, of course, art is both a field of dispute and a search space. We must not lose the complex essence of art.

Each period of our history is dramatic, and today life is complicated and filled with such incredible contradictions that contemporaries sometimes cannot comprehend. But no one else except ourselves can build our lives so that they can bring more joy and kindness.

I love Alexei Tolstoy’s lines: “Friends, row! In vain do the detractors mean to insult us with their pride. We, the victors of the waves, will soon come ashore solemnly with our shrine!” And further: “We will stir up a counter current against the current!” No matter what may happen, I look at the future with hope.

THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR IN SOVIET CINEMA

Films that told the truth about the war

By EKATERINA GRIG



The Dawns Here Are Quiet (1972)

During the war itself and in its immediate aftermath, Soviet cinema focused on themes of heroism, sacrifice, and the unity of the Soviet people against the fascist invaders. The post-Stalinist era witnessed a shift toward a more nuanced representation of the war. With Khrushchev's Thaw, filmmakers gained more artistic freedom, leading to works that explored the psychological and emotional consequences of the bloodiest and most destructive war in human history.

The Cranes Are Flying (1957), directed by Mikhail Kalatozov, takes a more personal and emotional approach to war. It tells the story of a young couple separated by the war. The film focuses on loss,

longing, and the human cost of war, marking a shift away from purely heroic depictions. It won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, gaining international recognition.

The Ballad of a Soldier (1959) by Grigori Chukhrai follows a young soldier Alyosha, who is granted a brief leave to visit his mother after a heroic act at the front. During his journey, he will meet various people and fall in love for the first time in his life... The film emphasizes themes of love, kindness, and the fleeting nature of happiness during wartime. Unlike traditional war films, *Ballad of a Soldier* focuses on human emotions rather than battle scenes.

The Clear Skies (1961) is a Soviet drama film also directed by Grigori

Chukhrai. The film explores the life of a Soviet pilot during and after World War II, addressing themes of political oppression, redemption, and personal resilience. The story follows Aleksei Astakhov, who was captured by the Germans during the war. Upon his return to the Soviet Union, instead of being welcomed as a hero, he is treated with suspicion, since former prisoners of war were often considered traitors. His struggle to reintegrate into society, the challenges he faces in his personal and professional life, and his relationship with Sasha, a devoted woman who stands by him, form the emotional core of the film.

As Soviet policies shift in the 1950s, Aleksei's status is eventually restored,

reflecting the political thaw under Khrushchev's de-Stalinization.

Clear Skies was a significant cultural marker in Soviet cinema, showing a more humanistic and personal perspective on political issues. It was one of the first Soviet films to openly criticize Stalinist repression, aligning with Khrushchev's more liberal policies.

The film won the Grand Prix at the 1961 Moscow International Film Festival.

The Dawns Here Are Quiet (1972) is a war drama directed by Stanislav Rostotsky based on Boris Vasilyev's novel of the same name. The film nominated for the Academy Award for the Best Foreign Language Film category (1973) tells the tragic and heroic story of a Soviet anti-aircraft unit consisting of five young female soldiers and their commander, Sergeant Vaskov. Stationed in a remote area, they unexpectedly face a squad of Nazi saboteurs attempting to infiltrate Soviet territory. Though poorly armed

and outnumbered, the women choose to stand and fight, displaying incredible bravery and sacrifice.

As the story unfolds, the film explores the backgrounds, hopes, and dreams of each female soldier.

By the 1970s and 1980s, Soviet war films had matured into complex narratives that questioned the cost of war. Films like *They Fought for Their Motherland* (1975) by Sergei Bondarchuk combined patriotism with a deeply personal perspective on soldiers' struggles. This epic war drama is based on the novel by Mikhail Sholokhov. Set during the Battle of Stalingrad, the film depicts the hardships faced by Soviet soldiers as they fight against overwhelming odds. It presents realistic battle sequences and exhaustion of soldiers. The film stands out for its realistic portrayal of the war, showing both physical and psychological struggles.

Elem Klimov's *Come and See* (1985) stands out as a harrowing portrayal of Nazi atrocities in Belarus, utilizing

surrealism and horror elements to depict the war's inhumanity.

It follows a Belarusian boy, Flyora, who joins the resistance against the Nazis and witnesses the atrocities committed against civilians.

The film uses surreal and haunting imagery to convey the horror of war, avoiding traditional action scenes in favour of psychological devastation. It remains a profound anti-war statement and is widely regarded as one of the most powerful and disturbing war films ever made.

Soviet films about the Great Patriotic War were not only significant cultural artifacts but also powerful tools for shaping historical memory. Soviet war films evolved over the decades, from early patriotic propaganda to deeply psychological and emotional works that explored the true cost of war. These films remain an essential part of cinematic heritage, they continue to influence global cinema and remain essential for understanding the Soviet perspective on World War II.