

FOREWORD

If we, the human race, are even the least bit fortunate, we shall never again suffer a conflagration as enormous and as horrific as the Second World War. Conservative estimates place the final death toll of the war near 50 million while many historians suggest more than 70 million. Well over two-thirds of the fatalities were civilians, many of whom were killed as innocent bystanders to pitched battles, indiscriminate artillery barrages and bombings. Millions more were killed deliberately through intentional, organized campaigns of mass murder.

The magnitude of losses suffered by the Soviet people is virtually beyond compare with respect to totals on both the Allied and Axis sides of the conflict. Around 27 million of the total casualties of the Second World War were citizens of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, 17 million of them civilians. By comparison, the United States, France and Britain – the largest contingents of the Allied forces after the USSR – suffered a combined total of 1.1 million military and civilian casualties. While the number is a formidable death toll unto itself, the losses of the three most powerful industrialized nations were but a mere fraction of those inflicted upon the USSR.

Axis losses were tremendous as well, but still much smaller than those of the Soviet Union. Nazi Germany counted approximately 5.3 million military and civilian deaths, while Japan's war losses totaled 2.2 million, including almost 225,000 civilian casualties of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.^{1,2}

¹ *World War II*, p. 303.

The USSR also endured debilitating blows to infrastructure and industry. In the areas occupied by the Germans, about 2/3 of the houses and productive capacity was destroyed.³ The incredible toll wrought upon the USSR by the forces of Nazi Germany did not deter the Soviet people from victory in the face of unprecedented adversity. The heroism of the Soviet youth – who brought Nazi Germany to its knees long before the Allied landings – stands out as a beacon for all humanity.

Following Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Joseph Stalin at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956, the Soviet government embarked upon an extensive campaign of ideological emendation known as "de-Stalinization." The bitter irony of this political paradigm shift was that it brought about an across-the-board, Orwellian alteration of Soviet history that included the systematic revision of historical texts and official government documents. In the years following the demise of the USSR, a new wave of ideological "redress" has swept the nations of the former Soviet Union, resulting in a new period of hyper-revisionism bent upon the vilification of all things Soviet, including the memories and legacies of those who defended the Motherland in its most perilous hour.

Historians, pundits and ideologues have spent the better part of a half-century debating Stalin's merits as a head of state and as a military commander. The tasks of this volume do not include the perpetuation of this debate. The documents in this collection present the youngest heroes of the deadly struggle against fascism from 1941 to 1945. These articles and speeches are drawn from original source material published in the USSR during and after the war, presenting the stories of a daring and dedicated youth movement in the original context and emotion of the day.

² "Hiroshima and Nagasaki Death Toll,"
www.aasc.ucla.edu/cab/index.html

³ *The World Almanac of World War II*, p. 614.

Stalin and the Great Patriotic War

For most of the 1930s, the menace of German imperialism cast a long shadow over Europe and by the waning years of the decade, an all-out war between the major powers of Western Europe seemed a virtual certainty. But Hitler did not limit his territorial and political aspirations to the nations of Europe, having publicly vowed to destroy Bolshevism and “defeat the Soviet Union” in 1938. Indeed, the Soviets had few illusions as to the true nature of the Nazi regime in the years prior to the German attack.⁴

In the years leading up to the war, the Soviets engaged in a series of defensive measures on diplomatic, political and military fronts which were aimed at staving off a large-scale conflict with fascist Germany for as long as possible. Already on guard against the “capitalist encirclement” of the USSR, the Soviet Union had mobilized to a state preparedness against an impending attack as early as February 1938.⁵ By mid-1939, the possibility of Anglo-French and Soviet united front against Germany was an impossibility, as the Soviets became aware of covert duplicity on the part of the British and French governments. The 1939 “Treaty of Non-aggression” between the USSR and German ostensibly guaranteed peace between the two nations for at least 10 years, but the conditions under which the agreement was reached were tenuous at best. Nevertheless, the non-aggression pact afforded the Soviets a much-needed opportunity to prepare for an inevitable conflict with German imperialism. By the autumn of 1940 – less than one year into the ten-year pact with USSR – the Nazi leadership had already built a formidable anti-Soviet bloc, signing military treaties with governments of Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Finland.⁶

⁴ *A History of the USSR, Part Three*, p. 396

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *History of the USSR, Vol III*, p. 7.

Despite extensive preparations for an inevitable conflict with fascism, Germany's June 22, 1941 attack on the USSR was met with understandable alarm and consternation on the part of the Soviet populace. Both the scale and ferocity of the Nazi assault were overwhelming but the Soviet military fought doggedly to halt the eastern advance.

In the first two weeks of fierce fighting, the German army advanced almost 600 kilometers into the western USSR. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet troops lost their lives defending the Motherland from the initial German onslaught and many more were captured. Under the leadership of Marshals Georgy Zhukov and Semyon Timoshenko, Soviet forces engaged the invaders and inflicted some early losses but failed to halt the advancing fascist juggernaut. The USSR's war machine was, by this point, fully mobilized and the Soviet government called upon the masses to bolster the ranks of its military.

In the hours following the June 22 invasion, the Soviet government appealed to the people of the nation to stand firm in the face of Nazi aggression. Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov, who had personally negotiated the terms of the 1939 "Treaty of Non-aggression" between the USSR and Germany, was the first to address the nation by radio following the outbreak of hostilities:

The government of the Soviet Union expresses the firm conviction that the whole population of our country, all workers, peasants and intellectuals, men and women, will conscientiously perform their duties and do their work. Our entire people must now stand solid and united as never before.

Each one of us must demand of himself and of others discipline, organization and self-denial worthy of real Soviet patriots, in order to provide for all the needs of the Red Army, Navy and Air Force, to insure victory over the enemy.

The government calls upon you, citizens of the Soviet Union, to rally still more closely around our glorious Bolshe-

vist party, around our Soviet Government, around our great leader and comrade, Stalin. Ours is a righteous cause. The enemy shall be defeated. Victory will be ours.⁷

Molotov's speech was a stirring call to arms that effectively recruited thousands of everyday citizens to service within the ranks of the Soviet military. Regional and local political cadres followed suit, urging citizens to enlist and serve in the defense of the Motherland. But as important as these efforts were in the early stages of the war effort, the Soviet people anxiously awaited guidance and words of comfort from their leader, Joseph Stalin.

By the first week of July 1941, the Nazi blitzkrieg had inflicted a terrible toll on the armed forces of the USSR. The Soviet government realized the gravity of the situation and were keenly aware that the USSR faced the real possibility of complete and utter defeat should the Germans capture Moscow. On July 3, 1941, Stalin himself took to the airwaves to directly address the people of the Soviet Union.



The importance of Stalin's July 3, 1941 "Radio Broadcast on the Invasion of the USSR" cannot be overstated. The tone of his much-anticipated address was reassuring, steadfast and defiant. His appeal presented the USSR as a diverse yet unified alliance of nationalities and ethnicities, all under threat of extinction by the common foe. Knowing full well that the USSR faced a grave situation, he articulated the full scope and nature of the Nazi threat, comparing the immediate struggle with Russia's 1812 war against Napoleonic France. Stalin pointed out that the war against Germany was not an ordinary war, but a nation-wide "pa-

⁷ Molotov, *Radio Address of the Vice-Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the U.S.S.R. and People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs*, p. 3.

triotic war” against fascist oppressors.⁸ With a standing army of thousands and an enlistment campaign in full swing, Stalin articulated an essential strategy in the defeat of Nazi units in occupied territories: guerrilla warfare. In his radio address, he explicitly called upon the Soviet populace to wage unconventional warfare against the German units in areas that were already under the control of the Nazis:

In areas occupied by the enemy, guerrilla units, mounted and on foot, must be formed, diversionist groups must be organized to combat the enemy troops, to foment guerrilla warfare everywhere, to blow up bridges and roads, damage telephone and telegraph lines, set fire to forests, stores, transports.

In the occupied regions conditions must be made unbearable for the enemy and all his accomplices. They must be hounded and annihilated at every step, and all their measures frustrated.⁹

Those who would heed Stalin’s call for a partisan resistance movement faced extreme danger and dark, bloody days ahead. But their heroic efforts would ultimately change the course of the war in the occupied territories. Workers and peasants composed the bulk of the guerilla units, but their ranks were supported by a new and dynamic force: the Soviet youth movement.

Youth Against Fascism

From the early days of the Russian Revolution, the youth culture of the Soviet Union proved vital to the existence of the fledgling nation. V.I. Lenin recognized the importance of the involvement of young Soviet citizens on the political and labor fronts and wrote extensively on the development of the communist youth movement. One of his most influential speeches on the topic was

⁸ See pages 71-79 for the full text of Stalin’s radio address.

⁹ *Ibid.*

his 1920 address to the Third All-Russia Congress of the Russian Young Communist League. This speech, known as “Tasks of the Youth Leagues” articulated the fundamental tenets of the discipline and organization that would prove essential to the movement’s two main branches. The Young Pioneer Organization of the Soviet Union was a “scouting” organization for children 10 to 15 years old and the Young Communist League featured a membership of young Soviets aged 14 or 15 to their late 20s.

The German invasion of the USSR brought the Soviet Youth movement to the forefront. Stalin’s speech on the invasion of the USSR was a cry of *in hoc signo vinces*¹⁰ to the young generation of the Soviet Union. During the Great Patriotic War, the Soviet youth movement proved themselves to be a true vanguard of Soviet youth. Tens of thousands of Young Pioneers and members of the Communist Union of Youth, or “Komsomol,” served in the ranks of the Red Army and among the partisan guerillas, fighting to defend the USSR. Komsomol members were among the most celebrated and decorated heroes of the war. Following the final victory over Nazi Germany, the contributions of the Komsomol were formally recognized by the Soviet government, as the organization was awarded the Order of Lenin for Outstanding Services to the Motherland.

Prologue: Zoya’s Story

One of the most enduring tales of heroism from the days of the Great Patriotic War is the story of the Soviet partisan Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya. A former Young Pioneer and a member of the

¹⁰ “In this sign you will conquer,” from the Greek “εν τούτω νικά.” This phrase is commonly associated with the legend concerning Constantine I’s vision before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in A.D. 312. V. I. Lenin invoked an adaptation of these words (“By this sign shall ye conquer...”) in his December 1, 1902 article “New Events and Old Questions.”

Moscow Komsomol, she was one of the thousands of youth to answer the call in the months following the invasion of the USSR. Her bravery and sacrifice would establish her as one of the most legendary heroes of the Soviet youth movement and the partisan resistance.

Like the millions of workers and soldiers who joined in the fight against Nazi Germany during the war, Zoya's life began amidst humble surroundings. But her extraordinary bravery and courage would eventually elevate her to the ranks of the most legendary of Soviet heroes.

Zoya was just 17 years old when the German Army invaded her homeland on June 22, 1941. She heard about the attack over the radio and shared the news with her mother, Lyubov. Like all Soviet citizens, she was deeply concerned and wanted to contribute to the fight against the fascists. She engaged in political work and joined a fire brigade during the first Nazi bombardment of Moscow. She volunteered at the "labour front," working at a state farm to harvest crops to feed Soviet citizens and soldiers. But as the war intensified and as Zoya watched her friends and family leave for the front, she felt obligated to make a greater contribution to the war effort. She became determined to join the fight and to stand shoulder to shoulder with her fellow citizens to defend the Soviet Motherland. A brilliant and outgoing young student, Zoya left Moscow for the front shortly after her 18th birthday. She volunteered through her local Komsomol district to fight for the partisan resistance.

During a fateful nighttime mission in December 1941, Zoya was captured by enemy forces in the village of Petrishchevo. She was tortured relentlessly in an effort to extract intelligence that would help them to locate and destroy the partisans. Despite severe torture and abuse, Zoya refused to share any information with her captors, identifying herself only by the enigmatic pseudonym "Tanya." She knew that the fate of her fellow partisans depended on her bravery and perseverance and despite unbelievable pain and misery, she did not betray her comrades to her enemies.

Zoya was hanged before the villagers who were forced to witness the spectacle. Her corpse was bayoneted by the Nazis as it hung from the billet. The Germans would not allow the villagers to remove her body for some time after the execution. Instead, they displayed her body as a warning to others who might have considered aiding the partisans. She was buried months later following the beginning of the Soviet counter-offensive.

Zoya's identity became known over the course of time in the months following her death. She was first identified as "Tanya" by villagers who shared the story with a correspondent from the newspaper *Pravda*. Zoya's brother Shura – who would himself become a legendary war hero within a few short years – later confirmed her true identity after reviewing Soviet newspaper accounts of Zoya's execution. Upon reading the report of her torture and murder, Marshal Joseph Stalin was said to have remarked, "*This is what a Soviet girl should be.*"

The martyrdom of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya galvanized the Soviet people as they forged ahead in their march to victory against the imperialist juggernaut. Her bravery and sacrifice inspired innumerable tributes from all fields and media. The 1944 Lev Arnshtam film "Zoya" tells the story of her arrest and execution. The score for the film was composed by Dmitri Shostakovich. The asteroid 1793 Zoya is named in tribute to her. Monuments to Zoya still stand in St. Petersburg (Leningrad), Tambov, Dorokhov, and Petrishevo.

The story of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya still stands as an inspiration in the worldwide struggle against oppression.