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**VICTORY  
DAY!**



**VICTORY**  
1945-2020

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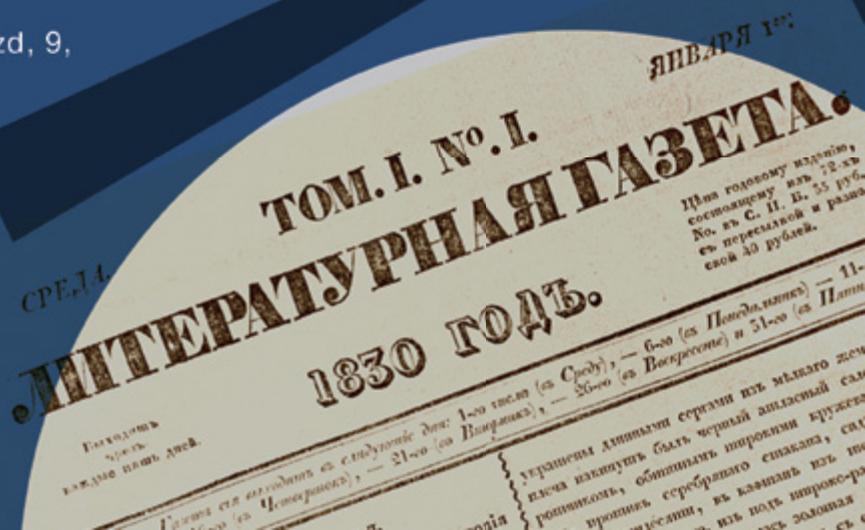
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EDITOR'S LETTER

## THE DEBT OF MEMORY



Celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Great Victory on 9 May 2020 had to be accompanied by a specifically triumphant ceremonial parade and the Immortal Regiment mass march. Due to pandemic, the Russian president postponed all the celebrations for an indefinite period of time. This is the first time over the whole post-war period when the Red Square will remain empty during the Victory Day. But our hearts will not be empty – they will be overwhelmed with devotion.

In this special issue of “Russian Mind” magazine we recall the great exploit of our fathers and grandfathers who shed blood for us on the fronts. With this, heroism shown by our mothers and grandmothers who worked long and hard under the “Everything for the front!” slogan, will also be never forgotten.

It is impossible to hold tears when thinking of ordinary civil population

who had no time or failed to evacuate themselves and suffered from death-dealing yoke of Nazi aggressors. Many of them moved to forests. Thanks to their valiance, a mass partisan army reached the exact enemy rear.

Terrible statistics also speaks for itself: the occupied areas accounted to almost 14 million innocent war victims among civilians. My grandmother Katya was one of them. This is why the revisionist campaign built up here, in Europe, is especially offensive to me.

On the quiet of criticism of the Soviet regime, the heroic victory of our people itself got to be negated. The facts which were obvious for people surviving the war, – including Germans, – turned to be abominably blemished and inverted.

Whether we like it or not, a strain of memory was put on Russia. When the banners previously owned by defeated Hitlerian hordes were thrown down exactly in Moscow, on the Red Square, the German Army was still holding several fortified tactical localities at the French Atlantic coast, Denmark and the most part of Norway, parts of Greece and the Netherlands. So, actually the victory of the Western coalition was theoretical rather than real.

Here and now they tell us that it was their victory, not ours. Well, let us not give up!

**Victor Loupan**

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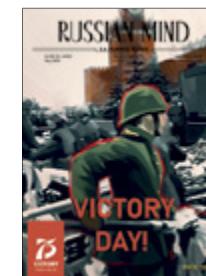
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## HIGHLIGHTS

## RUSSIA IS RIGHT!

*Russia is true when asserting its right to the truth and sacred admission of sacrifice brought by its people for the sake of rescue of humankind*

VICTOR LOUPAN,  
*Head of the Editorial Board*

Yes, Russia is right, and the Russians are right when saying: “This is our victory, we shall surrender it to no one!” Because this is not about any war (there were many wars), but about the Greatest Victory ever – the Victory over fascism.

Those of us who have lived many years in Western Europe are passing through a real shocking therapy. Negation of the historical truth which we have detected now, is so much unbelievable, that it challenges our belief in a suggested essence of the European civilisation. Because we had been told for decades that the European historiography is not an ideology-driven platform for mind affection, but a research discipline based on indisputable facts and documents.

It was possible, but I am not sure whether it really happened. However, today we observe exactly the opposite. The interpretation of World War II in Western Europe – namely, its run-up and its final – is so much influenced by the Western ideology values, that there is no more space for the historical truth.

To be fair, I would like to note that this odious fraud went native about twenty years ago. Of course, there were attempts to ideologically revise history at several American universities, particularly at Stanford, where they praised and justified Vlasov and Shkuro, but generally Western Europeans still remembered the great exploit of Soviet people – its Great Victory over fascism. It was especially well remembered by Germans. They were well informed of

who beat Nazis, who captured Berlin. They showed in their films how Hitler imprecated Russians for their victory and conquest of the capital of the Third Reich, while hiding in his bunker. They showed Himmler and other high-ranking Nazi officers cherishing a hope of cutting a separate peace with Americans, so that they could fight together against the Soviet Union.

We know, based on documents and verbatim records, that Stalin was aware of such plans and was afraid of their implementation. But the Red Army forces which took Berlin by storm prevented from bringing those plans to life.

There is a nefarious fact confirming this assumption which relates to signing of the German Instrument of Surrender on 7 May 1945. Do you know where? In Rheims. Look at the map to check the distance between this French town Rheims and Berlin, the capital of the Third Reich. Rheims never saw military actions, but Berlin almost saw a natural apocalypse. However, Rheims gave a nest to the US Army command... Today this shameful event is hardly remembered by anyone.

Understandably, Stalin refused to get such pseudo-capitulation serious. He thought, Germans had to surrender at discretion of their real winner, with

this happening in their beloved but ruined Reich capital – but not in strange Rheims.

Admiral Friedeburg approached Rheims back on 4 May to propose capitulation of Nazi forces to Eisenhower – but “only on the Western front”.

However, the order issued by admiral Doenitz contained the following: “All forces standing against the Eastern enemy shall draw in the West as soon as possible and battle their way through Russian military dispositions where necessary. Stop any resistance against Anglo-American forces immediately and arrange voluntary surrender into captivity. A general instrument of capitulation will be signed right today hosted by Eisenhower”.

This is all about shameful background of the capitulation. To be fair, it should be noted that Eisenhower refused to participate in the signing ceremony. But it was not a principal refusal; it was only due to adherence of protocol rules, as the German



party was represented by a person ranking lower than a Commander-in-Chief – which also confirms the machination idea.

Stalin declared the following regarding capitulation in Rheims: “The agreement signed in Rheims can be neither cancelled nor adopted. Surrender must happen as the historically most important event at the place giving birth to fascist aggression, in Berlin, – and not as a unilateral act, but strictly as the act executed by the supreme command of all the anti-Hitler coalition members”.

So, the true surrender took place in Karlshorst near Berlin. The instrument was signed by Wilhelm Keitel, general and field marshal, Chief of the Armed Forces High Command of Wehrmacht. This instrument was accepted and read loud by marshal Georgy Zhukov, a person who had had a leading hand in conquest of the German capital. It happened on 8 May 1945 at 23:01 CET which corre-

sponded to 9 May 1945 at 01:01 Moscow time. Soviet citizens received the news about surrender of Germany at 02:10 in the night from country-wide known Yuri Levitan who announced this news on the radio.

Germans and Americans attempted to misappropriate the Great Victory before the formal end of the war. Of course, they knew that the Red Army (not any other one!) had beaten Nazi horde which was unbeaten before and had won all European armies resisting against Germany in 1940 literally just in few weeks.

The Third Reich practically covered the entire mainland Europe. Americans knew it. They also knew that 90% of killed German military persons had fallen in battle on the Eastern front between 1941 and 1945. The Western front was organised much later, following the American disembarkation in Normandy on 6 June 1944. There were only few months left before the end of the war,

with its outcome being absolutely clear and doubtless.

This apocalyptic combat against Nazi evil spirit took 27 million Soviet lives. This is a real price to the win! This is remembered by the Immortal Regiment movement. This is embodied in monuments to Soviet soldiers being spread across the entire Eastern Europe, with some of them being desecrated in several countries.

But what is specifically slander, some countries attempt to underestimate the principal role played by Russia and its people to gain the Great Victory. This is a profanation. Russia is true and proper when asserting its right to the truth and sacred admission of sacrifice brought by its people for the sake of rescue of humankind. The truth is solemn!

Let us remember the speech by the great warlord Saint Alexander Nevsky who righteously declared once and forever: “God is in right rather than might!”

## DISSENTING OPINION

# QUID EST VERITAS, OR WHAT IS TRUTH?

*The frontline between Soviet and German armies remained the major European frontline up until 9 May 1945*

VYACHESLAV KATAMIDZE

Before the planned celebration of the Great Victory, various Russophobes, demonisers and falsifiers have combined their efforts in their aspiration to defame, slander, and underestimate the USSR's role in the horrible war launched by the German Fuehrer Adolf Hitler under the passive eye of some Western states.

Two fictions take the central focus in denigration of our country's role: the first of them attributes the leadership in crushing defeat of fascism to Western world instead of the Soviet Union, and the second one says that only participation of Western countries has allowed settlement of the war by May 1945.

Note the fact that not only mass media – newspapers and TV channels – propagate these ideas; such theses are included into textbooks and even multivolume explorations. Let us consider the case of the British undergraduate textbook named “Britain in the 20th century” by Charles Moore. This is the section about World War II: “Certainly, Russia's contribution

to the war was priceless, however, it was involved in the Eastern front only. Its direct contribution to Britain's efforts during the war was next to none, but Russia's participation in allies' joint strategy was limited to the

request for supply of resources or immediate (Anglo-American) disembarkation in France”.

The author may either be lack of knowledge of the real World War II history, or misrepresent the facts intentionally. British military supplies to the USSR were unsatisfactory. For instance, over the wartime Great Britain supplied 2124 Valentine tanks of British origin and 1208 Valentine tanks of Canadian origin, to the USSR. With this, 450 tanks were lost during transportation. The Valentines were running at low speed (with the top road speed of 24km/h), equipped with a weak 40mm canon,



*They suffered from Nazi Germany's invasion*

where the gasoline engine tanks were high-explosive and non-fire-proof against a single small projectile. Surely, such manageable assistance was highly appreciated under those circumstances. But remember that our

country had produced 57 339 T-34 tanks only during the war! The Soviet Union acknowledged help, but it was unreasonable to affirm that this assistance was absolutely necessary.

In context of the phrase “Russia's participation in allies' joint strategy was limited to the request for supply of resources or immediate... disembarkation in France”, the following should be recalled to British historians: when Wehrmacht inflicted a defeat on British-American troops in the Ardennes, Stalin, the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the USSR, issued the order to his generals to launch the Vistula-Oder Offensive eight days prior to its expected date with the aim to retract the maximum fascist forces back to the Eastern front. It is hard to count the exact number of allies lives saved on the Western front due to this decision of strategic importance!

It is also worth it to remind that the Soviet people singly fought against the major fascist German forces and their contributors in Europe over the first three years

which were the most horrible time of the war. The Soviet-German front then saw 180 to 260 division level units of the enemy at the same time, and among these were 140 to 200 fascist German divisions. During the



*The Red Army's foot troops make an attack*

military struggle Nazi command sent new additions to the East on the back of the USSR's allies restraining of aggressive attacks over a protracted period. Around 270 German divisions (except those activated immediately on the frontline from among newly received forces), as well as new tactical formations of Germany's satellites were repositioned there.

In November 1942 the Eastern front, in addition to Wehrmacht forces, saw over 70 Italian, Romanian, Hungarian and Finnish divisions, separate “volunteer fighter” formations from Spain, Belgium and other countries. Nazi forces lost 507 divisions and their European satellites lost nearly 100 divisions in total during the war. Germany's armed forces suffered heavy losses on the Eastern front: over 90 percent of their total losses are accounted for by the war against the Soviet Union.

When it comes to the total number of countrywide losses, the majority

of victims in the Soviet Union were due to genocide and ethnic cleansing among peaceful population living on the occupied territory. In contrast, Hitler avoided such policy in the West. 364 thousand UK citizens died in World War II, where only one sixth was accounted for by peaceful population. But in the USSR, among 27 million fatalities over the war, over 19 million habitants were accounted for by peaceful population...

The frontline between Soviet and German armies remained the major European frontline up until 9 May 1945. By January 1945 – by the moment of full-court press on the Western front for Germany after its attempt to attack in the Ardennes, – Wehrmacht units in the West counted 73 divisions only, while 179 Ger-

man divisions fought on the Eastern front at the same time. Totally, 80% of workforce of the German field forces, 68% of its artillery corps, 64% of its tanks, and 48% of its Luftwaffe air forces were used against the Soviet Army during this period. So, the main inland force of Germany fought in the East, not in the West, during the last year of the war, too.

Before the summer 1944 the Soviet forces retook the most of the occupied territory. Outcome of the war was absolutely and doubtlessly determined on the Eastern front. Wehrmacht's losses on the Eastern front of World War II were extremely high in armament and equipment. 70% of the total number of Nazi aircrafts crushed during the war, 75% of lost tanks and 74% of artillery losses of Germany were accounted for by the war against the USSR.

The scale and intensity of warfare in the scene of operations in Western Europe in 1944 and 1945 were never like the operations on the Eastern front held both between 1941 and 1943 and during the last two years of the war.

With the consideration of the full strategic picture of World War II, we can understand some Russian historians who affirm that the Anglo-American disembarkation in Normandy itself was organised in the summer 1944 with the only purpose to avoid conclusive defeat of Wehrmacht by the Soviet Army being independent of allies.



*Assembly of heavy tanks*

## VICTORY DAY

# LITTLE-KNOWN FACTS ABOUT THE VICTORY PARADE

*There are many interesting aspects of the history of the organization and conduct of the Victory Parade*

ALEKSEI RUDEVICH

The Victory Parade of 24 June 1945 could not be overshadowed even by the pouring rain, which caused the cancellation of the flight of 570 planes and of workers' performances. There are many interesting aspects of the history of the organization and conduct of the Victory Parade.

## The Victory Banner

The size of flags is standard, but for the Victory Banner some cloth is missing for its 3 cm width by 73 cm length. There is a version that a piece was torn off, to be kept as a memento, by Alexander Kharkov, gunner "Katyusha" of the 92th mortar regiment, who on 2 May 1945 was on the roof of the Reichstag. However, this version does not seem convincing. At that time nobody knew that this specific banner, one of many, would become the symbol of victory and of the end of the war effort.

There is another version. In the early 1970s an old lady came to the Museum of the Soviet Army and recounted how she had served in the political department of the 150th infantry division, where the banner was kept. At the time of demobilization, in the summer of 1945, the women who worked there tore off a piece of the banner's cloth, cut it into shreds and then each ripped off a small piece to keep as a souvenir. As evidence the woman showed her piece of the great banner.

The Victory Banner was brought to Moscow already on 20 June 1945,

but it was not carried to Red Square. It was assumed that during the parade it would be carried by the heroes who had hoisted the flag over the Reichstag: Neustroev, Kantariya, Berest and Yegorov. But they had little familiarity with training exercises. At the rehearsal the banner-bearers performed very poorly, and nominating others for the task would have been strange, while the time left for more rehearsals was inadequate. Marshal Zhukov decided not to use the banner. It was carried for the first time during the Victory Parade of 1965.

## Zhukov's Ceremonial Speech

Marshal Zhukov's ceremonial speech has been preserved until today. It contains very interesting features that demonstrate his professional work on the manuscript. In the speech he also annotated intonations.



Next to the words "Four years ago the German-Fascist predatory hordes attacked our country" there is the note "quiet, more stern"; by the phrase "the Red Army under the leadership of his military genius launched a resolute offensive" he noted "louder, with a crescendo", and so on.

## Why did Stalin not inspect the troops?

The nearly official, but still controversial, version of the story of Stalin's refraining from inspecting the troops himself at the Victory Parade is depicted in the memoirs of Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov. According to the Marshal, Stalin summoned him the day before the parade and ordered him to take responsibility for inspecting the Victory Parade, which Rokossovsky would lead. Having ascertained that Zhukov had "not forgotten how to ride", Stalin alluded to his advanced age, and already on the next day Georgy went to the parade rehearsals.

There, according to Zhukov, Vasily, Stalin's son, told the Marshal about how on 16 June 1945 his father did not manage to hold himself onto the saddle and was thrown off by a thoroughbred that had been especially chosen for him. Luckily, there were

no serious consequences, including for those around him. According to Vasily, even Budyonny was frightened at that moment. This version of events is considered controversial, for the reason that in the first edition of "Memories and Reflections" the episode with Zhukov was not included.

## The magic of numbers

The Victory Parade of 24 June 1945 was the first whose approval was granted through a prior detailed scheme. Parades in the 1930s had been approved at meetings of the

have in mind is the Moscow parade, held on 24 June. However, apart from that, in 1945 there were three other full Victory Parades. Before the Moscow parade, on 4 May 1945, a parade of Soviet troops took place at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. General Nikolai Berzarin, military commander in Berlin, presided over it. A Victory Parade of allied troops in Berlin was held once again on 7 September 1945 by a decision of Georgy Zhukov. A regiment composed of a thousand men and armored units took part in it. Finally, another parade was held in Harbin on 26 September 1945. Soldiers and

officers attended the parade in field uniform, while artillery units and tanks closed the procession.

## Not a holiday?

From the Victory Parade until 1949, Victory Day in the USSR was celebrated as a holiday. From 1949 until 1965 Victory Day was no longer a holiday for which people had a day off work. Until now historians can only guess the reasons for the cancellation of the holiday. There is even a version that Stalin was afraid of soldiers because many of them following their experiences at the front were affected by post-traumatic stress disorder. Any reference to the war could cause them to behave inappropriately. Therefore, the Soviet authorities "waited".

In 1965 Victory Day became a holiday at the initiative of Leonid Brezhnev, the former frontline soldier and lover of magnificent festivities, which he could attend in his marshal's uniform.



S.M. Budyonny, I.V. Stalin and G.K. Zhukov on the tribune of the Mausoleum at the Victory Parade on 24 June 1945.

Politburo on the basis of memos by Kliment Voroshilov, indicating the number and types of troops. Parades were usually approved unanimously. The training scheme of the Victory Parade was prepared under the supervision of the director of the Moscow garrison. The commander of the Moscow Military District, General-Colonel Pavel Artemyev approved it personally. It is believed that Stalin took the decision to hold a parade on 24 May 1945.

## Four parades

When people talk about the Victory Parade of 1945, what they usually



## CULTURE

# THE BOLSHOI THEATRE IN WWII: THE SHOW MUST GO ON

DARIA GONZALES

Although Moscow was bombed during the World War II, it didn't prevent the Bolshoi Theatre's actors and actresses from performing on the stage.

In October 1941, Moscow was rife with rumors that German troops were approaching the suburb of Khimki.

A group of eight young people – students from the Institute of Physical Culture – was in the process of digging a deep well under Hotel National. They were on a mission to mine the city's key buildings in case Russian troops had to retreat from the capital. The Bolshoi Theatre actually proved the easiest one to mine: a well was effortlessly dug out directly beneath the orchestra pit.

Just a few days before the pit was dug, nearly all the theatre's performers and its most valuable props were evacuated to the city of Kuibyshev (now Samara) by order of the government. A collection of Stradivarius violins, along with pictures from the Tretyakov gallery, were taken to the Kazan railway station. The priceless collection was moments from disaster; the train in which they were being taken away from Moscow had barely left the station when the Nazis dropped several

high-explosive bombs on the spot where it had stood.

The Bolshoi company spent nine months away from Moscow, leaving the building vacant. The front colonnade was disguised using the settings from the classic opera Prince Igor while canvases from the legendary ballet Taras Bulba were mounted into barricades. Painters drew the outline of the theatre and the surrounding buildings on the square next to the theatre in order to protect the building from a direct hit. Despite these efforts, 1,000 lb. bomb detonated right in front of the theatre's central entrance on Oct. 28, 1941.



*Ballet dancer Olga Lepeshinskaya (h) and actor Vladimir Preobrazhensky performing in the "Scarlet Sails" ballet the Bolshoi Theater in on Dec. 5, 1943*

It was at this time that Moscow, encircled by front lines, was opening its opera and ballet season. With almost the entire Bolshoi compa-

ny evacuated and the theatre itself closed, there were two theatres still operating in the deserted city. One was the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Music Theatre and the other was the Bolshoi Theatre affiliate that the government had opened upon requests from the artists who remained in Moscow.

"The affiliate's opening ceremony, if we may put it this way, was held on Oct. 19, 1941. We gave a great show. It was essentially a matinee performance, with the show starting at 2 pm. We could not start any later because of the regular bombings and the fact that it got dark very early.

The time we began our shows was a reliable indicator of the progress at the front: as our army moved west, we would lift the curtain open at a more customary time. The first show, however, was a roaring success. It was accompanied by three air raid sirens," said Mikhail Gabovich, a principal dancer and officer of the Moscow Fighters Battalion. "We were under strict instructions to break off rehearsals and shows during air raids.

The audience was prompted to go down to the metro station."

At first, the spectators did as they were told. But the audience soon



started to refuse to leave, as they wanted to see the end of the show. The audience at that time consisted of war correspondents, workers from military defence factories, party activists, Muscovites and people from other cities who were stopping over in Moscow on their way into the Russian interior.

Meanwhile, the main part of the company was settling down in Kuibyshev. In early 1942, while still in evacuation, Dmitry Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7 was performed for the first time. The composer dedicated the work to his native Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) and the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War (WWII).

"We were debating when we could start rehearsing Symphony No. 7," said Valeria Dulova, a principal of the evacuated orchestra. "We had no music paper, no one to copy the music. A special plane was sent to Moscow to deliver the paper. When we had no

performances or rehearsals, we tended wounded soldiers."

Finally, by 1943, the artists were finally able to return to Moscow, and the two companies were reunited again as one. By this time, the restoration of the theatre building after the bombing was virtually complete. Restoration work never stopped even at 40 degrees below zero in the winter of 1942. As a result of the explosion, one of the building's outer walls had to be replaced with a wooden structure, and the temperature in the hall matched that outside.

Between 1941 and 1945, the Bolshoi artists frequently went on tour to boost the morale of Russian soldiers. During the four years of war, 16 groups of artists were sent to the front lines and gave a total of 1,939 performances. Soviet Leader Joseph Stalin excused nearly 1,000 performers from active duty, although many artists remained on the front line as volunteers. The Bolshoi company per-

formed on the steps of the Reichstag building in Berlin in late April 1945.

"In Berlin, our group gave its 140th performance. The half-ruined Reichstag building still reeked of burning boxes and fragments of furniture. To the right of the entrance I saw three missile boxes stacked upon each other. I realized that that would be my 'stage,'" said singer Natalya Mikhailovskaya. "Soldiers helped me onto the boxes. Just a short while before, they had been fighting for every step here. As I started to sing, I could see a poster pasted on the opposite wall. It was in German and read: 'No sacrifice is too great in the face of the great goal.' Soldiers in shirts tainted with gunpowder flocked to the improvised concert hall from everywhere. Many of them were holding each other up or leaned on canes."

The Bolshoi Theatre celebrated the end of the war with two major premiers of Sergei Prokofiev's ballets Cinderella (1945) and Romeo and Juliet (1946).

## HISTORY

# THROUGH ICE AND FEAR FOR RUSSIA: THE ARCTIC CONVOYS

EUGENE KASEVIN,  
*special to RBTH*

As the world marks the 75th Anniversary of the end of the Second World War, we remember the dramatic and heroic story of the Arctic Convoys, a period of unique collaboration between Russia and the UK, when more than four million tons of vital military supplies were shipped across treacherous, often freezing seas.

As many as 87 Merchant Navy and 18 Royal Navy vessels were sent to the bottom of the sea during the perilous operation and over 3,000 Allied seamen died.

This is their story.

When Adolf Hitler launched his surprise Blitzkrieg – codenamed Barbarossa – on the Soviet Union in June 1941, bringing Russia into the war against Nazi Germany, Britain no longer stood alone against the fascist threat. Putting aside his lifelong antipathy to Bolshevism, Britain's Prime Minister Winston Churchill authorised urgent naval convoys of vital war material to Russia. Shipped across some of the most dangerous waters in the world, the Arctic Convoys between 1941 and 1945 delivered tanks, fighter planes, fuel, ammunition, raw materials and food to the Soviet Union's northern ports.

Churchill's genuine, if pragmatic, change of heart was announced the very day of the Nazi assault on the Soviet people. In a radio broadcast, Britain's wartime leader said: "... we shall give whatever help we can to Russia and to the Russian people. We shall appeal to all our friends and Allies in every part of the world to take the same course and pursue it as we shall, faithfully and steadfastly to the end."

Known as the 'Russian' and 'Polar' convoys – or by the sailors who risked their lives to bring the supplies to Russia, the 'Murmansk Run' – the Arctic Convoys were part of the Lend Lease programme under which the United States supplied France, Great Britain, China, the USSR and other Allied nations with food, oil, and material between 1941 and 1945. The programme started in March 1941 and ended in September 1945. Supplies to the Soviet Union also came overland via the Persian Corridor and to Russia's Far East by the Pacific Route.

The shortest route was to Russia's northern ports of Murmansk and Arkhangelsk sailing through Arctic waters above Nazi occupied Norway from Iceland and (from September 1942) Loch Ewe in Scotland.



*Ships at Hvalfjord, Iceland, November 1941, on board the tribal class destroyer HMS Ashanti. HMS Ashanti and some of the 6th Destroyer Flotilla at exercise.*

Merchant Navy ships escorted by Royal Navy cruisers and destroyers as well as U.S. and other allied warships, carried the essential supplies.

## *Dervish debut*

The first Arctic convoy, codenamed Operation 'Dervish', set out from Hvalfjord in Iceland on 21 August 1941, sailing into harbour at Arkhangelsk on 31 August 1941.

It consisted of six merchant ships loaded with raw materials and 15 Hawker Hurricane fighter planes escorted by the Royal Navy with three destroyers (Electra, Active, Impulsive), three minesweepers (Halcyon, Salamander, Harrier), three anti-submarine trawlers (Hamlet, Macbeth, Ophelia), with additional distant cover from the heavy cruiser Shropshire and destroyers Matabe-

le, Punjabi and Somali. Aircraft carrier Argus delivered 24 Hurricanes (the Royal Air Force's 151 Fighter Wing) to Vaenga airfield near Murmansk. Some of the 39 Hurricanes delivered by 'Dervish', flown by Russian pilots, were deployed defending Moscow between October 1941 and January 1942.

Those who sailed during operation 'Dervish' had beginners' luck – the

convoy suffered no losses, as the Nazis were simply unaware of it.

Code letters and sequential numbers subsequently identified convoys: PQ to Russia (inbound) and QP from Russia (outbound). The letters P and Q were from the initials of Commander P.Q. Edwards, who was responsible for the planning of these early operations. The system was used until convoys PQ18 in Sep-

tember 1942 and QP15 in November 1942. From December 1942 the convoys were coded JW (starting with 51) to Russia and RA (number) from Russia.

A total of 78 inbound and outbound convoys did the 'Murmansk Run' between August 1941 and May 1945.

### Rough Seas

Apart from Nazi warships, submarines and Luftwaffe aircraft, the convoys faced another, just as tough, adversary: the elements. Rough and unpredictable Arctic storms were the least of it. Temperatures were so low that water washed on board quickly froze and could add so much weight that a ship could become top-heavy and capsize. Constant de-ic-



The Navy experiences wintry weather in the middle of January 1941, with the destroyer HMS Kelvin. Photo shows the Arctic conditions that ships had to face during the cold winter months. HMS Kelvin shown blanketed in snow.

ing of decks and guns with axes and steam hoses was a daily routine for the Arctic Convoys' sailors.

Two of the 78 convoys represent the best and worst of the heroic missions.

"The sea was violent with waves of 30 ft plus. When we met a gale in the Atlantic we went into it bow on and ploughed through, but in the Arctic, east of Bear Island, the sea was very narrow and we had to go east with no deviation. This meant we were rolling as much as 30 degrees to port and starboard.

With the deck covered in ice and snow we had to use lifelines when going aft to the guns and depth charges. These lifelines were fitted very firmly and anyone going aft on deck had to fix a rope around the body with a hook on to the lifeline and gradually move aft when the ship was steady. But when she rolled, your feet left the deck and at 30 degrees you were hanging over the sea. At maximum roll the ship shuddered for a few sec-

onds and then decided to come back or turn over – some did.

The temperature in these seas got as low as 60 degrees below freezing.



Your eyebrows and eyelashes froze and your eyes were very sore with the winds blowing into them. When you got down to the mess deck there was about three inches of water from condensation. The older men, who had hair in their noses, found that these froze solid and were like needles. Many men came off watch with faces covered in blood as they had rubbed their noses without thinking.

The main thing at this time was to keep the upper deck clear of ice and snow by means of axes and steam hoses or the ship could become top heavy."

**Bill Smith**

An Arctic Convoy sailor who served on HMS Magpie

### Fatal mistake

Winston Churchill had predicted the Arctic Convoys would be "the worst journey in the world". The biggest disaster in naval history befell Convoy PQ17.

The convoy left Iceland on 27 June 1942 for Arkhangelsk made up of 36 merchant ships and six naval auxiliaries with one close and two distant escorts, 43 warships in total. The convoy was carrying 297 aircraft, 594 tanks, 4,246 trucks and trailers, and 150,000 tons of military and general supplies. It was by far the largest convoy ever to sail to Russia.

The biggest threat to the Royal Navy at the time was the German battleship Tirpitz, armed with a main battery of eight 15-inch (38 cm) guns

in four twin turrets. She had been deployed to Norway in January 1942 in order to prepare to attack a convoy.

In March 1942, the Tirpitz launched her first attack on PQ12 convoy, but bad weather kept her from zeroing on the convoy and the attack failed. Later, the German navy, the Kriegsmarine, came up with Operation Rösselsprung (Knight's Move), a plan to bring the Tirpitz and her entourage into contact with the next outbound convoy PQ17.

On 4 July after sending a message from Norway to the Admiralty in London, saying that the Tirpitz has moved the previous day, the First Sea Lord Sir Dudley Pound, fearing attack, commanded the escort ships to turn back and the convoy to scatter and to chart their own course to Russia.

It was a mistake of historic proportion that profoundly misjudged the situation and would have fatal consequences. The Tirpitz has merely changed position to the north without any plans to intercept the convoy.

Fully exposed to Nazi aircraft and U-boats without any escort, PQ17 was gradually destroyed. By 22 July only 11 of the convoy's original 36 merchant vessels had reached Arkhangelsk, delivering just 70,000 tons – less than half the anticipated cargo.

In his monumental six-volume record of those times, The Second World War, Churchill called PQ17 "one of the most melancholy naval episodes in the whole of the war." U.S. Admiral Dan Gallery in his memoirs was more blunt, referring to the disaster as "a shameful page in naval history."



British Naval activities in winter. 20 January 1942, Rosyth, under Arctic like conditions

"I remember it was 13 July, 1942. That day I was asked to fulfil the duties of navigation officer. Our ship was on the outer patrol near Kola Bay – the main base of the Northern Fleet. The weather was extremely good, calm and sunny. Suddenly there was a telegram cipher on the bridge. Our commander Kondratyev read the telegram, handed it to me and gave an order to navigate on the set course. The telegram read 'To the commander of frigate SKR-32. Our submarine K-22 identified a rescue boat with sailors in distress [coordinates]. Locate the boat and save the men. Commander of the Fleet.'



full of freezing men. Fifty sailors had spent several days in the Barents Sea. Some were unconscious. We took them aboard, gave them alcohol and dry clothes.

On our way back to Polyarnoye base we realised that six of the sailors were Russian, and they told us the story. The rescued survivors were from the British merchant ship 'Bolton Castle' that was part of PQ17 convoy. They had been sunk by air attack on 5 July.

Sixty-two years later, in 2004, I found one of the survivors of 'Bolton Castle', Albert Higgins from Bridlington."

**Anatoli Livshit**

a 96 year-old Russian war veteran from St. Petersburg who visited Britain in December 2014

The given coordinates were about 30 miles to the north of our position, and a little more than three hours later we found the rescue boat



Convoy to Russia, with a British cruiser escort on Arctic lifeline, December 1941, on board the cruiser HMS Sheffield. In the Russian base HMS Sheffield anchors and waits once more for the sailing orders. In the background can be seen snow covered hills.

Between August 1941 and May 1945, the Arctic Convoys delivered more than 4 million tons of cargo to Russia including at least 7,000 airplanes, 5,000 tanks, trucks, tires, fuel, food, medicine, clothes, metals and other raw materials.

Convoy JW55B was a total success for the Royal Navy, better known for its part in the Battle of the North Cape, which was designed as a distraction manoeuvre against the Germany battle cruiser the Scharnhorst, armed with a main battery of nine 11-inch (28 cm) guns in three triple turrets.

The convoy consisted of 19 merchant ships that sailed from Loch Ewe on 22 December 1943 accompanied by a close escort of two corvettes (Borage and Wallflower) and two minesweepers (Hound and Hydra). Destroyers Whitehall and Wrestler, minesweeper Gleaner, and corvettes Honeysuckle and Oxlip, were also deployed as escorts. Vice-Admiral Robert Burnett, who was accompanying the homebound RA-55A with cruisers Belfast, Norfolk and Sheffield, later offered further support. Admiral Bruce Fraser, expecting – and hoping – that the Scharnhorst would attack the convoy, headed for Bear Island from Iceland with battleship Duke of York and cruiser Jamaica.

Scharnhorst (commanded by Rear-Admiral Erich Bey) and five destroyers sailed from northern Norway on Christmas Eve. Early on Boxing Day, 26 December, JW55B was about 50 miles south of Bear Island when the enemy fleet headed north to intercept.

By 9am Belfast detected Scharnhorst as she was heading south, some 30 miles east of



Scharnhorst survivors at Scapa Flow, 2 January 1944. Blindfolded Scharnhorst survivors, in merchant seaman rescue kit, walking down a gang-plank on their way to internment.

the convoy. Norfolk engaged and hit Scharnhorst as she turned north try to get closer to JW55B. Expecting this move Burnett continued leading his escort towards the convoy, and when Belfast regained contact with Scharnhorst all three cruisers opened fire. Scharnhorst was hit and Norfolk damaged by 11-inch shells. By this time the German battle cruiser was

heading south and away from the convoy and Fraser was in a position to cut off her retreat. Soon after 4pm, the three cruisers were closing in and at 4.50pm, Belfast lit up Scharnhorst with a parachute-borne star shell. Burnett's cruisers engaged from one side while the Duke of York and Jamaica came in from the other. Scharnhorst, hit by Jamaica and the Duke

of York, was severely damaged. Other cruisers and destroyers fired torpedoes, 11 of which reached their target. Scharnhorst went down shortly after 7.30pm. Of the 1,932 men on board the Scharnhorst only 36 were rescued.

Few, if any of the ordinary sailors involved in the battle could have known that before the war, Vice-Admiral Robert Burnett of Belfast and Rear-Admiral Erich Bey of Scharnhorst had been friends, and they and their families had visited each other.

The Arctic Convoys, like the Battle of Britain in the summer of 1940, involved relatively few servicemen. But like that struggle in the skies above southern England, the debt owed by so many to those few thousand men who served on the convoys is immense. The bond forged through their courage and sacrifice with Russia endures to this day.

For both Russia and Britain, the Arctic Convoys are an enduring symbol of heroic cooperation in the joint fight to defeat Nazi Germany.



"We spent two days shadowing Scharnhorst and eventually she was sunk. I fired three torpedoes at Scharnhorst. It was so dark, whether they hit or not she went down not too long afterwards. And when she went down I had tears in my eyes, because she had two thousand men with her. All with mothers, brothers, sisters, wives, and I thought – what a waste. But, faced with circumstances, it could have been us and not them."

**Ted Cordery**

A veteran of the Arctic Convoys who served on the Belfast

## HISTORY

# HOW I DEFENDED STALINGRAD

BORIS EGOROV

The Battle of Stalingrad was a veritable meat-grinder for both the Soviet and German armies. Few made it through the most terrible battle in the history of mankind from day one to day done.

More than a million Soviet soldiers took part in the fateful Battle of Stalingrad, which marked the turning point in WWII. Some fought to stop the enemy on the outskirts of the city, others engaged in close-quarter combat for every building and street. In combination, they dealt a fatal blow to the most powerful German force on the Eastern Front – the 6th Army of General Friedrich Paulus.

After reviewing dozens of memoirs of Red Army soldiers who took part in the battle, we imagined what the Battle of Stalingrad looked like through the eyes of a common soldier who witnessed all the key episodes of this nightmare from the first day to the last.

Meet our hero. Siberian Mikhail Nekrasov, 20, an ordinary infantryman. Recently drafted into the Red Army, he will endure a baptism of fire in the cauldron of the most horrific battle in history. His diary is based on the memoirs of foot soldiers, tankmen, radio operators, artillerymen, and soldiers from other divisions who collectively succeeded in breaking the spine of the Wehrmacht in the city on the Volga.

## August 23, 1942

Just arrived in Stalingrad and walked straight into hell. Hundreds of German bombers are turning the city into an inferno. Everything that can

burn is burning. Even the Volga is on fire – burning oil from bombed storage facilities is gushing into the river.

## September 3, 1942

Under bombardment and artillery fire, we crossed to the west bank of the Volga. It's difficult to make out what's happening on the other side, only the looming box-like buildings strewn with pieces of brick, logs, and iron, and the black treetops are visible. We have set up base in the ruins. The HQ of our 62nd Army is sited right here on the river bank.

## September 12, 1942

The Luftwaffe hovers over the city day and night. There is no escape from the hum. All you want to do is burrow deeper into the ground, nibble it, dig it with your nails to merge with it, become invisible. Our planes are almost nowhere to be seen, sometimes a few “donkeys” (I-16s) try to engage, but they are scattered into pieces by the fire from the “Messers” (Messerschmitts).

## September 15, 1942

The commander of the 1345th regiment, Major Zhukov, and the regiment commissar, Senior Political Instructor Raspopov, were shot in front of the unit: “Under attack from the enemy, they displayed fear in battle, abandoned the regiment, and shamefully fled the battlefield.” We despise cowards. Everyone is scared, but everyone fights. These two got their just desserts...



## September 19, 1942

The enemy infantry broke through to the city center, and somewhere gained access to the river. The order was received to retake the State Bank, from where the Germans had a strategic view of the whole Volga. An anti-retreat detachment of the 13th Guards Rifle Division stormed the building with us in support. Sappers disguised as machine-gunners dragged boxes of TNT inside. After the explosion, the assault troops burst in and killed the stunned garri-

son. Anti-retreat detachments in Stalingrad fight alongside ordinary units. The Command mainly uses them as a reserve, and not for their intended purpose. Otherwise there wouldn't be enough people!

## October 3, 1942

There's a battle for every building, every street. Day and night. There's no more fear, just bluntness... and a constant near-death feeling. Plus hopelessness and indifference. Our wrecked tank sits there, something's burning

inside, exploding. The master sergeant approaches the smoldering tank with a pot of porridge and calmly places it on the armor-plating to warm it up. Nothing seems strange anymore...

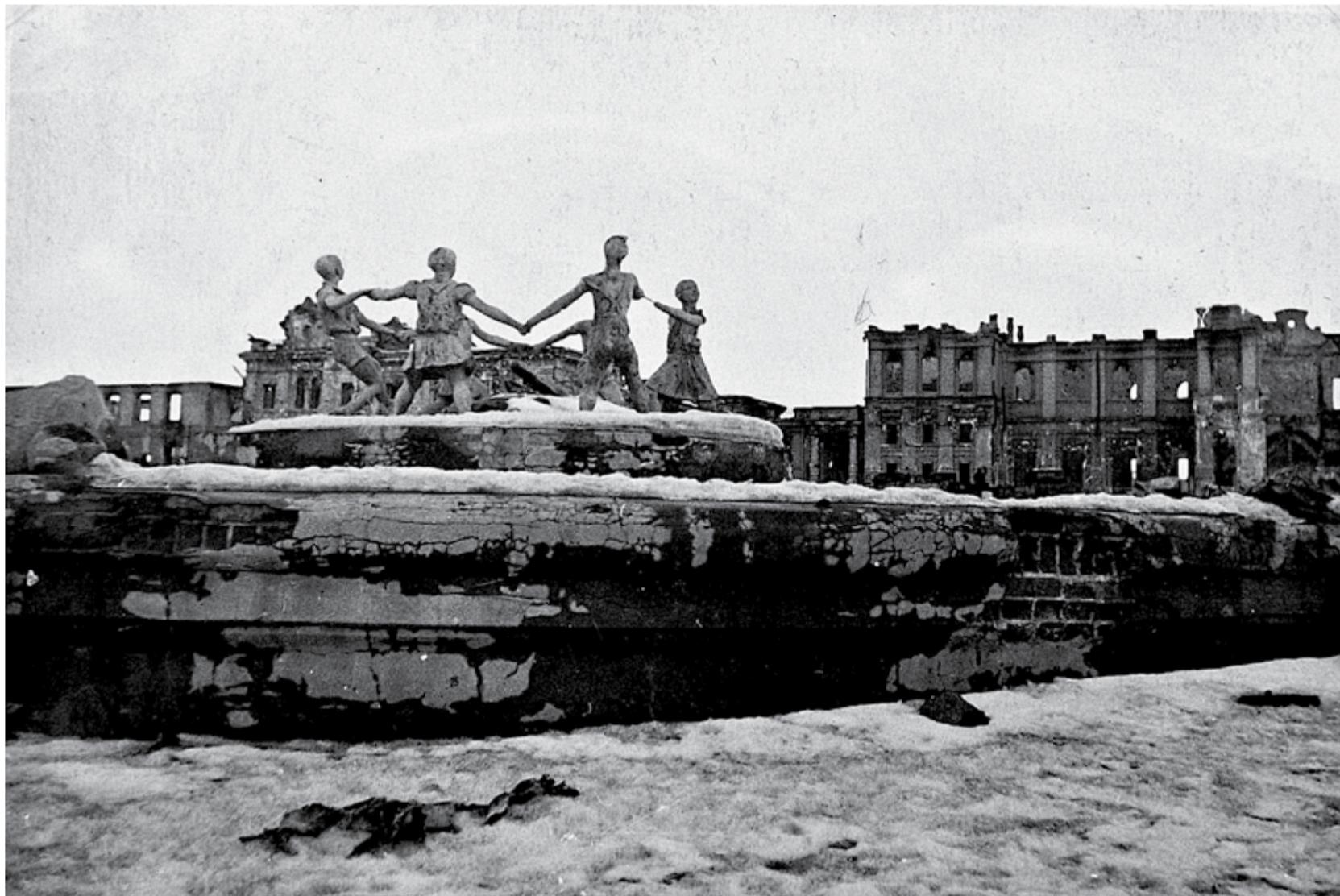
## October 7, 1942

Sometimes we see our T-34s and KVs with German crosses on the turrets. Once at dusk, several of these captured tanks wedged into a column of our tanks on their way to be repaired. They opened fire from the nearby tractor plant and did a lot of

damage before they were destroyed. Our soldiers, of course, are heroes, but the Germans sometimes show a fanatical level of sacrifice.

## October 23, 1942

The Command ordered us to hold the Barricades and Red October factories at any cost. Just behind these giant complexes is the Volga. We lose them, we lose the city. Easier said than done, though. Despite our resistance, the Germans are driving us towards the river.



**November 11, 1942**

All the Barricades workshops are lost. The remnants of our division managed to cling on to the edge of the factory. The enemy destroyed our neighbours and blocked us on three sides on a tiny patch of land. Behind is the Volga. The only communication with the “mainland” is via boat.

**November 18, 1942**

We’re holding on with our last forces. Our whole small “island” is exposed to enemy fire along the length and breadth. The Germans storm it by day and try to tunnel through by night. We fight hand-to-hand. All the basements are stuffed full of corpses.

es. Rations are just one dried crust a day. Boats try to deliver supplies and take away the wounded, but they suffer heavy losses. At night our planes drop cargo, but mostly miss the target. There’s a shortage of cartridges, so we fight with captured weapons. When things get really bad, we call for friendly fire from our artillery on Zaitsevsky Island.

**November 22, 1942**

Good news at last. It turns out that for several days on the city outskirts our guys have been carrying out Operation Uranus, an offensive against the Romanian forces covering the German flanks. There’s every reason to hope for success. The Romanians

are less well-equipped and less effective than the Wehrmacht. We’ve got a tiny breathing space. The Germans have fallen silent, our positions are no longer being attacked.

**November 29, 1942**

The order was received to attack. The division is to liberate the factory and advance to the center of Stalingrad. I won’t be taking part – me and a unit of soldiers are being transferred out of the city to strengthen Operation Uranus.

**December 19, 1942**

What a nightmare! At the village of Verkhne-Kumsky, Manstein’s tanks

broke through our defences while trying to relieve their own forces in Stalingrad. About ten of us survived. We ran to the edge of the field. Our artillery was there, silent. We shouted at them: “Why aren’t you bastards firing?!” They answered: “We have three shells per gun. The order is to fire only at point-blank range.”

At night, the Germans went around us. We don’t know where they’ll attempt another breakthrough. All around is the noise of motors and German speech. They spotted us and opened fire. How many fled, I can’t say. Barely conscious, we burst into a village. There was a guy in a white camouflage suit. I grabbed him by the collar, shook him, shouted in his face: “Who are you?!” He was scared, silent. I grabbed his headgear; my hand was stung the sharp cor-

ners of a... Red Army star! The other soldiers could barely drag me away. In the end, the German offensive was repelled – the guys from the 2nd Guards Army helped out.

**December 24, 1942**

We’re accompanying the 170th Tank Brigade. We’ve teamed up with the tank crews. During the day they cover us, and at night the tanks are blind, so we act as their eyes and ears. They took the Khlebny and Petrovsky farms. At 5am the alarm sounded. The enemy had been spotted in the low-lying area between the farms. The remnants of the Italian 8th Army were escaping encirclement. As soon as the vanguard units drew level with us, the command went around the columns: “Crush them!” Our massive tank wedges struck from two flanks and literally pulverized the Italians into the ground. We followed and finished them off. I’ve never seen such a horrible sight. The white lime-camouflaged tanks were all red below the turrets, bathed in blood. On the caterpillar tracks there was a hand sticking out here, a piece of skull there...



**January 31, 1943**

The enemy’s southern group in the city center surrendered along with Friedrich Paulus himself. The Germans are still holding out near the tractor plant. The streets are full of corpses. The basements are crammed with the wounded and those dying of cold and hunger. Our doctors help them as best they can. The soldiers walk among the ranks on the lookout for SS men (although there are very few) and traitor-defectors (the Germans call them Hiwis [Hilfswilliger – auxiliary volunteers]). They are made to lie on the freezing ground and get a bullet in the forehead.

**February 2, 1943**

The seemingly endless artillery fire suddenly stopped. It was followed by such a piercing unbearable silence that it hurt the ears. A joyful soldier came running over, shouting: “That’s it! The war’s over!” The German northern group had surrendered. Some cried, some laughed. Many were just silent. We knew that nothing was over. But Stalingrad had shown us something no one had dared to believe before – the Germans can be beaten!

**January 27, 1943**

We’re patrolling the ruined Stalingrad. Our troops have just divided the 6th Army into two groups. Now they definitely don’t have long left! In one building we found hundreds of saddles. Turns out the 1st Romanian Cavalry Division ended up in this cauldron. The krauts ate all the horses, had a right proper feast.



(Literary sources: A. Drabkin. *I Fought at Stalingrad. Revelations of Survivors*. Moscow, 2012; A. Isaev. *Stalingrad. There Is No Land for Us Beyond the Volga*. Moscow, 2018)