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## From the Trenches of Stalingrad to the Digital Front: The Myth and Memory of WWII in the Soviet Union and the New Russia

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**From the Trenches of Stalingrad to the Digital Front: The Myth and Memory of  
WWII in the Soviet Union and the New Russia**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Global Studies from  
The College of William and Mary

by

Jacob Evan Lassin

Accepted for \_\_\_\_\_  
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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## **Introduction**

This thesis examines the evolution of the mythology and memory of WWII in Russia, with a focus on the appropriation of the war narrative by Putin's state and the uses of war memory on state-controlled Russian internet sites. World War II has been one of the foundational narratives of modern Russian identity, inextricably linked to the evaluation of the nation's past and central to its present-day struggle for self-definition, in both the political and the symbolic dimensions. Two concepts are central for the methodology of this study: "myth" and "memory." The myth of World War II in the Soviet Union and in post-Soviet Russia stands as the foundational story from which the state derives much of its legitimacy and from which the Russian people gain a sense of identity, both communal and individual. In my understanding of myth I follow Peter Burke who argues that myth should be approached "not in the positivist sense of 'inaccurate history' but in the richer, more positive sense of a story with symbolic meaning made up of stereotyped incidents and involving characters who are larger than life, whether they are heroes or villains" (103-104). For my approach to World War II mythology I use Frederick Corney's study *Telling October: Memory and the Making of the Bolshevik Revolution*, which examines the narrativization of the October Revolution. Corney writes that "foundation myths are only successful insofar as they are able to implicate the individual in the tale" (1). In the case of the memory of the World War II in Russia this "implication" has been accomplished almost totally with personal memories becoming subsumed in the official narrative of the war.

Underlying the entire act of remembering is the notion that "one only ever remembers as a member of a social group" (Wachtel 211). This key concept is especially

important to keep in mind when discussing the Soviet Union's and the Russian Federation's approaches to telling the war myth. Up until the late 1980s, the state had a complete monopoly on all mass media discourses which determined how the memory of World War II was transmitted and commemorated. Thus, part and parcel of the evolution of the remembering of such events as the war are what Alon Confino calls "vehicles of memory": books, songs, films, official speeches, monuments, and in the twenty first century, Internet sites (1386).

In Chapter 1, I chart the history of the war narrative starting with the immediate responses and commemorations during the war and early post-war celebrations and extending through the end of the Stalinist period. I then explore in greater detail the ways in which the war myth evolved during the Stagnation era of the late 1960s to early 1980s. It is during this time period when the myth crystallizes and becomes, to many subsequent generations, *the* telling of the war, which continues to inspire celebrations and remembrances of the war today. The myth then becomes the object of much scrutiny and debate during the latter days of the Soviet Union and the 1990s.

Chapter 2 discusses the revival of WWII mythology under the Putin/Medvedev administrations for the purposes of serving a new state, regime, and ideology. I look at three instances of the Russian state using the symbolic capital of the war myth to project an internal and external image of the Russian Federation as the strong, legitimate heir to the great past, before focusing on the advantages and challenges that the Internet offers to such traditional mythology. In Chapter 3, I examine Iremember.ru, a website funded by *Rospechat*, the Russian state ministry of publishing, which contains oral history interviews with Soviet war veterans as well as user generated material and comments. In

this chapter I am especially interested in how, on the one hand, the war mythology adjusts to the transnational and participatory medium of the Internet, which maintains a plethora of information and opinions concerning World War II and on the other, offers new opportunities and challenges for such inherited mythologies. Both the new medium and the new cultural environment necessitate a modified version of the war myth, which (re)-constructs the war as an epic, identity-forging event while making it appealing both to younger, nationalist Russian users and “palatable” to non-Russian, Western audiences. I attempt to explain how the state, through its funding of the site, controls how the war myth is presented, and look at how the veterans’ individual memories corroborate or digress from the “official” telling of the war. The ultimate goal of this thesis is to describe the uses of the war mythology in contemporary Russia and to get an insight into the formation of the new Russian identity.

## **Chapter 1: The Evolution of the War Myth in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet**

### **Russia**

#### **Stalin's Approach to Telling the War**

For Russians and other populations who lived and were reared under Soviet rule, World War II was an event of mythic proportions, both as the greatest national tragedy and the unprecedented collective victory. It was commemorated throughout the Soviet Union and continues to be celebrated today in the Russian Federation as a moment of great national unity, sacrifice, and heroism. Often, the telling of the war narrative transcended the actual acts of the war. Even the name that Russians give to the Soviet fight against fascist Germany, the “Great Patriotic War,” evokes the Napoleonic War which is called the Patriotic War in Russian.<sup>1</sup> This connects the two events as Russia’s collective struggle against megalomaniacs with designs on controlling all of Europe.

Memory of the war was being shaped even as the war was still raging in the Soviet Union, as the state realized that it was critical to control the memory and meaning of the war in order to maintain popular support for the army, the party, and the state. To many Soviet officials “the war represented the apotheosis of the social mobilization for which Soviet ideology was striving” (Lovell 6). For Soviet citizens the war was an event so devastating and epic in scale that there could be only one response, standing together to oppose the Nazi invasion. Thus, the state saw a need to carefully frame every aspect of the war in order to capitalize on the feelings of solidarity and national purpose the war

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<sup>1</sup> See Stephen M. Norris, *A War of Images: Russian Popular Prints, Wartime Culture, and National Identity, 1812-1945*, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006). pp. 3-10, for a comprehensive argument of the use of traditional visual forms, such as *lubki*, used in Russia during the war against Napoleon and their later revival during World War II. Norris demonstrates the continuity between visual representations during the two wars, which suggests a connection between the two conflicts in the Russian mythos and national consciousness.

elicited in the population. Stalin's decision to stay in Moscow during the German invasion even as most of his government evacuated is a clear example of actively crafting a certain public image, and the opportunity to tout his own self-sacrifice was not wasted in Soviet propaganda.<sup>2</sup> Stories of collective and individual heroism which abounded in newspapers and on the radio served both as models for emulation and as signs of the future victory. What was at the time a necessary means of lifting people's spirit would soon become the official position on telling the war: understate the disastrous campaigns and losses of 1941-42 and focus on the collective Soviet effort to free the country—and then Europe—from fascism. The first Museum of the Great Patriotic War opened as early as 1943 in order to contain and correctly frame the lived experience (Merridale 188).

Popular songs, literature, and poetry, which circulated during the war, had a profound impact on how the population perceived the Soviet Union's mission in the war. No song was more popular during the war than Aleksandr Aleksandrov's "The Holy War" (*Sviashchennaia voina*) with words by Vasilii Lebedev-Kumach. Aside from the title, which evokes the crusades, the song also calls the Germans, "the damned horde," connecting World War II with a previous, legendary Russian victory over the Mongol horde. This national war anthem was commissioned and supported by the officially atheist Soviet government, which, together with the temporary abandonment of socialist rhetoric in favor of a nationalist, Russian one<sup>3</sup> laid the foundation for the malleable post-

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<sup>2</sup> This move allowed Stalin to ally "himself with popular patriotism to an extent inconceivable in the 1930s" (Lovell 7): if the population was going to have to withstand the Nazi onslaught, then at least they could look to Comrade Stalin standing right there with him. This helped to solidify his role as indisputable head of the war effort in the minds of many Soviet citizens.

<sup>3</sup> See Richard Stites, "Soviet Russian Wartime Culture," *The People's War: Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union*, Eds. Robert W. Thurston and Bernd Bonwetsch (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), pp. 171-84.

war mythology of WWII: as both the victory of socialism and the forging by fire of the national consciousness.<sup>4</sup>

State sanctioned commemorations were another method used to stamp out conflicting personal memories. These celebrations often emulated state policies and goals. The first Victory Day celebrations were relatively understated events in comparison to the great parades of power of the 1970s or the full blown media events of today. Instead of reflecting on the victory over fascism and lamenting the many lives lost, Stalin moved to shift the focus of the commemorations. In countless speeches and writings he emphasized the necessity for the country to rebuild and revitalize in order to bring the Soviet Union on an even level with the West. Germany's surrender in Berlin put an end to one war and allowed for a new showdown, the Cold War, to begin. This new conflict required a fully rebuilt country after the utter decimation left in the wake of World War II.

In preparing for the imminent fight with the West there was not time for tears and remembrances of the mass destruction. Instead the nation needed to look forward. Propaganda during this time began to reflect the change in emphasizing that fascism was part and parcel of world imperialism. Thus, public discourse presented World War II and the Cold War as parts of the same epic battle of socialism against capitalism and imperialism. This meant that the Soviet Union's recent allies became bitter enemies and their contribution to the victory was erased from the official story.

This shift in rhetoric revealed as much about the state agenda as it concealed. Stalin was aware that, just like Russian officers who marched through Europe in the war

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<sup>4</sup> Some other war time favorites were far more explicit than even "The Holy War" was. For instance, a celebrated poet Konstantin Simonov wrote a wildly popular poem titled "Kill Him" which exhorted readers to kill any German wherever he was (Stites 180).

against Napoleon in 1812 and came back dreaming about a better life in Russia, the returning Soviet soldiers in 1945 were energized by the victory and the relative freedom from repressions.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, they saw that people in the parts of Europe they liberated from fascism lived much better than the “most progressive country in the world.” In order to forestall the emergence of new “Decembrists” Stalin needed to suppress these memories. As veterans were returning home, competing memories indeed became an issue. While it is common to refer to veterans as a stable, coherent social group, the truth remains that veterans were a rather diverse group of people from different generations, from different social and ethnic backgrounds, and with different reasons for participating in the war.<sup>6</sup> The variation among veterans predictably meant a variation in how they viewed and remembered the war based on their backgrounds, wartime experiences, and how they had been treated after the war. In lieu of any officially sanctioned organization of veterans in the Soviet Union, veterans would meet informally to reminisce about the war and discuss *their* memories. Soviet authorities viewed this as a challenge to the top-down approach they took to telling the war and would often arrest and prosecute veterans meeting in this informal groups on grounds that they were engaging in anti-Soviet activities (Edele 130). This repression of informal groups effectively ended the “alternative” views of the war propagated by veterans, allowing for a dominant state-controlled myth to emerge.

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<sup>5</sup> This parallel is most interesting, as previously mentioned, due to the connections between the Napoleonic War, the “Patriotic War” in Russian and World War II, the “Great Patriotic War” in Russian. World War II is often seen as the heir to the struggle against Napoleon, a moment of great national pride, sacrifice, and victory over tyranny.

<sup>6</sup> For a more complete picture of the diversity amongst Soviet war veterans and their treatment after the war, see Mark Edele, “Soviet Veterans as an Entitlement Group, 1945-1955,” *Slavic Review* 65.1 (Spring, 2006): 111-37.

In 1947 Stalin demoted Victory Day from a national holiday to a regular workday. Stalin highlighted his desire to move away from the traumatic past with explicit instructions that the immediate post-War period was not one for memoirs about people's own experiences of the war. In Stalin's reign "the only postwar hero was Hero Number One, and he was not inclined to make room for any competition" (Tumarkin 100). This did not only apply to famous generals; any personal memoirs or fictional accounts that problematized the epic narrative were decidedly deemphasized.<sup>7</sup>

Stalin's attempt to quell the wide scale remembering and commemoration of the war was not only designed to allow the Soviet Union to get on with the business of rebuilding the country; it was also crucial in solidifying Stalin's place in war mythology. The official narrative was entirely hierarchical and top-down and had no place for nuances or critiques of Stalin's wartime policies. Rather, the Soviet population was made to believe that it was the Communist Party under Stalin's leadership that brought the victory and that without him the Soviet Union and Europe would surely be under the boot of the fascists. This creation of an official memory and its uses to bolster state policies and the rule of Stalin demonstrates the easily blurred line between commemoration and propaganda.

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<sup>7</sup> Exceptions only prove the rule. For example, Viktor Nekrasov's novella *Stalingrad* (which during the Thaw under the name *In the Trenches of Stalingrad* became the flagman of the "trench prose") was published in the literary journal *Znamia* in 1946 and even received the State Stalin Prize in 1947. According to Nekrasov, this award caught everyone by surprise. In his interview to Radio Liberty in 1976 Nekrasov recalls how Vsevolod Vishnevskii, the editor-in-chief of *Znamia* called him, locked all doors and said that the night before the Union of Soviet writers removed *Stalingrad* from the list of nominees. But in the morning it was back in—and a winner. "Only one person could have, in one night, put your novella back on the list. And that man did it." See, "Vernyi soldat Viktor Nekrasov," <http://www.svobodanews.ru/content/transcript/24232994.html>. The vast majority of Stalin Prize recipients conform to the prescribed epic and triumphant vision of the war and post-war re-construction, such as Boris Azhaev's *Far from Moscow* (1948) and Semen Babaevsky's *Cavalier of the Golden Star* (1947-48).

The attempt to re-write the meaning of the war so as to fit with the state's agenda was manifest in the removal of the physical reminders of war losses, which could be construed as "weakness."<sup>8</sup> After the war, crippled and disabled veterans, begging on the streets, reminded passers-by of the great sacrifices that were made for victory; moreover, these people made the war memories too palpable, too *present*, destroying the epic distance necessary for the picture of the monumental triumph of the Party and its socialist ideology. "Stalin had evidently decided that the presence of those mutilated war victims was upsetting to people, and that they should no longer be in evidence to remind the public of the horror of the past war" (Tumarkin 98). If the country was to move on from the war and rebuild, people should not be constantly reminded of the terrible tragedy they just overcame.

Stalin himself needed to cleanse his image in order to maintain the trust of the people and move his goals along. He banned the mentioning of two of his most draconian wartime orders:

Military Order #270 (of August 16, 1941), which equated being taken prisoner with treason and stipulated that the families of prisoners of war would suffer dire consequences, and Military Order #227 (of July 28, 1942) popularly known as 'not one a step back,' which created punishment battalions and established within military divisions special units to shoot anyone who retreated without orders. (Tumarkin 102-3)

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<sup>8</sup> This process also began during the war as there were official pressures to doctor statistics and reports in order to hide the vast numbers of Soviet war dead. Official reports often understated Soviet casualties in a battle or how much military hardware was lost or destroyed, while the number of Germans killed or captured was always carefully recorded and reported (Merridale 188).

Publicizing such reminders of the harshness of the war would not only lead people to doubt the strength of the leader, but also cause introspection about how much winning truly cost the Soviet people. If Stalin strove for the country to mobilize and overtake the West, there was no need for messy discussions of history and the brutal actions taken during a brutal time. It was better then, to simply remove them from public view and maintain Stalin's image as an infallible ruler, without having to mention his more inhumane directives.

Despite the devastation, the Soviet Union emerged from the war victorious and Stalin's grip on the country and now Eastern Europe was stronger than ever. As the most traumatic and heroic event in recent Russian history the war had to be "appropriately" framed and understood and this process took time to develop. It was not until the late 1940s that the official narrative of the Great Patriotic War was articulated in such texts as Mikhail Chiaureli's epic film *Fall of Berlin* (1949). Some aspects of the story would later be changed, but the key meanings, symbols, actors—as well as omissions and distortions—would survive until Gorbachev's *perestroika*.

The key elements of the war myth that were put in place by Stalin and only minimally challenged until *perestroika* were first, the credit for the victory ("Who won the war?"); second, the idealized image of the Party and the Soviet state as guarantors of the victory; and third, the claim that the USSR liberated the countries of Eastern Europe, including the Baltic states, and therefore had a "natural" right to decide their fate. Underlying all of these elements was the notion of shared Soviet sacrifice and suffering—the key aspect of the myth around which the diverse Soviet population united.

Sacrifice was not only accepted but lauded, except in instances where it insinuated Soviet weakness or unpreparedness, especially in relation to Stalin or the Soviet military.

The Soviet press contended that the Soviet Union alone saved the world, defeating imperialism and the forces of reaction. The European powers and the United States may have given spam to the Soviets, but they were not credited with giving much else to the war effort. Moreover, according to this narrative the “so-called allies, the United States and Britain, had maintained an active collusion with the enemy” (Tumarkin 105), and continued to harbor Nazi criminals after the war.<sup>9</sup> The underplaying of the Allies’ role in the war remained a stable feature of the war narrative throughout changes in Soviet leadership and even into the post-Soviet period.

Just as Stalin aimed to clear his wartime record by banning any mention of some of his worst orders during the war, the same was true for his pre-war policy. Nothing was ever mentioned of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, not to mention Stalin’s near destruction of the officer corps in late 1930s. Statistics of the losses the Soviet Union suffered in the beginning of the war, as well as the human cost of the trumpeted military triumphs of 1944-45, including the battle for Berlin, were non-existent. These topics remained taboo until the waning years of the Soviet Union. It is through these omissions and retellings that one sees the state utilizing the war for its narrow pragmatic ends. Speaking of the war freely and critically immediately before Stalin’s death was impossible. In a time of rebuilding and mobilization the state needed a narrative that highlighted the strong leadership of the party and the superiority of socialism without the distractions of facts.

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<sup>9</sup> Former German scientists like Wernher von Braun, the famous rocket scientist, had distinguished careers in the United States, the fact used by Soviet propaganda to claim that the US imperialists and Nazi “revanchists” saw the Soviet Union as the common enemy. This of course glossed over the fact that the Soviets courted and convinced some former Nazi scientists to come to the Soviet Union to work after the war (Gruntman 164).

The Cold War of course affected not only the Soviet Union and the United States. It was a global confrontation in which many of the world's countries either picked sides voluntarily or were co-opted to a certain side. In Eastern Europe, the memory of World War II was used as a means of keeping the satellite states of the Soviet Union in line and as a reminder to these nations of the "debt" they owed to the Soviet Union due to Soviet sacrifices on their behalf during the war. In the immediate post-war period, the Soviet Union supported the imposition of socialist governments throughout Eastern Europe, including in Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and East Germany. As these governments took power the Soviet Union engaged in a massive project of monument building in these countries in order to memorialize the valiance of Soviet soldiers and their ultimate sacrifices to liberate people from fascism. Monuments such as the Soviet Warrior-Liberator in Berlin (1949), the Bronze Soldier of Tallinn (1947), the Soviet Military Cemetery in Warsaw (1950), and the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia (1954) stood as symbolic representations of political discourse reminding the citizens of these countries that the Soviet Union was firmly in control of their affairs.

#### The "Canonical" War Myth of the 1960s-70s

Stalin's death in 1953 led to a great change in Soviet society. Following Nikita Khrushchev's "secret speech" denouncing the personality cult of Stalin and its excesses there was a mass campaign to remove Stalin from his pedestal in Soviet history, including his chief position in the war narrative. Khrushchev oversaw the removal of countless Stalin monuments, as well as the former leader's symbolic "demotion" from his

key role in winning the war with the help of the Party and the people.<sup>10</sup> Instead, the retooled war narrative and the new monument building at war sites such as the Brest Fortress and “The Motherland Calls” in Volgograd (formerly known as Stalingrad) “emphasized the leading role of the Party during the war” (Brovkin qtd. in Tumarkin 145) and the heroic feats of the Soviet people. This “hierarchy of credit,” repeated in countless speeches, history textbooks, newspaper articles, novels, and films would not be challenged until *perestroika*, affirming the dominance of socialism as the superior ideology.

The emphases on the party’s and socialism’s place in the war effort were the most important features of Khrushchev’s treatment of the war. Khrushchev’s desire to return to the principles of socialism he claimed were abandoned under Stalin meant that while the victory in the war demonstrated the power of socialism, the commemoration of the war could not infringe upon the primacy of commemorating the October Revolution. Thus, the Thaw period continued both the downplaying of the devastating effects of the war on the country’s population and economy and the silencing of any attempts to address Stalin’s policies beyond the limited scope of state-approved de-Stalinization.<sup>11</sup>

On the one hand, the more liberal political and cultural climate of the Thaw of the 1950s-60s allowed writers and filmmakers more space for personal expression, including a number of first-hand accounts of the war. Such films as *Cranes Are Flying* (dir. Mikhail Kalatozov, 1957) and *Ballad of a Soldier* (dir. Grigorii Chukhrai, 1959) and

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<sup>10</sup> Stephen Lovell notes that in the “Secret Speech,” Khrushchev becomes “noticeably more vivid and heartfelt when his four-hour oration moves on from the 1930s to the Great Patriotic War” (9). De-Stalinization at least partially enabled the Soviet elite to take back the war memory from Stalin.

<sup>11</sup> Many Soviet soldiers were “confused and appalled” by Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin, which many saw as an “apparent betrayal of the armed forces [which] caused widespread disquiet” (Merridale 374).

literary works such as Viktor Nekrasov's *In the Trenches of Stalingrad* were radical departures from Stalin-era epics like *Fall of Berlin*. During the Thaw, the story of the Great Patriotic War as a traumatic, life-changing experience of every soldier and civilian in the Soviet Union co-existed with the officially sanctioned narrative of the "great victory of the Communist Party and the Soviet people."

On the other hand, any challenge to the "master plot"<sup>12</sup> of the war was perceived as a threat to the legitimacy of the "storyteller," namely the state and the Communist Party. Works such as Evgenii Evtushenko's 1961 poem "Babii Iar" and Anatolii Kuznetsov's 1966 novel of the same title, both dealing with the Nazi massacre of thousands of Jews outside of Kiev drew the ire of Soviet authorities. Khrushchev said that the "poem represents things as if only Jews were the victims of fascist atrocities, whereas, of course, the Hitlerite butchers murdered many Russians, Ukrainians and Soviet people of other nationalities" (qtd. in Tumarkin 121). Any divergence from the Soviet, grand narrative could not be tolerated and was summarily written off or criticized by the Soviet government.<sup>13</sup>

As the 1960s were coming to an end, so did the utopian hopes for a reformed socialism. Faced with the sagging economy and the growing indifference of the population, especially young people, toward the official Soviet rhetoric, the state needed to find a stronger narrative to bind the party and the people together. Leonid Brezhnev and his administration understood the emotional pull of the war mythology and made a

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<sup>12</sup> Katerina Clark's term for the conventions of all socialist realist novels of the Stalinist era is exceedingly applicable to the state's telling of World War II which followed many of the same patterns such as the party providing guidance to overcome obstacles. For Clark's full description of the master plot, see Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (Bloomington University of Indiana Press, 2000) pp.255-60.

<sup>13</sup> Jews were an especially problematic group for the Soviet Union to memorialize due, at least partially, to official Soviet opposition to Israel, which was a clear US ally.

conscious attempt to harness its symbolic power in order to maintain the loyalty of the population and gird itself against international challenges.

During the period known as Stagnation or *zastoi* in the Soviet Union, which lasted from about 1964, with Leonid Brezhnev coming to power, until 1985 when Mikhail Gorbachev took control of the Soviet Union, the myth of World War II transformed into a full blown war cult. May 9<sup>th</sup>, Victory Day, once again became a state holiday and a day off for the population. In 1965, to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory, a massive Victory Parade was organized on the Red Square, for the first time since the late 1940s. A highly ritualized and widely televised spectacle; the parade featured the Banner of Victory, the Soviet flag raised when the Red Army took Berlin, carried by two of the three legendary participants who had hoisted it over the Reichstag. The state also used the occasion to demonstrate its military might by rolling several intercontinental ballistic missiles through Red Square. This parade became the blueprint for all subsequent Soviet and post-Soviet official war commemorations. The late 1960s to the mid 1970s saw a number of lavish celebrations of major anniversaries: The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution in 1967, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lenin's birth in 1970, and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of victory in the Great Patriotic War in 1975. The epic scale of these events was an attempt by the Soviet state to give a boost to waning Soviet ideology. The commemoration of the war was by far the most important state holiday, its power residing in the sense of the *shared* heroic and tragic national past. Tumarkin notes that as late as the mid 1980s people she interviewed in Russia repeatedly called the Victory Day "the only real holiday" (33).

The war became increasingly more important than even socialism in state ideology. This pervasive cult of the war was ubiquitous in every aspect of life in the Soviet Union during Stagnation. Why was this case? The answer lies in the fact that the war myth provided a foundational narrative for the Soviet people and the state. Frederick Corney writes that this type of narrative so “deeply informs the individual that the individual’s very identity, experiences, and memories are inextricably bound up with it” (1). As a result, the myth of World War II was an extremely effective means of keeping the loyalty of and control over a population rapidly giving up belief in socialism, the state’s official ideology, and becoming disillusioned with their everyday experiences.

One of the most important ideas that the state imprinted upon the Soviet consciousness was the unbreakable link between the people and the Party when speaking of the war. During the Thaw, Stalin was demoted from his role as the uncontested leader of the war effort. This development necessitated his replacement with a new figure that could be looked to as having “won the war.” State propaganda settled upon the unity of the people and the Party as the new “hero” in the victory over fascists.<sup>14</sup> The populist narrative was designed to ensure allegiance of war veterans by giving them an opportunity to share their war experience with the younger generations. Second, and more importantly, this improved narrative and the massive war commemoration campaign of the 1970s-mid 1980s positioned the Communist Party and the Soviet state as the guardians of the “sacred memory” of the war. With little else to buttress the popularity of the gerontocratic Soviet government, the war cult was a mechanism to link

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<sup>14</sup> Brezhnev’s ability to “share” the victory in the war with the people was an important move and allowed for the war myth to reach its pinnacle during Stagnation. This decision also allowed him to avoid the problems his predecessors faced when attempting to conflate their own leadership with leading the war effort (Lovell 9).

the uninspiring present to the heroic past. In an attempt to use the aura of the war for political legitimacy, Brezhnev himself inscribed his personal history into the war mythology. In 1978 he published his (ghostwritten) memoir *Little Land (Malaia zemlia)* about his participation in the heroic defense of a Soviet outpost on the Black Sea.<sup>15</sup>

While the heroism and the great sacrifices of the Soviet people during the war became the centerpiece of the official discourse, authors did have some leeway in writing about the war. However, many things were still off limits.

Topics that might have been seen to undermine the status of the military command or political authorities –the disaster-hit early campaigns of the Red Army in the months after the German invasion, or the collaboration of some Soviet citizens with the occupying forces, or revelations that the system of privileges according to rank had persisted during the Blockade in Leningrad –remained taboo, in fiction as in journalism, until the height of *glasnost'* in 1989-90. (Kelly 264-5)

The war became not only the cornerstone of late Soviet ideology, but the major watershed of twentieth-century history, an event against which to measure the past and, especially, the peaceful and prosperous present of “developed socialism.” Official speeches and textbooks on the war from this period often mentioned the importance of the rapid collectivization and industrialization of the first two five-year plans. The Party’s decisions, they explained, enabled the state to recover immediately after the Nazi invasion. When the Molotov-Ribbentrop Non-Aggression Pact was mentioned, it

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<sup>15</sup> The work was translated into multiple languages, made into a television film, and became an inspiration for a patriotic song. So much fanfare surrounded the event that it quickly became the target of political jokes: “One veteran asks another: ‘Why did you sit out the war in Stalingrad, while the fate of the nation was being decided at the Little Land?’”

showcased Soviet diplomatic skill, with no connection to the partition of Poland and the occupation of the Baltic states. Soviet losses in the first years of the war were ascribed entirely to Germany's "treacherous attack," silencing any discussion of the Soviet Union's woeful unpreparedness for the war. The careful omission of certain aspects of the war history squelched any major public criticisms of the Party's leading role in the war effort.

The definitive official narrative of the war was crystallized in the monumental, multi-volume edition *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941-1945. A Short History*, which was published in 1984 by the "Military Publishing House" (*Voenizdat*). A look at the massive work's table of contents (Appendix A) tells the war narrative as one grand epic. The reader moves from one chapter outlining a great Soviet victory in the war to another: military victories at the front develop parallel to mobilization and economic victories in the rear and diplomatic triumphs in dealing with the sluggish and treacherous Allies. Moreover, some of the chapter titles, such as Chapter 14 "The Liberation of the Soviet Baltics" use language which makes clear the official Soviet opinion on politically sensitive issues. The 1970s status quo ("Soviet Baltics") explains the "messy" past while Soviet war-time sacrifices naturalize the present. The *Short History* demonstrates how the state and party were able to codify an epic telling of the war myth for the population, omitting or re-writing some of the most problematic aspects of the Soviet Union's actions in the war.

The writing of the full war narrative is just one example of how in the 1970s the war became a crucial element in the ideological upbringing of Soviet youth. For those who came of age during Stagnation, the war was not directly experienced and for most

was only a distant memory of their parents and grandparents. The state understood that the war narrative was its best means of holding onto power and that saturating education with its lessons was critical. In many of the leading pedagogical journals and popular magazines of the time there was much handwringing over ensuring a proper military-patriotic upbringing for children. Under Brezhnev, “the message was that the nation had fought as one, that young lives had been lost, and that new generations owed the past (and their current) leaders limitless loyalty and gratitude” (Merridale 374). It was necessary to ensure that the youth would understand the great sacrifices that allowed for them to live with all of the benefits of the Soviet system.

What then exactly constituted this military-patriotic upbringing? Facts and figures of the war, which all young people had to learn and memorize in order to understand the epic magnitude of the war, was the most emphasized aspect of this curriculum. All Soviet schoolchildren knew that twenty million of their countrymen died in the war. All could tell you that during the Blockade of Leningrad, residents received just 125 grams of bread a day to survive. The names of the selected iconic heroes—Zoya Kosmodem’ianskaia, Alexander Matrosov, the Belorussian partisans, the young pioneer heroes<sup>16</sup>-- and of the major, always victorious, battles constituted the key points of war mythology.<sup>17</sup> This provided all citizens with a collective memory of the immense heroism and suffering during the war. These shared and accepted facts about the war

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<sup>16</sup> Kosmodem’ianskaia, as previously mentioned, was a teenaged partisan fighter whose death was retold in the pages of *Pravda* in 1942. Matrosov was a soldier who threw himself on a German machine gun, sacrificing his life to allow his unit to advance. Belorussian partisans fought against German occupation from 1941 until the liberation of Belorussia in 1944. Finally, young pioneer heroes were the Soviet youth who were valorized in the Soviet Union for foiling attempts by the Nazis to infiltrate their hometowns via espionage or attack. Many post-Soviet war memory internet sites reproduce this iconic list almost verbatim. See, for example, the site “Heroes of the Great Patriotic War,” <http://www.all4heroes.ru/>.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of the Soviet Union’s creation of war heroes pantheon during the war see Catherine Merridale’s *Ivan’s War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Picador, 2006) p. 190.

were supplemented with class visits to local war museums and monuments and stories from veterans at schools and on television. Tumarkin notes that, in addition to pride for the heroic Soviet past, these exercises engaged another important means of controlling the interpretation of the war:

Shame. An old fashioned inner response that in many places in the West had long ceased to function as a source of social control continued to resonate in Russia. Shame is a community-based complex of emotions: we feel shame before others. Its more modern analogue, guilt, is more self-contained: we feel guilt within ourselves. (133)

Awareness of what your classmates or parents or teachers might think of you, if you did not behave appropriately during war rituals was a self-imposed system of maintaining the war cult during Stagnation. Public shame, deriving from a need to respect the terrible losses of Soviet life in the war was a central element in the propagation and survival of the war myth and a clear instance of the state utilizing the shared sacrifice of the Red Army for pragmatic purposes.

Public rituals were a key component of the remembrance and celebration of the war myth and provided a forum in which public shaming might be incurred or avoided. Every Soviet schoolchild was required to take part in the recitation of war poems, the singing of war songs, and the placing of flowers on memorials. Even on wedding days, no procession was complete without the newlyweds paying their respects at the local war memorial. Through these practices, the remembrance of the war became a reflex. People knew the exact ways to act in those public situations, without prompting and without questioning. The state ordained “proper” commemoration of the war became such a

common action that to break from convention would be socially unacceptable, an affront to the holy memory of those who perished in the war.

Making veterans part of the educational process was not the only way in which the state used the war to co-opt this sizeable portion of the population. During Brezhnev's time the state granted special privileges to veterans. For example, veterans were able to skip the line waiting for food. Also, on Victory Days the state gave out medallions and other knickknacks as tokens of gratitude for the heroism and sacrifices of veterans. Of course these pittance did not make up for the short shrift given to veterans after the war. Buying poor quality cheese before others did not make up for poor medical care for war related injuries, nor did a pin on Victory Day make up for not having a suitable apartment. However, the symbolic value of being part of the legendary past neutralized one of the potentially most critical elements of society.

The war myth was not only an effective means of controlling affairs internally, but served as an unfailing legitimizing tool of the USSR's foreign policy. One of the most powerful examples of this was the justification of Soviet control over Eastern Europe and the Baltic states. Official Soviet discourse often touted the spilling of Soviet blood in Eastern Europe during its liberation of these lands from Nazi tyranny. Therefore, the war myth was a very public mechanism for the Soviet Union to impose guilt on these countries for not properly appreciating the sacrifices of the Red Army as a means of making their people more amenable to Soviet rule and decision making. If these countries and their governments did not comply they would be branded as ungrateful for the Soviet sacrifice, or even worse, as desirous of fascism. The war experience gave the Soviet government the upper hand as it dealt with the "liberated" states.

When Soviet officials realized that they could not keep up in the Cold War's arms race they rebranded the state as the non-aggressive arbiter in international disputes and the champion of peace. The Soviet Union only had to mention the twenty million who perished in the war as the proof for wanting to avoid conflict in the future. This self-promotion as the world leader in peace may seem strange to many Americans, well-versed in the common Cold War narrative, but to many other nations, this image made the Soviet Union a more appealing country to get behind, in contrast to the "war mongering" United States.<sup>18</sup>

The canonization of the war myth during the period of Stagnation demonstrates the utility of the war narrative in giving legitimacy to the regime and its leadership. The victory over fascism made clear that socialism won out and will continue to do so. Moreover, the ability of the Soviet Union to quickly recover after a "treacherous" attack provided evidence that the party had prepared the nation and was the best leadership under duress. The war myth then moved into everyday life and its commemoration became reflexive acts, which all Soviet citizens, even those who had no experience of the war, could identify with. Finally, the war myth was used for the state's international ends. The socialist satellite nations "owed" the Soviet Union for freeing them, and the great losses of the Soviet people was played up to portray the Soviet Union as never wanting to engage in fruitless conflict again. While the war myth served the state well when it was unchallenged during Stagnation, the period of *perestroika* under Mikhail Gorbachev saw

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<sup>18</sup> One of the cultural texts that embodied the trope of the USSR as a "naturally" peace-loving country was the song "Do Russians Want a War" [*Khotiat li russkie voiny*], written in 1961 with lyrics by Evgenii Evtushenko. According to him, the Main Political Administration (GlavPUR) criticized the song for promoting pacifism and demoralizing the Soviet armed forces. By the late 1960s, however, the song became an efficient means of presenting to the world a peace-loving image of the Soviet Union, in contrast to the war-mongering West. The song became a stable part of the repertoire of the Soviet Army Choir on its foreign tours. <http://www.peoples.ru/art/literature/poetry/contemporary/evtushenko/interview7.html>

numerous attacks on the fundamentals of the war myth, weakening its potency for state use.

### Perestroika and the De-Mythologizing of WWII

Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost*' or openness triggered radical re-evaluation of the myth of World War II. When Gorbachev took power in 1985 his first orders of business were economic reforms, which would allow for the socialist system to re-build and reverse the decades of economic mismanagement. In an effort to revitalize the nation Gorbachev allowed more transparency in government operations, eased censorship, and opened for public debate some of the previously taboo social and economic issues, such as corruption and crime.

The new freedoms afforded to the Soviet press meant an explosion in investigative journalism during *perestroika*. One of the targets of reporters, such as Dmitrii Zakharov,<sup>19</sup> was Stalin's policies during the war. This new wave of de-Stalinization was so powerful that "within a year or two [it] called into question the very legitimacy of the government and Party that had produced Stalin's system and continued its legacy" (Tumarkin 165). Soviet citizens were treated to a host of revelations and admissions about the worst aspects of Stalin's reign, including his harsh treatment of POWs after the war. Certain staples of the Soviet war myth, like the narrative of the "treacherous," surprise attack on the Soviet Union during Operation Barbarossa was shaken with the Gorbachev government's official admittance in 1989 that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact de facto meant cooperation between the Germans and the Soviets in

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<sup>19</sup> Zakharov was one of the hosts of the wildly popular, *perestroika*-era investigative television programs Viewpoint [Vzgliad], which ran many pieces challenging the "canonical" telling of World War II. He now hosts, on the radio station *Ekho Moskvy*, the program *The Price of Victory (Tsena pobedy)*, which reevaluates and explores the telling of World War II in Russia.

dividing Europe. Gorbachev had, in his own words, desired to fill in the “blank spots” in history and restore the foundations of the system (Tumarkin 164). However, very quickly these moderate reformist policies transformed into a nationwide reassessment of everything that had been taken for granted by Soviet citizens.

By the late 1980s, the inquiry of journalists and professional historians expanded to target the very meaning of victory. With Stalin’s abuses of power coming to light virtually every day in the press and on television the familiar narrative of Soviet sacrifices and the “blood spilled for freedom and peace” acquired new urgency and new meaning. On the one hand, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Baltic republics were moving towards independence, while the two Germanies were on the verge of reunification. As a result, the discourse of Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe, beginning with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and culminating with the installment of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe started competing with the narrative of liberation. On the other hand, the official cliché of the “high price” that the Soviet people paid in the war was re-interpreted as the *cost* of Victory, implying that the losses were attributable to the inefficiency and criminal policies of Stalin’s government, in addition to German atrocities. At times some of the criticisms lobbed at the Soviet war memory have put the Soviet policies towards Eastern Europe and especially the Baltics on a par with the actions of the Nazis.

This de-sacralization of the Soviet war myth was difficult for many parts of society to accept. To those who believed wholeheartedly in the myth and the importance of victory as a symbol of the USSR’s status as a great world power, these revelations represented an affront to the very foundations of Soviet socialism and the heroic past.

Those who thought that the state had repressed information about the true nature of the war were vindicated, their suspicions of the party's and state's propagation of misinformation confirmed.

Two camps began to emerge in the waning days of the Soviet Union and came into their own in the Russian Federation in the debate over the fate of Soviet history and the memory of World War II. These groups were labeled the "liberals" or "democrats," those allied with Yeltsin and his future government, and the "patriots," nationalists, and communists, those in a wide range of political organizations including nationalist politicians and communist apparatchiks, who would later become parliamentary deputies. The very meaning of patriotism became subject of heated debates. As "[c]ommunist 'patriots' converted powerful memories of World War II into currency for present political conflicts, liberals changed their rhetoric, if not always their policies, to respond to aspersions cast on their patriotic credentials" (Smith 57).

Faced with historical revelations and the demands by the population for full disclosure of the failings and atrocities of the state in war time, the regime engaged in many public *mea culpas* during *perestroika*, a reemergence of much of the popular memory that was either subsumed in the "canonical" war myth or suppressed because it did not fit with the official telling of the war. One of the most important of these was the official, if understated, recognition of Stalin's massacre of Poland's military elite at Katyn. For years, the Soviet leadership blamed the Germans for the mass murder, despite the mounting evidence indicating Soviet responsibility (Tumarkin 176-81). The acknowledgement of such brutal treatment towards the Poles, a supposed ally of the Soviet Union within the Eastern Bloc, greatly damaged the notion that the Red Army

liberated Eastern Europe, saving them from fascism. Rather, to many in Poland and the other Eastern Bloc countries it appeared that Soviet actions during the war in these countries were just as vicious as the Nazi atrocities and that the imposition of Communist governments in the region was simply Soviet occupation by a different name.

Victory Day celebrations, in the final days of the Soviet Union, lost much of their triumphalist character as a result of the loss of international prestige concerning Soviet war victories and the evaporation of the war cult domestically. Mikhail Gorbachev's speech marking the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory in 1990 was noticeably more toned down than the addresses of Soviet leaders in the past. His speech focused on remembering the sacrifices of those lost in the war and the collective suffering endured by *all* the Soviet people, including those interred in the gulags:

[L]et us remember those about whom there was silence for long decades, who had been illegally stripped of their honorable names and their citizenship rights, and locked up in camps... We repeat, no one is forgotten and nothing is forgotten. This is not a call for vengeance. It is spoken as a remembrance from the heart, which is what makes a human being human... (Gorbachev qtd. in Tumarkin 197)

Another surprising development in Gorbachev's speech was his divergence from the "canonical" figure of twenty million war dead. Gorbachev claimed that "the war had carried off twenty-seven million people" (Tumarkin 197). This act further emphasized the deep losses suffered by the Soviet Union during the war, changing the tenor of Victory Day to one of quiet self-reflection as opposed to the bombastic displays of might and mass celebration that once characterized their commemoration. In both official

discourse and in the public imagination, the meaning of the day and of the war in general had changed. In an effort to stem the tide of popular dissatisfaction the regime attempted to contain some of the damage to the “canonical” war myth caused by new information. However, instead of restoring the faith of the disaffected, the admissions unleashed more doubts and helped to hasten the fall of the Soviet regime.

### The 1990s and the Emergence of the New Russian Patriotism

With the collapse of the Soviet Union came the emergence of the Russian Federation. This new state needed to contend with the Soviet past while transforming the country into an open society, ready for the modern world. Dealing with the memory of World War II became a proxy fight for some of the most fundamental conflicts in the early stages of the new Russia’s political life. Some of the strongest representatives of the liberal wing of the new Russian political landscape were also the most vocal denouncers of the war cult during the late years of the Soviet Union. For them, questioning the war myth was a means of getting at the very ideological underpinnings of the Soviet past. The zeal of the liberals in their de-mythologization of socialism and revealing the truth about World War II were met with popular support during the death throes of the Soviet Union.

However, as the realities of privatization, economic crises, and social chaos mounted, resentment towards these reformers increased and there was a noticeable public retreat in support of this side on the political spectrum. The liberals’ rhetoric of democracy and a free society quickly grew hollow due to the loss of a unifying Soviet identity and the trauma caused by economic liberalization. The conservative, Communist politicians saw an opportunity to move in and present an alternative vision to the

population. These conservative elements took the criticisms of the war put forward by the liberals as evidence of their disloyalty to the country and their abandonment of its veterans who sacrificed so much. In a time of great uncertainty in Russia, the war once again occupied a prominent place in public discourses. The war represented a time of national greatness and unity, an alternative for the chaotic and harsh Russian reality of the 1990s, such as the sharp rise in crime and the lack of regularly paid salaries. In the new nationalist, “patriotic” discourses, the *loss* of the USSR and the *loss* of Eastern Europe emerged as a direct result of the democrats’ attacks on Stalin and as a betrayal of the great shared past.

In her chapter on the attempted return in the early 1990s of trophy art, works of art the Red Army took from German museums and collections during the war and brought back to the Soviet Union afterwards, Kathleen Smith speaks to how effectively the conservative “patriots” were able to castigate the liberals for wanting to return the art to their original owners. The conservatives labeled the attempt to return the works of art as an acceptance of “the loss of superpower status,” strongly damaging the liberals’ legitimacy in the eyes of the population (Smith 71). In contrast, the conservatives, who defended the strong legacy of the war, appeared to be advocating for a strong Russia, a popular position. The liberals needed to respond in order to fend off the claims of their disloyalty and lack of pride in the achievements and history of the Russian people. However, they did not seem to recognize that not all Stalinist decisions and institutions were automatically debunked and some, like the strong, unified leadership during the war still resonated quite well with a sizeable portion of the population. As time wore on it became increasingly difficult for liberal politicians to find and promote the “positive

bases of liberal Russian patriotism,” namely those aspects of Russian history and culture which would reflect positively on the endeavor of democratization (Smith 77).

Yeltsin’s fights with the nationalists and his desire to reassert liberal values prompted him to announce in 1996 a contest to define New Russian National Idea; however due to more pressing political matters at the time, this contest was scrapped. The public discussion was taken up once again during Putin’s first term as president. However, his administration had the “National Idea reduced to the issue of economic growth,” namely doubling the state’s gross domestic product (Volkov 19). Others, including Anatolii Chubais, an important member of Yeltsin’s cabinet, have advocated for different notions of the National Idea, such as one based on controlling energy production and distribution throughout post-Soviet space, an idea that Chubais himself labels as a “liberal empire” (Volkov 19). This debate has still not been settled in the Russian Federation and controversy rages over just what exactly the purpose and National Idea of the new Russia ought to be.

The divisions over the memory of World War II did not end with debates over artwork or national ideas. The proper means to commemorate the war on Victory Day became a public battle over the “correct” memorializing of the war. Initially the democrats wanted to make the event more of a popular remembrance and to eschew the old displays of military might and state authority in Red Square, which were hallmarks of Soviet-era commemorations. Instead, the liberals instituted a “peace parade,” with representatives from around Europe including Germany in attendance, which was “meant to start a new non-militaristic tradition that simultaneously reaffirmed Russia’s membership in Europe” (Smith 86). However, this did not provide the strong patriotic

image which the public desired, providing the Communists with the upper hand in the fight over the memory of World War II as they decried the government's "abandonment" of veterans and making the ceremony "too festive" (Smith 87). Yeltsin and his government eventually understood the need for strong, positive patriotism and by 1995 had reintroduced military parades and even symbols of the Soviet period, such as the red victory banner, to show continuation between the heroic Soviet past and the new Russian state. The "canonical" telling of the war myth and its associated symbols lend legitimacy to those who support them, due to the strong memories and feelings they stir up. This important lesson has been taken quite seriously by the Putin-Medvedev administration. This chapter outlined the development and adaptation of the war myth during Soviet times, demonstrating how the war myth was created, developed, and used for specific state purposes. The next chapter argues that this process has not ceased and that the current Russian regime has devoted a great deal of resources to Victory Day celebrations and commemorations of the Great Patriotic War. However, the Putin regime has adapted the telling of the war myth to both suit its own policy goals as well as to meet the new challenges of defining what constitutes contemporary Russian identity.

## **Chapter 2: Putin and the Memory of World War II**

For many in Russia, Vladimir Putin's ascension to power represented a welcome change from the social and economic chaos of the 1990s. From the very beginning, Putin presented an image of a strong leader of a well-ordered, powerful state. In order to cultivate this image he needed to strengthen a notion of national unity and tradition as a means for deriving legitimacy for his authority. To forge this identity, Putin looked to the same territory that his predecessors explored: the myth of World War II.

World War II in Russia still holds a certain mystique for most as a moment of national glory and unity, which could remind those born after the war of the great sacrifices of their forebears, act as a model which Russian society could learn from, and remind the outside world that present-day Russia is the heir of the great Soviet past. Putin understood the immense potential of the war mythology and made the commemoration of the war a key part of his policy. Putin's and Medvedev's administrations' strategy of using the war mythology to bolster the regime's own image derives from a revived "canonical" telling of the myth which attempts to erase from public memory the revelations about the war and Stalinism of the late 1980s-1990s. "Memory," as Alon Confino writes, "has come to denote the representation of the past and the making of it into a shared cultural knowledge for successive generations" (1386). By the mid-late 1990s, with the collapse of communist ideology (and a gap in place of a new one) and the population's efforts directed at economic survival *in the present*, Russia's past was on the back burner. A 1996 survey done by VTSIOM, the All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion, showed the waning power of the war myth over younger generations. Only 26% of respondents under 40 with a higher education and

39% without a higher education, experienced pride from the war victory, illustrating that for many younger Russians the war myth was no longer as powerful a source of national pride as it was for older respondents, of whom 39% with a higher education and 52% without one felt that the victory was an important source of pride (Dubin 300). A key element in the promotion of the ideology of “Great Russia” under Putin in 2000s was bringing history—or rather the “politics of history”—back and making the defense of the national past against its “blackners” the foundation of national cohesion.<sup>20</sup>

It is not surprising that the revival of the WWII mythology in state discourse and public debates occurred simultaneously with the elevation of the Brezhnev-era period as the “golden age” in the country’s past.<sup>21</sup> Many Russians, including the young people who never lived at that time, see the 1970s as an imaginary era of social equality, material prosperity, and, most importantly, a stable collective identity. The positive image of the 1970s, when the myth of WWII was crystallized and became the foundational national myth, facilitated the adoption of WWII mythology in its Stagnation-era form.

During the Putin-Medvedev decade several key events suggest an attempt to reinvigorate war mythology. This chapter examines three of these: the celebration of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Victory Day in 2005, the 2007 conflict with Estonia over the removal of a Soviet war monument, and the 2009 creation of a government commission against historical revisionism. Analyzing these events provides insight into how the memory of

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<sup>20</sup> In his article “The Armored Train of Memory,” historian Nikolay Koposov quotes Gleb Pavlovsky, who until 2011 served as an advisor to the Presidential Administration: after the collapse of the traditional ideologies, “politics of history is the only possible form of politics.” *Perspectives of History*, January 2011; <http://www.historians.org/Perspectives/issues/2011/1101/1101int1.cfm>

<sup>21</sup> In a survey conducted in 2002, answering the questions “When have people like you lived best?” and “If you could start life anew, during what time would you prefer to live?” 49% and 39% of respondents respectively chose the Brezhnev era. See Boris Dubin, “‘Krovavaia’ voina i ‘Velikaia’ pobeda,” *Otechestvennye zapiski* 5.19 (2004); <http://www.strana-oz.ru/?numid=20&article=937>

World War II is manipulated, especially in the construction of a specific national identity for both domestic and international audiences. In addition, looking at these events in depth helps to clarify the role of Vladimir Putin's strong-hand policies in the identity building process and how the memory of World War II reinforces the need for his authoritarian policies.

### The 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Victory Day

In his study of Soviet and Russian nationalism, political scientist Yitzhak Brudny notes that during the Brezhnev era the state developed a "politics of inclusion" in which the ideas of Russian nationalism were incorporated into the state's official discourse.<sup>22</sup> Russian nationalism provided many benefits for the Soviet regime, such as connecting the Soviet government with Russia's long history and helping to legitimize the waning socialist ideology to the people. This use of inclusionary politics did not disappear with the Soviet Union but persists to the present day. The commemoration of the Great Patriotic War in Putin's Russia provides a vivid example of the revival of "inclusionary politics" and populist discourses of national glory, personal heroism, and a sense of tradition to silence the alternative narratives about the meaning of the war.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union the state has abandoned socialist inspired celebrations of the October Revolution and May Day and fully embraced the more ideologically malleable Victory Day, which was not explicitly based in celebrating the achievements of socialism and Marxist thought. The sheer size of the celebrations for Victory Day in Russia appears astonishing, with every single program on Channel One (a government controlled television channel) on May 9<sup>th</sup> focusing on the war and the great victory. This focus on Victory Day works to quell the anxieties of an "imperial" regime,

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<sup>22</sup> See *Reinventing Russia*, pp.16-17 for Brudny's definition and discussion of the "politics of inclusion."

worried about its own identity. While the Russian state wants to distance itself from the ideology of socialism, it is nevertheless eager to establish its continuity with other aspects of the “great Soviet past.” The uncertainty of what exactly constitutes contemporary Russian identity presents a challenge to the government, which wants to create one clear notion of Russianness. Official television reporting referring to the veterans as Russian, rather than Soviet soldiers, presents a clear example of the Kremlin viewing this war as its own, even if Russia as a state did not exist during the war.

Stephen Hutchings and Natalia Rulyova note that “by de-ideologising the context of the Second World War, space was surreptitiously created to accommodate the modern ideology of Russian statism with its assertive nationalist pride, its pseudo-imperialism and its newly authoritarian agenda” (146-7). The use of the familiar images and rituals, like the procession of military hardware and the moment of silence for the fallen allow the Victory Day celebration to transmit the ideology of the new Russian state, packaging it in familiar symbols. The symbols extended back to the Russian imperial army, with soldiers sporting golden epaulettes and cords and bright red plastrons on their chests. The state took this principle to an extreme, yet very pragmatic end in its rehabilitation of Stalin. As Hutchings and Rulyova argue,

[w]hat viewers witnessed was a form of inverted carnival logic in which the fallen king, Stalin (rather than the fool), was (re)crowned, as hierarchies were overturned for the duration of the celebration. This repositioned Stalin at the locus of the popular rather than the official, bolstering Putin’s status as a leader whose own charismatic popularity is

based on his willingness to accommodate the desires of those nostalgic for Stalin's authority (if not his ideology). (147)

This ceremony ignored the revelations of the past two decades about Stalin's mistakes and crimes which weakened the Red army and led to the disaster of the first years of the war. Putin incorporated the aura of Stalin's alleged strong decision making and leadership into his own image. As a result, Putin is able to allay the gripes of more conservative elements of society who lament the lack of such leadership in post-Soviet Russia.

The most blatant use of the Victory Day proceedings for the purposes of the state's agenda appeared in the linking of World War II to the war on terror. At the end of a montage of documentary images from the war, the producers placed images of the 9/11 attacks. Throughout the day television announcers drew parallels between fighting against Hitler and fighting against Chechen terrorists within Russia. This continuity between eras was visually reinforced with famous television anchors from the Soviet period and contemporary Russia appearing on TV together, acting as a bridge for an "unbroken" Russian history and identity spanning from Soviet times to the present. The commemoration of the Great Patriotic War in which Russia maintains the moral right and carries out an almost divine mission "legitimizes" the regime's current military and political goals. Putin's co-optation of the rituals, images, ideas and emotions connected to Victory Day and the state's pragmatic uses of the past for current policies illustrate the extent to which the current administration bases its public image on the myth of World War II. The use of the World War II myth as a major aspect of Putin's policies and rhetoric is not only centered on the actions of the Russian state and government. It has

also developed in reaction to how other countries treat the Soviet experience in World War II.

### The Bronze Soldier of Tallinn and the Russian Outrage

The Baltic states have long held resentment towards the official Russo-Soviet story of World War II. To many in these countries, World War II represents the loss of national sovereignty and the beginning of half a century of harsh repression. Therefore, it is not surprising that Estonia became a battle ground over the fate and meaning of Soviet war monuments. In 2007 the Estonian nationalist government's decision to move the Bronze Soldier of Tallinn memorial from a main thoroughfare in the city sparked intense backlash from the ethnic Russian population of Estonia and from the Kremlin. Official Russian interpretations claim "complete control over Russia's Soviet history" (Bruggeman and Kasekamp 58). Any disavowal of the sacrifice and hardships endured by the Soviet Army and the people comes across as an affront to the current Russian state. Moreover, any such attempt at "re-writing" history brings phantom pains of the lost Soviet empire. The nature of this and similar controversies between Russia and former Soviet republics (e.g., the elevation of Stepan Bandera from a Nazi collaborator to a Ukrainian national hero) is both political and symbolic. Such disputes demonstrate how seriously modern Russia values the memory of World War II in defining itself and the lengths it goes to protect this memory in international disputes.

The Baltic states were at the forefront of disengaging from the Soviet memory of World War II and of "purging" their cities of the symbols of what they saw as Soviet occupation. The residents of Tallinn made this especially clear in their unofficial nicknaming of the Bronze Soldier as the "unknown rapist" (Wertsch 135). The decision

to move the monument in Tallinn was preceded by numerous acts of vandalism on it. The newly elected Estonian government decided to move it in the name of keeping it safe. However, to many in the ethnic Russian community this appeared as an offense to the suffering of Soviet soldiers. Moreover, many ethnic Russians had long felt marginalized in the newly independent Estonia. The removal of the monument seemed like yet another piece of evidence of erasing their past from Estonia and its history. Thus, the widespread protests, emboldened by supporters crossing the border from Russia, set out to protect the “sacred” past from those who would wish to profane one of its symbols.

The reaction from Russia itself was quite strong. Putin, in his Victory Day speech that year noted that those who “desecrate monuments to war heroes offend their own people and sow discord and new distrust between states and people.”<sup>23</sup> The Russian offensive against Estonia continued on into the year, from rallies at the Estonian embassy in Moscow denouncing the decision to cyber-attacks from Russia, which shut down Estonian banking and government websites for periods of time. The extent and severity of the Russian response makes clear the importance of the memory of World War II in the national consciousness of Russia. Even more importantly, the controversy over the monument testifies to the symbolic power that the memory and the interpretation of the war have in Russia’s relations with former Soviet republics and members of the socialist camp.

Wertsch suggests that the massive reaction of Russians points to a “deep collective memory,” one that is inextricably tied up in the fundamental “identity claims of the group” (139,142). One of the key mechanisms of the emerging Russian identity is the preservation of the notion of Russia and her people as a self-sacrificing nation. If this is

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<sup>23</sup> For an English translation of the speech see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4528999.stm>.

the case, any attempts to deny this history would be rejections in part or in full of what many Russians believe to be true about themselves and what *they* did for the world. In a Russia that is working to define itself based on its past achievements and martyrdom the monument's removal qualifies as the worst type of affront. The backlash in Estonia and the other Baltic states against the Soviet war narrative does indicate the existence and persistence of alternative, popular memories of the war. However, the well-organized Russian opposition to this supposed "revisionism" illustrates how Putin's administration has been successful in revitalizing the symbolic power of WWII mythology. This defense of the "canonical" telling of the war has not only been a product of official rhetoric and popular action, but has also been adopted and enshrined in law, with the full backing of the Russian government.

#### The Campaign against Historical Falsification under Medvedev

In 2009, Russian president Dmitri Medvedev announced the creation of the Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests (*Komissia pri prezidente Rossiiskoi Federatsii po protivodeistviuu popytkam fal'sifikatsii istorii v ushcherb interesam Rossii*). Medvedev charged this weightily titled body with safeguarding and promoting the "correct" telling of the Soviet Union's victory in World War II and weeding out "false" history about the actions of the Red Army. While the now former president insists and the commission claims to be merely engaging in historical research to ensure that objective truth is revealed, the political goals of the commission are self-evident. The commission consists of members of the Medvedev government, members of the State Duma, and even media personalities, like television host Nikolai Svanidze. Of the

twenty-eight members, only three are historians, but the distinction between politicians and historians appears dubious. As historian Roy Medvedev notes in an article entitled “Will History Endure it All?” (*Istoria vse sterpit?*), published in the newspaper *Kommersant*, those chosen to be on the committee “do not hold authority among professional historians” (*ne imeiushchikh avtoriteta sredi professionalov*).<sup>24</sup> Many observers saw the creation of the commission as a counterattack to the OSCE’s 2009 resolution equating the terrors of Nazism with those of Stalinism, essentially linking the two regimes as culpable for starting WWII and the atrocities that ensued.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to the politically biased membership of the commission, the Kremlin has unveiled a law, which Andrew Osborn in *The Wall Street Journal* described as, “mandating jail sentences from three to five years for anyone in the former Soviet Union, not just those in the Russian Federation, convicted of rehabilitating Nazism.”<sup>26</sup> The broad category of what constitutes “rehabilitating Nazism” will of course be determined by those in power in Russia.<sup>27</sup> The notion that Russia believes it has the right to prosecute citizens of other countries and alone can write proper history typifies the approach of the Putin/Medvedev administration towards the memory of World War II. The current Russian regime feels a need to protect the Soviet legacy during World War II as a means of defending its emerging identity, which largely hinges on the image of the strong, victorious and “morally right” Russia.

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<sup>24</sup> For the full article see <http://kommersant.ru/doc/1172794>.

<sup>25</sup> See, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8133749.stm>

<sup>26</sup> See Andrew Osborn’s article, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124277297306236553.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Often in Soviet Cold-War discourse capitalism and fascism were conflated, such as in the film *Mertvyi sezon* (dir. Savva Kulish, 1968), in which capitalist West Germany (with help from the CIA) harbors former Nazi scientists who continue their gruesome human experiments.

The Putin/Medvedev regime mobilizes this popular feeling, through actions like the creation of the commission, a means of putting emotion into action. Furthermore, the administration frames any attack on the accepted history of World War II as an attack on Russia itself. As historian Frederick Corney notes in his discussion of the October Revolution myth, the arguments of those who opposed the official interpretation of the events (i.e., referred to the 1917 events as a “coup”) were “defined in essential aspects by the component parts of the Bolshevik argument *for* October as a revolution” (24). As responses to the master narrative, they were by default weaker and less organized. The same is true for counternarratives about World War II in contemporary Russia, such as the program “The Price of Victory” on the radio station *Ekho Moskvy*.

The opposition to counternarratives is not just a means of generating domestic support for the Putin/Medvedev regime, but also serves to enhance Russia’s prestige and influence internationally. The commission’s creation mimics similar activities in the West and aims to give a sense of authority and objectivity to the propagation of a certain vision of history. When international organizations such as the OSCE equate Stalinism with Nazism, however, “the drumbeat of this criticism—and the political motives that often drive it—have reinforced the proclivity of the Kremlin to diminish wrongdoing on the part of the Stalinist regime and to increasingly view the legitimacy of the Russian regime as intertwined with the historical reputation of the Soviet Union” (Sherlock 465). As a result, Russia now has a governmental body to denounce these claims, with the full force and decorum of a distinguished national institution. However, in the twenty-first century, formalized institutions and pronouncements are often not enough to preserve and

spread the myth of WWII, and the regime has begun to look to the Internet as a new frontier to propagate the war mythologies.

### Propagation of the War Myth on the Web

In the past decade the Internet has become a new venue for “memory vehicles” concerning the Soviet Union’s role in World War II.<sup>28</sup> Online, there are a multitude of websites, which talk about everything from military strategy and weaponry to oral histories of the war. The predominance of the “canonical” telling of the war myth has been challenged in the Information Age. The “growth of Internet popularity in Russia broke this hegemony, and the dynamics of content production, distribution, and consumption today look much more complicated than when propaganda, as a rule, remained undisputed” (Trubina 64). The Internet provides the first readily accessible venue where people can discuss their alternative versions of the war narrative. These may have existed since the war itself, but due to state control of the myth, they have not been heard. The state in turn must present its own version of the narrative if it hopes to continue to forge the “politics of history” for its own pragmatic purposes.

In the absence of a developed public sphere and with television and the press conforming to the new “party line” the Internet provides one of the very few arenas for free discussion and alternative speech. The Internet offers the perfect opportunity for those who wish to challenge the official memory of the war. Without having to be filtered through the state controlled media, these comments can go straight to Internet users and generate discussion. The need to monopolize the war narrative on the Internet is, therefore, of vital importance to the regime, especially because the vast majority of Internet users are young. But, while the state agenda remains the same, the strategies of

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<sup>28</sup> See Confino p. 1386.

representation of World War II in new media manifest a fundamental shift in constructing and marketing the memory of the war to Internet consumers.

Two features, central to the state-funded internet sites, best signal the adjustment of the mythology to the new medium. First, as Trubina writes, the Internet necessitates a move away from a parochial, national memory towards the paradigm of a cosmopolitan one, one that transcends the nation entirely (68). Often this involves taking into account several different audiences and de-contextualizing the memory of the war, not making it so specifically a Russian memory with specific details of Russia but rather a universal memory (Trubina 68). Second, Russian internet WWII sites function as a populist, bottom-up complement to the more traditional, top-down, state-authored discourse. The image of the Internet as a free space, where user-generated projects find “natural” supporters, fits this role perfectly. Even more importantly, many such sites focus on oral history interviews with WWII participants—the sacred voices from the legendary past.

Jussi Lassila takes the case of Russia Today’s war memory site “War Witness” as an example of Trubina’s idea of creating a “cosmopolitan” and “participatory” war myth. Russia Today, widely known simply as RT, is a Kremlin funded media conglomerate which presents news about Russia with a pro-Kremlin spin, broadcasting in English, Spanish and Arabic. In an attempt to compete with the growing number of user-generated sites on World War II and as a way to present the Kremlin’s telling of the story, RT launched its own site concerned solely with the war. The bulk of the material on the site are interviews with former soldiers, mostly Russian but including veterans from other countries as well. The presence of non-Soviet soldiers’ memories opens up the war remembrance to a transnational audience, which often differs from Russia in how it views

the war. In a time when Russia often appears as opposed to the greater international community, making the war myth transnational acts as a means of marketing a different side of the country, highlighting the tradition of Russian cooperation and leadership in the international community as well as Russia's indelible contributions to defeating Nazism.

The RT website is notable for its transnational view of the war with a noticeable absence of references to Stalin. In the Putin era, there has been a revival of Stalin in order to link his strong leadership with the leadership style and tactics of the current regime. However, on a website intended for foreign consumption, Stalin does not take a prominent place. This represents a tempering of the "traditional" narrative as a means of selling it abroad. This new "cosmopolitan," transnational and moderate narrative, which showcases first-person accounts, transforms the myth into something far more palatable for a foreign audience and, as a result, more influential abroad, creating what Lassila terms a "profitable 'outer' image" for the new Russia (10). The sites have to negotiate Russia's internal version of the war, which views Stalin's role positively, with the external view, which labels him a tyrant. Stalin then can be portrayed among the military leaders, but a caveat on his role is included, telling the audience that Stalin's actions in World War II are still a matter of debate. The Internet is the new staging ground for these debates over the details of the war, and the Russian state has taken an active role in adapting the war myth for this new medium in order to best relate it to the Internet's unique audience.

This chapter described certain events in which the Putin-Medvedev government has used the inherited version of World War II from Soviet times in bolstering its own position and policies, as well as how the myth has been adapted for the new Russian

Federation and has transitioned onto the Internet. The next chapter will explore in depth the state's use of the war myth on the Internet through a detailed case study of Iremember.ru. It will argue that while the presentation of the myth has changed, in the final analysis the late Soviet discourse concerning the war remains.

### **Chapter 3: Iremember.ru and the Negotiation of the War Memory**

In Russian cyberspace intended for a Russian audience, there is almost none of the tailoring of the war myth done for a transnational audience. The state, however, does employ some techniques borrowed from transnational memory vehicles, such as using personal memories and oral histories of veterans as part of the epic narrative of the Soviet Union's participation in World War II. One of these projects using eyewitness accounts and oral histories is Iremember.ru, a website funded by *Rospechat*, the Federal Agency on Press and Mass Communications of the Russian Federation. The name of the site indicates first person accounts of the war, but also makes clear that these are memories are not strictly documentary evidence and makes this eye-witness evidence part of an epic project of Russian national "recovery" of memory, imploring the readers to personally to heed the veterans' words and lessons.<sup>29</sup> This is a shrewd approach to World War II mythology because the site is able to "construct" the desired memory, appearing more "authentic" with the use of oral histories from real participants.

Iremember.ru is a highly complex website which maintains a great deal of information about World War II, ranging from oral histories of veterans and treatises on technical aspects of the war to user forums to discuss and critique books and films about the war. Iremember.ru seems to be the perfect setting for a negotiation between the myth of World War II inherited from the Soviet period and the new media and cultural environment of post-Soviet Russia.

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<sup>29</sup> One of the site's authors, Artem Drabkin, even provides an introduction for the users into the topic of oral history, e.g., explaining the subjective, interpretive nature of the interviews. According to Drabkin, he started the iremember.ru project alone in 2000 but soon received support from Rospechat'. As of January 2009 (the date of the posting) the site featured over 600 interviews—a monumental project which indeed suggests a *massive* state support and funding. This information, however, is hidden under a modest posting in "Other Materials." See Artem Drabkin, "Neskol'ko slov o predmete 'Ustnaia istoriia,'" <http://iremember.ru/dopolnitelnie-materiali/artem-drabkin-neskolko-slov-o-predmete-ustnaya-istoriya.html>

This chapter argues that, for all of the apparent openness and the plethora of opinions present on Iremember.ru, in the final analysis the site does not challenge or overturn any of the inherited Soviet tropes and the official discourse concerning the memory of World War II in Russia. Instead, the state-sponsored site attempts to erase revisions to the Stagnation-era myth of the Great Patriotic War in order to bolster the authority of the current Russian regime and to enable the use of the mythology as an important aspect of Soviet identity in helping to construct the still ill-defined Russian identity.

It is most pertinent that Iremember.ru is funded by the Russian state ministry of publishing and the Yauza Publishing House, whose stated purpose is “the upbringing of the next generation of Russia in the military-patriotic spirit.”<sup>30</sup> This support ultimately determines the narrative presented on Iremember.ru. As Roger Bastide notes:

It is not the group as such that explains collective memory; rather, it is the structure of the group that provides the frameworks of the collective memory, which is no longer defined as collective consciousness but rather as a system of interrelating memories. (Qtd. in Wachtel 215)

Thus, in a state like the Soviet Union which maintained a monopoly on discourse in the public sphere and in the Russian Federation of Vladimir Putin and Dmitrii Medvedev, where the channels of discourse are (again) nearly entirely state-owned, one sees how the narrative of World War II can be controlled.

The content on Iremember.ru largely consists of the accounts of participants in the war who represent a vast spectrum of war-time occupations: from civilians who worked in the rear to sailors, tank drivers, and *katiusha* rocket launcher operators. Aside from the

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<sup>30</sup> <http://yauza.org/about.php>

site's focus on memoirs there are discussion threads in which registered users can comment on the site's materials and links to a sister site called Battlefield.ru, which is mostly concerned with military history. Moreover, there is a conscious effort to make this site attractive to young Russian users of the Internet. For example, there is a version of the site meant specifically for mobile devices, as well as a means of accessing material through an add-on to the popular social networking site vkontakte.ru (now known as VK.com).

The great effort made by government agencies and the site's creators to make the site open and available to the widest possible audience makes clear the government's trust in this site to propagate a "correct" version of the World War II narrative. A full reversion to the myth of the Brezhnev era is, however, impossible in a more informed Russia, and Iremember.ru negotiates among various discourses. This chapter will first address these areas of negotiation, before discussing specific aspects of the site: interview questions and answers, omissions, and strategies of making site materials accessible (or inaccessible) to certain audiences, and audience comments.

The three main areas of discourse negotiation are, first, the balance between the Soviet (internationalist) rhetoric of the inherited mythology and the Russian (nationalist) reality of the present; second, the need to present a modern Russian identity as part of the global community and the desire for a specifically *Russian* iteration of the war; and third, the (re)introduction of a familiar, uncomplicated version of events and remembrances, to the Russian population (e.g., the tropes inherited from the 1970s) and the need to imbue such a discourse with new meanings. These negotiations are critical for Russia to both

define what it means to “save Europe and the world from fascism” and to present itself as a modern nation, equal to other major players around the globe.

Soviet (Internationalist) Rhetoric in the Russian (Nationalist) Present

A cursory glance at the names of veterans included on the website shows the diverse backgrounds of Iremember.ru’s contributors. The site contains memories of Ukrainians, Jews, Armenians, Tatars, and other ethnic groups, along with ethnic Russians, who predictably constitute the majority of those interviewed. This inclusion of ethnically diverse memories of the war reflects the Soviet trope of the “friendship of the nations” (*druzhiba narodov*), which figured prominently in Soviet propaganda and played a major role in the canonical Soviet discourse of WWII.<sup>31</sup> The “friendship of nations” encapsulated the idea that in a socialist state, all were brothers and no animosities between ethnic groups existed; in the context of the war this meant that all rose against the common enemy to defend the country. The diversity of participants provides a cultural memory of a time without the violence, discrimination, and prejudice that exists today between Russia and other former Soviet states and between ethnic groups within Russia’s borders. The site’s portrayal of the Red Army and the Soviet state populated by nations living in harmony—but led by the Great Russian nation—harkens to an ideal that Russian citizens can strive for and reclaim.

Not only does the diverse group of contributing veterans invoke the great internationalist Soviet past and teach the site’s younger readers a more inclusive vision of Russia, but it also acts as a means of toning down the hyper-nationalistic and sometimes

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<sup>31</sup> During Soviet times, it was the sacrifice of all Soviet people, led by the Russian nation that was central to the discourse of victory. For example, as Kelly notes, “the Soviet Jews who had died in Nazi atrocities were not separately commemorated; the part played by non-Russian nationalities in defeating the Germans was played down” (263).

xenophobic rhetoric common in contemporary Russia (especially on the Internet) in order to include the myriad of different ethno-national groups present in Russia into the commemoration of the war. These memoirs from members of different ethnic groups show that all types of Russian citizens (*rossiane*) and not just ethnic Russians (*russkie*) were part of the struggle against fascism.

The Kremlin of course needs to navigate between a more inclusive conception of the Russian nation and the one that explicitly addresses issues of national identity and Russian-ness. Robert A. Saunders argues that many Russians use the “Web to build a more cohesive (and in some cases xenophobic) Russian nation” (193). The desire for a “more cohesive Russian nation” appears to be one of the key goals of the Putin/Medvedev administration as it works to piece back together a nation that fell with the Soviet Union. Thus, this site provides an opportunity for the state to put forward a notion of national identity and multi-national harmony inherited from the Soviet period, while foregrounding Russia *and* answering charges that the new Russian state is xenophobic and unwelcoming to non-Russian ethnic groups. What emerges is a modified notion of an internationalist identity meant to portray to the reader a unified, yet diverse Russian nation.

#### Speaking of the Nation through a Global Medium

Just as the nation is negotiated on Iremember.ru the site also strives to address both a domestic audience and a transnational one, present on the global Internet. Jussi Lassila writes that on the Internet “national politics has found an effective channel to a global audience, but at the same time it is irrevocably conditioned by this channel” (14). Such sites must speak a language that is acceptable for a transnational audience, which

necessitates the modification of some ideas that seem integral to the “canonical” telling of the war narrative. Driven by the need to serve two audiences, the site directors created two versions, a Russian-language one for domestic consumption and an English-language one for the transnational audience.

Noticeable differences exist between the two sites. The English-language version of the site includes a great deal less material. One possible explanation is a lack of human resources or perhaps simple laziness; however, one must take into account what was deemed worthy of translation. Some of the oral histories are nearly the only materials available on the English-language site. This seems the obvious choice as individual memories and tales of heroism are part of the transnational discourse of the war. Incidentally, Americans are especially conditioned to react well to tales of individual heroism due to a national ideology of individualism and a tradition of respect and admiration for the armed forces.

In contrast to the limited English-language materials available on the site, the Russian version is much more heterogeneous, with some materials that are the potentially more divisive and problematic. For example, the Russian-language version of the site contains a section called the “Wall of Shame” (*pozornii stolb*), which denounces various aspects of revisionism and “misconceptions” about the war. This section acts to protect the war memory from being “distorted,” one of the central tenets of the official “politics of history,” as evidenced by the creation of the Commission on the Revision of History. The “Wall of Shame” allows the authors of the site to show their Russian audience how others attack or misrepresent the war and allows site users to take part in decrying these historical revisions through the comments section.

The differences between the versions of the site highlight the need to negotiate the national and global aspects of Russian remembrance and identity concerning World War II. On one hand, the English-language site requires fare appealing to the war buffs and acceptable to a Western audience with varied and conflicting war accounts. On the other hand, the Russian-language version, while including oral history accounts, also counters any attempts to confuse or modify details of the “truth” and clearly functions as a means of creating a common identity for a nation that has only recently emerged.

#### How the Discourse Remains the Same

The use of a discourse familiar from the Soviet period serves to provide continuity with the past, including the Soviet claim of a unified, multi-national state. The use of a new “memory vehicle,” the oral history, may appear as a break from the Soviet past; however the content of the oral histories tells a different story. Veterans’ stories about their experience in the war provide a connection to the Soviet period. In turn this continuity with the past also creates continuity with past discourse via the presence of familiar tropes and symbols on the site, the edited individual interviews, the eliciting of the nostalgic responses about the veteran’s youth, the discourse of gratitude from the younger generation in the comments section, and the sheer number of interviews which turns individual oral histories into cogs in an epic national memory.

Iremember.ru is a website dedicated to World War II, but the interviews do not solely focus on the war effort. Often, the respondents spend a great deal of time describing their lives before and after the war. This comes as a result of the interview questions given to the veterans, which ask them to speak of their pre-War and post-War lives, ostensibly in order to elicit more narrative, humanized, memoir-like responses,

rather than just cold facts about life at the front. Information about veterans' lives before and after the war also helps in telling a more complete epic narrative, from peaceful life before the war to the reestablishment of peace afterwards. The highly personalized nature of these interviews inevitably softens the reader's perception of life under Stalin, especially because war heroism projects its aura onto the more problematic aspects of the 1930s and 1940s, such as Stalin's brutal collectivization policies, which could be construed as past analogues of Putin's own harsh policies, such as the war in Chechnya.

Moreover, the site illustrates an important aspect of oral history, which these interviews exploit. Historian Linda Shopes writes that often these interviews are "dialogues across generations" (3). The memoirs on Iremember.ru are no exception. The subjects are interviewed by people the same age as the interviewees' children or grandchildren. Thus, the interview questions not only invite the older participant to share his or her memories of the war, but couch it in a language of teaching about the good old days as well as the hardships endured. As a result, the elderly participant fills in the paternalistic role of the state in providing a model of an ideal to strive for as well as a reminder of the great sacrifices his generation made for the current generation.

In the past, the state through speeches by politicians, mass celebrations of Victory Day, history books and textbooks, just to name a few means, told the population *the* World War II narrative. In contemporary Russia, a website like Iremember.ru fills this role. Telling the war myth is no longer under the direct aegis of the government; instead this duty is now outsourced to the site's authors, many of whom were raised at the height

of the war cult, the Brezhnev era.<sup>32</sup> To ensure a semblance of authentic history, they use material from veterans, who often garner more respect than the occupants of the Kremlin. Thus, *Rospechat*' funds the oral histories of the veterans as a means of presenting a more personal account of the war and as a result the Kremlin hopes for younger generations to pay more attention to these individual memories. However, in reality, these oral histories are still vetted and their personal candor is filtered by the site's editors ensuring that their content falls mostly in line with the inherited narrative of the Great Patriotic War.

Finally, it is not only the words of the veterans that must be examined. The site's layout and use of certain symbols and language, like referring to the war as the Great Patriotic War (*Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina*), showing the image of the red star prominent on Red Army uniforms and accompanying the memoirs with pictures of their subjects in military uniform are means of playing upon the emotional power of well-known wartime symbols. The method of delivery has devolved from the government to individuals, but the message remains the same: these are the symbols and lessons from the war—and the Soviet past—that are sacred, shared, and formative for the Russian identity.

### Interview Questions

According to Linda Shopes, “oral history is, at its heart, a dialogue” between interviewer and interviewee:

The questions of the interviewer, deriving from a particular frame of reference or historical interest, elicit certain responses from the narrator, deriving from that person's frame of reference, that person's sense of what

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<sup>32</sup> On a section of Iremember.ru titled *Administratsiia* (Administration) there are links with the site's authors' names, email addresses, phone numbers and short biographies. The authors live in places within Russia, the former Soviet Union, and even in the United Kingdom and Israel.

is important or what he or she thinks is important to tell the interviewer.

The narrator's response in turn shapes the interviewer's subsequent questions, and on and on. (Shopes 3)

Thus, it is essential to analyze the types of questions asked, the context of these questions, and the information which the questions are intended to elicit. Also, one must look to which questions are *not* asked—both as follow-ups and as a new direction of inquiry—as a means of determining what of the past is *not* to be remembered. The authors of Iremember.ru have published on their website lists of questions which have been asked of veterans in other oral history projects concerning veterans of both World War II and other armed conflicts. The questions used for the site's interviews are derived from other major projects, such a renowned war poet Konstantin Simonov's questions prepared for the popular Soviet television documentaries *Soldiers' Memoirs (Soldatskie memuary*, dir. Marina Babak, 1976) concerning veterans' war memories, thus relying on sources already tested and approved for the war myth canon and applying them to the adaptation of the war narrative to the Internet (Appendix B). The authors, in turn, have created both a set of general questions, which discuss the war effort and its participants writ large, and questions specifically tailored for those who engaged in specific actions during the war, such as artillerists or snipers. The outcome of these two types of question sets are the answers meant to grab and hold the interest of a diverse audience, ranging from those interested in historical questions of how the Soviet past is remembered by participants to those who wish to learn more about the minutiae of operating certain weaponry or the tactics of a certain offensive.

The first set of questions presented to the audience comes from *Soldiers' Memoirs*. Simonov was one of the most famous war correspondents and poets in the Soviet Union, winning great popular acclaim and governmental accolades. His work on *Soldiers' Memoirs*, which focused on the personal stories of veterans, lent a great deal of credibility to the 1970s project and provides a strong model for Iremember.ru. These questions were specifically designed for veterans of World War II and manifest a surprising amount of curiosity in the personal experiences of Soviet WWII veterans. Simonov's questions ask about specific battles and the technical aspects of fighting, topics commonly discussed in war narratives. However, Simonov does not limit himself to such issues. His questions press further, beseeching his respondents to discuss their daily habits and their material situations while at the front. Moreover, he asks them about their contact with German prisoners of war. Such personal inquiries aim at exploring some of the more personal and psychological effects of the war upon these soldiers and officers. Oral histories are not only concerned with the mechanical actions of the war effort and the movement of troops, but also with how the participants in the war reacted to the trials, challenges, and sacrifices of the war. The authors of Iremember.ru understand that this is the goal of their own project and re-use many of these questions, which represent a detailed foray into the personal side of the war in the Russian context. Moreover, by publishing and recycling Simonov's questions, the site establishes its continuity with one of the most honored and trustworthy Soviet war writers, who experienced the war himself as a frontline correspondent.

The authors of Iremember.ru, however, do not simply take Simonov's questions for use in their oral histories; rather they use similar themes and wording, but make their

own questions for use on the site (Appendix C). One of the most notable features of these questions is their brevity in comparison to the questions prepared by Simonov. Where Simonov asks, “Who was the first prisoner you saw. Your feelings and impressions [of the prisoner]. What did you think of/how did you treat prisoners” (*Pervyi plennyi, kotorogo vy uvideli. Vashi chuvstva, vpechatleniia. Otnoshenie k plennym voobshche*), Iremember.ru instead presents a much shorter, more direct question, “How did you deal with prisoners” (*Kak vy postupali s plennymi?*). The first question asks for an open-ended, narrative response and delves into the psyche of the veterans concerning their relations with POWs and the emotions that came with seeing them and taking them into custody. The question used for Iremember.ru is far more limited and direct; it does not ask for the same type of emotional depth as the first and instead demands a straighter, unqualified response from the respondent. While this question seems to ask about the personal experience of the veteran, it is not concerned with the moral issues faced by the veteran dealing with prisoners of war. Instead the question mainly focuses on the face-to-face interaction between soldier and prisoner. Moreover, in its very wording the question frames diverse individual experiences, when speaking of “your first POW,” as a collective experience. The use of the imperfective past in Russian with the verb “*postupali*” suggests the same, normalized way of dealing with captured Germans by all veterans. The question thus presupposes a collective identity of Soviet people, making it harder to provide an individualized response.

While direct questions often attempt to anticipate and neutralize any ambiguities that may emerge when answering a question, this does not mean that they preclude one from learning the true opinions of respondents. Often, a more direct question strikes right

at the heart of an issue, forcing the respondent to answer the question succinctly and unambiguously. This function proves especially helpful when dealing with some of the more controversial aspects of the war, such as the respondents' views of Stalin, his policies, and leadership. As expected, Simonov's questionnaire does not contain any questions about Stalin or his role in the war. This may be a result of the fact that Simonov formulated his questions during Stagnation, a period in which the "canonical" story of the war, namely the sacrifice of the Soviet people led by the Communist Party, could not be challenged publicly. Stalin's name was simply not mentioned, and individuals were not supposed to have personal opinions about party or military leaders.

Iremember.ru meanwhile exists in a different cultural milieu, and the questions it asks veterans reflect the changes within Russian society. On these topics Iremember.ru asks quite a pointed question: "What was [your] attitude to the party, Stalin, patriotism?" (*Kak bylo otnoshenie k partii, Stalinu, patriotizmu*). As with many other aspects of the site, this question tries to negotiate between a more open discussion of the Soviet experience and a desire to contain this discussion. On the one hand, such a question requests a straightforward answer about the Soviet past, the Communist Party's rule, and Stalin's reign. Asking this question of veterans demonstrates the changes that have occurred in Russia since *glasnost*'. The Communist Party no longer exists to control what is published concerning the war or to get involved in what individuals say about their experiences or beliefs about Soviet leadership during the war. On the other hand, the very wording of the question attempts to eschew a detailed and personal response. First, instead of asking "What did you think about Stalin and the party" (*Kak vy otnosilis'/Chto vy dumali o...*) the question resorts to the neutral *bylo* ("there was"),

asking for the “general” attitude among soldiers. Second, the question lumps together the Party, Stalin, and patriotism, as if these three naturally belong together, with “patriotism” safeguarding the other two, more problematic, objects of inquiry. Third, this question is never followed up by a more detailed one, drawing on the answer and triggering the veterans’ memory. Follow-up questions are a mainstay of oral history interviews, and the absence of these from the interviews on Iremember.ru shows the unwillingness of the authors to “problematize” the Soviet past.

Aside from the rather limited questions asked about some controversial aspects of the Soviet Union’s participation during the war, there are also those aspects, which are not addressed at all. One of the most noticeable lacunae in the questions is the absence of any mention of Soviet POWs. In fact, after the war many Soviet soldiers who had been taken prisoner were sent to the Gulag as traitors to the country. It is clear that the authors of Iremember.ru want to avoid raising this issue altogether. As a result, the discussion of Soviet POWs—even as an indirect question like, “Were you ever afraid of being taken prisoner”—is left out of any interviews and expunged from the historical record presented on Iremember.ru.

The questions asked of the veterans also aid in determining the type of audience which the authors of Iremember.ru are hoping to attract. Questions used for the oral histories on Iremember.ru are focused on general inquiries about daily life and often target distinct military units, including scouts, snipers, infantryman, and pilots. These questions are designed for a specialized audience interested in the specific details of military hardware and military service. In these sections one sees questions such as, “Was it hot inside the cabin of a La-5/7 [a type of Soviet fighter plane]? Did exhaust gas

get into the cabin (could one have been poisoned)” (*Bylo li zharko v kabine La 5/7? Popadali vykhlopnye gazy v kabinu (mozhno li bylo otravit’sia)*). Learning such minutiae is not a draw for the general public, but does hold the interest of war buffs. The decision to cater to this group represents an acknowledgement of the size and dedication that this group shows to the war memory, both in Russia and abroad.

Such questions, however, are not entirely “value-neutral.” They might, for example, raise the issue of the possibly inferior quality of Soviet military equipment and thus a broader discussion of the Stalin-era economy. Quite often they indeed do exactly that, as the discussion of the “Wall of Shame” section below makes clear. Moreover, because the number of such questions in each interview far outweighs any contended issues, technical questions efficiently guide the interviews in the desired direction, while the wealth of details and the “smooth” flow of most interviews suggest a fair amount of editing on the part of the site’s authors.

The move towards attracting war buffs to the website is a new direction for the telling of the Russian war narrative. The site’s authors provide detailed information for both a Russian and global audience of war buffs, making clear that they see a need to cater to these audiences’ interests. This in turn means that the Russian war narrative now more closely resembles the war narrative in the West in form. Indeed, details of artillery or tanks represent what Lassila refers to as the “transnational or ‘cosmopolitan’” aspects of the war (14). Instead of focusing on the actions of a country’s army or having conflicting reports of battles from different countries, there is a common agenda of exploring the diversity of military hardware. The open courting of war buffs illustrates points of convergence between Russian military aficionados, however patriotic they

might be, and war enthusiasts around the world. The more technical questions show that not only is the war narrative in Russia shifting towards becoming more inviting for those interested in military history around the world, but that the Russian audiences are becoming more similar to their counterparts in the West. At the same time the questions about hardware shift the emphasis from history of the war to military history, which in a country with many unresolved issues about the past seems quite intentional.

### Pre-War Life

Unlike the limited number of questions about a controversial figure like Stalin or the omitted questions about Soviet POWs, every interviewer asks the veterans to recollect their pre-war lives in great detail. While the war remains the central theme of the questions, it allows for a broad picture of Soviet life to emerge in each interview. Throughout the Soviet era, many films and books depicted idyllic, pastoral scenes, often on the *kolkhoz* (collective farm). This socialist paradise is suddenly destroyed by the invading, marauding German army, which senselessly kills and rapes the peaceful Soviet villagers.<sup>33</sup> Such scenes became one of the only few windows on pre-war Soviet life that were accessible to a good portion of the population, the other of course being family recollections and stories. On Iremember.ru these familial recollections are published for a wide audience and allow for a more nuanced view of life before the war than was presented in Soviet films and books. These personal memories and the language they are told in at times conform to the “canonical” view of pre-war life and at others differ sharply. In the end, these stories attempt to meet criticisms of the overly sentimentalized

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<sup>33</sup> One of these iconic scenes occurs in *Fall of Berlin* (dir. Mikhail Chiaureli, 1949) in which the two lovers, Alesha and Natasha, are separated and reunited only in Berlin which is captured by Stalin, who descends from the sky and restores heaven on Earth.

glosses, which passed for depictions of pre-war life in Soviet times, while still painting a picture of the inherent goodness and simplicity of pre-war life.

Reading the oral history of Liudmila Sushkova, one sees a classic refrain of both the industriousness of Soviet pioneers developing the other republics of the Soviet Union as well as the primordial draw of Russia:

We lived well in Central Asia for a while and you could say that we were well established there, because in the last place where we lived before the return [to Russia], we had two rooms. In those times, those were considered great accommodations. But Papa longed for Russia, for Russian nature, therefore the idea lived within him to return to the Motherland.<sup>34</sup> (Interview with Liudmila Sushkova)

Her father's heartsickness for his native land is meant as an emotional pull for the audience. Russian readers identify with the deep emotional and even nationalistic attachments to the landscape and territory of Russia which has been a constant element in Russian literature for centuries.<sup>35</sup>

The theme of hard, honest work is another important trope that is brought up in many of the respondents' answers concerning their pre-war lives. Mortar gunner Aleksei Kartavov speaks of his work on a *kolkhoz* where he “plowed on a horse-pulled plough, mowed by hand, tilled the land” (*pakhal na loshadiakh, kosil vruchnuiu, obrabatyval zemliu*)<sup>36</sup> (Interview with Aleksei Kartavov). His description of the mundane, but necessary chores of pre-war life do not “gloss over” the backwardness of the countryside,

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with Liudmila Sushkova, <http://iremember.ru/grazhdanskie/sushkova-medvedeva-liudmila-ivanovna.html>

<sup>35</sup> In wartime culture, the Russian land became the object of “unabashed idolatry,” a maternal figure which Germans desired and Russians sought to protect at all costs (Stites 177).

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Aleksei Kartavov, <http://iremember.ru/minometchiki/kartavov-aleksey-petrovich.html>.

yet paints a picture practically lifted out of a folk song. This description both reiterates to post-Soviet audiences the process of building the country as well as the “normal” and good life before the German invasion but also resonates with the new Russian nationalism.

Another veteran, Vasilii Andreev, a former medic, mentions that his pre-war village life involved teaching himself to play folk songs on the accordion:

No one ever taught me to play the accordion. I was simply at my uncle’s for some holiday. He played some melody and then they called him off somewhere. And then I took the accordion and was able to play the melody. My uncle saw this and said to his sons, ‘Look here how long have I tried to teach you and none of you are able to play, but Vasia repeats the melody at once,’ and he gave me the accordion. Thus, I began to learn the melodies of peasant songs and dances and you could say I was a village big shot.<sup>37</sup> (Interview with Vasilii Andreev)

Such stories of prodigious learning and folksiness conform quite well to the “canonical” telling of the World War II myth’s insistence on a tranquil pre-war life without conflict and full of exceptional people living happy, simple lives. Moreover, there can be no real controversy surrounding these personal memories as they do not touch on sensitive issues surrounding political or military decisions or leadership. Rather, these questions aim to provide context and background to the website’s readers about life in the 1930s, depicting the population with a clear goal, namely to develop the country, and as a peaceful close-knit community. Since these veterans are authorities on pre-war life they are generally beyond questioning, not only because of the respect their age and

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Vasilii Andreev, <http://iremember.ru/mediki/andreev-vasiliy-nikolaevich.html>.

experience affords them, but also because they are the only ones who remember such a time and place.

However, one should not equate longing and reminiscing about pre-war life with a mass forgetting about the challenges both of living in poverty and the fear of repressions, which were everyday experiences in Stalinist society. Many veterans, including those who present a rosy view of pre-war life, also discuss the many difficulties they faced before their military service. Andreev may speak of his musical prowess, but he also mentions that his father was arrested by the secret police and shortly after that his younger sister got sick and died (Interview with Vasilii Andreev). On the one hand, the veterans' answers often reflect canonical literary and cinematic depictions of pre-war Soviet life. On the other hand, one should not view these as simply whitewashed memories, without any real depth, as the veterans are willing to give multifaceted descriptions of their pre-war lives combining both joyous and tragic moments.

Some interviews cannot help but raise suspicions as to their authenticity, especially when they “tap” into the most familiar, “textbook” history of the USSR. For example, Pavel Naumov recounts that, as a little boy growing up in a village in the Sverdlovsk region, he witnessed *both* Pavlik Morozov's famed martyrdom at the hands of his *kulak* relatives (and even saw his body) and the frequent visits of Nadezhda Krupskaja, Lenin's wife who, as a representative of the Commissariat of Enlightenment visited the region to inspect the state of public education (and stayed in the house of Naumov's grandmother).<sup>38</sup> Curiously, such legendary biography does not intrigue the notoriously vigilant comment writers, who, nevertheless, notice yet another contradiction in the

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Pavel Naumov; <http://iremember.ru/svyazisti/naumov-pavel-markovich.html#comment-4109>

interview: Naumov states that he retired from the army in the rank of a chief warrant officer (*starshii praporshchik*), yet in the picture he is represented as a colonel.

Ultimately, however, it is the sheer number of questions addressing life in the 1930s and the expected nostalgic pull of the past and of the interviewees' youthful selves that construct a very positive picture of Soviet life before the war. This creation of a less complicated, purpose-filled pre-war Soviet life in the veterans' responses offers something of an alternative vision for Russia, a place that once existed and can exist again under the right circumstances. This vision, however utopian, appears quite appealing to many Russians who have borne the brunt of the negative effects of Russia's transition to a market economy and the dissolution of the Soviet social safety net.

#### Stalin and Other Omissions

If pre-war life is the most uncontested aspect of the war narrative, then Stalin's pre-war and war-time policies are the most controversial element of the narrative of World War II in post-Soviet Russia. It is difficult to reconcile the image of Stalin as the leader who brought the Soviet Union to victory in the war effort with Stalin the senseless butcher, who gunned down the officer corps on the eve of the war, labeled all Soviet POWs as traitors, and ordered mass deportations and purges. At present, how Stalin should be remembered is one of the key issues concerning the war myth and the Soviet past in post-Soviet Russia. Is he the strong leader who brought stability and a vision of national greatness to the country? Or, is he the history's worst megalomaniacal tyrant? As the myth of World War II moves to the transnational medium of the Internet, Stalin's actions and role are being constantly scrutinized and reexamined.

In his article on Russia Today's "War Witness" site, Lassila notes that the "explicated criticism and visible absence of Stalin on the transnational media leaves a problematic space for converting 'inner image' of Russia's national-patriotic narrative to its profitable 'outer image'" (11). "War Witness," with its focus exclusively on a non-Russian audience, has the luxury of being able to play down, omit, and even criticize Stalin's role in the war in an effort to make the Russian telling of the war acceptable to Western readers. Iremember.ru, however, maintains quite a different audience than "War Witness." The difference in readership determines a different approach to dealing with Stalin and his legacy. As previously noted, the set of questions given to veterans includes one question amongst dozens of others which directly addresses the respondent's views of Stalin. Sometimes this query is part of a larger question concerning the respondents' views of the Party, but at other times it asks of the interviewees' opinions of Stalin himself. This limited inquiry into veterans' feelings of Stalin avoids controversial answers and preserves the monologic nature of the war narrative in a similar way to Simonov, who did not ask about Stalin at all. Most of the material published on Iremember.ru is in Russian and intended for Russian and post-Soviet<sup>39</sup> audiences, which necessitates greater acknowledgement of Stalin and his role in the war. The site allows respondents to air some grievances and express a variety of opinions concerning Stalin within Russia and in émigré communities, which are present both in the former Soviet Union, the European Union, the United States, and Israel.

While one ought not to be surprised that criticisms are leveled against Stalin on Iremember.ru, their specificity and at times directness are not expected on a state-

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<sup>39</sup> I am using the term "post-Soviet" to include both people residing in the independent countries which constituted the former Soviet Union and those people who emigrated from the former Soviet Union and its successor states but were raised at least partially under Soviet rule.

sponsored website because of the Putin/Medvedev regime's rehabilitation of Stalin in other official venues.<sup>40</sup> Il'ia Kal'nitskii, an artillery soldier during the war, speaks of being taken to a military hospital "in the former territory of the Volga German Republic" (*na territorii byvshei Respubliki nemtsev Povolzh'ia*)<sup>41</sup> (Interview with Il'ia Kal'nitskii). While this reference may appear minor, its inclusion acknowledges the liquidation of this area and the suppression and deportation of its population. This event of course was noticeably downplayed during the war and afterwards, but Kal'nitskii's comment makes clear that the deportation is still meaningful in people's minds and that Stalin's destruction of the Volga German ASSR was memorable amidst the pressing events and travesties of the war.

Kal'nitskii also speaks of one of Stalin's most notorious wartime policies, the decree, known as "Not One Step Back" (*ni shagu nazad*), which exhorted soldiers to shoot down any of their compatriots who dared to retreat in the midst of battle. "Official" histories of the war omitted this decree and any talk of it was quickly squelched. In the canonical war story, Soviet soldiers rushed into battle without any encouragement or threat, shouting "For Motherland! For Stalin!" However, in this personal narrative, Kal'nitskii mentions that "[he] spent two months in field hospital number 10 and there, by the way, they read to the [them] Stalin's order number 227, which has received the name 'not one step back'" (Interview with Il'ia Kal'nitskii).

There is no follow-up question after this passage, and the mention of "not one step back"

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<sup>40</sup> As a 2005 VTSIOM survey found, 21% of respondents felt that Stalin brought power and prosperity to the Soviet Union, a greater percentage than in 1998, 1999 or 2003 when the same survey was conducted (Dubin 343). These survey results show that, as the Putin/Medvedev regime has revived the war mythology for their own political ends, it has also helped to partially rehabilitate Stalinism and Stalin's role in the victory.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Il'ia Kalnitskii, <http://iremember.ru/artilleristi/kalnitskiy-ilya-moiseevich.html>

is not the central focus of his narrative, but rather a contextual aside. However, the interviewee volunteers this answer which implies that the event was memorable for him during the war and that he feels compelled to share these recollections.

Conversely, another view of Kal'nitskii's mentioning of "not one step back" indicates sensitivity to new historical evidence brought to light in Russia concerning Stalin's brutal war-time orders and acts, which have been forthcoming from *perestroika* to the present. Linda Shopes notes that one often sees "inconsistencies and conflicts among individual interviews and between interviews and other evidence [...] [A]n interview is a storied account of the past recounted in the present, an act of memory shaped as much by the moment of telling as by the history being told" (6-7). A choir of opinions and voices in the different oral histories and indeed within one veteran's narrative embodies Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, which is "*another's speech in another's language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way" (Bakhtin 324). This refraction of authorial intent allows for a hybrid but in many ways stronger telling of the war narrative, as the reader receives multiple versions and approaches which aggregate in a single narrative. Indeed, this helps to explain the wide range of voices on the site which is strikingly different from the more monological narrative of the Soviet period.

No matter the reasoning behind Kal'nitskii's mention of "not one step back" the result is singular, namely that criticism of Stalin emerges in a localized and distanced manner. Speaking of the destruction of the Volga German ASSR or the implementation of "not one step back" is not an all out renunciation of Stalin, but rather they are passing references to Stalin's decisions which could be read as subtle criticisms. Moreover, these

comments are personal, present only in this individual oral history and not intended as a broad rewriting of history. Thus, the authors of the website have the benefit of truthfully transmitting veterans' memories, while at the same time answering criticisms from abroad and within Russia of whitewashing Stalin's role in the war.

Another survivor of the war, Liudmila Sushkova, when asked about her feelings towards Stalin, gives stronger criticism than Kal'nitskii, even though her comments are limited to personal memories and familial concerns. She relays a humorous anecdote in which her father speaks sarcastically of Stalin:

A good piece of bread remained, and I remember, he stood, cutting an onion and said as if thinking aloud: "Here we get to eat Stalin's bacon..."

Father simply adored Lenin, but he thought little of Stalin.<sup>42</sup> (Interview with Liudmila Sushkova)

This small story speaks volumes about the way in which the authors of Iremember.ru approach speaking about Stalin and about the ways that those who lived through Stalin's reign still speak of him decades after his death. First, she mentions a small incident that occurred within her home and only amongst family members. There was no way her father would say such things in public. Moreover, it is a harmless comment, mostly a gripe concerning the scarcity of material resources rather than a tirade against Stalin's policies and overall leadership qualities. Sushkova also qualifies the statement, mentioning her father's devotion to Lenin, portraying the father as a patriotic Soviet citizen, who was simply frustrated with the tough times of the war.

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Liudmila Sushkova, <http://iremember.ru/grazhdanskie/sushkova-medvedeva-liudmila-ivanovna.html>.

Another important element of Sushkova's anecdote is the example it provides for controlled criticism of authority figures. Young readers, who often are quite mistrustful of authority figures can relate to Sushkova and her father with this story of their exasperation with Stalin. This lends credibility to the rest of Sushkova's interview and could potentially make this portion of the audience more amenable to her account of life during the war and the lessons her oral history is intended to impart. Of course, this critique of Stalin is quite limited and therefore not subversive to the entire project of telling the "canonical" war myth. Thus, one sees that thematically limited and personalized criticism of Stalin is permissible and at times encouraged. There is, however, no attempt to engage interviewees in a conversation about, for instance, the cost of Soviet victory and Stalin's role as the commander-in-chief.

Limitations on criticizing Stalin are reinforced through the omissions in the questions on certain topics. As discussed above, there is only one question that addresses Stalin by name on the list of questions prepared by the site's authors. Moreover, there are no questions which speak directly to the harshest aspects of Stalin's war time reign, such as penal battalions (*shtrafbaty*), which only emerge when a veteran volunteers information about them and even then the divulgence is often benign. Thus, the authors of the site use the oral histories to contain the discussion of Stalin and to contain criticism in general.

While Iremember.ru features dozens of interviews in each of twenty enumerated types of services, including no less than four different types of pilots, until a month ago there was no separate section devoted to political commissars or to NKVD officers. In fact there is still not separate section for political commissars, and the section for the

NKVD was only recently added to the site, curiously coinciding with Vladimir Putin's reelection as president in March 2012. Adding this section to Iremember.ru represents a bold step in the design and transmission of information concerning the war. Giving NKVD officers their own section on the website legitimizes their role in the war and makes them part of the larger epic that constitutes the war myth. This is a direct reassertion of the Soviet telling of the war, which valorized NKVD officers.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, one should keep in mind the timing of site's author's decision to add the section. Due to Putin's own past as a KGB officer, the move to add a distinct section for the NKVD can be viewed as a way for the state to show the heroism of the secret police and by extension the link between the new president of the Russian Federation and his war-time predecessors.

The NKVD veterans engaged in important wartime activities from maintaining "correct" ideology in various units to rooting out espionage at the front. However, they also took part in some of the harshest punishments exacted upon soldiers at the front, including enforcing Stalin's policy of "not one step back." It is significant that on the site NKVD officers appear under the same subheading as Red Army SMERSH (counter-intelligence) officers. In both the West and Russia, SMERSH is seen largely in a favorable light, and placing its veterans in the same section with the problematic NKVD makes it appear that the NKVD was merely trying to thwart traitors and spies like SMERSH did, without addressing the political directives and excesses of the NKVD.

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<sup>43</sup> Igor' Gostev's epic trilogy *The Front without Flanks* (1974), *The Front at the Front Line* (1977), and *The Front Behind Enemy Lines* (1981) documents the heroic exploits of a secret police officer played by Soviet star, Viacheslav Tikhonov, who leads a unit of partisans and intelligence officers. Tikhonov is best known for his portrayal of Stierlitz, a Soviet agent who infiltrates the Nazi high command and exposes and stops a secret pact between the Americans and Germans in the television serial *Seventeen Moments of Spring* (dir. Tatiana Lioznova, 1973).

Indeed, in those few interviews where veterans provide some details about their service, the latter is often treated in the format of heroic exploits and/or curious incidents which nevertheless paint a positive picture of these organs. For example, Boris Averbukh, who served in SMERSH as a German interpreter, concludes his long interview with the story of how, during his emigration to Israel in 1979, a KGB colonel tried to manipulate him to stay through threats and promises. Averbukh remarks: “I was looking at this colonel, with his air of self-importance, and I was smirking inside. He is nothing compared to our SMERSH officers ... Those were eagles, and this one... People are not what they used to be.”<sup>44</sup> Not only does this story portray SMERSH officers as larger-than-life heroes (using a common Stalin-era trope of an “eagle”), but it also resonates with the nostalgia, wide-spread among young Russians, for Stalinism as the apogee of the “Great Russia.”

The initial omission of the NKVD from the main page of Iremember.ru and the subsequent inclusion of the NKVD with SMERSH at the time of Putin’s reelection underscores the highly fluid memory of World War II in Russia today and its direct connection to the pragmatic political goals and the image of the Russian state and its leaders. In the 1990s it was unthinkable to publically celebrate and advertise the exploits of the NKVD, lauding them for their war time actions. This opinion persisted through the first two decades of the Russian Federation’s existence. With Putin’s third presidential term, the “heroic Soviet organs” have become prominent again as paragons of strength and instrumental in the protection of national interests.

#### Wall of Shame and User Comments

While most of the oral histories on Iremember.ru attempt to negotiate the inherited Stagnation war myth with criticisms of it from perestroika, one section of the

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<sup>44</sup> <http://iremember.ru/nkvd-i-smersh/averbukh-boris-ber-yakovlevich/stranitsa-7.html>

site does not even attempt to pass itself off as a space for transnational understanding of the war and a reassessment of the Soviet war myth. No section of the site better fits the “canonical” Soviet telling of World War II and departs from Western accounts of the war more than the “Wall of Shame” (*pozornyi stolb*) section. By clicking the link, the reader is sent to Iremember.ru’s sister site, Battlefield.ru, which is focused on military history. “Wall of Shame” consists mainly of articles criticizing various publications that “dare” to challenge the sacredly held assumptions that Soviet and now Russian citizens hold dear about the facts and details of World War II. The articles posted on the “Wall of Shame” are mostly critiques of various books and movies, which “revise” the Soviet Union’s place in the war and the contribution of its people. Most often these articles criticize tiny aspects of the works, which their authors have gotten wrong, like the type of tank used at a certain battle or the amount of rations those at home received. However, there are some times when the articles incite the ire of the devoted readership of the “Wall of Shame” and in response the audience unleashes its anger in the comments section, which can range from petty name calling to accusations of treason and betrayal of the veterans and the Soviet war experience.

Hosting this section on Battlefield.ru, rather than on Iremember.ru represents a critical decision on the part of the site’s authors. They recognize that Iremember.ru is mostly for the oral histories of veterans and comments concerning them. It is a venue for discussing the personal aspects of the war, what people remember, and how the war has affected them to the present day. Iremember.ru is generally not the arena for squabbles over technical minutiae or for the wholesale rejection of certain readings of the war. The oral histories are given almost as a gift from the heroic, departing generation. The

interviewers are always quite thankful for the material and the audience responds similarly, with gushing comments thanking the veterans for their service. Even if individual interviews touch on some cultural sore spots, collectively the authority of the veterans safeguards the myth.

The “Wall of Shame,” on the other hand, maintains a rather different dynamic. In this section, books, movies, and other “memory vehicles” are taken up in critical articles and their supposedly spurious accounts are torn apart. The works discussed are chosen not for their scholarly merit but rather for their “revisionist” approach concerning the war and are presented as objects for public shaming. As a result, the audience plays into the section’s authors’ thought processes and viscerally rejects any work that seems to infringe upon the “clean,” “canonical” telling of the war that the audience grew up with.

Even the titles of the threads on the “Wall of Shame” indicate an inflexibility and lack of meaningful dialogue concerning Russia’s role in the war. One thread concerning the American film *Enemy at the Gates* (dir. Jean-Jacques Annaud, 2001) is titled “Idiotism at the Gates: Americans won’t notice, Russians won’t forgive” (*Idiotizm u vorot: amerikanets ne zametit, russkii ne prostit*). Such an incendiary title makes clear that the “Wall of Shame” works to preserve the discourse dominant in Russia and in the Soviet Union of the uniqueness of Russia’s World War II experience, in terms of both of its heroism and its suffering. This discourse effectively cancels any informed, nuanced discussion of the role of the Allies and denies that those outside of Russia and the former Soviet Union can even *begin* to understand the Russian role in the war. Moreover, discussion of the Allies, like discussion of Stalin, is mostly absent, except in a specially

designed thread on the “Wall of Shame.” Through omission the authors of the site are able to contain and control the discourse concerning the war.

While almost every other section of the site is at least partially translated into English, the “Wall of Shame” is only available in Russian, obstructing access to its materials for “outsiders.” Such strategy allows for often unchecked free-for-all attacks on the “blackeners of Russia,” typical of the Russian blogosphere. Even more telling is the approach of the authors to the criticized material and to the assumed audience. In the good old Soviet tradition, the articles criticize works that the audience most likely has not read.<sup>45</sup>

The choice to have this section of the website only in Russian and thus inaccessible to the wider global audience is motivated more than a desire to retain a particular telling of the war mythology. Rather, it provides a forum where the new Russian patriotism can be exercised and where “mistakes” made both within Russia and in the West concerning important details of the war can be “corrected.” One of the most debated of these “revisions” concerning the war narrative in post-Soviet Russia is the technological inferiority and overall military unpreparedness of the Red Army at the beginning of the war. The Soviet war narrative maintained that the Red Army was ready to take on the Nazis from the beginning and that only Germany’s “treacherous” attack detained the Soviet offensive.<sup>46</sup> However, in actuality the Red Army was left with nearly no experienced leadership following Stalin’s senseless massacre and purge of the officer

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<sup>45</sup> In contrast, a similar section which is hidden on the English version of the site under “Analytics” takes care to quote the criticized original extensively, provide publishing information, and even post photocopies of specific pages. This different treatment most likely has to do with a different presumed audience (international users) and a concern with presenting a more objective (and civilized) external image. See, <http://english.battlefield.ru/analytics>

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, the Chapter “Strengthening of the Country’s Defense” in the *Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941-1945*; <http://militera.lib.ru/h/gpwwsh1/01.html>

corps on the eve of the war, while Soviet military hardware was at times not as advanced as that of the Germans or other European countries and lend-lease from the Americans was critical for the Soviet Army to survive the early years of the war.

Looking closely at the “Wall of Shame” section and the material posted one sees that the majority of the articles concerns obscure Russian books on very technical aspects of fighting the war and the occasional Hollywood film. For example, an article “Zefirov Syndrome” (*Sindrom Zefirova*), deals with the issue of Soviet air power. The article is a review of the book *Laptezhnik versus Black Death* (*Laptezhnik protiv chernoï smerti*) by Mikhail Zefirov and Dmitrii Degtev, which details the founding and development of German and Soviet ground attack aviation. This is seemingly a topic only of interest for war buffs and does not seem to have greater implication beyond those most interested in the technical details of the war, the main audience of Battlefield.ru. However, the vitriol present in the article’s critique of the book and the additional rebukes of the book in the comments section demonstrate that “Wall of Shame” transcends the technical aspects of the war and is more concerned with provoking bouts of collective bashing. One commenter known as Mik writes that, as he was reading this “nonsense, the whole time wanted to ask the author, if everything was so bad for us and so great for the Germans. So then why did we win the war?” This comment has received five positive votes. Other comments which garnered high praise in terms of positive votes include one from a site user known simply as C, who wrote that “Zefirov specializes in praise for the valiant Luftwaffe” and that “Zefirov and Co. ought to be institutionalized” (C, *Sindrom Zefirova* comments section). Yet another commentator known as Slava notes that for Zefirov there was “obvious love at first sight for the Luftwaffe” (Slava, *Sindrom Zefirova*

comments section).<sup>47</sup> These comments and the praise they receive from fellow site users show just how impervious to criticism some aspects of the Soviet war victory are. It appears that anything claiming that the Germans possessed superior technology or organization must be summarily castigated, while cheap shots and crass humor receive many plaudits. One must wonder if the commenters have even read Zefirov's book or are merely responding to a spiteful, biased retelling of it.

It would be misrepresentative to mention only those who agree with the site authors' criticism of "revisionism." The users who post more balanced comments often write in a much more civil tone than the others mentioned above. For instance there is more often than not correct spelling and syntax in these comments, which is not always the case in those that passionately attack the "revisionists." In addition these comments in support of the criticized work, in this case Zefirov's book, often try to get past ad hominem attacks on the author in order to speak about the argument, rather than the person. A site user called Anantoly [sic] asks simply if the author of the article could "point to a place in the article [criticizing Zefirov], where he substantiates his claims." In another comment Anantoly writes incredulously, "where do you find criticism of our [Soviet] technology and praise for the Germans? Then show the paragraphs and pages. And then you would not need to launch baseless accusations" (Anantoly, *Sindrom zefirova* comments section). However, all of this advocating for documentary proof and citations merely results in other users giving his comments negative votes. There is no clamoring for the article's author to do real research or foster discussion on the topic at hand, with two equal sides substantiating their arguments. The dominant motivation of

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<sup>47</sup> To view the article and the full comments section *Sindrom Zefirova* see, <http://www.battlefield.ru/zefirov-sindrom.html>

the website's users is to trample any attempts to denigrate the greatness of the Soviet Union and its contributions to victory over Germany.

The function of the “Wall of Shame” as well as Iremember.ru as a whole is to allow for discussion on some of the most important, foundational events in the making of Soviet and Russian identity. To discuss the meaning of the Great Patriotic War is to discuss what it meant to be Soviet or means to be Russian. Thus, the oral histories on the website showcase the diversity of experiences and opinions of veterans and survivors of the war, but any criticisms of the “canonical” war myth in their interviews are often limited. The interviews mostly just exist as individual moments that make up a greater epic story of the Soviet Union and by extension Russia's victory in the war. Moreover, the “Wall of Shame” provides an outlet to discuss works that offer revised views of the war myth and to have discussions about those works. But the comments section tends to mainly be a forum for baseless accusations and finger pointing over allegedly spreading falsehoods about the true story of the Great Patriotic War, and any real attempt to discuss the issues and details surrounding the war are quashed. As a result, the state-sponsored website gives the promise of an open forum and place to see individual war memories, but in final analysis the material on the site mostly repeats the “canonical” war myth of Stagnation and does very little to accept—or impartially discuss—the criticisms of the war myth which came out during the 1980s and 1990s.

## **Conclusion**

In this thesis I have attempted to chart the evolution of the myth of World War II in the Soviet Union and in Russia, from the early commemorations during the war to the present day Russian Federation and on the Internet. The Soviet government's control over discourse and its promotion of a certain version of the events and meaning of the war led to the development of a large war cult which reached its zenith during the stagnation era. At that point in time, Soviet citizens and authorities viewed the war as a "sacred" event, bonding all Soviet citizens and the Communist Party together. As a result any challenges to the state's telling of the war myth received almost no public attention or were met with hostility.

However, in the tumultuous years that marked the end of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the independent Russian Federation, alternative memories and opinions of the WWII mythology were finally able to gain credence. Newly publicized information about the darker aspects of Soviet wartime policies and events nearly destroyed for many Soviet citizens their pristine view of the victory in World War II, and with it the view of a united Soviet people with a sense of purpose. When Vladimir Putin took office in 2000, he inherited a country that had suffered through a decade of crisis and had lost any semblance of a unified national identity. Thus, in an attempt to forge a new sense of national unity—one that was conceptualized as a yearning for a "Great Russia"—he and his administration set about elevating certain symbols and events to new heights as a means of constructing a new Russian identity and connecting this myth with Putin's own policies and leadership style.

In Putin's Russia no event garners more attention and care than the commemoration of World War II and the meaning of victory. The revival of the war myth, which derives mostly from the "canonical" narrative of the 1970s, is an attempt to connect the most important event in Russia in the twentieth century, World War II and the generally favorably viewed period of stagnation with Russia today, building a new Russian identity from aspects of the Soviet past. In this version of historical narrative, that past was reviled and its memory destroyed in the 1980s and 1990s. As Serguei Oushakine writes in his aptly titled book *The Patriotism of Despair: Nation, War and Loss in Russia*, there is a "post-Soviet tendency to achieve a sense of belonging by framing the nation's history as one of experienced, imagined, or anticipated traumatic events" (5). In terms of sheer brutality and scale, World War II stands as the most traumatic event in recent Russian history, making it the obvious choice as the paramount event used by the Putin administration for creating a sense of unified national identity in the Russian Federation. However, unlike the events which Oushakine describes as unifying, such as the Afghan and Chechen wars, there is not only despair attached to the memory of WWII; in fact despair is quite a small portion of the war memory overwhelmed by the sense of accomplishment the war provides the population. As a result, the state has and continues to utilize the memory of the war as a *unifying* event and as a *mobilizing* event, carrying with it a sense of national purpose and destiny, which have been lacking since the end of the Soviet Union.

The myth of course cannot just stay exactly the same as it was under the late socialism, Russia and the world have both changed significantly and the myth has to take those changes into account. This thesis explored how the myth has been adapted for the

Internet, a medium that had not reached Russia when the Soviet Union collapsed. The case of the state-sponsored Iremember.ru represents, in many ways how the myth maintains certain elements from the 1970s, but also changes to deal with the facts that came to light in the late 1980s and 1990s. The veterans' oral histories, the focus of Iremember.ru, are a means of showing independent views and voices from those who experienced the war. Allowing the veterans to air opinions on everything from Stalin to the quality of food at the front is a means of heading off criticism that the state-sponsored site merely parrots the "official" telling of the war myth.

However, criticisms present in the oral histories are generally innocuous and do not challenge any of the most sacred truths of the "canonical" war myth. Moreover, the oral histories bolster the "canonical" war myth, recreating the epic telling of the war, with a myriad of details, through the many, varied voices of the veterans. On the surface, Iremember.ru acts a "public sphere," a place of negotiation which "usually lies between private discourse and official culture," since it allows for commentary from users along with the different voices of the veterans (Stites 175). However, it is clear that state sponsorship heavily weighs on the material put on the site, which acts as a tool of revitalizing the "canonical" war myth of stagnation for use in the new Russia. There is no true dialogue on Iremember.ru and the resulting site is another means of state control over discourse concerning the memory of World War II and with it, the complex Soviet past.

**Appendix A: Table of Contents of *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941-1945. A Short History***

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**ВОПРОСЫ К.М.СИМОНОВА К ВЕТЕРАНАМ  
ВЕЛИКОЙ ОТЕЧЕСТВЕННОЙ ВОЙНЫ**

Вопросы были составлены при работе на серии документальных фильмов "Солдатские мемуары" для записи воспоминаний полных кавалеров ордена Славы - См. К. Симонов Солдатские мемуары. Документальные сценарии. М., 1985. С. 311-312.

1. Мирная предвоенная профессия, место рождения, условия жизни, состав семьи.
2. Какое участие в войне - на фронте и в тылу - принимали другие члены семьи.
3. Как и когда ушел на войну. В каких родах войск служил.
4. Где начал войну и где закончил.
5. Через какие населенные пункты и водные преграды пришлось пройти за годы войны в период отступления и в период наступления.
6. За какой подвиг и в каких обстоятельствах совершенный были получены награды.
7. Какая минута, день, событие были самыми трудными, тяжелыми, опасными.
8. В какой или в каких именно воинских частях воевал, на каком фронте и под командованием каких военачальников.
9. Был ли ранен, когда, где и сколько раз; как и кто оказывал медицинскую помощь, в каких госпиталях и медсанбатах он лечился, кого запомнил из лечивших его людей в стационаре и в дороге, на санитарных летучках, в санитарных поездах. Куда именно был ранен, в свою или в другую часть возвращался после ранения на фронт.
10. Когда и откуда писал домой, что сообщал о себе.
11. Когда и какие получал известия из дома.
12. Кто из семьи во время войны был убит или ранен на фронте, кто из семьи отличился на фронте или работая в тылу.
13. Какая немецкая техника противостояла солдату в боях, с чем он сталкивался.
14. Какая наша техника на земле и в воздухе поддерживала солдата в разное время войны: авиация, артиллерия, танки, "катюши" и все другие средства поддержки.
15. Участвовал ли в разведке, во взятии "языков" и в других операциях, связанных с проникновением в тыл врага.
16. Вопросы о пленении немцев, о первом пленном немце, которого увидел солдат, о его отношении к этим пленным.
17. Были ли встречи с партизанами. Участвовал ли в партизанской войне.
18. Что запомнилось из встреч с населением во время отступления, во время пребывания в прифронтовых населенных пунктах, во время пребывания в прифронтовых населенных пунктах, во время наступления и встреч с освобожденными от оккупации жителями.
19. Какие трудности приносило солдату на войне каждое из четырех времен года: зима, весна, лето, осень - жара, дожди, снег, распутица.
20. Как снабжали солдата, что для него значили хлеб, горячая пища, наркомовская

норма, табак.

21. Где и как и сколько приходилось спать солдату.

22. Где, когда и сколько приходилось отдыхать.

23. Сколько верст или километров прошел, по его мнению, за время войны, сколько и на чем проехал.

24. С какими развлечениями в минуты и часы отдыха приходилось встречаться солдату за годы войны: песня, выступления артистов, концерт фронтовой бригады.

25. Что в разное время войны думал солдат о будущей победе, что он думал о времени ее.

26. Что думал солдат о Москве в тот период, когда к ней подходили немцы.

27. Что думал о Ленинграде в период его блокады.

28. Что думал о Сталинграде в период Сталинградской битвы и какое первое впечатление произвели на него разгром немцев под Москвой, под Сталинградом и на Курской дуге.

29. Где был солдат в День Победы, что делал и что чувствовал.

### Appendix C: Questions for Oral History Interviews on Iremember.ru

1. В стране было ощущение надвигающейся войны? Из чего оно складывалась? Частные разговоры? СМИ? Политзанятия?
2. Когда Вы ушли на войну?
3. Чем Вы были вооружены?
4. Вы помните Ваш первый бой?
5. Вы помните первого увиденного Вами немца?
6. Какое было отношение к партии, Сталину, патриотизму?
7. Как Вы поступали с пленными?
8. Какое у Вас было личное оружие?
9. Было ли вам тогда известно о гигантских потерях Красной Армии?
10. Каково было настроения в тылу и на фронте, особенно в период кризисов: июль-октябрь 41, июль-октябрь 42?
11. Каково было отношение к старшим офицерам, к среднему командному звену, настроение в среде его уровня. отношение непосредственно к высшим руководителям (Сталин, Жуков, Молотов и т.п)?
12. Состояние глубокого тыла, промышленность, обыватели - моральное состояние, мысли, чувства. Случаи гражданского неповиновения. Спекуляция, воровство. Соблюдение режима особого положения.
13. Как Вы сейчас относитесь к бывшим противникам? Если был у него какой горький случай, то что бы он сделал, если бы такого же немецкого 80-летнего старика привели и посадили рядом с ним?
14. Тяжело ли было возвращаться с войны? Как встречали? Как проходила реакклиматизация?
15. Какое было взаимоотношение с мирным населением в освобожденных странах?
16. Посылали ли посылки домой из Германии?
17. Что было самым страшным на фронте?
18. Как мылись, стирались?
19. Выдавался ли сухой паек и что в него входило?
20. Были ли какие-то приметы, предчувствия?
21. Чем Вас кормили?
22. Как Вы относились к немцам?
23. наших убитых как хоронили?

24. Женщины у Вас были в части? Как к ним относились?

25. Были ли вы все время убеждены в неминуемом поражении немцев и в своей победе?

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