

Donbass: The War on Remembrance

The Ukrainian Army wants not only to annihilate pro-Russian forces in eastern Ukraine but also wipe out the region's heroic history of resisting the Nazi onslaught in World War II.

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We had just received the news that another shelling had taken place.

To be sure, the school we had just left had been hit for the umpteenth time with a 155 mm NATO-made missile during the morning hours. The quasi-totality of the window frames was covered with wood panels which bore witness to the almost frantic desire of the NATO-supported Kyiv regime not only to target the most vulnerable but also to impede the transmission of remembrance in an attempt to eradicate the future.

In what has become a grim reminder of the daily ordeal suffered by the population of Donetsk these past nine years, we drove to the site of the bombardment only to discover that this time the target had been the football stadium.

Known as the Donbas Arena, this state-of-the-art stadium had been home to the Shakhtar Donetsk (the Donetsk Coal Miners) football team since its inauguration in 2009.

It embodied the vibrant economy of the region and its then-attractiveness to foreign investors. (The structure had been built and completed ahead of schedule by a Turkish consortium and its architectural style was conceived by a famed British designer.) The DONBAS ARENA was selected to host a few games of the 2012 European Football Championships, including a semi-final game featuring future champion Spain.



Photo courtesy of Arnaud Develay

What immediately struck me upon arriving at the site was that it was built adjacent to the city's war memorial in Lenin Komsomol Park.

Known as the Monument dedicated to the DONBAS Liberators, the site features a towering 18-meter high sculpture depicting a soldier and a miner (Donetsk's name during the Soviet Era was Stalino and as the symbol of the city's then-vibrant mining industry, "Stalino" had been named as twin city to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) jointly holding a sword with its edge planted firmly in the ground.

At the foot of the statue stands the entrance to a museum with an eternal flame.

The Monument was dedicated to "the memory of all military units and formations that liberated Donbas during the Great Patriotic War."



Photo courtesy of Arnaud Develay

The contrast between the gravitas oozing from this place in opposition to the consumerism, almost pagan rituals, symbolized by the stadium situated a stone's throw away highlights the struggle currently taking place in this part of the world against the unhinged forces of materialism.



World War II memorial. [Photo courtesy of Arnaud Develay]

The cult of money and ephemera-like gratification of supporting football teams stands in stark contrast with the timeless sobriety and dignified undertones emanating from the site where the names of thousands of martyrs are forever etched in dark granite.

In the background, the thundering of artillery resonated sporadically in the grim grey sky as if to remind the visitor that the war is ongoing and that its outcome is still uncertain.

This dichotomy plays out throughout all of the Donbas.

We then drove to a place where the current war might very well have turned out completely differently had it not been for a few soldiers turning the tide of fate against incredible odds back in 2014.

As a place where the forces of nihilism also attempted to eradicate the memory of those who had given their lives in liberating the region, Saur-Mogila was “the focal point of intense fighting, when Soviet troops managed to retake control of the height from German forces in August 1943. In 1963, a memorial complex was unveiled at the top of the hill to honor fallen soldiers, comprising an obelisk with a steel-and-concrete statue of a Soviet soldier, four steel-and-concrete sculptures built along the slope leading up to the obelisk (each memorializing infantrymen, tank men, artillerymen and airmen involved in the battle), and walls inscribed with the names of fallen soldiers in the battle.”^[1]



Photo courtesy of Arnaud Develay

In May 2014, the Kyiv junta launched a massive military attack on this highly strategic hill. They started by bombing World War II war memorials. A few DPR volunteers managed to contain the offensive by calling their artillery gunners to target their own coordinates with the intention of inflicting huge casualties on the enemy.

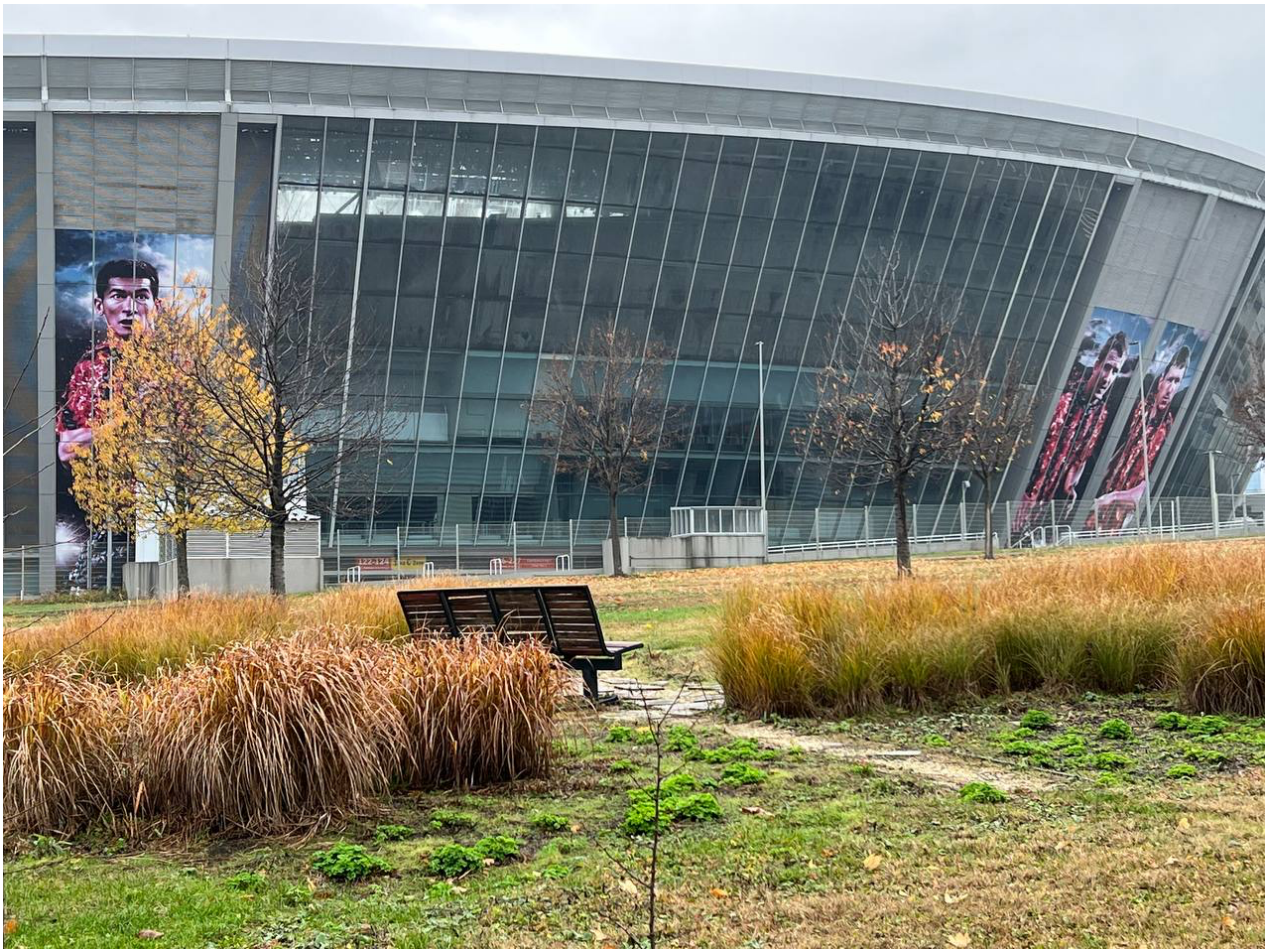
This tactic succeeded in allowing the Republic of Donetsk time to mobilize in a way conducive to survival in order to prolong the struggle. “Alec,” one of these heroes, was with us and told us about the ferocity of the fighting. He joined the ranks of the volunteers at 48 years old. He is now 57. He testifies that, in the heat of the moment, he called on his commanders “to bomb the Germans.”

Former SBU operative Vassili Prozorov perfectly captured the war for the control of the narrative going in Ukraine for at least 20 years. In his documentary [“Culturocide,”](#) he recalls in detail how the school manuals throughout the cities of the Lugansk and Donetsk Republic were aimed at brainwashing children with crude russophobic propaganda and an invented history of Ukraine predicated on an ideology known as “integral nationalism.”^[2]

Oleksii Arestovych, a former intelligence officer now serving as an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, once [stated that](#) *“Ukraine’s national narrative is predicated on a lie that we tell ourselves and others for if the truth was to come out, the country would cease to exist.”*^[3]

These are the stakes of the Special Military Operation.





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Notes

1. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donbas_strategic_offensive_\(August_1943\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donbas_strategic_offensive_(August_1943))
2. <https://video.search.yahoo.com/search/video?ei=UTF-8&q=culturocide%2C+you+tube#id=1&vid=0123ba93df81edbd14ba2a6197b63abd&action=click>
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0aXu1IYABJI>

Featured image: World War II memorial in Saur-Mogila. [Source: Photo courtesy of Arnaud Develay]

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