

# World War II: The Decisive Role of the Russian People in defeating Nazi Germany

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## GR Editor's Notes

*This article by Russian scholar Aleksander B. Krylov was first published by GR in May 2007. It sheds light on an important historical debate. Who won World War II? The historical record suggests that when British, American and Canadian Troops landed in Normandy in Jun 1944, the Third Reich had already, from a military standpoint been "defeated by the Russian People".*

*Translated from Russian. Editing by M. Ch. (emphasis added)*

*(Michel Chossudovsky, GR Editor, May 2015)*

Certain noteworthy tendencies keep surfacing in British and US historical studies of WWII during the last several years. Until recently, US and British scholars focused mainly on the events related to the Western Front (the Battle of El Alamein, the Normandy Invasion, the Ardennes Offensive, etc.). There was a reason behind their emphasizing the significance of the operations carried out by the Western allies: this approach created the false impression among the general public that Germany was defeated by the US and Great Britain. In some cases, schoolchildren in Great Britain and the US were actually led to believe that the Soviet Union had been Germany's ally during WWII.

This interpretation of history became canonical in the West from the very beginning of the Cold War era, from the time when, adhering to a kind of a "class approach", Winston Churchill in his writings denigrated the crucial contribution of the Red Army to the victory of Nazi Germany.

Later, Western historical thinking were largely influenced by the writings of former Nazi officers who had been involved in analyzing the Nazi military archives, and by numerous memoirs left by the Wehrmacht generals. As a rule, these authors tended to justify themselves and the German Wehrmacht, which was upheld as a purely professional entity separate from Hitler and Nazi ideology. The reminiscences of Hitler's dogs of war also reflected a lot of their arrogance and hurt pride, which further distorted the historical process.

On the other hand, the memoirs and archives of the Soviet military and political leadership were dismissed by Western authors. They failed to serve as a scholarly and ideological "counterbalance" opposing the flow of literature by former Hitlerites. The war-time recollections published in the USSR were subject to an ideological censorship in the West so

severe that oftentimes they lost any value as sources of historical knowledge.

The first attempts to assess in a more realistic way the respective roles of the Eastern and Western Fronts were made in the West nearly 30 years after the end of WWII.

John Erickson, a British historian, was among the first to move in this direction – in his books “The Road to Stalingrad” (1975) and “The Road to Berlin” (1983); he demonstrated the magnitude of the actual contribution of the Eastern Front to the defeat of Nazi Germany. Next, David M. Glantz, a US military historian, wrote several books about the war on the Russian front. In 1989-2006, he published 16 works including “When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler”.

Hundreds of works by British and US scholars focused on specific aspects of the operations on the Eastern Front such as the treatment of the prisoners of war, the war-time ethnic purges, the role of the NKVD (the Soviet secret service), the economy and the food supplies, etc. Those publications were not meant for mass audience. Therefore, for decades the perceptions of the broader public in Great Britain and the US were shaped primarily by the memoirs left by W. Churchill and other Western statesmen, who presented the Western Front as the main theatre of WWII. This traditional assessment started to erode in recent years. In this respect, “Europe at War 1939-1945: No Simple Victory” by Norman Davies, a British historian, played a significant role.

Norman Davies is a popular author in Great Britain and the US, and justly so. He became famous after the publication of “The Isles. A history” (1999), an extensive and captivating treatise on the British past. His “Europe. A History” (1996) and “Europe at War 1939-1945: No Simple Victory” (2006) were no less successful. In the latter book, Davies clearly, and with the emotionality untypical of a British scholar, condemns the pathological narcissism of the US. He finds especially harsh words for those US authors who continue stupidly to convince their countrymen that it was the US who stopped fascism and ultimately defeated Hitler.

According to Norman Davies, fighting went on between 400 German and Soviet divisions on the Eastern Front for four years. The front itself spanned 1,600 km. In the meantime, the fighting on the Western Front involved 15-20 divisions at most.

The German army suffered 88% of its casualties on the Eastern Front. It was the Soviet troops who broke the will and capacity of the German army to carry out massive front offensives in 1943. The Battle of Kursk – that is the name historians must remember! Norman Davies writes that the key role of the Soviet army in WWII will be so obvious to future historians that they will merely credit the US and Great Britain with providing a vitally important support.

Nevertheless, discussing the crucial contribution of the Red Army to the triumph over fascism, N. Davies fails to avoid the invariable ideological cliché concerning the “clash of the two totalitarianisms”: in his view, the most bestial regime in the history of Europe was crushed not by democracies, but by another bestial regime. In other words, a tyrant got defeated by a tyrant.

Recognizing the decisive contribution of the Soviet Union to the victory in WWII, N. Davies however ignores the fact that Nazism, which was crushed by the Soviet Union in 1941-1945, was an aggressive and inhuman creation of Western society. At the same time, N. Davies

acknowledges the personal role of Stalin in the victory of Russians. Geoffrey Roberts, another historian, concurs with this view. In his "Stalin's Wars. From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953", he writes that rising from the ashes after so many mistakes and leading the country to the greatest victory was an incomparable triumph, and that the world was saved for democracies by Stalin.

The truth is that the world was saved by the Russian people, not by Stalin's genius. Stalin admitted this in 1945 – in his toast "to the Russian people" during a reception for the Red Army commanders in the Kremlin. For Russians, this war will always be Great and Patriotic, as well as holy, since for our people it was a deadly fight against the absolute evil – the Nazism that came from the West.

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