

**A War for Memory:  
Commemoration and the Creation of Second World War  
Memory in Russia**

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A War for Memory:

Commemoration and the Creation of Second World War Memory in Russia

Eighteenth-century Russian general A.V. Suvorov once said that "A war is not over until the last slain soldier is buried."<sup>1</sup> By this standard, the Second World War has never ended in Russia, as millions of the dead soldiers and civilians remain buried in unmarked mass graves or listed as missing. Between 1939 and 1945, the Second World War ravaged Europe, leaving 63 million people dead. Between their military and civilian casualties, the Soviet Union bore almost half of these deaths, an estimated 25 million citizens, and the Second World War has been neither commemorated nor remembered in popular memory the same way in Russia as it has been in the West.

Commemoration in the Soviet Union was a difficult process from the very beginning, because there were more factors than just the war at play. Commemoration of the Second World War in Russia and the Soviet Union has been different than the commemoration that has taken place in Western nations for a number of reasons, including wartime experience, the legacy of the Communist Party, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. This paper will examine the creation of popular historical memory in Russia, why commemoration has differed in Russia and the Soviet Union, and also how commemoration is unique, especially when compared to Western commemoration, finishing with a case study of what is arguably the best remembered, commemorated and glamorized battle of the Eastern Front: Stalingrad.

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<sup>1</sup> Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia*, New York: Basic Books (1994): 13.

## Part I: The Creation of Memory

Historian Jay Winter suggested in his work *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* that the First World War's commemoration shaped the memorialisation that would take place in Europe after the Second World War.<sup>2</sup> Although this observation applies to the commemorative practices seen in Western Europe, there was very little commemoration of the First World War in the newly formed Soviet Union, firstly because the war had been a subject of great controversy (partially responsible for the collapse of two governmental regimes within a year), and secondly because post-revolution Russia quickly dissolved into civil war. Thus, the tradition of the First World War commemoration that influenced Western memorialisation of the Second World War was largely absent in Russia, leaving a distinct commemorative style to develop in engagement not only with the politics of memory, but also with the politics of the Soviet regime.

In 1990, General Dmitri Antonovich Volkogonov drafted a history of the Great Patriotic War entitled *On the Eve of War*.<sup>3</sup> It was the first work of mainstream Russian history to discuss the purges carried out by Stalin prior to the war, describe the ruthless military policies used during the war, and offer a comparison of Hitler's and Stalin's crimes.<sup>4</sup> The work even went so far as to suggest that the deaths of 27 million people had been unnecessary.<sup>5</sup> Volkogonov was subject to scathing peer reviews from various military officials, academics and Communist Party members.<sup>6</sup> Of the book, Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev said

Had Volkogonov succeeded in publishing the work, with its obviously false positions...it would have done great harm, and not only to history. The lies about the war have been

<sup>2</sup> Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Yale University Press (2006): 3.

<sup>3</sup> David Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire*, New York: Vintage Books (1993): 401.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid: 401.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

used for undermining the integrity of our country and the socialist choice, and for the constant defamation of the Communist Party. This could not be allowed.<sup>7</sup>

Volkogonov was labelled a “traitor” and an “anti-Communist turncoat”, and the book was not published.<sup>8</sup>

Russian historian Alexei Miller suggests that when memories are painful for a nation, the state may engage in collective “forgetting” or “denial”.<sup>9</sup> Forgetting often comes about when issues are recent, painful, or may generate conflict.<sup>10</sup> Denial, which differs from forgetting in that acknowledgement of events becomes a social taboo, is especially common when a nation fears that events were reprehensible, immoral, or even criminal.<sup>11</sup> This denial was demonstrated during the Soviet period by the refusal to acknowledge the USSR’s role in the Katyn Massacre, and can still be seen today in Russia, where the conduct of Soviet soldiers as they advanced into Germany is not a topic to be discussed.<sup>12</sup>

Miller also argues in his article “Russia: Power and History” that all countries engage in the politics of memory, as all historians are influenced by the political and social climate of their countries, and their work will reflect these biases.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, all governments and societies choose for themselves which aspects of their histories to commemorate, and which to forget.<sup>14</sup> There is a difference, however, between what Miller calls “politics of memory [and history]”, as explained above, and “*istoricheskaiia politika*”, the “historical politics”. “Historical politics” refers to a version of history that is created by the state, such as in the Soviet Union, when the state sees itself as having “[an] ideological monopoly” on what the correct version of events

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<sup>7</sup> David Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*: 401-402.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*: 401-402.

<sup>9</sup> Alexei Miller, “Russia: Power and History,” *Russian Social Science Review* 52 no 3 (May/June 2011): 31.

<sup>10</sup> Alexei Miller, “Russia: Power and History,” 31.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>13</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg, “The Politics of Russian History,” *Russian Politics and Law* 48 no 4 (July/August 2010): 4.

<sup>14</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg, “The Politics of Russian History,” 4.

was.<sup>15</sup> Ostensibly, when an authoritarian regime like the Soviet Union collapses and democracy is implemented, historians will regain their freedom, teachers will be able to choose their own text books, and society will be able to form its own version of history.<sup>16</sup> However, in post-Soviet Russia, historical politics have been activated in order to re-create the patriotism and loyalty to the state that was characteristic of the Soviet Union.<sup>17</sup>

The writing of textbooks in post-Soviet Russia has been a task of revision many times over. The latest edition, published in 2009, has been a source of great controversy, including accusations of “creating ethnic strife.”<sup>18</sup> Unlike the Soviet narrative of history, these textbooks do discuss Stalin’s crimes and repressions—but as a very necessary part of the “glorious Soviet past.”<sup>19</sup> Prior to the 2009 edition, *The History of Russia 1945-2007* came out, complete with a teacher’s manual, in late 2006 and early 2007, co-authored by Aleksandr Filippov and Pavel Danilin, both with strong ties to the presidential administration.<sup>20</sup> Despite claims that both these textbooks seek to “educate students to be citizens”, the reality is that they foster the patriotism that is rooted in the Soviet period—that is, patriotism based not on loyalty to the state, but rather to the authority that governs it.<sup>21</sup> Even those who are not outspokenly critical of the 2007 textbook admit that the text only mentions the GULAG once, identifies the main reason for food shortages to be the lack of motivation of on the part of the kolkhoznik labourers, and seeks to

<sup>15</sup> Alexei Miller, “Russia: Power and History,” 34.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.: 34/35.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid :38.

<sup>18</sup> Ekho Moskvyy, “Chechen Rights Ombudsman to Challenge Russian History Textbook in Court,” *BBC Monitoring International Reports* (September 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Peter Goodspeed, “Stalin the Murderous Dictator? He’s Gone; Russian Textbooks Re-write the Country’s Traumatic Past,” *National Post* (September 2009): A1.

<sup>20</sup> Alexei Miller, “Russia: Power and History,” 39.

<sup>21</sup> Alexei Miller, “Russia: Power and History,” 39.; Peter Goodspeed, “Stalin the Murderous Dictator?”, A1.

normalize the Soviet past, especially for those who do not remember the purges of the 1930s, but rather remember the era that came after Stalin.<sup>22</sup>

In its last chapter, the text also seeks to use this created history to legitimize Vladimir Putin, with a presentation of his rule that even non-critic historian Vladimir Solonari characterizes as “saccharine”, teaching students that it is only Putin’s ability to balance consolidation of his power with the state and civil rights that saved Russia from collapse after the 1990s.<sup>23</sup> In the Soviet period, as late as 1991, official histories were often commissioned by the military.<sup>24</sup> Now, they are commissioned exclusively by the state.<sup>25</sup> The message that they convey to students, however, remains very much the same, presenting a narrative that encourages loyalty and admiration to the government, and leaves no room for the questioning of authority. Prior to the commissioning of the 2007 text, Putin said in a meeting that he would like history books to focus on portraying the “positive” aspects of Russian history, and that Russians should not be “saddled with guilt”, although they should be aware of the negative events in Russian history.<sup>26</sup>

In a way that is eerily reminiscent of the textbooks commissioned by Stalin in the Soviet era, the textbook finishes with the notion that the “sovereign democratic” government that is in power in Russia today is the ultimate form of government—there is no room for change or improvement, because the ultimate form of government has already been reached.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, Russian society continues to demonstrate the effects of its Soviet past in historical memory: a study conducted in 2011 demonstrated that, although Russians are united in their

<sup>22</sup>Vladimir Solonari, “Normalizing Russia, Legitimizing Putin,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10 no 4 (Fall 2009):835.

<sup>23</sup> Vladimir Solonari, “Normalizing Russia, Legitimizing Putin”, 838.

<sup>24</sup> David Remnick, *Lenin’s Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire*, New York: Vintage Books (1993): 400.

<sup>25</sup> Vladimir Solonari, “Normalizing Russia, Legitimizing Putin”, 838.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid: 838.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid: 838.

perception of history and events that they see as being important, 67% were unable to determine the reliability of historical evidence and facts, and 70% were unable to deal freely with historical facts (that is, to disengage them from the state version of events).<sup>28</sup> The memory that is being created through the Russian education system is one that emphasizes the glory and the victories of the Great Patriotic War, leaving little room for mourning or questioning of the authoritarian system that won the war, or the government that remains in power today.

It is not only the Russian school system that is actively working to re-create the state's version of glorious victory in the war. Professional historians and universities have also come under threat. As recently as 2009, there were threats of a law which would be used to prosecute those who dared to make "incorrect" statements about the Second World War or Russia's role in it.<sup>29</sup> That same year, President Dmitry Medvedev issued a decree which created the "Russian Federation Commission to Counteract Attempts to Harm Russia's Interests by Falsifying History."<sup>30</sup> Included in this Commission were new reforms which restrict access to archives and documents, despite the law that states they must be opened to researchers after thirty years. Instead, access is now limited to researchers working "on commission" for the state, and official archivists.<sup>31</sup> The current Russian regime is actively working to create and homogenize history by implementing a single, state-edited textbook, organizing historical research, controlling access to archives and publishing, and attempting to regulate interpretations of history under the law.<sup>32</sup> It is as if, as Polish historian Andrzej Firszke says, "A real war for memory is going on."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Zhan T. Toshenko, "Historical Consciousness and Historical Memory," *Russian Social Science Review* 52 no 3 (May 2011): 10.

<sup>29</sup> Alexei Miller, "Russia: Power and History," 40.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid: 39.



The purpose of creating a national memory which glorifies the Soviet role in the Great Patriotic War can be traced back to control of the country by the current regime, Russia's place on the international stage, and a new school of history which has emerged, referred to by some as the "national-patriotic school".<sup>34</sup> This "national-patriotic school" of history seeks to re-enforce the history of the war that was created by the Communist Party.<sup>35</sup> The crimes of Stalin are ignored, and the implications of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, the invasion of Poland, and the post-war invasion and oppression of Russia's neighbours are explained away as necessary for the security of the USSR.<sup>36</sup> The West, especially the Americans, are blamed for their "primitive Russophobia".<sup>37</sup> One Western researcher declared that "the post-Soviet era trend in retrospection toward minimizing Stalin's crimes and maximizing his military and security achievements enjoys both governmental and popular support."<sup>38</sup> These researchers are reacting to the decline of Russia's prestige on the world stage, and seek to use history to create a popular, righteous, and uncomplicated version of the past that can be used to return Russia to a place of heroic, national pride, with a resurgence of popular patriotism.<sup>39</sup> This version of history has been endorsed by both the Putin and Medvedev regimes.<sup>40</sup> This endorsement makes sense, given the current political climate in Russia, under a regime that mirrors many of the Soviet security policies, such as drastically limited access to archives,<sup>41</sup> state controlled media,<sup>42</sup> and state edited historical education.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Teddy J. Uldricks, "War, Politics and Memory: Russian Historians Re-evaluate the Origins of World War II" *History and Memory* 21 no 2 (Fall/Winter 2009): 67.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*: 67.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*: 67.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*: 67.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*: 65.

<sup>42</sup> Vladimir Solonari, "Normalizing Russia, Legitimizing Putin", 838.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

The creation of memory and history in Russia is a concept that is strongly influenced by both the political needs of the current regime and the country's communist past. Popular memory of the twentieth century is further influenced by the fact that many of the participants are still living, and the events and memories maintain significance in everyday life.<sup>44</sup> The Great Patriotic War holds a particularly notable place in popular memory, as 82% of Russians over the age of 50, and 70% of Russians under 25 hold it as the most important event of the twentieth century, according to polls taken in the 1990s.<sup>45</sup> According to historian Zhen T. Toshchenko, this profound influence in the collective memory of Russia can be traced to three factors.<sup>46</sup> Firstly, the war had consequences for every Russian family. Secondly, the winning of the war shaped not only the future of Russia, but also the future of the world. Thirdly, the war has become a starting place, to which all memory can be tied back in some fashion.<sup>47</sup> The war is also important in collective memory because, in a regime that had so many other issues, the Soviet victory stands out as a positive event and as a uniting force in contemporary Russian society.<sup>48</sup> Given this positive view of the war as an event, it should come as no surprise that Russian society is unwilling to accept re-examinations of battles like Stalingrad, and heroes such as Zoia Kosmodem'ianskaia and Aleksandr Matrosov.<sup>49</sup>

The meaning of the Soviet Great Patriotic War victory is further complicated by the pre-war relations of the USSR and the rest of the world. The pre-war alliance with Nazi Germany, invasion of Poland, and the Winter War invasion of Finland continue to haunt the Russian past. The war began for Great Britain, the Commonwealth, and France in 1939 when Nazi Germany

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<sup>44</sup> Zhan T. Toshchenko "Historical Consciousness and Historical Memory", 7.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid: 9.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.: 8.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

invaded Poland. The USSR took part in this invasion along with the Nazis, and indeed continued to act as the aggressor in its takeover of the Baltic states and the invasion of Finland. The USSR remained faithful to Nazi Germany, sending transports of grain and other goods right up until the moment that the German troops crossed their border on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1941.<sup>50</sup> Although the legacy of the pre-Allied USSR was one of collaboration with the Nazis, this legacy was erased by their contribution to winning the war. As Winston Churchill famously stated in parliament, "If Hitler invaded Hell, I would at least make favourable reference to the Devil in the House of Commons."<sup>51</sup> This quote demonstrates the turn of faith in the other Allied nations—Stalin was bad, but Hitler was worse. For all these reasons, the alliance between the USSR and the other Allied nations was unstable from its very beginning.

Despite the fact that the USSR entered the war two years after the Western Allies, they sustained the heaviest casualties of any nation, and almost half the total casualties of the Second World War.<sup>52</sup> Along with their civilian and military losses, the USSR faced some of the greatest losses in infrastructure. The Soviet Union experienced the war differently than the Western nations, as the country faced the threat of total destruction, especially given that the second front that Stalin needed did not come until 1944. Therefore, it makes sense that their commemoration is different as well.

Along with the differences in wartime experience, the Soviets faced the complicated legacy of Stalin. Stalin's place in history and commemoration is a complicated one. While many historians have rightfully argued that the Soviets played an integral part in winning the war, and indeed in drawing German troops away from the D-Day front, the harsh regime

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<sup>50</sup> John Keegan, *The Second World War*, New York: Penguin Books (2005): 183.

<sup>51</sup> Piers Brendon, "Sir Winston Churchill: Biographical History," *Churchill College Cambridge Archives Center Collections, Churchill Papers* (2012): The War Leader.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Goff, Walter Moss, Janice Terry, Jiu-Hwa Upshur and Michael Schroeder. *The Twentieth Century and Beyond: A Brief Global History*. Seventh Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill (2007): 274.

imposed by Stalin remains a matter of controversy. Prior to the war, his reign of terror in the 1930s, culminating in the Great Terror of 1937, decimated the Red Army, and left the country in a state of constant fear.<sup>53</sup> During the war, Stalin united the USSR through the defence of Mother Russia, rather than under party propaganda. His policies, however, remained harsh, especially when it came to the men serving on the front lines.

The policy of “not one step back” was the motto of the Sixty-Second Army, as it had been issued by Stalin on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1942 over a Radio Moscow speech, and resulted in any soldier attempting to retreat from the front being shot by their own military leadership.<sup>54</sup> The Red Army would shoot 13,000 of their own soldiers before the war was over.<sup>55</sup> Any soldiers who were suspected of spying or considering desertion would be punished severely, taking part in tasks that would inevitably lead to death, such as clearing minefields with their feet.<sup>56</sup> Combined with being chronically undersupplied and never having enough re-enforcements, this policy led to the Red Army becoming extremely disillusioned with their officer classes and political leaders.

After the war, as Stalin sought to tighten his grip on the new Soviet satellite states and reassert control over the armed forces, commemoration of the War could not take place unless it glorified the heroes of the USSR and the winning of the war. After Stalin’s death, the question of how to commemorate the war became an issue that could not be solved by the political forces in the government, who themselves remained a part of the very regime they did not wish to commemorate. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the commemoration of the Great Patriotic War became divided over the issue of how to commemorate Stalin—as the great leader who helped win the war, or as the bloody tyrant who murdered millions of Soviet citizens?

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<sup>53</sup> John Keegan, *The Second World War*: 175.

<sup>54</sup> Craig, William. *Enemy at the Gates: The Battle For Stalingrad*. USA: Konecky & Konecky, 1973: 39.

<sup>55</sup> Dean Jordan, “The Battle for Stalingrad: A Requiem for the Endurance of the Human Spirit Under Inhumane Conditions.” *13<sup>th</sup> Annual History of Medicine Days* 13, no.1, (March, 2004): 321.

<sup>56</sup> Dean Jordan, “The Battle for Stalingrad : 321.

It is not only Stalin's legacy that divides modern Russia on the issue of commemoration. It is also the division between those who wish to celebrate and commemorate the veterans and the Red Army, and those who wish to commemorate the Communist Party, and even the possibility of returning to communism in Russia.<sup>57</sup> During the Victory Day parade on May 9<sup>th</sup> 1995, veterans of the Great Patriotic War marched in Red Square before American President Bill Clinton and ex-Soviet President Boris Yeltsin, carrying flags and banners bearing Stalin's image and celebrating the heroism that won the war on the Eastern Front.<sup>58</sup> However, this commemoration of Stalin, controversial in and of itself for the reasons discussed above, was not the only commemoration taking place that year. Ten thousand soldiers put on a military parade as an attempt to re-assert Russian military dominance on the world stage, despite the commemorative tone of the day.<sup>59</sup> Further away, twenty thousand leftists gathered to demonstrate their desire to return to the Soviet days.<sup>60</sup> Thus, commemoration remains a politically charged issue in Russia that is layered with more issues than just how to commemorate— who and what to commemorate remain important as well.

## Part II: Ties to the West: Comparing Russian Commemoration

Despite the differences in ideology that divided the USA and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, their commemoration bears the most similarity of any comparisons that can be drawn between Russia and the West. Both nations seem intent on glorifying the heroism of the war; Russia because of its implications with regards to current politics and national identity, discussed above, and the USA for many of the same reasons, especially following the Vietnam War and

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<sup>57</sup> Robin Knight, "Remembering, for Civilization's Sake," *US News and World Reports* 118 no 20 (May 1995): 10.

<sup>58</sup> Robin Knight, "Remembering, for Civilization's Sake," 10.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

involvement in Iraq, seeking to emphasize their position as a positive interventionary power. Both countries fought unpopular, interventionist wars during the twentieth century that caused great outrage among their citizens—the USA in Vietnam, and the USSR in Afghanistan. This similar style of commemoration by both countries, and the popular memory they have created, seeks to discredit the notion that they may have fallen from their former Cold War glory as great powers.

The need to glorify wars and the war dead can also be tied to the need to glorify the military. In the USA, where the switch has been made from a conscripted army to a volunteer force, it is important to make military life seem as appealing as possible, including commemorating those who give their lives in military service as glorious heroes. In modern Russia, where conscription remains in place, this is perhaps more important still, especially when soldiers are often seeing active duty in controversial places like Georgia and Chechnya.<sup>61</sup> The Russian military seeks to draft more than two hundred thousand people each autumn, a number that continues to rise.<sup>62</sup> In spite of this, an average of 54% of conscripts will be limited in their service due to health concerns, more than six thousand conscripts will not report, and still more will desert after reporting for duty.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the Russian army benefits greatly from the creation of a glorious military history, as it increases the likelihood that people will volunteer for service, rather than being conscripted, and decreases the likelihood of failure to report for duty and desertion. However, the effectiveness of this glorious memory in encouraging military volunteers is debatable.

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<sup>61</sup> BBC Worldwide Monitoring. "Russian Army to Draft More People in 2009 than in 2008." *BBC Worldwide Monitoring* (December 2008).

<sup>62</sup> BBC Worldwide Monitoring. "Russian Army to Draft More People in 2009 than in 2008."

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

Perhaps the best example, however, of Russia's commemoration of glory comes in the form of their celebration of Victory Day, on May 9<sup>th</sup> each year, rather than Remembrance Day.<sup>64</sup> The Victory Day Parade, which takes place in Moscow's Red Square, features tanks, soldiers, decorated veterans, and the heads of state.<sup>65</sup> Notably present in the 2012 parade is the traditional red of the Soviet Union, and the hammer and sickle symbol can be seen on columns around the parade.<sup>66</sup> Despite the fact that the uniforms of the army have been re-designed four times since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, they still manage to maintain many of the same elements of traditional Soviet military dress.<sup>67</sup> The most recent uniform updates, mostly to improve functionality, also speak of the Soviet past. The service hat has been redesigned to resemble one worn in the 1930s, and the general's hat is a direct copy of the one worn by Marshall Zhukov during the Second World War.<sup>68</sup>

In direct contrast to this glorious, heroic commemoration is the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which commemorates and maintains cemeteries for all the countries of the British Commonwealth, including Great Britain, Australia and Canada.<sup>69</sup> The Commonwealth also maintains memorials, such as the Vimy Ridge Memorial, and the Menin Gate, and museums such as the Juno Beach Centre. Much like their Russian counterparts who maintain museums such as the Stalingrad Memorial Museum, these memorial centers seek to educate youth by hiring them to work in the museums during the summer. However, unlike the Russian museums and memorials, which are often larger than life and convey a sense of glory and victory, Commonwealth memorials convey a sense of mourning and loss. The Vimy Ridge memorial,

<sup>64</sup> Sergei Cherekov, "Russia Marks Victory Day with a Military Parade on Red Square in Moscow." (Photo Collection). *The Telegraph* (May, 2009): 1-17.

<sup>65</sup> Sergei Cherekov, "Russia Marks Victory Day with a Military Parade on Red Square in Moscow.": 1-5.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid: 3.

<sup>67</sup> Vremya Novostey, "Russian Paper Views Military's Transition to New Uniforms." *BBC Monitoring International Reports* (January 2010).

<sup>68</sup> Vremya Novostey, "Russian Paper Views Military's Transition to New Uniforms."

<sup>69</sup> Commonwealth War Graves Commission. "About Us." *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (2013).

although it is a WWI memorial, and despite the fact that it rivals the Russian memorials in size, conveys a sense of deep loss, with its many statues, including the weeping statue of Mother Canada, which overlooks the edge of the ridge.<sup>70</sup>

This distinctly different tone in commemoration can arguably be tied to the fact that most Commonwealth countries do not rely on the legacy of the Second World War in the same political and social way that Russia does. Historical memory in Commonwealth countries is also arguably less important, as there has not been the same creation of a new national identity that Russia has continued to struggle with since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. There is also no increasingly authoritarian regime, unpopular war, or military draft to be justified in most Commonwealth countries.

Commonwealth cemeteries, which are located primarily in Northern France near or at the sites of WWI and WWII battles, contain personalized gravestones, bearing the name, date of birth and death, rank, regiment and country of each soldier, are distinctly different from Soviet or American war cemeteries.<sup>71</sup> Unlike American soldiers, who are often repatriated by their War Graves Commission, Commonwealth soldiers would not be repatriated except at the explicit request of the family, and the family would have to pay for the cost of the return of the body.<sup>72</sup> Because of this, there are far more Commonwealth soldiers buried abroad, and commemoration is a much more individualized process than that of the American or Soviet cemeteries.

In contrast, when one walks into the American Normandy cemetery, built overlooking Omaha Beach, it does not evoke sympathy, empathy, or even mourning. The cemetery, like all those erected in France by the United States, is clinical in its approach to commemoration. The

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<sup>70</sup> *Weeping Mother Canada, Vimy Ridge, France*. 2012, Meghan Stewart. (Appendix 1)

<sup>71</sup> *Commonwealth War Cemetery, Dieppe, France*. June 1, 2012, Meghan Stewart; *Canadian War Grave, Dieppe, France*. June 1, 2012, Meghan Stewart. (Appendix 1)

<sup>72</sup> Commonwealth War Graves Commission. "About Us." *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (2013).



crosses used as grave markers bear names, states, ranks, and nothing else. They are organized into neat rows that appear to line up no matter which way you approach them from.<sup>73</sup> There are no flowers, no wreaths, and nothing to individualize the gravestones in any way. The lack of personalized inscriptions on the graves, not even giving a date of birth, conveys the message that the USA was, and remains, a cohesive unit that does not differentiate their citizens. The cemetery is also home to massive monuments that commemorate the bravery, valour, and heroism of the American soldiers, including the Reflecting Pool, Memorial Chapel, and the statue of a massive, muscular man cast in steel (entitled "The Spirit of American Youth Rises From the Waves") that stands beneath a curved, pillared wall that reads "This Embattled Shore, Portal of Freedom, is Forever Hallowed by the Ideals, the Valour and the Sacrifices of our Fellow Country Men".<sup>74</sup> This cemetery speaks to the American desire to commemorate as a nation, rather than an individual. It offers a proud view of the war, of the soldiers, and of the lives lost in battle, and, with its grandeur, forces its viewer to see the heroism, and not the horror of the war.

Much like their American counterparts, although for different reasons, Russian cemeteries commemorate with an almost complete lack of personalized gravestones. Most war cemeteries contain no gravestones at all, and even those that do contain a single, commemorative stone or statue, and large stone markers that bear the names of all the dead that have been buried, or are thought to have been buried in that cemetery.<sup>75</sup> Because many of these cemeteries are found in areas that are otherwise relatively undeveloped, they are often surrounded by nature,

<sup>73</sup> *Graves, Normandy American Cemetery, Normandy, France*. June 9, 2012. Meghan Stewart. (Appendix 1)

<sup>74</sup> American Battle Monuments Commission. "Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial." *American Battle Monuments Commission* (2002): 4.

<sup>75</sup> *Russian War Cemetery (898) Maksatikha (Central Russia)*. 2002-2013, S. Smirnov.

< <http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/30221/Russian-War-Cemetery-Maksatikha.htm>>;

*Russian War Cemetery (2, 144) Krasnoye Selo (St. Petersburg)*. 2002-2013, Alexsej Hvalj.

< <http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/9670/Russian-War-Cemetery-Krasnoye-Selo.htm>>;

*Russian War Cemetery (187) Manyilo (Northwestern Russia)*. 2002-2013, Vitold Muratov.

< <http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/30222/Russian-War-Cemetery-Maynilo.htm>>;

and would remain forgotten about completely if it were not for the grave markers that distinguish them. There are notable exceptions, of course, such as the Preobrazhenskoye Cemetery in Moscow, where the remains of more than 10,000 soldiers and officers are buried in individual graves with individual gravestones that conform to a single style, or the Primosk cemetery in Northwestern Russia, which commemorates 187 soldiers individually.<sup>76</sup>

There is much discrepancy between the cemeteries that commemorate Russia's WWII dead. Some cemeteries, like the Baldone cemetery in Latvia, feature ornate gravestones made of red granite complete with inscription and photographs of the fallen soldiers.<sup>77</sup> These gravestones, however, found in the civilian cemetery of a church, commemorate the lives of only three Soviet officers. Others, such as the Spalenieki Russian War Cemetery in Latvia, feature no gravestones at all. Instead, they feature two large brick markers with engraved silver plaques that commemorate the mass graves there.<sup>78</sup> This can be explained by the fact that, unlike in all Western nations where gravesites are maintained by taxpayer dollars and independent graves commissions, Russian war cemeteries are paid for and maintained by the military.<sup>79</sup>

Another interesting aspect of Russian World War II cemeteries is the fact that the grandeur of the cemetery is not necessarily dictated by the importance or number of the people buried there, which speaks to the Soviet desire for equality, or at least the appearance of it. The Dubrovka Cemetery which contains the bodies of 2, 815 soldiers, including a hero of the Soviet Union, features no ornamentation and only a few stones low to the ground.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, Golbitsy

<sup>76</sup> *Russian War Cemetery (10,000+) Preobrzhenskoye (Moscow)*. 2002-2013, Dmitry Rozhkov.  
<<http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/9586/Russian-War-Graves-Preobrazhenskoye.htm>>

<sup>77</sup> *War Graves (3), Baldone (Latvia)*. 2002-2013, Kiko S.  
<<http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/30214/Russian-War-Graves-Baldone.htm>>

<sup>78</sup> *Russian War Cemetery (3)Spalenieki (Latvia)*. 2002-2013, Kiko S.  
<<http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/30215/Russian-War-Cemetery-Spalenieki.htm>>

<sup>79</sup> Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*: 13/14.

<sup>80</sup> *Russian War Cemetery (2, 815) Dubrovka (Northwestern Russia)*. 2002-2013, Alexei Soychev.  
<<http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/25050/Russian-War-Cemetery-Dubrovka.htm>>

Cemetery contains the bodies of 326 soldiers, including a hero of the Soviet Union, and yet it is a small, dismal graveyard with a black fence, plain cement markers, and no ornamentation of any kind.<sup>81</sup> Alternatively, the Yermilovo Cemetery, which contains the remains of only 17 soldiers, has two memorial stones on either side of a large, stone cast monument with a hedge-lined path and stairs leading up to it.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, the Russian war grave in Retyun, which holds the remains of only one, unknown, soldier, features a far larger, more decorated monument than the larger cemeteries discussed above.<sup>83</sup> These cemeteries are all located in the same geographic area of Northwestern Russia, and they all commemorate soldiers who fell during the Siege of Leningrad.

Another issue with having individual commemoration in Russian World War II cemeteries is that there are always more remains that need burial. Russian Cemetery Number 4 in Aristova features a large statue with a commemorative plaque, and a wall of mismatched, family-created and financed stones with pictures and inscriptions.<sup>84</sup> Each year, the remains of more soldiers are discovered and buried there.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, in Southern Russia, the Rossochka Cemetery was created to bring remains found in the area together for burial.<sup>86</sup> By 2007, there were 11, 618 soldiers buried there, 182 in individual graves, and the remaining soldiers in 15 mass graves.<sup>87</sup>

Despite the fact that the war has ended, newly discovered remains are not always buried in individual graves. Although there are hundreds of World War II cemeteries in Russia, there

<sup>81</sup> *Mass Grave Russian Soldiers (326), Globitsy (Northwestern Russia)*. 2002-2013.

<<http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/20605/Mass-Grave-Russian-Soldiers-Globitsy.htm>>

<sup>82</sup> *Mass Grave Russian Soldiers (17), Ermilovo (Northwestern Russia)*. 2002-2013.

<<http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/12199/Mass-Grave-Russian-Soldiers-Ermilovo.htm>>

<sup>83</sup> *Russian Grave (1), Retyun*. 2002-2013, Alexei Soychev.

<<http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/25051/Russian-War-Grave-Retyun.htm>>

<sup>84</sup> *Russian War Cemetery 4, Aristova*. 2002-2013.

<<http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/20544/Russian-War-Cemetery-No-4-Aristova.htm>>

<sup>85</sup> *Russian War Cemetery 4, Aristova*. 2002-2013.

<sup>86</sup> *Russian War Cemetery (11,000+) Rossoschka (Southern Russia)*. 2002-2013, Auke de Vlieger.

<<http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/10592/Russian-War-Cemetery-Rossoschka.htm>>

<sup>87</sup> *Russian War Cemetery (11,000+) Rossoschka (Southern Russia)*. 2002-2013, Auke de Vlieger.

are more mass graves, both dating from the Great Patriotic War and from recent years. For example, the Chernysheno mass grave was created in 2006 to re-bury the remains of 110 Soviet soldiers found in the surrounding area.<sup>88</sup> The distinction between cemetery and mass grave is not always clear, however, and there is often no difference between the structure, ornamentation and commemoration featured in the two. Many cemeteries have mass graves in them; however, many are a product of the type of fighting that took place on the Eastern front, and the way in which the soldiers were buried at the time, which makes it virtually impossible to commemorate each soldier individually.<sup>89</sup>

Mass graves are often paved or fenced off to demonstrate the borders of the grave.<sup>90</sup> Also lacking individualized grave markers, mass graves are marked with commemorative plaques and statues.<sup>91</sup> They also typically feature stones or walls with names of soldiers thought or known to be buried there.<sup>92</sup> The message that these stones send to visitors today, however, is reminiscent of both the singularity that the Americans seek to create in their cemeteries and the monuments to the missing, as seen in Commonwealth World War I memorials such as the Menin Gate<sup>93</sup> and Thiepval Ridge<sup>94</sup>, where there are massive walls bearing the names of the missing.

<sup>88</sup> *Mass Grave Russian Soldiers (110), Chernysheno (Central Russia)*. 2002-2013.

< <http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/26174/Mass-Grave-Russian-Soldiers-Chernysheno.htm> >

<sup>89</sup> John Keegan, *The Second World War*, 196-200.

<sup>90</sup> *Mass Grave Russian Soldiers, Akkolovo*. 2002-2013. <<http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/20609/Mass-Grave-Russian-Soldiers-Akkolovo.htm>>; *Mass Grave Russian Soldiers (Unknown Number), Buregi (Northwestern Russia)*. 2011, Dar Veter.

< <http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/10618/Mass-Grave-Russian-Soldiers-Buregi.htm> >;

*Mass Grave Russian Soldiers (218), Dachnoye (Northwestern Russia)*. 2002-2013, Alexei Soychev. <

<http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/25049/Mass-Grave-Russian-Soldiers-Dachnoye.htm> >; *Mass Grave Russian Soldiers (326), Globitsy (Northwestern Russia)*.

<sup>91</sup> *Mass Grave Russian Soldiers (218), Dachnoye (Northwestern Russia)*, Alexei Soychev.

<sup>92</sup> *Mass Grave Russian Soldiers (110), Chernysheno (Central Russia)*.

<sup>93</sup> *The Menin Gate, Ypres, Belgium*. May 26, 2012. Meghan Stewart.

<sup>94</sup> *Thiepval Ridge Memorial, Thiepval Ridge, France*. May 29, 2012. Meghan Stewart. (Appendix 1)

These Russian mass graves often contain large monuments, typically made of stone, that offer a glorious view of the soldiers resting there.<sup>95</sup> These memorials, often erected during the Stalinist period, offer the same messages of heroism seen in the American memorials. The desire to commemorate the heroism of the Red Army under Stalin served a dual purpose: Firstly, it allowed Stalin to further tighten his grip on the Red Army after the war and the terror of the 1920s and 1930s; secondly, it commemorated in a way that highlighted the strength and bravery of the Red Army in a world where all eyes were on the two rising superpowers as the Cold War dawned.<sup>96</sup>

Another way of commemorating the remains of the Red Army soldiers is found in the Sinyavino Heights National Memorial, which uses the entirety of the battlefield to commemorate the estimated 360,000 soldiers who died here during the Siege of Leningrad (1941-1944).<sup>97</sup> Just like the Russian war cemeteries and mass graves, which do not contain individualized gravestones, the battlefield is covered with mismatched stones, erected throughout the post-war period, that commemorate the sacrifice of the soldiers buried there.<sup>98</sup> Like several other national monuments scattered across Russia, the Sinyavino Heights National Memorial features a stone pillar with a commemorative inscription, stone inlaid into the ground around it, and the star with the eternal flame burning in it.<sup>99</sup> These gravestones continue to be laid with wreaths and

<sup>95</sup> *Mass Grave Russian Soldiers (Unknown Number), Klip Yavr (Northwestern Russia)*. 2002-2013, Maarten Dirkse.

<<http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/19913/Mass-Grave-Russian-Soldiers-Klip-Yavr.htm>>

*Mass Grave Russian Soldiers (Unknown Number), St. Petersburg*. 2002-2013.

<<http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/10594/Mass-Grave-Russian-Soldiers-Komarovo.htm>>;

*Mass Grave Russian Soldiers (136), Komlevo (Central Russia)*. 2002-2013, Dmitry K.

<<http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/28658/Mass-Grave-Russian-Soldiers-Komlevo.htm>>;

*Mass Grave Russian Soldiers (Unknown Number) Kozhino (Central Russia)*. 2002-2013, Alexei Soychev.

<<http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/28182/Mass-Grave-Russian-Soldiers-Kozhino.htm>>

<sup>96</sup> Nurit Schleifman, "Moscow's Victory Park: A Monumental Change," *History and Memory* 13 no 2 (2002): 9.

<sup>97</sup> *Sinyavino Heights National Memorial (360,000), Northwestern Russia*. 2002-2013.

<<http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/9606/National-Memorial-Sinyavino-Heights.htm>>

<sup>98</sup> *Sinyavino Heights National Memorial (360,000), Northwestern Russia*. 2002-2013.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

fresh flowers, and they are marked with artifacts from the war, such as helmets and shell casings.<sup>100</sup> There are tens of thousands of soldiers buried in mass graves scattered across the battlefield, some commemorated, and some not, because the exact location of the grave remains unknown.<sup>101</sup>

The war cemeteries dating from the Soviet period, and even those created after the collapse of Communism, commemorate this way because so many of the war dead remain missing in Russia. As historian Nina Tumarkin notes in her work, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia*, the Red Army was reluctant after the war to locate and rebury their dead.<sup>102</sup> Firstly, it was dangerous, because many of the battlefields remained mined, and the Soviet Union had seen enough death during the war.<sup>103</sup> Secondly, if the Army buried their dead in war cemeteries, then the task and cost of maintaining them fell to the military.<sup>104</sup> Given that the Red Army sustained over an estimated 10 million military casualties during the war, this would have been a very expensive endeavour. In the 1960s, an initiative was undertaken by the Komsomol (Communist Youth Organization) to begin the search for human remains;<sup>105</sup> however, this too was ultimately unsuccessful. Searching for human remains suggested that the central theme of the post-war period, that “no one is forgotten, nothing is forgotten”, was not true.<sup>106</sup> It also proved difficult for Soviet children to exhume remains from the forests, hills, rocky terrain and cliffs of Northern and Western Russia.<sup>107</sup> It was not until 1988-89 that the Soviet Army began to assist with the burial of the war dead, providing trained

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<sup>100</sup> *Sinyavino Heights National Memorial (360,000), Northwestern Russia*. 2002-2013.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, 13.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid:13/14.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid: 14.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid: 14.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid:13/14.

de-mining personnel, transportation for volunteer searchers (still often from Komsomol youth leagues), coffins and gasoline.<sup>108</sup>

The trouble with these new endeavours, as with so many explorations into the Soviet past, was that they unearthed more truth than the state was prepared to make public knowledge—and this truth was not an archived document, so easily kept out of the reach of researchers.<sup>109</sup> For example, excavations of a former military hospital revealed patients, still in their hospital gowns, with Soviet bullets in their skulls.<sup>110</sup> In a country where history tries to downplay the crimes of Stalin, including this example of his “scorched earth” policy, excavations like this had the potential to be very damaging to the state.

In early 2011, twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet regime, an excavation project began in the village of Sinyavino, Russia, 31 miles east of St. Petersburg, that unearthed the remains of more than 500 soldiers who died during the heavy fighting that took place between 1941 and 1945.<sup>111</sup> On May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011, despite heavy rain, members of the search and excavation team buried the caskets containing the remains in mass graves under the blessing of an Orthodox priest.<sup>112</sup> Despite the fact that fifty years had passed since the first soldier was killed near Sinyavino, the ceremony was attended by people carrying flags of many nations, including neighbouring Poland and Finland.<sup>113</sup> The impact of the sacrifice made by the Soviet soldiers could also still be seen in the general population, as demonstrated by Antonina Melnikova, now

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<sup>108</sup> Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, 13/14.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid : 15

<sup>110</sup> Ibid : 15

<sup>111</sup> Phaedra Singelis, “WWII Soldiers from the Former Soviet Union Are Buried,” (Photo Collection). *NBC News* (May 6, 2011): Photo 3.

<sup>112</sup> Phaedra Singelis, “WWII Soldiers from the Former Soviet Union Are Buried,”: Photo 4.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

age 78, who stood crying with a photo of her father and the memorabilia her family had collected from him.<sup>114</sup>

Even this ceremony and cemetery, however, were not filled with gravestones as are seen in Western cemeteries. Rather, like the traditional Second World War graveyards erected in the Soviet period, this cemetery featured a plot marked out by concrete with grass in the center, and a collection of mismatched black gravestones around the edges bearing the photos, framed in white, of the soldiers buried there.<sup>115</sup>

Like all wars, the casualties of the Second World War were not limited to their countries of origin. Therefore, it makes sense that the Soviets commemorated in Germany, and vice versa. Perhaps the most stunning (and certainly the largest) of these memorials is the Sowjetisches Ehrenmal (Soviet Memorial) in Berlin, designed by Soviet architect Evgenii Vutechich.<sup>116</sup> Upon entering the memorial, visitors pass through an entrance way made of two, fifteen metre high, red granite triangles engraved with quotes from Stalin.<sup>117</sup> Once inside, there is a 200 by 100 metre paved rectangle that leads to the towering mausoleum at the far end.<sup>118</sup> Surrounding this paved area are stone blocks with depictions of soldiers marching into battle, of the battle itself, and of other relevant depictions of the war, such as Lenin's face, floating above the soldiers as they march.<sup>119</sup> On each rectangle, there is a quote from Stalin.<sup>120</sup> Six green, metal wreaths measuring ten metres in diameter lay in grassy squares at the centre of the paved area leading up to the mausoleum's steps.<sup>121</sup> This open air commemoration features a massive mausoleum at the

<sup>114</sup> Phaedra Singelis, "WWII Soldiers from the Former Soviet Union are Buried," Photo 5.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid: Photo 6.

<sup>116</sup> Nurit Schleifman, "Moscow's Victory Park: A Monumental Change," :11.

<sup>117</sup> *Sowjetisches Ehrenmal in Treptower Park, Berlin*. August 31, 2009, Jon Brunberg, The Polynational War Memorial. <[http://www.war-memorial.net/mem\\_det.asp?ID=98](http://www.war-memorial.net/mem_det.asp?ID=98)>

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> *Sowjetisches Ehrenmal in Treptower Park, Berlin*, Jon Brunberg.



end of the park, with a ten to twelve metre tall bronze statue of a heroic Soviet soldier.<sup>122</sup>

Standing atop the mausoleum, he holds a child in his left arm, and a sword slicing into a crushed swastika at his feet.<sup>123</sup> Located in the grounds of the Treptower Park, this memorial commemorates the 20, 000 Red Army soldiers who died during the battle for Berlin.

This memorial is located close to the former Eastern German Embassy, and was a gift from Stalin to the families of the soldiers who died in the battle for Berlin; however, it is also a reminder to the East Germans that it was Stalin and the Red Army who liberated them from the Nazis.<sup>124</sup> This was especially important as tensions rose over Berlin and the division of Germany in the post-war period.

Even after Stalin had died, and the tensions of the Cold War had faded somewhat, the theme of memorials commemorating heroism, with communism and the Communist Party as a central figure, continued until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. In 1972, a memorial was dedicated to the Polish soldiers and German Anti-Fascist Fighters in Friedrichain Park in the Soviet section of Berlin.<sup>125</sup> This memorial, inscribed "For Your and Our Freedom," commemorates the heroes of those who fought against fascism—and ostensibly for communism, if the Eastern German Communist Party had anything to say about it. The memorial was also seen at the time as an effort to strengthen ties between East Germany and neighbouring Poland, whose relations with the USSR had never been very good, and were especially soured after the Warsaw Uprising in 1944.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> *Sowjetisches Ehrenmal in Treptower Park, Berlin*, Jon Brunberg.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

The time of forcing the Germans to remember the Russians as their liberators, however, seems to have passed in the commemoration of the Second World War. In 2000, a five hectare cemetery for 80,000 German soldiers who died near Sologubovka, a Russian village 45 miles northeast of St. Petersburg (formerly Leningrad) was opened.<sup>127</sup> The cemetery was honoured by Russian veterans and their relatives at the restored Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>128</sup> The cemetery and restoration of the church, which had been shut down under Stalin and served as a German military hospital during the war, was paid for by the “Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge” (People’s Association for the Care of German War Graves)<sup>129</sup>.<sup>130</sup> Of the new cemetery, Russian veteran Vladimir Spindler stated: “Future generations will assess our reconciliation. The future always assesses the present better.”<sup>131</sup> Others present at the ceremony appeared less impressed with the commemoration of the former enemy.<sup>132</sup> Earlier in the year, however, German veterans visited the nearby Soviet war cemetery to lay wreaths for their former enemy, before laying wreaths at the new cemetery for their own fallen comrades.<sup>133</sup> This graveyard is the largest of 89 graveyards in Russia dedicated to fallen soldiers from foreign countries.<sup>134</sup>

### Part III: Re-living the Soviet Regime: Stalingrad and the Politics of Memory

The Battle of Stalingrad raged on the Eastern front from August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1942 until February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1943. Leaving behind the bloodiest legacy in history, this battle cost almost 2 million Soviet

<sup>127</sup> Alonia Bocharova, “Cemetery for Fallen German Soldiers Opened,” *St. Petersburg Times* (September 12, 2000).

<sup>128</sup> Alonia Bocharova, “Cemetery for Fallen German Soldiers Opened.”

<sup>129</sup> Fritz Kirchmeier. “Abstract.” *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgraberfursorge* (2013): 1-1.

<sup>130</sup> Alonia Bocharova, “Cemetery for Fallen German Soldiers Opened.”

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

and German lives. This massive loss of life is vastly commemorated, not only in historical circles, but also in Western popular memory.

In popular Western memory, Stalingrad is arguably the best remembered battle of the Second World War, save D-Day, and certainly the most popularized of the Eastern Front battles. Whether this can be attributed to its bloody legacy, the fact that it is often cited as a major turning point in the war, or the mass of horrifying primary sources that remain from the battle (such as the "Voices from Stalingrad" collection of German letters, Soviet sniper Vasily Zaitsev's memoirs, or the German boots made of human hair on display in the American Omaha Beach Museum in Normandy<sup>135</sup>), is debatable. Regardless, Stalingrad lives on in the memory of anyone familiar with the Second World War in the West. It has been popularized through books, translations of primary sources, and movies.

Of these sources, perhaps the most notable is *War of the Rats*, the book on which the Hollywood blockbuster *Enemy at the Gates* is based. The premise of the book is the sniper battle that took place between Russian sniper Vassili Zaitsev and Colonel Thorvald, a German sniper specialist flown to Stalingrad with the single purpose of killing Zaitsev. The story was made into a motion picture in 2001, starring Jude Law as Vasilli Zaitsev.<sup>136</sup> The movie differs from the book in that it eliminates the moral questions raised in the book, and instead focuses on the action of the war and the love story between Zaitsev and Tanya Chernova, a civilian fighting in Stalingrad. However, the movie also reached out to a broader audience and further popularized the battle in Western culture.

The commemoration of Stalingrad in Russia has been and continues to be a massive undertaking. Constructed between 1960 and 1967, the Alley of Heroes and Fallen Fighters,

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<sup>135</sup> *Boots from Stalingrad*, American Utah Beach Museum. June 5, 2012, Meghan Stewart.

<sup>136</sup> Paramount Pictures, Pathe. *Enemy at the Gates*. March 16, 2001.

which stretches four city blocks in Volgograd, consists of a long, pedestrian only walking street lined by trees and benches.<sup>137</sup> At the beginning of the walkway there is a stone and metal memorial which bears the names of the heroes of Stalingrad on one side, and metal castings of the various medals on the other, with enough space between the two to allow visitors to pass through and begin their walk down the Alley.<sup>138</sup> The walkway is lined with lights and stars, and is lit up at night in a spectacular light show.<sup>139</sup> Upon entering the Fallen Fighters park, visitors are greeted with the Chapel of Alexander Nevsky, a widely celebrated hero of the Middle Ages, and the Topol (poplar tree)-Hero, a tree which survived the Battle of Stalingrad and continues to thrive despite its shrapnel and bullet wounds.<sup>140</sup> At the end of the Fallen Fighters Park, there is the memorial to the fighters of Stalingrad, which is a stone and cement statue with several engraved plaques and a large, metal casting of a ceremonial wreath in the centre.<sup>141</sup> Below this, an engraved commemorative plaque sits at ground level above a metal cast star.<sup>142</sup> In the star is the eternal flame, which has been burning since it was lit in 1967.

Also commemorating the battle of Stalingrad is the Mamayev Kurgan, featuring a 52 metre statue of Nike, goddess of victory, brandishing her sword in the defence of Stalingrad, that stands on the hill in the center of Volgograd.<sup>143</sup> The name literally translates to “Mamayev Hill”, and is significant because the hill switched hands several times during the battle, and 34,

<sup>137</sup> Вечный Огонь (Eternal Flame). *360°Cities: Russia* (February 14, 2010): <http://www.360cities.net/image/-eternal-fire-russia#218.99.4.06.58.2>.

<sup>138</sup> *Alley of Heroes, Volgograd*. 2002-2013, Auke de Vliegger.

< <http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/10572/Alley-of-the-Heroes-Volgograd.htm> >

<sup>139</sup> Аля Героев летним вечером (Alley of Heroes on a Summer Evening). *360 ° Cities: Russia*. (July 1, 2012): <http://www.360cities.net/image/alley-of-heroes-on-a-summer-evening#-56.76,27.85,70.0>.

<sup>140</sup> *Remembrance Tree, Volgograd*. 2002-2013.

< <http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/10579/Remembrance-tree-Stalingrad.htm> >

<sup>141</sup> Вечный Огонь (Eternal Flame). *360°Cities: Russia* (February 14, 2010).

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Hearst, David. “Skeletons of Stalingrad: Hundreds of Thousands of German and Russian Soldiers Died in the Killing Fields along the Volga but now, 50 years after Hitler’s Forces Surrendered, More than Bones and Guns are Surfacing.” *The Guardian* (January 2, 1993): 14.;

*Mamayev Hill, “The Motherland Calls”, Volgograd*. 2002-2013, Auke de Vlieger.

< <http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/10628/Mamayev-Hill---The-Motherland-Calls.htm> >

505 soldiers are buried there beneath the statue, including Vasily Zaitsev, the famous sniper.<sup>144</sup>

Beneath the towering statue, is a panoramic museum, which offers eight separate rooms containing dioramas, a cinema, and a military history library.<sup>145</sup>

Dating from the Soviet era, these memorials offer an interactive experience for the visitor, commemorating the dead, but also reaching out to the living. However, both the park and the Mamayev Kurgan statue seek to perpetuate the glorious view of the war by showcasing the names of the heroes of Stalingrad, the eternal flame, still in its Soviet star, and in the sheer size of the commemoration. Even Nike, who is not seen in commemoration later on, is brandishing a sword, bravely and heroically protecting the city from her place upon the hill, and the natural memorial of the poplar tree is heroic, as it lives on despite its wounds.

Connected to this statue and memorial museum is the “Historical and Memorial Museum for the Battle of Stalingrad.”<sup>146</sup> First conceived in 1936, the museum was built to showcase the civil war and conversion to communism in Stalingrad (formerly Tsaritsyn).<sup>147</sup> The museum receives massive government funding from the Federal State Institution of Culture, and can be found online in an interactive, 3D walkthrough display that allows visitors to explore the preserved ruins of the Stalingrad steam mill, and then walk through the exhibits, with options to enlarge and examine each display.<sup>148</sup>

Much like the textbooks discussed in the first portion of this paper, the museum commemorates and seeks to create memory in a very patriotic, glorifying way. Like the many graveyards that can be found across the Russian countryside, which commemorate in a way that

<sup>144</sup> Mamayev Hill, “The Motherland Calls”, Volgograd. 2002-2013, Auke de Vlieger.

<sup>145</sup> Historical and Memorial Museum for the Battle of Stalingrad Website. *English Translation*.  
<http://www.stalingrad-battle.ru/>

<sup>146</sup> Historical and Memorial Museum for the Battle of Stalingrad Website. *English Translation*.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

presents an almost forceful view of the Soviet Union and its soldiers as a singular entity, the museum is also forcefully inclusive, with exhibits entitled “One for all”, “It was the Soldiers”, and “We are all Komsomolskaya (on the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Komsomol)”. The museum is committed to the “patriotic education of the youth”, as written in their mission statement.<sup>149</sup>

Despite the fact that Communism has long collapsed in Russia, the museum remains committed to “going forward, but still maintaining their best traditions.”<sup>150</sup> The museum’s main goal (now, as it was when the museum was first established in the 1930s) in working with their visitors is to engage them in military-patriotic education.<sup>151</sup>

The newest exhibit at the Stalingrad museum opened on November 22, 2012, a date that commemorates the launch of the counter-attack that pushed the Germans out of Stalingrad and turned the tide of the war on the Eastern Front decisively. The exhibit, entitled “One for All”, displays the fate of regular Russian soldiers next to the generals who led them, and perpetuates the idea that the Great Patriotic war was fought by a willing, united force that truly believed in and supported the Communist cause.<sup>152</sup>

One thing that the Stalingrad museum does well, however, is to portray daily life in Stalingrad. Unlike many military museums, like the D-Day museums that line the Normandy Coast of France, which portray only the military side of the battle, the Stalingrad museum emphasizes the plight of the civilians and daily life in the battle of Stalingrad. The exhibit, entitled “Unforgotten Forgotten Things”, features artifacts of daily life from Stalingrad and seeks

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<sup>149</sup> Historical and Memorial Museum for the Battle of Stalingrad Website. *English Translation.*

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

to showcase the lives led by the inhabitants of Stalingrad who were never evacuated, despite the ever-worsening situation in Stalingrad.<sup>153</sup>

In the debate about how to commemorate Stalin's place in the Great Patriotic War, the Stalingrad museum takes a clear stance. The exhibit "Gifts to the Supreme Commander and the Hero-City", funded and created by the State Museum of Modern Russian History in Moscow and opened in 2010 at the Stalingrad museum, featuring works of art, clothing, knives, jewelry, and pipes dedicated as gifts to Stalin to recognize the winning of the Great Patriotic War.<sup>154</sup> The exhibit speaks clearly of Stalin's role in the war as a glorious one, and showcases him through the gifts and finery that were presented to him to honour his contributions to the war.

Even the website itself harkens back to the days of the communist party, with the communist red lining the page, accented with white and black. The same star that holds the eternal flame in the Stalingrad memorial in the Fallen Fighters Park is scattered across the page, including a black and white banner at the top which is shaped by a star on the left edge and depicts scenes of battle beneath faint falling stars.<sup>155</sup> The museum also employs university students, and has tours and projects specifically aimed at children, families, adults and the elderly.<sup>156</sup> Twice a year, the museum holds a ceremony with young new recruits of the Russian army, and the City Day is held in the museum with the military commissariat.<sup>157</sup>

The Stalingrad memorials and museums are not only the largest sites of commemoration in Russia, they were also the least controversial during their construction. It was the first of the major memorials to be constructed and opened as we know it today, between 1960 and 1967.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Historical and Memorial Museum for the Battle of Stalingrad Website. *English Translation*.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Nurit Schleifman, "Moscow's Victory Park: A Monumental Change," 8.

Furthermore, because both the museum and the monuments commemorate a single battle, and do so in a way that very much echoes the glorious narrative that has been perpetuated since the war's end, they do not leave room for questioning the victory. Controversy can be found, however, in the Moscow Victory Park and the Moscow Great Patriotic War Museum, which seek to commemorate not a single battle, but the war as a whole.<sup>159</sup>

The first corner-stones of the Moscow Victory Park were laid in 1947.<sup>160</sup> Unfortunately, under the strain of the Cold War, and in an effort to reassert control of the Communist Party over the Red Army, Soviet leader Josef Stalin put a stop to the project as a part of his "anti-cosmopolitanism campaign."<sup>161</sup> After Stalin's death in 1953, the task of commemoration fell to the new Minister of Defence under Nikita Khrushchev, Marshal to the Soviet Union Georgii Zhukov.<sup>162</sup> Zhukov was a powerful general in the Second World War, credited with the counter-attack that led to the collapse of the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad.<sup>163</sup> In 1955, Zhukov proposed that five massive monuments be built in Moscow, Leningrad, Stalingrad, Odessa and Sevastopol, attesting to the glory of the Red Army and the citizens of the USSR.<sup>164</sup> Notably, the role of the Communist Party would be left out of Zhukov's commemoration project.<sup>165</sup>

Despite Zhukov's intentions, the resulting political and bureaucratic disagreement ensured that this project did not come to fruition until much later. In 1958, a contest was held by the state for memorial designs.<sup>166</sup> None of these designs were chosen, however, and a second, exclusive contest was held featuring only state sanctioned artists.<sup>167</sup> This too was unsuccessful,

<sup>159</sup> Nurit Schleifman, "Moscow's Victory Park: A Monumental Change," 18.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid: 10.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid: 8.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid: 10.

<sup>163</sup> John Keegan, *The Second World War*: 189.

<sup>164</sup> Nurit Schleifman, "Moscow's Victory Park: A Monumental Change," 10.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid: 10.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid: 11.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.



and eventually, in 1960, the project was entrusted to Evgenii Vutechich, the same architect who had designed the Treptov Park Soviet Cemetery Memorial in Berlin.<sup>168</sup> Unfortunately, Vutechich passed away before he could design anything, and the commemoration once again fell to an open contest.<sup>169</sup>

In 1978, it was proposed to include the Moscow Great Patriotic War Museum, including a "Hall of Glory", in the commemoration.<sup>170</sup> The Brezhnev regime consented, but the coming Moscow Olympics meant that the funds needed for such a project simply were not available.<sup>171</sup> Neither the Andropov nor the Chernenko regime lasted long enough to address the question of commemoration.<sup>172</sup> Both the park and the museum remained on paper until late in Mikhail Gorbachev's reign, when a timetable was designed to have the park completed by 1990, the museum by 1993, and entire site completed for its grand opening in time for the fiftieth anniversary of Victory Day in 1995.<sup>173</sup>

Although construction began under Gorbachev, it would be finished under a completely new regime and open in a new chapter of Russian history. The final product, although based on the 1978 plans, has a very different tone than that of the Stalingrad Museum.<sup>174</sup> The "Hall of Glory" that was proposed is there, complete with the names of Heroes of the Soviet Union and decorated soldiers carved into its marble walls, but it is complemented by the "Hall of Memory and Sorrow".<sup>175</sup> The "Hall of Memory and Sorrow" features thousands of glass beads, representing tears, strung across its ceiling, and the eternal flame that was proposed in the 1978 plans has been replaced with a weeping statue of Mother Russia, holding her dead son on her

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<sup>168</sup> Nurit Schleifman, "Moscow's Victory Park: A Monumental Change," 11.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid: 12.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid: 18.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid: 15.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid: 23.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid: 24.

knees.<sup>176</sup> The site also features a church, as is traditional in Russian commemoration, but has a synagogue and mosque on site as well.<sup>177</sup>

This site is unique from other sites of Russian commemoration because it does not simply thrust a glorious view of the Great Patriotic War onto the viewer. It is also unique in that it is inclusive, featuring a multi-religious narrative of the soldiers who fought in the war. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this complex, however, is the fact that for the first time, the Great Patriotic War was showcased as a part of the Second World War, demonstrated by the armour of various countries that lines the paved paths through the park, and the gravestones in the park, which denote both the massive casualties and the various countries that took part in the war.<sup>178</sup> Completed in the 1990s, this site offered a new view of history that challenged the traditional Soviet narrative, and it certainly challenged the traditional commemoration of glory and victory that had been built in Stalingrad (1960-67) and Leningrad (1975)<sup>179</sup>.

#### Conclusion:

Given the far-reaching implications of the Great Patriotic War for the Soviet Union and the significance of its commemoration for modern Russian identity, it should not be surprising that the war is memorialized everywhere in Russia. Despite the difficulties involved in creating memory, and the long, divided process of commemoration, there are more than 70,000 memorials in Russia, and every museum, no matter how small or rural, features a display of the surrounding area during the war.<sup>180</sup> Every large battle is commemorated in schools, media and on

<sup>176</sup> Nurit Schleifman, "Moscow's Victory Park: A Monumental Change: 24; *Sculpture of "Mourning Woman" in the Hall of Memory and Sorrow, Central Great Patriotic War Museum, Moscow*. Nurit Schlieffman, 2002.

<sup>177</sup> Nurit Schleifman, "Moscow's Victory Park: A Monumental Change," :24.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid: 24.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid: 8.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

the Russian calendar.<sup>181</sup> As time began to pass from the Soviet era, however, distance began to appear from the new commemoration that appeared in Moscow in the 1990s, and the new history that went along with it. The creation of memory, history, and commemoration once again became a political tool for the current government to justify an increasingly authoritarian regime, glorify the military, validate its military draft and rationalize state involvement in unpopular armed conflicts, like Chechnya and Georgia. In Russia today, where the state holds a monopoly on the creation of memory and history, the war may be over, but the battle for memory is just beginning.

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<sup>181</sup> Nurit Schleifman, "Moscow's Victory Park: A Monumental Change," 8.

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