

It was not Erroll Flynn who won the war

— ANC Khumalo

Who won the second world war? Who was responsible for the defeat of Hitler? Those questions are still hotly debated today. And not simply by children in school, but by historians and ideologues.

The ruling point of view in South Africa, Britain, America and other western countries is that America and Britain played the decisive role. The way some people argue, and certainly the way the Hollywood films put it across, you would think that Errol Flynn, John Wayne and other gum-chewing yanky hemen did it all single-handed.

In South Africa schools, and wherever imperialist propaganda is pumped out, they tell us that the Germans were defeated not by the Soviet people but by Generals Hunger and Cold. I remember seeing a western war documentary when I was at school. It showed the fascist invaders becoming bogged down on their advance to Moscow and then later being forced to retreat.

Apparently it was not the fighting qualities and capability of the Soviet soldiers that were responsible for the about-turn. According to the commentator of this propaganda piece it was "Snow...Snow...and more Snow". General Zhukov was nowhere to be seen. Only General Snow. As though the Soviet forces did not have to fight under the same weather conditions as the Nazis? As though they only beat them during the winter months?



The nazis laying down arms.

FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY

This year sees the fortieth anniversary of the end of the war. There will be numerous commemorations throughout the world. In the west renewed attempts are being made to play down the Soviet Union's role in the war. At the same time the western mass media seeks to exaggerate Britain and America's role. Emphasis is being placed on battles on the

Western Front and the claim that the western allies were the main adversaries of the Germans.

The American edition of John Pimlott's "Battle of the Bulge" claims just that in the blurb. And Robert Leckie's "Wars of America" juggles the facts by claiming that Hitler weakened his 1500 mile Eastern Front with the Soviet forces "to the extreme" to provide troops for his Ardennes offensive in Belgium in

December 1944 (which came to be called the Battle of the Bulge).

This is typical western falsification. At that stage Hitler had 250 divisions on the Soviet front and 24 divisions facing one million allied troops in the west. Hardly a case of weakening the Eastern front "to the extreme". The Americans in fact made such a poor showing in the Ardennes battle that Churchill had to appeal to Stalin to put forward the date of the Soviet offensive in the East in order to take pressure off the Americans.

In his book "The Second World War", Churchill praised Stalin for advancing the date of the Soviet offensive. "It was a fine deed of the Russians and their chief to hasten their vast offensive, no doubt at a heavy cost of life", is what Churchill wrote. As a result of the Soviet offensive, in January 1945 Hitler was forced to redeploy 12 divisions from the western front to the east. The Battle of the Bulge was the biggest battle on the western front. But it was minor compared with those on the Soviet-German front.

THE SOVIET-GERMAN FRONT

All the main events of the Second World War, or the Great Patriotic War as it is called in the Soviet Union, took place on this front. Hitler's main aim was to overthrow the Soviet Union and crush communism. This would enable

him to achieve his dream of world domination. He therefore concentrated his main forces and means of war on this front. This is where the decisive events and turning points of the war occurred.

It was on this front that through four grim years of war the Soviet Union, fighting for most of that time on its own, stopped the gigantic war machine of the fascists, bled it white, forced it into retreat and finally destroyed it. Millions of fascist troops and ten million Soviet soldiers died in this fighting. Another ten million Soviet civilians perished at the hands of the invaders. By comparison 340 000 American soldiers died in the war and not a bomb was dropped on the USA. We do not denigrate the deaths of these Americans or anyone who fought fascism but are concerned to show who carried the major burden of the war.

To get an idea of the scope of the war we will divide it into the specific periods:

1st Period — Nazi Blitzkrieg

Space does not allow us to go into the causes of the war, the political manoeuvrings and contradictions between the imperialists who built up Hitler and encouraged him to attack the Soviet Union. Those contradictions led Hitler first of all to overrun the whole of Europe and to turn against France and Britain whose leaders had sought to appease him. On September 1, 1939 Poland was invaded, falling to the German troops within two weeks.

This was the new military strategy of "blitzkrieg" or lightning strike" perfected by the German generals. It entailed the use of superior forces, panzer (tank) divisions, motorised infantry, artillery and air bombardment and paratroop drops behind enemy lines. It involved surprise attack and speed of movement. A hole would be punched into the enemy's front and the tanks, followed by motorised

infantry, would speed deep into the rear to link up with the paratroopers. The opponent's front lines would be cut off from the rear and the forward posi-



G. V. Zhukov

tions surrounded in pincer movements. In this way Hitler banked on quick and dramatic results.



Blitzkrieg worked in one country after another as Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium and France fell in quick succession in the summer of 1940. The German army became highly skilled in this type of warfare and the myth of Hitler's invincibility grew. Britain and France had declared war on Germany after the invasion of Poland. No serious fighting took place between them however, and a period of lull set in, known as the "phoney" war.

It served to show that they were not serious in their opposition to Hitler until the once mighty France paid the price of its folly and was occupied in July 1940. Hitler now began to build up his forces for the assault on the Soviet Union. With most of Europe under his control he could count on a combined population of 300 million as against 190 million Soviet citizens and he had greater resources of iron, coal and steel under his command. In fact most of Europe became a labour camp for the fascist war effort. By June 1941 Hitler and his generals were ready to launch "Operation Barbarossa", the code name for the invasion of the Soviet Union. They had amassed 90 per cent more troops, 50 per cent more tanks, 20 per cent more artillery and 130 per cent more combat aircraft than the Soviet command.

2nd Period — The Soviet Union Attacked

On June 22, 1941 Hitler invaded the Soviet Union with an army of 3 million. 190 divisions took part in the initial assault on a front stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Fifty divisions were supplied by Hitler's fascist allies such as Italy, Finland, Rumania, Hungary and Spain. The Hitlerite forces had the advantage of surprise and were superior in equipment and numbers, whereas the Soviet Union was not as prepared as it could have been. Moreover, the invaders had the decided advantage of being



more experienced in modern warfare.

The blitzkrieg strategy soon saw the fascists striking deep into Soviet territory. Hitler had boasted that he would be in Moscow within six weeks. But the time of easy way for the fascists was over. The small fortress of Brest on the Polish border held out for six weeks until the last defender fell. Leningrad, near the Finnish border, was besieged and by October the enemy had come within sixteen (16) kilometres of Moscow. But at tremendous cost. Every inch of Soviet territory had been fiercely defended and one third of the invasion force was either dead or in hospital by this time. After four months of fascist advance it was clear that the enemy was being halted. Not by snow, but by the fierce determination of the Soviet people and soldiers to defend their motherland.

The essence of this period of the war, fought under unfavourable conditions by the Red Army, was the struggle to halt the enemy's advance and seize the strategic initiative from him.

Under the slogan "The defeat of the enemy must begin at Moscow" the first Soviet counter-offensive was launched at the end of 1941. With the army reorganised by the Party, fresh men and resources brought up, communists leading the troops into battle and the people giving everything for the war effort, the enemy was hurled back. By April 1942 the fascists had been pushed back 400 kilometres from Moscow. The Battle of

Moscow revealed the strength of the Soviet people. This was the first massive defeat for the fascists and it shattered the myth of Hitler's invincibility.

Hitler's hopes of lightning war with a swift conclusion were wrecked. Instead he was forced into a protracted war. The invaders still held the strategic initiative, however, and launched a fresh offensive in the south. An army of 1 million troops broke through the Soviet front and drove to the Volga in the summer of 1942. In July 1942 Stalingrad was flattened in one day and the fiercest fighting of the war took place over many months for every street and house of the city. The whole world watched as the outcome of the war was being decided at this great city in the River Volga. The German forces were hoping to break through the Soviet defences and speed on to seize the



strategic oil fields at Baku and the Caspian Sea. This would have placed the Soviet Union in an extremely vulnerable position.

3rd Period — From Stalingrad to Kursk

November 19, 1942 saw the unfolding of a carefully planned and devastating counter-offensive at Stalingrad. The encirclement of the German 6th Army took place. Over 330 000 crack German troops were caught in a trap and pulverised. By February 1943, 90 000

survivors finally surrendered. The tide of war had turned on the Volga and the German army could never be the same again. At this stage there were 258 fascist divisions on the Soviet front and 50 divisions concentrated at Stalingrad. There had never been such a crushing defeat in the history of warfare yet war historians in the west seek to play down this momentous event. By contrast the fascists had a mere 14 divisions operating in North Africa. And the Battle of Alamein which is greatly magnified in the west only resulted in the destruction of four fascist divisions. Hitler had ordered his top generals to commit suicide rather than surrender at Stalingrad but in the end they decided to ignore their Fuhrer and save their skins. From this stage of the war the strategic initiative belonged to the Red Army.

The fascist beast had been tamed but not broken. The Nazi generals still aimed to regain the all important initiative. Fresh armies with the newest equipment had been mobilised. In July 1943 the fascists launched another powerful summer offensive south of Moscow near Kursk. They concentrated their forces on a very narrow sector. Fifty divisions, twenty of which were tank or motorised divisions, were formed into a "battering ram" aimed at punching a hole into the Soviet lines, and once again thrust on Moscow. The biggest battle in history unfolded on the fields near Kursk, involving thousands of tanks, planes and artillery. The Red army's defences held and at the precise moment a powerful Soviet counter-offensive was unleashed which caught the fascists by complete surprise.

This manoeuvre from defence into counter-offensive "on the move" i.e. in the course of a battle and not from a set position, required the kind of generalship, command and control, and troop discipline under fire that makes it difficult for any force then and today

to rival that of the Soviet army. The result was the most decisive victory of the war. Thousands of enemy tanks, planes and artillery pieces were captured or put out of action and hundreds of German troops killed or captured. Thirty enemy divisions were destroyed.

The Battle of Kursk is justifiably called "the decisive turning point" of the war by Soviet and other objective historians. After Kursk the German High Command could never again assume the offensive on a large scale. The Soviet Air Force gained air supremacy which it retained till the end of the war. The fascist army was near catastrophe and on the other hand Soviet prestige and morale was greatly increased. From Kursk the Red Army developed a general offensive along a large front, hurling the enemy across the Dnieper River.



Along this wide river the enemy had built heavily fortified positions, the "Eastern Wall". Overcoming this obstacle required tremendous bravery and combat skill. In the process more "Hero of the Soviet Union" awards were won in the Battle of the Dnieper than in any other battle of the war. By the end of 1943 the tide of the war was irreversibly turned in favour of the Soviet Union. The stage was now set for the expulsion of the enemy from Soviet territory. The Red Army's fighting ability, experience, mastery of directing large formations was clearly

superior to that of the German army. The Soviet Union's wartime economy was functioning better than fascist Germany's and Soviet war industry was now producing two-and-a-half (2½) times more tanks and 20 000 more aircraft than Germany and her allies.

4th Period — The Enemy Driven From Soviet Soil

The Red Army's mission for 1944 was the clearing of the fascist invader from Soviet soil and the setting of action on the enemy's own territory. Nine crushing blows on various fronts were unleashed. The siege of Leningrad was lifted, ending 900 days of suffering which left one million soldiers and civilians dead. Under the brilliant generalship of Zhukov, Rokossovsky and Konev the Soviet forces cleared Byelorussia and the Ukraine.

Partisan (guerilla) forces numbering one million had been operating behind enemy lines and in no small way contributed to the successes of the regular forces. They had literally made every inch of occupied Soviet land burn under the invaders' feet and in the "Railway War" of 1943-1944 disrupted the movement of enemy troops and equipment by blowing up thousands of kilometres of track and by attacking anything that moved. By the middle of 1944 Soviet territory was cleared of the fascists. Eight million German soldiers, Hitler's crack and elite divisions, died or were taken prisoner on Soviet soil. At this stage Nazi Germany had lost 55 000 tanks, 62 000 planes and 190 000 artillery pieces.

The Red Army now began its great campaign of liberating other European countries from Nazi bondage. It was at this stage, when the bulk of the fighting had been done and it was clear that the USSR had the capacity to crush Hitler alone, that the western allies belatedly opened up the Second Front



Citizens of all ages took part in the fighting.

with the landings on the Atlantic coast of France. We have referred to the heavy going the Americans and British made against inferior German forces in the west. Hitler hoped that the USA and Britain would want to "save" Germany from communism and that together

they could unite against the Soviet Union.

His attacks on their forces in the west were thus of a political nature. The Western Allies had a relatively easy task yet they pretend their advances were fantastic and scarcely mention Stalingrad and Kursk or the terrific resistance battles taking place on the Eastern Front in 1944-45. Against fierce resistance the Red Army drove the Germans out of Poland, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, etc. By January 1945 the final stage for the offensive on German soil was set.



5th Period – Battle of Berlin and Final Victory

With the Western Allies stuck in the forests and mud of the Ardennes the Soviet offensive in January 1945 got underway. We have seen that Stalin advanced the time in response to



Warm welcome for Soviet soldiers in Bulgaria.

Churchill's appeal for assistance. Thus commenced large scale Soviet operations on German soil. The Red Army crashed through the German defences and by April 16 had reached the outskirts of Berlin. An army of one million troops defended the capital. The Red Army had to advance against fortified positions on high ground and fighting was extremely fierce with thousands of Soviet casualties.

By April 25 the German troops had been surrounded and routed and on April 30 Soviet soldiers, fighting from floor to floor, hoisted the red banner of victory on the roof of the Reichstag — the German parliament. In order to escape justice Hitler swallowed poison in his bunker. In this way the dream of world domination ended. After Germany's unconditional surrender, May 9 was declared "Victory Day" in the Soviet Union. In August the war against militarist Japan was concluded.

But the final act of barbarity was carried out by America. On August 8 the Soviet Union declared war on Japan as a result of a commitment given to the West at the Yalta Conference the year before. Soviet forces soon routed the 1 300 000 strong Japanese army in Manchuria giving Mao Tse Tung their arms. On August 6 and 9 the USA dropped



atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There was no military necessity for this act since Japan was already finished. The purpose was to warn the Soviet Union.

CONCLUSION

We have attempted to show that the Soviet Union carried the main burden of the war and was the key force in the defeat of Hitler's Germany. We have shown that by the time the Western Allies landed in France, June 6, 1944, the Soviet Union had to its credit brilliant victories at Moscow, Stalingrad, Kursk, on the Dnieper and elsewhere. These marked a radical turning point in the entire course of the war. Between November 1942 and the end of 1943, 213 divisions of the German army were routed on the Soviet front. These were Hitler's best divisions which had hitherto known no defeat. By June 1944 the war had already entered its concluding stage. By then as many as 370 divisions had been wiped out on the German-Soviet front. Nazi Germany could no longer compensate these losses and its death agony set in. Germany lost two million of its best officers and men at Stalingrad and Kursk alone.

The elite divisions which had overrun France in the Summer of 1940 lay buried on the Volga and the fields near Kursk. When Eisenhower landed at



Normandy the Germans had only 160 combat aircraft on that front. The Western advance was guided not so much with routing Hitler but with meeting up with the "Russians" as far to the east as possible. All in all a total of 607 enemy divisions were destroyed on the Soviet-German front. Nazi Germany lost 10 million men in killed, wounded and captured on the Soviet front. The Anglo-American troops operating in North Africa, Italy and Western Europe accounted for 176 divisions. Most of them in the concluding period of the war when Nazi Germany was on the brink of surrender.

The Soviet Union lost 20 million people in the war. 1 740 towns and 70 000 villages were destroyed. The Soviet people made tremendous sacrifices which explains why they hold so dear to peace today. The source of the Soviet Union's victory over fascism is its people, organised, inspired and led by their communist party. Because they were fighting a just war in defence of their socialist motherland they were united, determined, disciplined and ready to make any sacrifice. By comparison their enemy was fighting an unjust war

for false promises which were unattainable.

So it was not Errol Flynn who won the war. Neither was it General Snow. It was the Soviet people and their Red Army.

Let us conclude with these words from Marshall Grechko: "The Soviet



Union had won a war which in its scope, intensity and impact on post-war world developments exceeded past wars in every respect. History knows few examples when such traumatic setbacks early in a war were so dramatically reversed and where the aggressor having scored fairly impressive success in the opening stages, eventually suffered complete defeat".