

# GREAT VICTORY OF 9 MAY 1945 IS NOT FORGOTTEN

EVERY nation has its own vision of World War II. Obviously every nation focuses its remembrance on its own contribution.

For the overseas countries, the war began with fascist's assault on Poland in September 1939 or with the militarist's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. For the Russian Nation its Great Patriotic War started in early morning of 22 June 1941.

The tenacity of the Russian people and their role in mutual with the Allies stopping the march of Adolf Hitler's armis is generally not well known to the Bangladeshi public even for those who set up patriotically and in the spirit of Bangladesh-Russian fraternity. On the eve of 70th anniversary of the Great Victory of 9 May 1945, I would like to share with our friends a few thoughts regarding the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Nation and its Red Army against fascism.

During the early morning of 22 June 1941, Hitler broke the Non-Agression Pact with the Soviet Union by starting Operation Barbarossa, the fascist's invasion of Russia-held territories, and that began the war on the Eastern Front. The Great Patriotic War of the Russian Nation against fascism started.

In the first three weeks of the invasion, as the Soviet Union tried to defend itself against large advances, it suffered 750,000 casualties, and lost 10,000 tanks and 4,000 aircraft.

By the end of 1941, the Soviet military had suffered 4.3 million casualties and the fascists had captured 3.0 million Soviet prisoners, 2.0 million of whom died in Nazi's captivity by February 1942. The Wehrmacht troops had advanced 1,700 kilometers, and maintained a linearly-measured front of 3,000 kilometers. The Red Army put up fierce resistance during the war's early stages.

The Battle of Moscow in October-December 1941, where the Red Army mysteriously stopped the Nazis in the neighborhoods of the Russian capital-city, was a breakthrough that many Western military scholars are till now unable to explain. By December, Hitler's troops had advanced to within 25 kilometers of the Kremlin in Moscow. On December 5, the Red Army launched a counteroffensive, pushing fascist's divisions 80 kilometres back from Moscow in what was the first major defeat of the Wehrmacht in the war. While the Nazis made huge advances in 1941, killing millions of Soviet soldiers, the Red Army directed sizable resources to prevent the fascist troops from achieving one of their key strategic goals, the attempted capture of Leningrad (Saint-Petersburg). They held the city at the cost of more than a million Soviet soldiers sacrificed in combat and more than a million civilians, many of whom died from starvation.

In early 1942, the Soviets began a series of offensives labeled "Stalin's First Strategic Offensives". At the same time, Hitler was worried about American popular support after the U.S. entry into the war following the Attack on Pearl Harbor, and a potential Anglo-American invasion on the Western Front in 1942 (which did not occur until the summer of 1944). He changed his primary goal from an immediate victory in the East, to the more long-term goal of securing the southern Soviet Union to protect oil fields



vital to the long-term Wehrmacht efforts. The Wehrmacht southern campaign began with a push to capture the Crimea, which ended in disaster for the Red Army.

I.S.Stalin publicly criticized his generals' leadership. In their southern campaigns, Nazis took 625,000 Red Army prisoners in July and August 1942 alone. At the same time, in a meeting in Moscow, W. Churchill privately told I.S.Stalin that the British and Americans were not yet prepared to make an amphibious landing against a fortified Nazi-held French coast in 1942, and would direct their efforts to invading Wehrmacht-held North Africa. He pledged a campaign of massive strategic bombing, to include German civilian targets.

Estimating that the Russians were "finished," the Hitler generals began another southern operation in the fall of 1942, the Battle of Stalingrad. Hitler insisted upon splitting his southern forces in a simultaneous siege of Stalingrad and an offensive against Baku on the Caspian Sea.

I.S.Stalin directed his generals to spare no effort to defend Stalingrad. Although the Soviet nation suffered in excess of 1.1 million casualties at Stalingrad, our victory here over Axis's troops including the encirclement of 290,000 of them, marked a turning point in the World War-Two. The Red Army at Stalingrad repulsed the important fascist's strategic southern campaign and, although 2.5 million Soviet casualties were suffered in that effort, it permitted our country to take the offensive for most of the rest of the war on the Eastern Front. The battle of Stalingrad, where the Soviets crushed the Wehrmacht 6th Army, was the turning point for the war on the Eastern Front.

In 1943, Stalin ceded to his generals' call for the Soviet Union to take a defensive stance because of disappointing losses after Stalingrad, a lack of reserves for offensive measures and a prediction that Wehrmacht would likely next attack a bulge in the Soviet front at Kursk such that defensive preparations there would more efficiently use resources. The Nazis did attempt an encirclement attack at Kursk, which was successfully repulsed by the Soviet troops. After it Hitler canceled the offensive, in part, because of the Allied invasion of Sicily, though the Soviets suffered over 800,000 casualties.

By the end of 1943, Russian troops occupied half of the territory taken by fascists from 1941-1942. Soviet military industrial output also had increased substantially from late 1941 to early 1943 after the Soviet government had evacuated industrial plants and factories well to the East of the front, safe from Nazi's invasion. The strategy paid off, as such industrial increases were able to occur even while Wehrmacht in late 1942 occupied more than half of European Russia, including 40 percent (80 million) of its population, and approximately 2,500,000 square kilometres of the country's territory.

In November 1943, I.S.Stalin met with W.Churchill and F.D.Roosevelt in Tehran. Roosevelt told Stalin that he hoped that Britain and America opening a second front against Germany could initially draw 30-40 German division from the Eastern Front. Stalin and Roosevelt, in effect, ganged up on Churchill by emphasizing the importance of a cross-channel invasion of Nazi-held northern France, while Churchill had always insisted that Wehrmacht was more vulnerable in the "soft underbelly" of Italy (which the Allies had already invaded) and the Balkans. The parties later agreed that Britain and America would launch a cross-channel invasion of France in May 1944, along with a separate invasion of southern France.

In 1944, the Soviet Union made significant advances across Eastern Europe toward fascists, including Bagration Operation, a massive offensive in Belarus against the Army Group Centre of Wehrmacht. Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill closely coordinated, such that Bagration Operation occurred at roughly the same time as American and British forces initiation of the invasion of Nazis held Western Europe on France's northern coast. The operation resulted in the Soviets retaking Belarus and western Ukraine, along with the successful effective destruction of the Wehrmacht Army Group Centre and 300,000 German casualties, though at the cost of more than 750,000 Soviet casualties.

Success at Bagration Operation and in the year that followed were, in large part, due to a weakened Wehrmacht that lacked the fuel and armament they needed to operate effectively, growing Soviet advantages in manpower and materials, and the attacks of Allies on the Western Front. In his 1944 May Day speech, Stalin praised the Western allies for diverting German resources in the Italian Campaign. TASS published detailed lists of the large numbers of supplies coming from Western allies. In November 1944 I.S.Stalin made a speech stating that Allied efforts in the West had already quickly drawn 75 German divisions to defend that region, without which, the Red Army could not yet have driven the Wehrmacht from Russian territories.

In late 1944, Soviet forces battled fiercely to capture Hungary in the Budapest Offensive, but could not take it instantly. The Axis' troops held out in the subsequent Battle of Budapest until February 1945, when the remaining Hungarians signed an armistice with the Soviet Union. Victory at Budapest permitted the Red Army to launch the Vienna Offensive in April 1945. To the northeast, the taking of Belarus and western Ukraine permitted Red Army to launch the massive Vistula-Oder Offensive, the successful culmination of which resulted in the Red Army advancing from the Vistula river in Poland to the German Oder river in Eastern Germany.

By April 1945, Hitler and his Wehrmacht faced its last

days with 1.9 million Nazi soldiers in the East fighting 6.4 million Red Army soldiers while 1 million Wehrmacht troops in the West battled 4 million Western Allied soldiers. Three Red Army's fronts converged on the heart of Eastern Germany, with one of the last pitched battles of the war putting Russian troops at the virtual gates of Berlin. By April 24, Berlin was encircled by elements of two Red Army's fronts, one of which had begun a massive shelling of the city on April 20 that would not end until the city's surrender. On April 30, the Red Banner was hanged over Reichstag.

Fending off the fascist invasion and pressing to victory over Nazism and Fascists in the World War II required a tremendous sacrifice by the Soviet Union. Soviet military casualties totaled approximately 28.2 million with approximately 14.7 million killed, missing or captured. Although figures vary, the Soviet civilian death toll probably reached 20 million.

Nevertheless the whole of the Nation became dedicated to the war effort. The population of the Soviet Union was suffering more than any other nation involved in the fighting of World War II. The war was especially devastating to Soviet citizens because it was fought on their territory and caused massive destruction. Economic losses were catastrophic. The war resulted in destruction of approximately 70,000 Soviet cities, towns and villages. Destroyed in that process were 6 million houses, 98,000 farms, 32,000 factories, 82,000 schools, 43,000 libraries, 6,000 hospitals and thousands of kilometers of

roads and railway track. To avoid total hunger the government in 1941 had to implement rationing and applied it to bread, flour, cereal, pasta, butter, margarine, vegetable oil, meat, fish, sugar, and all across the country till the very Great Victory.

Today it has sense to remind that the Nazi Wehrmacht suffered 88% of its casualties on the Eastern Front. These casualties broke the will and capacity of the Nazi army and save the World for democracies.

As we celebrate on May 9 Great Victory Day, nobody should forget about the simple Russian soldiers, the lowly non-commissioned officers and first lieutenants, who went through the battles near Moscow, Leningrad, Stalingrad, Kursk, Kiev, Minsk, Riga, Vilnius, Tallin, Warsaw, Prague, Bratislava, Budapest, Vienna, Beograd, Sofia, who opened the gates of the death camp of Auschwitz, and, after all entered Berlin first, and who carried the burdens of what they experienced in the war throughout their lives. Nevertheless, the Russians pay tribute and glorify every single US, UK, Canadian, Australian or other Allied soldier who died making a big, important and immortal contribution to the shared Victory.



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Yalta conference of the Allies in 1944



Victory parade in the Red Square of Moscow in 1945 (the inglorious Hitler standart & Wehrmacht banners are casted by the Red Army soldiers)



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