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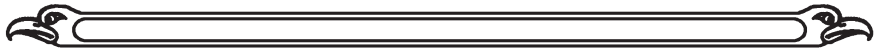
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Of Tablecloths and Soviet Relics: A Study of the Banner of Victory (*Znamia Pobedy*)

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Introduction

The Second World War produced many iconic photographs. Among these were two famous photographs of flag-raisings. Americans are most familiar with Joe Rosenthal's photo of United States Marines raising the Stars and Stripes over Mount Suribachi on the Japanese island of Iwo Jima. In the Soviet Union and modern Russia, the best known flag-raising photo from the war is Evgenii Khaldei's photo of Soviet soldiers raising the red banner with the hammer, sickle, and star over the Reichstag in Berlin. When this photo is published it is often labeled in Russian as Знамя Победы над Рейхстагом (*Znamia Pobedy nad Reikhstgom*) or "Banner of Victory over the Reichstag". It is not only used to illustrate the end of the war, but has also become a powerful symbol of the Soviet victory over Fascist Germany. In some written accounts about the photograph it is linked to the *Znamia Pobedy*, or Victory Banner—a historical flag, museum artifact, and Soviet relic that is still treasured in post-Soviet Russia. This banner (and reproductions of it) has become a regular feature of the Victory Day parades held annually on 9 May since the end of the war. Some discussions of the *Znamia Pobedy* suggest that the flag in Khaldei's photo and the flag in the museum are one in the same. Close examination of the evidence, however, has determined that these are two different flags and that they are just a few of the many red banners raised over the Reichstag building during the final battle for Berlin. Further confusing the issue, the term "*Znamia Pobedy*" (Знамя Победы) also refers to replicas of the museum artifact flag that are used on Victory Day. In early post-Soviet Russia an attempt was made to change the design of the Victory Banner to eliminate Soviet symbolism. However, changing a relic is not easy to do, so

today the *Znamia Pobedy* retains its hammer, sickle, and star. This paper will examine the many aspects of the Victory Banner including the Khaldei photo, the museum relic, and the role of the banner in Russia and elsewhere today.¹

World War II in a Soviet Context

In any discussion of the *Znamia Pobedy*, it is important to understand the impact of World War II (known in Soviet times as “the Great Patriotic War”) on the Soviet Union and Russia. Only then can the importance of this flag be truly understood. Most Americans are taught the importance of the war within an American context. For example, for Americans the war began with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. For those from the former Soviet Union, it began months earlier, on 22 June 1941, when the first fascist troops invaded the Soviet Union (most Soviet or Russian sources use the term “fascist” or “Hitlerite” to describe their enemy, rather than “Nazi” or “German”). Another important contrast is the location of the war. With the exception of a few incidents, very little action occurred on American soil, and most were primarily in overseas territories of the United States that were little known to the American public. So, from an American perspective, it was very much a foreign war. For the people of the Soviet Union, however, it was



Figure 1. Map showing the fascist invasion of the Soviet Union during World War II (Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)

a war to defend their homeland from a foreign invader. Much of the European portion of the Soviet Union was either occupied or in danger of falling into fascist hands.

As a result of the war, twelve cities were designated “Hero Cities” for outstanding heroism in defense of the Soviet Union: Leningrad (now called Saint Petersburg), Stalingrad (now called Volgograd), Odessa, Sevastopol, Moscow, Kiev, Novorossiysk, Kerch, Minsk, Tula, Murmansk, and Smolensk. The stories of many of these cities were horrific. For example, the people of Leningrad endured a siege of nearly 900 days (known in Russia as the “Blockade of Leningrad”) where the city was almost completely cut off from resupply. In this extended siege the Soviets lost 1,017,881 troops (killed, captured, or missing) and 642,000 civilians. Another example is the Battle of Stalingrad, which resulted in 478,741 Soviet troops killed or missing and 40,000 civilians dead. The Soviet Union also was the site of numerous Nazi atrocities such as mass executions of Soviet prisoners and civilians, and the systematic murder of Jews and other peoples targeted for extermination during the genocide known as the *Shoah* or Holocaust.²

The best points of comparison of the impacts of the war on the United States and on the Soviet Union are the overall casualty figures for military and civilian losses. On the American side, the casualty figures were 416,800 military deaths and 1,700 civilian deaths. In contrast, it has been difficult to determine exact figures for Soviet losses. Only after the breakup of the Soviet Union have new sources become available to historians to recalculate and produce numbers that are probably more accurate than those previously cited by the Soviet government. In 1997, a Russian historian generated new casualty figures for the Soviet military losses—8,668,400 killed and 14,685,593 wounded who survived. Civilian losses are even more difficult to accurately document. A report published by the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1995 suggested the following numbers: 7,420,379 civilians killed as a result of direct, intentional actions of violence; 2,164,313 Soviet citizens who died as forced laborers in Germany; and an additional 4,100,000 civilians who died from famine and disease in the occupied regions. In all, the report estimated that the fascist invasion, occupation, and the conflict on Soviet soil resulted in the deaths of 13,684,692 civilians.³

How do these numbers relate to the *Znamia Pobedy*? They provide a framework for understanding why the Banner of Victory (both that portrayed in Khaldei’s photo and the museum artifact) has been important in the post-war

context of both the Soviet Union and the modern Russian Federation. For the people of this region the Banner of Victory is a potent symbol of the defeat of fascist Germany. The hoisting of the red Soviet flag over the Reichstag in the German capital illustrated not just a military victory, but also the defeat of the very idea of fascism. It is also a poignant reminder of the cost of the war and the valiant efforts of the Soviet military, partisan members of the resistance, and non-combatants who endured the hardships of the war.

The Khaldei Photo

The most famous photograph of the red flag being raised over the Reichstag in Berlin is “*Znamia Pobedy nad Reichstagom*” (Banner of Victory over the Reichstag). When the photo was first published it was credited to TASS and E. Khaldei. TASS is the Russian acronym for Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (Телеграфное агентство Советского Союза/*Telegrafnoe agentstvo Sovetskogo Soiuz*). During the Soviet era, TASS was the central agency responsible for collecting and distributing news to all Soviet newspapers, radio stations, and television stations. Evgenii Anan’evich Khaldei (Евгений Ананьевич Халдей) was a Soviet Jewish photographer from the Ukraine. As a self-trained photographer he published his first photograph in a factory newspaper at the age of 17. In 1936 (when he was 19) he moved to Moscow and began work as a staff photographer for TASS. On 22 June 1941 Khaldei was walking to the TASS offices when he came across a large group of Soviet citizens gathered in the street to listen as Vyacheslav Molotov announced that Germany had invaded the Soviet Union. Khaldei took “War is Announced”, the first photograph of what would become his new career as a wartime photojournalist for TASS.⁴

Khaldei was given a commission as a naval lieutenant and spent the war photographing Soviet troops, both in combat and at rest. He documented the action in the north where the Soviets were engaged with the enemy near Murmansk, and in the south where they were fighting in the Crimea. Later in the war, as Soviet troops were working their way through liberated portions of the western Soviet Union and the previously occupied countries of Eastern Europe, Khaldei was there to photograph evidence of Nazi war crimes such as the execution of prisoners of war and the mass murder of Jews and other civilians. Khaldei accompanied the troops as they moved through Hungary and Austria on their way to Berlin—their ultimate goal. From Vienna, he went



Figure 2. Evgenii Khaldei's photo "Banner of Victory over the Reichstag" (Source: ITAR/TASS)

back to Moscow before flying out for Berlin. It is here that the story of his historic photograph begins.⁵

What we know about this story comes from several interviews with Khaldei when he was in his late 70s. His accounts are fairly consistent from interview to interview, so it is likely that his version is a fairly accurate description of what happened. Throughout his work as a combat photographer, Khaldei had taken a number of photos incorporating flags. He created flag photos in Novorossiysk, in Kerch, in Sevastopol, and in the cities of the newly-liberated countries. Having seen Joe Rosenthal's photo of American Marines raising a flag over Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima, Khaldei decided he would try to do something similar to celebrate his own country's flag. He realized that his opportunity would be in Berlin and he became determined to photograph Soviet soldiers hoisting the red flag in the German capital. To accomplish this goal, he needed some flags. As he describes it, he went to one of his friends at TASS to acquire some red cloth. According to Khaldei, his friend Grisha Liubinsky was a steward at the TASS warehouses, and "loaned" him three red tablecloths that were used for official meetings. Khaldei then took the tablecloths to Israel Solomonovitch Kishitser, his tailor (and perhaps his uncle, according to some accounts). Kishitser created three Soviet flags from the tablecloths by sewing a hammer, sickle, and star on each one. Flags in hand, Khaldei went back to the front to join the troops as they advanced toward Berlin.⁶

Once he reached Berlin, Khaldei looked for iconic locations in which to photograph victorious Soviet troops with the flags. The first flag was placed at Tempelhof Airport. At this location he photographed soldiers posing with the flag in front of a large sculpture of the Reich's eagle. Khaldei's second flag was placed near the remnants of the quadriga statue (a chariot drawn by four horses) atop the Brandenburg Gate—one of the most highly-recognizable monuments of Berlin. The background of this photo hints at Khaldei's ultimate objective. At left behind the quadriga is the damaged dome of the Reichstag, just one block to the north. While the capture of this structure was of little strategic value, its importance as a symbolic target was recognized by the soldiers on both sides of the conflict. For Khaldei and his Soviet comrades, the Reichstag represented the historical center of the German capital. Its capture would be the final stab at the heart of German fascism and revenge for the devastation that Hitler's regime had brought to their Soviet homeland.⁷

The storming of the Reichstag took place on 30 April 1945, but Khaldei did not get access to the building until 2 May. In his books about Khaldei's

photos and the Banner of Victory, Ernst Volland records the photographer's version of the story (in English translation):

As the war started, everyone was talking about the Reichstag. It was always, Reichstag... Reichstag. How many millions of people had to die before that building was taken? Early in the morning on the May 2, 1945, I entered it. I was surrounded by horrendous noise, Russians and Germans were all shouting in a horrible confusion. The din was like a rushing waterfall. The Germans were outraged the Russians had arrived. The Russians were celebrating. I went in wearing my Navy uniform. A pleasant young soldier came up to me. I had a red flag in my hand. He said: "Lieutenant, davai, let's hurry up and climb onto the roof with the flag." "That's why I'm here," I said. We started out, but all the stairs were badly damaged. When we finally got up top, the Reichstag was on fire. All the heat and smoke was gathering in the dome. He said, "We want to climb onto the dome, don't we." "No," I said, "we'd end up getting smoked and then burnt to a crisp." He replied, "So, then let's try it here." We found a long pole. I spent lots of time trying out different compositions. I took one picture from the left, but that wasn't any good. I wanted Berlin to be clearly visible in the picture. Then I said, "Boys, go and stand over there and raise the flag... then try over there." There were three of them. One was from Ukraine, the other from Makhachkala in Dagestan, and the third was a Russian. There were little red handkerchiefs tied all over the roof of the Reichstag. Our troops, both women and men, climbed up on the roof to put them there. But I had my flag with me. I shot a whole roll of film, 36 shots. In the early hours of May 3, I flew to Moscow and this picture was processed and published immediately.⁸

The first of Khaldei's Reichstag photos was published under the headline "Znamia Pobedy nad Reichstagom" (Banner of Victory Over the Reichstag) in the news magazine *Ogon'ek* on 13 May 1945. The caption under the photo dramatized the significance of this moment for the people of the Soviet Union:

The scarlet banner flutters over the Reichstag, in the center of the fascist capital—Berlin. Berlin has fallen! It lies subdued at the feet of the Soviet soldier-victors. Hitler's fascist Berlin—that bastion of international reaction, the seat of German aggression—is no more. The Red Army not only won a great historical victory in the fight for Berlin: it brought liberation from the fascist gloom to a long-suffering mankind. The day 2 May 1945 will forever go down in history; it will be remembered for centuries.

While the photo was credited “E. Khaldei” in the caption, little notice was given to the photographer. Unlike Joe Rosenthal, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his photo of the flag-raising on Iwo Jima, Khaldei lived out much of his life in relative obscurity. It was only in his old age that he gained recognition for his wartime photography. This probably did not surprise or disappoint Khaldei at all. Like everyone else involved in the capture of Berlin he saw himself as just a part of a greater whole. As a child of the revolution and a loyal Soviet citizen, he understood that he was just documenting the collective victory of the Soviet nation.⁹

In an interview published in a book by Ernst Volland and Heinz Krimmer, Khaldei said “A few months later, someone noticed that one of the soldiers supporting the flag bearer was wearing a watch on each arm. I was assigned to retouch the watch on the right.” However, in a video interview with Marc-Henri Wajnberg he implies that the request to remove the second watch was made much earlier.

This photo has a story, of course. The same night, I flew back to Moscow. The editor of the TASS agency, Palgunov, was supposed to sign it. I walk into the office, he shows me the photo in a small size and asks: “What is it?” “The flag... on the Reichstag...” “Didn’t you see the soldier is wearing a watch on each wrist, one on the left, one on the right?” “No, I only saw the flag on the Reichstag, over Berlin...” “No, no way, this is a looter... A true Soviet soldier does not loot. You fix it quick, take it off the negative.” “Alright, you want it off, I’ll take it off...” I had to give in. In the office, I took a pin and scratched the watch off the right wrist.

Viewing the version of the photo published in *Ogonëk* on 13 May 1945 confirms this version of the story. Careful examination of the right wrist of the man supporting the soldier with the flag reveals an unusual white stripe where the second watch once was. This was not the last alteration associated with the photo. In other versions that have been published, Khaldei added several columns of smoke in the background to make the scene more dramatic and emphasize that Berlin lay in ruins. Later published versions were colorized to bring them up to date. In addition, over the years other photos from Khaldei’s flag-raising series have been published. In one notable version which shows the obverse side of the flag (the “usual” version shows the reverse side), Khaldei compensated for the lack of wind by adding a billowing flag into the photo. It is unclear if this flag is a “flipped” version of the flag from one of the other photos in the series or if it came from another source.¹⁰



Figures 3–4. Details of Khaldei’s Reichstag photo showing the original version where the soldier is wearing two watches and the published version where the watch has been removed from the right wrist. (Source: Wikipedia)

The Banner of Victory (*Znamia Pobedy*)

While the flag in Khaldei’s photo is usually labeled as *Znamia Pobedy*, it is not the primary flag with this name. The official *Znamia Pobedy* is a famous flag that is now on exhibit in the Central Museum of the Armed Forces (Центральный музей Вооруженных Сил/*Tsentral’nyi myzei Vooruzhennykh Sil*) in Moscow. This flag was raised over the Reichstag two days before the one photographed by Khaldei. The flag design is very well known, and replicas of the flag are used in the annual Victory Day parade on 9 May each year. It is a classic red Soviet flag with a star over the Soviet hammer and sickle. Unlike the national flag, these symbols are painted in silver. On the field of the flag, white lettering in the Cyrillic alphabet reads “150 стр. ордена Кутузова Ист. идрицк. див. 79 ск. 3 у.а. 1 Б.Ф.” This cryptic text is heavily abbreviated for the Russian designation of the unit that carried the flag, “150-я стрелковая ордена Кутузова II степени Идрицкая дивизия, 79-й стрелковый корпус, 3-я ударная армия, 1-й Белорусский фронт,” and translates as “150th Rifle, Order of Kutuzov 2nd class, Idritskaia Division, 79th Rifle Corps, 3rd Attack Army, 1st Byelorussian Front.” The dimensions of the flag are reported to be 82 cm (32.28 in.) at the hoist by 188 cm (74.02 in.) to the fly. Some descriptions of the flag specify that the numeral “5” appears on the flag somewhere at the lower corner of the hoist. Because of this number the flag is also known “Victory Banner #5”. It was one of nine “official” flags intended to be taken to Berlin and hopefully raised over the Reichstag, and the only one of these flags known to have been preserved after the war.¹¹

While the design of the flag is well known, the history of the flag is not entirely clear. First, it was not the first red banner of victory, or the only Soviet flag, raised over the Reichstag. An account of the battle by M. Bondar' describes how members of his unit placed multiple flags on top of the building. And, as Khaldei noted in his interview, there were numerous red handkerchiefs and other improvised flags on the roof when he arrived. The distinction that is most often made about this flag is that it was an "official" flag intended to be planted on the Reichstag. Most accounts state that it was made in "battlefield conditions", implying that it was pieced together out of available materials. Some accounts say that it was made of a red tablecloth, although this detail might be a cross-over from the story of Khaldei's flag. In some portrayals of the flag, the star, hammer, and sickle are shown in silver, in others they are white.¹²

Many histories of the Banner of Victory begin with a speech that Soviet leader Josef Stalin gave on 6 November 1944 for the anniversary of the Revolution. In the speech, Stalin acknowledged the struggle in which the Soviet Union was engaged at that time, and made clear their ultimate objective:

The Soviet people and the Red Army successfully carry out the tasks which have risen before us in the course of the Patriotic War...From now on and forever our land is free of the Hitlerite vermin, and now before the Red Army remains its last, final mission: to complete together with the armies of our allies the business of the defeat of the German-fascist army, to finish off the fascist beast in its own lair, and to raise over Berlin a banner of victory.¹³



Figure 5. Basic design of the Znamia Pobedy or Soviet Banner of Victory. Note: on the actual flag the star is further to the right. (Source: VectorImages)

Six months later, the Soviet army was on the outskirts of Berlin positioned to fulfill this goal. While it is unclear whether Stalin issued a literal order to raise a flag over the Reichstag, the leaders of the Red Army recognized the symbolic importance of showing the red flag in the German capital. Over the years, bits and pieces of the story have been pieced together through the remembrances of those involved. It started when the commander of the 3rd Shock Army, Colonel-General Vasilii Ivanovich Kuznetsov, ordered that nine assault flags be made—one for each division in the army. They were hand-made using material scavenged from a shop somewhere in the area of Berlin. The star, hammer, and sickle were added by artist Vasilii Buntov using paint and a stencil, and the staffs were made by A. Gabov. According to the majority of the sources, the inscription on the flag was added after it was removed from the roof of the Reichstag.¹⁴

One member of the unit later described their initial impression of the banner when it was presented to them:

The lieutenant colonel there and then untied the cover and pulled out the banner. We anticipated seeing something unusual: satin or silk, embroidered in gold, velvet tassels. In front of us was a simple red panel, fastened to a hand-carved staff. In the upper left-hand corner in white oil paint was apparent a small star and a large hammer and sickle. On the other side appeared the numeral 5. Quite later appeared on the banner the inscription...

None of us then could imagine that the banner was fated to become the Banner of Victory of the Soviet Union in the war with Hitlerist Germany and that it was to become one of the most sacred relics of our nation.¹⁵

The battle for the Reichstag began on 29 April 1945. German resistance in this area of Berlin was intense and the first attempt to take the building occurred the following day. Later that afternoon it was reported that a Banner of Victory had been placed on the roof at about two in the afternoon by Captain Neustroev and Major Davydov. However, at that time the building was not completely under Soviet control. It is unclear whether a flag had actually been placed or if this report was an exaggeration of Soviet progress. The fighting went late into the night with several flags reportedly being placed on the roof, but many of those were destroyed by German shelling. A military report dated 2 July 1945 describes the raising of the *Znamia Pobedy*:

The Commander of the 1st Belarussian Front, Marshal of Soviet Union comrade Zhukov, ordered the troops of the 3rd assault army to surge forward into Berlin, to seize the central region of the city and the Reichstag and to erect on it the Victory Banner.

The military council of the army, with the goal of increasing the offensive impulses of the fighters established 9 red banners for hoisting over the Reichstag and presented them to the rifle divisions which were advancing on Berlin. One of those banners during the night of 22 April 1945 in the suburb of Karow was presented to the Order of Kutuzov 2nd class of the 150th Idritskaia Division's Major General Shatilov.

The report details how the division defeated the last enemy strongholds and entered Berlin at 6:00 a.m. on 21 April 1945. They then seized the downtown area and reached the neighborhood of the Reichstag at the end of 29 April. The assault on the Reichstag started on 30 April.

And finally, on the 30th of April 1945 at 2:25 p.m. the fighters of Senior Sergeant S'ianov's company fought their way up the staircase onto the roof of the building and reached the cupola of the Reichstag. The courageous warriors—Communist Lieutenant Berest, Comsomol member-Red Army soldier Egorov and non-party member Junior Sergeant Kantaria placed the banner, over the German Parliament building was flying the proud flag of the Soviet Union—the symbol of our great victory.

The report then emphasizes that the fighting in Berlin had not yet finished. Pockets of German resistance continued the battle around and within the Reichstag. However, at this point Soviet victory was assured and the Banner of Victory on the Reichstag was proof of that certainty.

The banner hoisted over the Reichstag, pierced by bullets and singed, fluttered victoriously over the believing Berlin.

The Soviet people will never forget this historic event—the capture of the capital of Germany and hoisting the Banner of Victory over Berlin by the troops of the 3rd Attack Army.

In our nation will be forever preserved the glory of the Red Army soldiers who took part in the great battle for Berlin. Our descendants will open a book of victories and will glimpse in it gold letters revealing the names of the heroes who hoisted the Banner of Victory over Berlin.

*The Commander of the troops of the 3rd Assault Army, Soviet Union
Hero, Colonel-General Kuznetsov*

*Member of the Military Council of the 3rd Assault Army Major-General
Litvinov*

However, other accounts suggest that the flag was actually planted on the roof at 3:00 a.m. on 1 May, or maybe even later on 2 May 1945. The confusion in the stories is understandable, considering that the fighting continued around the Reichstag for several days. One thing is clear—*Znamia Pobedy* #5 was the only one of the nine divisional flags to survive the battle. This was because it was placed in a location on the east side of the roof that was relatively shielded from German shelling.¹⁶

Yet another point of confusion is the date that the banner was withdrawn from the Reichstag roof. One report says that it was removed on 5 May, while others place the date for this event on the 8th, 9th, or even the 12th. Regardless of when it was taken down, the flag remained in the possession of the division for several weeks after its retrieval while arrangements were being made to send it on to Moscow. As one report from 9 May explained:

*By my personal order the red banner that was raised on 30 April 1945
by the 150th infantry division over the building of the Reichstag has now
been withdrawn.*

In its place I ordered the erecting of a large scarlet banner.

*The banner which was raised over the Reichstag on 30 April 1945, I
ordered to be preserved and I sent petitions before Marshall of the Soviet
Union comrade Zhukov that a delegation of the First Belorussian front,
the 3rd shock army, and the 79th rifle corps could hand over personally
this banner of victory in the Kremlin or in another place to our Great
leader, beloved Marshall Josef Vissarionovich Stalin.*

It was during this time that we know that the inscription was added to the flag. According to the memoirs of I. U. Matveev, the inscription was added no earlier than 15 May 1945. He attributed the idea to write the unit designation on the flag to the direct participants who placed it on the Reichstag. The writing was applied to the banner by the division's deputy head of political affairs in their headquarters using white paint. At some time after the flag was removed from the Reichstag roof, a strip of cloth measuring about 3 cm

by 73 cm was removed from the lower fly of the flag as a souvenir. Newsreel footage of the flag from 20 June 1945 shows this segment already missing.¹⁷

Eventually the flag was sent off to Moscow. Samsonov, Grechenkov, and Levshov's account says that a delegation from their unit was dispatched to take the Banner of Victory to Moscow on 24 May 1945. Other versions suggest that it was as late as 20 June. In addition, not all sources agree on whether the actual *Znamia Pobedy* #5 was used in the Victory parade held in Moscow's Red Square on 24 June 1945. There are several sources that say it was not carried in this first Victory Parade. We do know for sure that after the war it was placed in the custody of the Central Museum of the Soviet Army (now the Central Museum of the Armed Forces), where it remains today.¹⁸

The Flag-Raisers

There is one fact about Victory Banner #5 that is very well known—the names of two of the soldiers who raised the flag over the Reichstag—Egorov and Kantariia. Their names became famous throughout the Soviet Union. According to the memoir of battalion commander S. A. Neustroev, the regimental commander Colonel F. M. Zinchenko ordered three men to go to the roof of the Reichstag and raise the flag: the unit's political officer, Lieutenant Aleksei Prokop'evich Berest (a Ukrainian), Sergeant Mikhail Alekseevich Egorov (a Russian), and Junior Sergeant Meliton (sometimes written as Mel'ton) Varlamovich Kantariia (a Georgian). Field reports from Berlin consistently mention all three men as participants in the flag-raising, but do not give details about the role each played in the operation. Because of the time of night there were no photographs of this flag-raising. Some later accounts of the event specify that Berest accompanied the other two into the building, and provided cover while Egorov and Kantariia went up to the roof and attached the flag to an equestrian sculpture of Wilhelm I on the eastern side of the Reichstag. Other sources imply that Berest's role was downplayed later, with a variety of reasons having been suggested. Some say that Berest was excluded from the list of soldiers recommended to receive citations for their role in the event because General Zhukov did not like political officers. Yet another suggests that it was because Stalin did not like Ukrainians. It is also possible that Berest's role was later cleansed from the popular memory because, after the war, Berest found himself at odds with the Soviet government and was sentenced to a labor camp. Regardless of the reason, it was Egorov and Kantariia who were named "Heroes of the Soviet Union" and are most celebrated for this accomplishment.¹⁹

People in the Soviet Union often assumed that two of the men in Khaldei's Reichstag photos were Kantariia and Egorov. A third name which was often mistakenly associated with the photograph was Konstantin Samsonov, another "Hero of the Soviet Union" from the Battle of Berlin. Samsonov was a senior lieutenant in a different division which also participated in the storming of the Reichstag. During the Victory Day Parade on the 20th anniversary of the German Surrender in 1965, Samsonov carried the *Znamia Pobedy* accompanied by Egorov and Kantariia. Photographs of the three heroes with the flag at this parade further reinforced their connection with each other in the collective memory of Soviet citizens.²⁰

Khaldei's flag-raisers were not identified until after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Over the years, the photographer mentioned several details about the men in various interviews. In one, he stated that "One was from the Ukraine, the other from Makhachkala in Dagestan, and the third was Russian." In another interview, Khaldei identified the soldier holding the flag in his Reichstag photographs as Aleksei "Alyosha" Kovalëv from Ukraine. The other two were named as Abdulkhakim Ismailov (from Dagestan, holding Kovalëv's feet) and Leonid Gorychev (a Russian, standing behind Ismailov). None of them became well known for their participation in the flag-raising or their portrayal in the Reichstag photographs of Khaldei.²¹

As has been previously discussed, neither *Znamia Pobedy* #5 nor Khaldei's flag was the first Soviet banner raised over the Reichstag. This fact is very clear from the evidence that is now available. What we do not know for certain is exactly who raised the first Soviet flag on the building. One soldier with a plausible claim was Mikhail Petrovich Minin. He was part of a unit led by Captain V. N. Makov, which joined with the battalion of Captain S. A. Neustroev in the effort to take the Reichstag. Minin's group included Gazi Zagitov (sometimes called Giya Zagitov), Aleksandr Lisimenko, and Aleksei Bobrov. They reached the roof on either 30 April or 1 May. While members of the unit were awarded the title "Hero of the Soviet Union" for their role in the battle for Berlin, their flag-raising does not seem to have been officially reported by the military commanders or recognized by Soviet authorities. Minin's account only became known after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Running in front was Giya Zagitov, who had a flashlight with him. That flashlight helped us to pass through the damaged stairs. All the corridors linked to the stairs were cleared by grenades and long submachinegun bursts.

Right before reaching the attic I tore a one and half meter pipe off the wall to serve as a flagpole. After reaching the spacious attic, we faced the problem of getting to the roof. Again G. Zagitov found a solution—with his flashlight he noticed in the darkness a heavy winch and two chains going to the top. We climbed the chains and then through a tiny window got out to the roof somewhere on the western side of the building. There near a barely noticeable column Zagitov and I began setting up our Red Banner. Suddenly an explosion lighted up the roof and Lisimenko found our old reference-point—a sculpture of a bronze horse and a large woman in a crown. It was immediately decided to set the banner on the sculpture.

The guys raised me onto the horse's back which shook from the explosions, and then I fixed the banner right in the crown of the bronze giantess.

We checked the time. It was 2240 local time.

It is not known if Minin's flag was one of the numbered banners distributed to be placed on the Reichstag. We also do not know what became of the flag, although it is generally believed that it was destroyed in the fighting that continued around the building.²²

Status of the Banner of Victory after the War

It is commonly believed that the *Znamia Pobedy* was used in the Moscow Victory Parade held on Red Square on 24 June 1945. The parade featured many Soviet troops who had participated in the battle for Berlin, as well as troops from other fronts of the war. One of the highlights was a ceremony in which Soviet soldiers marched in with captured German banners, including a banner of Adolf Hitler's personal bodyguard bearing the name of the Führer. The banners were tossed unceremoniously to the ground at the base of Lenin's mausoleum which is located on the square.²³

During the first twenty years after the war the *Znamia Pobedy* was displayed in one of the halls of the Central Museum of the Soviet Army. However, concern over preservation of the banner resulted in a decision to place it in extended storage in the custody of the Znamennyi Fund and to display a replica in its place. While the Banner of Victory was preserved as a museum artifact, it did not become just another forgotten war relic. Each year on 9 May, replicas of the banner were carried behind the national flag in Victory

Day parades throughout the Soviet Union. On some significant anniversaries, the actual banner was used in the parade in Moscow. The first such use was on the twentieth anniversary of the German surrender in 1965, when the *Znamia Pobedy* was carried through Red Square in the Victory Day parade. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 the flag continued to be valued as a potent artifact of the defeat of Nazi Germany. In 2000, for the 55th anniversary, it was temporarily exhibited in both Minsk, Belarus, and in Kiev, Ukraine. And, in 2003 it was displayed in Saint Petersburg (known as Leningrad during the war) for ten days.²⁴

However, the status of the flag design for public display has been a point of much debate in the Russian Federation and in other former Soviet republics. In the days following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russian leaders worked to define a set of national symbols. For the national flag and the coat of arms, they reverted back to the designs used before the Russian Revolution. But the *Znamia Pobedy* posed a unique problem—central to the design were the Soviet hammer, sickle, and star. There were many in the Russian Federation who believed that all the symbols of the Soviet Union should be retired. In 1996, President Boris Yeltsin signed a decree “About the Banner of Victory”:

With a goal of the perpetuation of a national feat in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, in commemoration of contributions of the soldiers of the Soviet Armed forces before the Fatherland, and as a token of gratitude from the descendants to the victors over the fascist aggressors, I decide:

1. On days of the state holidays of the Russian Federation, days of military glory (Victory Days) of Russia, at carrying out military rituals, and also of the mass actions connected with military victories of the Russian people, the Banner of Victory will be used along with national flag of the Russian Federation.

2. The Banner of Victory which has been set up over a Reichstag in May, 1945, will be taken out on May 9—on the Victory Day of the Soviet people in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 and on February 23—on Defenders of the Fatherland Day for wreath-laying at the grave of the Unknown Soldier by federal public authorities, carrying out ceremonial meetings, parades of armies and processions of veterans of the Great Patriotic War on Red Square in the city of Moscow.

3. *In other cases provided by point 1 of the present Decree, the symbol of the Banner of Victory is used.*
4. *The symbol of the Banner of Victory represents a field of red color with a ratio of length by width 2:1. On both sides in the top corner the image of a five-pointed star is located.*
5. *During addresses of heads of states—participants of the Commonwealth of Independent States to the President of the Russian Federation, the Banner of Victory or a symbol of the Banner of Victory can temporarily be taken out in the territory of the specified states according to the order of the President of the Russian Federation.*
6. *In some cases the Banner of Victory or a symbol of the Banner of Victory can temporarily be taken out in the territory of the subjects of the Russian Federation according to the order of the President of the Russian Federation.*
7. *The present Decree comes into force from the date of signing.*

President, Russian Federation

Boris Yeltsin

15 April 1996

Essentially, the decree acknowledged the status of the original Banner of Victory as a war relic, while establishing a “symbol of the Banner of Victory”—a new flag design with a red field and a simple star at the upper hoist on both sides of the flag. The Yeltsin decree specified the old Soviet proportions of 1:2, but over time the design was shifted to proportions of 2:3 to match those of the Russian national flag. The color of the star was not mentioned in the decree, leading to two different color schemes sometimes being used—red with the yellow star based upon the colors of the former Soviet flag, and red with a white star like that found on the original *Znamia Pobedy*. It is difficult to assess just how widely this flag was used, but it was clearly unpopular with World War II veterans and members of the Communist Party.²⁵

The design of the Banner of Victory remained a point of contention in the Russian Federation for many years. On 16 April 2003 the City Council of Kaliningrad adopted a red flag with the single yellow star (in proportions of 2:3)



Figures 6–7. Variations on the “Symbol of the Banner of Victory” created by presidential decree on 15 April 1996. The flag at left has a yellow star and uses the traditional Soviet 1:2 proportions. The flag at right has a white star and the 2:3 proportions of the current Russian flag. (Sources: Wikipedia and Vikipediia)

as their official symbol of victory over fascism. Then, in 2005, the State Duma considered several versions of a bill to formalize the legal status of the new flag on the federal level. Opposing proposals favored the Yeltsin design without specifying the star color, the Yeltsin design with a white star, or restoration of the classic Soviet-era *Znamia Pobedy*. The debate continued with defenders of the classic design accusing those who supported the Yeltsin-era design of attempting to rewrite history or denying the role that the Soviet Union played in the defeat of Nazi Germany. Veterans’ groups lobbied for the restoration of the old banner. Eventually, in March 2007 the State Duma (the lower house of the Russian Parliament) adopted a bill about the *Znamia Pobedy* which did not specifically describe the design of the banner, thus restoring it back to its Soviet-era design. The bill specified that the Banner of Victory is the flag raised over the Reichstag on 1 May 1945 and affirms its status as a state relic. It provided for the preservation of the banner at state expense. In addition, it allowed for replicas of the *Znamia Pobedy* to be displayed on buildings alongside the national flag on Victory Day, and to be used at events commemorating victory in World War II and at wreath-laying ceremonies memorializing the dead. The bill as passed by the Duma was rejected by the Federation Council, the upper house of Parliament. However, the Duma overrode the veto of the upper chamber and forwarded the bill to the president. It was signed into law by Vladimir Putin on 4 May 2007 and so the Banner of Victory was restored to its previous design and the Yeltsin-era banner was made obsolete.²⁶

Similar debates have occurred in other countries that were former republics of the Soviet Union. In some cases, the adoption of the *Znamia Pobedy* as an official symbol has been used to assert pro-Russian sentiment. An excellent example of this is the break-away region of Transnistria that declared its

independence from Moldova in 1990. Russians and Ukrainians make up more than 50% of the population in this territory between the Dnieper River and Moldova's eastern border. On 21 October 2009 the Supreme Council of Transnistria adopted the Soviet-era Victory Banner as an official symbol of the territory in recognition of the heroism of the Soviet people during World War II. In Belarus, a former Soviet republic that bore the brunt of much of the Nazi occupation, a presidential decree of 6 May 1996 gave the banner official status in that country. It proclaimed that duplicates of the *Znamia Pobedy*, the symbol of the Banner of Victory (described in the decree as red with a five-pointed star, a sickle, and a hammer), the Soviet national flag, and the Belarussian national flag would be used together on three national holidays—23 February (Day of defenders of the Fatherland), 9 May (Victory Day), and 3 July (Day of Liberation of Belarus from Nazi Aggressors). The president justified his action by saying that it was “In grateful memory of the national heroic fight against Hitlerite aggressors for honor, freedom and independence of the Homeland in years of the Great Patriotic War”.²⁷

In Ukraine, another former Soviet republic that suffered under fascist occupation, the banner has not only been a contested symbol, but also a source of conflict between Ukrainian nationalists and ethnic Russians living in the country. The status of the *Znamia Pobedy* in Ukraine is complicated by a number of factors. While the population of the country overall is 77.8% Ukrainian and only 17.3% Russian, in the south and east there are significant Russian and Russian-speaking populations. In the west and north, ethnic Ukrainians and Ukrainian-speakers dominate. This ethnic and linguistic division creates significant challenges for the country. For many in Ukraine, Soviet symbols are reminders of the many decades of repression against Ukrainian nationalists at the hands of the Soviet authorities in Moscow. However, for veterans of World War II, and for many of those who survived the fascist occupation, the Banner of Victory is a symbol of their liberation and the end of the war. These viewpoints become even more complicated when Russian nationalists use the flag to further their own “pro-Russia” agenda.²⁸

The issue literally came to blows in the city of Lviv in western Ukraine during Victory Day celebrations in 2011. On 21 April 2011 the *Verkhovna Rada*, the Ukrainian parliament, passed a law allowing for the use of the Soviet-era *Znamia Pobedy* alongside the Ukrainian national flag during celebrations for Victory Day. The law specified that both flags should be displayed together on buildings and during public ceremonies throughout the country. Ukrai-

nian president Victor Yanukovych declared his intent to sign the bill, but had not done so before Victory Day—9 May. Prior to these actions, several pro-Russian groups had declared their intentions to hold a victory march in Lviv—a city in western Ukraine that is a center of anti-Russian sentiment. As one social scientist described the situation, in Ukraine as a whole about 55% of the population reacted calmly to the idea of using two flags for the ceremonies. “However, in Western Ukraine—and that is seven oblasts—75 percent of inhabitants unequivocally do not support this decision.” City officials, hoping to avoid a conflict, decided to cancel Victory Day rallies in favor of public prayer services. Their efforts were to no avail. On Victory Day, pro-Russian demonstrators and World War II veterans gathered in the city with their red Banners of Victory. They were confronted by Ukrainian nationalists. During the course of the day, there were a number of violent incidents including young Ukrainian nationalists snatching victory ribbons and flowers from elderly war veterans, incidents where replicas of the *Znamia Pobedy* were burned, and fighting between participants on both sides. The conflict in Lviv, of course, was not really about the Banner of Victory, but rather was a symptom of the divisions that exist in modern Ukrainian society.²⁹

It was only on 20 May that the president signed the “two flag” bill, clearing making it legal to use the red flag on government buildings during celebrations of the end of World War II. However, this was not the end of the story. Later that summer, on 17 July 2011, Ukraine’s Constitutional Court found the law to be unconstitutional. The basis of its decision was straightforward—the state symbols defined by Article 20 of the constitution included only the blue and yellow national flag, the coat of arms, and the national anthem. The Soviet Banner of Victory is not mentioned; therefore it is not a national symbol and should not be displayed on government buildings or at national memorials. As a result of this decision private citizens are still allowed to use the flag, but its status as part of the official symbolism of Victory Day in Ukraine has come to an end.³⁰

The *Znamia Pobedy* Today

Finally in 2011 the Museum opened a new hall for the *Znamia Pobedy* where the original flag could once again be displayed in a specially-designed climate-controlled case. At the opening on 8 May, Russian president Dmitrii Mevedev noted the significance of the day for the people of Russia: “The



Figure 8. The Znamia Pobedy on display in Moscow's Central Museum of the Armed Forces. (Source: Ken Martinez)

eighth of May is a very special day in our memory: at twenty two o'clock forty three minutes was signed the Act of unconditional surrender of Germany... The Central Museum of the Armed Forces is a special place. It is a museum of the Army which has huge value for our citizens..."

Medvedev reminded the assembled veterans and other members of the audience that a special law devoted to the Banner of the Victory had been signed on 7 May 2007. Calling the banner "a relic of our people", the president recalled that for many years a duplicate had been exhibited in the place of the original: "It is proper that all can see the original Banner of the Victory which was raised by Egorov and Kantaria...Today is an important event: any citizen, and foreign guests, can come and look at this relic."³¹

Today, the original *Znamia Pobedy*, the Soviet victory banner raised over the Reichstag during the final days of the Third Reich, is again on display as a relic of the Soviet victory in World War II. Its status reaffirms the importance of recognizing the significant successes of the Soviet era, and also the undefeatable spirit of the Russian people in the face of adversity. With its legal status as a relic of Soviet victory restored, it will stand as a reminder of a strong Russia for generations to come.



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End Notes

Irregularities occur when Russian text is transliterated from the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin alphabet. Different transliteration schemes are used in different contexts. The author uses the Library of Congress transliteration table at <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/romanization/russian.pdf>, as this is the usual style of transliteration used in the United States. In this system the corresponding transliteration for these Russian letters is as follows: й = i, ю = iu, and я = ia. In Europe, these letters are often transliterated following this practice: й = j, ю = ju, and я = ja. Finally, many native Russians and other Russian-speakers use this transliteration: ю = yu and я = ya. These differences account for the many variant spellings of names and other key terms found in various sources. In the sources listed below, transliterations by the author follow the Library of Congress schema, while those that were already transliterated into the Latin alphabet have maintained their original transliteration.

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2. Map from the United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum website, http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_nm.php?ModuleId=10005164&MediaId=344, accessed 21 July 2012.
3. American casualty figures are from the *Wikipedia* article "World War II casualties," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II_casualties, accessed 21 July 2012. Soviet casualties are from the *Wikipedia* article "World War II casualties of the Soviet Union," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II_casualties_of_the_Soviet_Union, accessed 21 July 2012. Soviet military casualties are based on the work of Russian historian, G. I. Krivosheev (*Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses*, Greenhill, 1997, ISBN 978-1-85367-280-4). The Soviet civilian losses were estimated by the Russian Academy of Sciences in the report Людские потери СССР в период второй мировой войны: сборник статей (Human Losses of the USSR in the Period of WWII: Collection of Articles) (Saint-Petersburg, 1995, ISBN 978-5-86789-023-0).
4. "Znamia Pobedy nad Berlinom", *Ogonëk* #19 (938) (13 May 1945), 3; Valery Stigneyev, "The Photojournalist Yevgeny Khaldei", in *Russia in Black and White: The Photojournalism of Yevgeny Khaldei* (San Francisco: Jewish Museum of San Francisco, [1997]), [2-3]; Alexander Nakhimovsky and Alice Nakhimovsky, *Witness to History: The Photographs of Yevgeny Khaldei* (New York: Aperture, 1997), 4-11 and 16-17; Maksim Maksimov, "'Znamia Pobedy nad Reichstgom'. Sensatsionnaia istoriia foto", *Velikaia Epokha / Epoch Times* (8 May 2006), <http://www.epochtimes.ru/content/view/5101/34/>, accessed 26 May 2012.
5. Stigneyev, [3-4]; Nakhimovsky and Nakhimovsky, 7-11; Maksimov; Dean Lucas, "Flag on the Reichstag", *Famous Pictures: The Magazine* (17 February 2007),

- http://www.famouspictures.org/mag/index.php?title=Flag_on_the_Reichstag, accessed 26 August 2012.
6. Maksimov; Stigneyev, [4]; Marc-Henri Wajnberg, *Evgueni Khaldei: Photographe Sous Staline / Evgueni Khaldei: Photographer Under Stalin*, VHS video (Chicago: Home Vision Entertainment, 2001); Nakhimovsky and Nakhimovsky, 10-11; David Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War, and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 226-227.
 7. Maksimov; [Evgenii Khaldei], Ernst Volland and Heinz Krimmer, *Von Moskau Nach Berlin: Bilder Des Russischen Fotografen Jewgeni Chaldei / From Moscow to Berlin: Pictures Taken by the Russian Photographer Yevgeni Khaldei* (Berlin: Parthas, 1999), 71-72 and 151-152; Nakhimovsky and Nakhimovsky, 2-3, 10-11, and 58-67; Shneer, 135-137 and 226-227; "Iconic Photos: Three Flags of Khaldei," blog posting, <http://iconicphotos.wordpress.com/2011/08/02/three-flags-of-khaldei/>, accessed 28 July 2012.
 8. Maksimov; [Khaldei], Volland and Krimmer, 64-67 and 151; Nakhimovsky and Nakhimovsky, 10-11 and 58-67; Lucas; Ernst Volland, *Das Banner Des Sieges: Deutsch, English, Italiano, Espanol* (Berlin: Berlin Story Verlag, [2008]), 11. In the second source cited here, the quote has been shortened and translated with slight differences.
 9. "Znamia Pobedy nad Berlinom", *Ogonëk* #19 (938) (13 May 1945), 3, English translation by the author; "Raising a flag over the Reichstag," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raising_a_flag_over_the_Reichstag, accessed 28 July 2012; "Znamia Pobedy nad Reikhstagom (foto Khaldeia)," *Viki-pediia: Svobodnaia entsiklopediia*, no direct URL available, accessed 28 July 2012.
 10. [Khaldei], Volland and Krimmer, 64-67 and 151; Wajnberg, VHS video; Volland, 20-28. Note that the English translation cited here is based upon the English subtitles of the video. The altered photo showing the obverse side of the flag was published on the cover of *Ogonëk* in May 1965. The colorized version of the classic version of the photo was on the cover of an issue of *Ogonëk* in May 1975. Details of the photograph showing the difference in wrist watches are taken from the *Wikipedia* article "Raising a flag over the Reichstag", http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raising_a_flag_over_the_Reichstag, accessed 26 August 2012. The version with two wrist watches is the image from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Red_army_soldiers_raising_the_soviet_flag_on_the_roof_of_the_reichstag_with_two_Wachs.jpg and the version with one wrist watch is http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Red_army_soldiers_raising_the_soviet_flag_on_the_roof_of_the_reichstag_with_no_Watch.jpg.
 11. "Znamia Pobedy nad reikhstagom: Geroi Sovetskogo Soiuza pervyi komendant reikhstaga polkovnik v ostavke F. Zinchenko", *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal* #4 (April 1980), 53-59; V.M. Shatilov, "Stiag Pobedy", *Voprosy istorii* #5 (1970), 104-115; Kuznetsov and Litvinov, "Donesenie komandyiushchego 3-i udarnoi armiei nachal'niku glavnogo politicheskogo upravleniia Krasnoi Armii o boe za Reikhstag

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 15. Zinchenko, 56, English translation by the author.
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18. Kiselev, 16; Samsonov, Grechenkov, and Levshov, 95.
19. Shatilov; Kiselev, 16; Mizerkin; Lisitsyn, "Donesenie nachal'nika Politicheskogo Otdela 3-i Udarnoi Armii nachal'niku politicheskogo upravleniia 1-go belorusskogo fronta o vodruzhenii Znameni Pobedy nad Reichstagom", in *Russkii Arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia* (Moskva: Terra, 1995) v. 15, 4(5), 142-145, English translation by the author; S. A. Neustroev, *Put' k Reichstagu* (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo Ministerstva Oborony Soiuzu SSR: 1961), 65-74; "Prominent Russians: Yegorov and Kantaria", *Russiopedia*, <http://russiopedia.rt.com/prominent-russians/military/yegorov-and-kantaria/>, accessed 26 August 2012; "Piat' zagadok Znameni Pobedy", *Izvestiia*; Valerii Iaremenko, "Kto podniat znamia nad Reichstagom?", *Polit.ru*, <http://www.polit.ru/article/2005/05/06/banner/print>, accessed 12 November 2012; Vasilii Iaremenko, "Kak vodruzhalii flagi Pobedy na Reichstage. Odin iz nikh stal ofitsial'nym znamenem", <http://www.pskovkdm.ru/downloads/1203443594.doc>, accessed 12 November 2012; Aleksandr Sidorov, "Tak kto zhe vodruzil znamia nad Reichstagom?", <http://zhiganets.tyurem.net/node/151>, accessed 12 November 2012; "Znamia Pobedy", *Vikipediia*; "Banner of Victory (Soviet Army in Berlin, 1945)", *FOTW: Flags of the World*.
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21. Volland and Krimmer, 64 and 151; Nakhimovsky and Nakhimovsky, 10-11; Volland, 48-56; Jordan Bonfante, "Remembering a Red Flag Day", *Time* (23 May 2008) <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1809018,00.html>, accessed 26 August 2012.
22. In his book about the Banner of Victory, Ernst Volland gives this account of Minin's role in the flag-raising:
At about 9 pm the artillery arrived and opened fire on the Reichstag. The first to enter the Reichstag were the gun spotter, captain Vladimir Makov, soldiers Zagitov, Lismenko and Borbrov, and sergeant Mikhail Minin; they stormed onto the deserted roof. They looked for an appropriate spot from where to hoist the flag and discovered

the statue of 'Germania', which they identified as a kind of victory goddess sitting on a horse; the ideal point from which to hang the flag. Minin mounted the statue and wedged the flag into a crack. Captain Makov states the exact time of this operation as 10:40 pm on April 30th, 1945. Other witnesses of the event put time and date to the following day: 3 pm on May 1st, 1945, surely so that the event could coincide with the most important national holiday of the working classes. On May Day, 1945, Colonel Zicenko, newly appointed 'commander of the Reichstag', ordered the Makov group to hoist their flag at the highest point on the cupola. Meanwhile there were already countless flags on the roof, tiny shreds made out of red bedsheets, that could be hoisted by any soldier who was able to reach the roof. The Makov group was only able to hoist the flag on the cupola on the night of the 1st of May, so that the flag could only be seen over Berlin on the 2nd of May.

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