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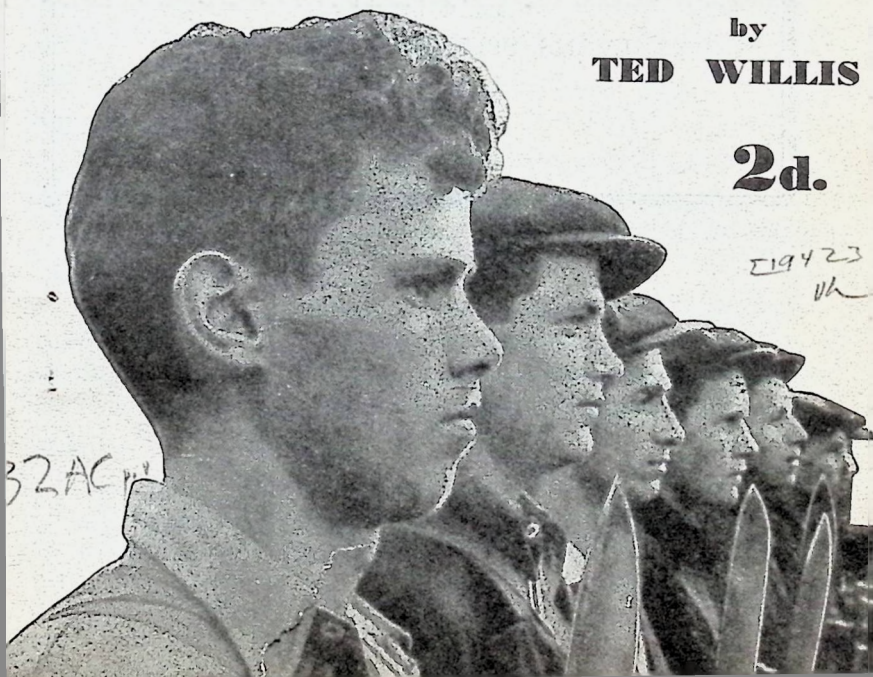
FIGHTING YOUTH OF RUSSIA

THE STORY OF THE YOUNG
MEN AND WOMEN OF THE SOVIET
UNION

by
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Fighting Youth of Russia

By TED WILLIS

THE HEROIC GENERATION.

INTRODUCTION.

This is the story, or rather part of the story, of a generation of heroes.

It is the story of the young men and women of the Soviet Union. The young men and women, who, by their valour and skill and imperishable spirit changed the course of world history.

It is set down, briefly, here, not because we feel that Russian youth are born braver and stronger than are the youth of Britain. We have our heroes, too.

It is set down because the whole world owes to this heroic generation a debt they can never repay; because if they had not fought and bled and died as they did, and as they are doing, the outlook for mankind would be black indeed, and because from their spirit we can all learn.

THE FASCISTS STRIKE.

The young men and women who fill the ranks of the Soviet fighting forces and play so large a part in the war effort of their country have grown up with the Soviet system and out of that system.

They are not so old that they cannot remember from personal experience the early struggles of their country, as it emerged from famine and civil war to tackle the tasks of industrialisation. They saw, and knew for themselves, how successfully that job had been tackled.

By 1941, when the Fascists struck at Russia, the U.S.S.R. had grown rich and prosperous. Youth had privileges, rights, opportunities never before known in history. And when we

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speak of youth in Russia, we must remember that we are speaking of nearly half the population, 43 per cent. of the population of the U.S.S.R. It was estimated before the war that one out of every three workers was under 23 years of age.

“To our youth now every door is open,” run the words of the song, *Soviet Fatherland*. And so it is. Education, the chance of learning a trade, of following a career, is guaranteed to all. Since 1931 no unemployment has existed in any part of the Soviet Union. And in the factories young men and women were encouraged to take leading positions.

Imagine, for example, the Moscow Calibre Plant, in which seven out of every ten workers were between 19 and 24 years old! Twenty per cent. of the engineering specialists were under 26!

In sport, in culture, in science, in adventure, the Soviet youth were among the foremost. Remember the long-distance flights over the North Pole to America? Remember the Expedition which stayed on an ice-floe in the region of the North Pole for almost a year?

Wherever their country called the youth went. In the Far Eastern provinces, on the river Amur, there is a thriving industrial town called Komsomolsk. It is named after the Russian youth organisation, the Young Communist League; and it is so named because these young Communists built this town where previously there was only a wilderness. The need was to build up an industrial region which would make the Soviet Far Eastern Army self-supporting in the matter of munitions and supplies.

The young people answered the call, at Komsomolsk and at a hundred other places.

It was at such a young people, steeled and tried, that Hitler struck on June 22nd, 1941. He thought they would be easy meat for his plunder-laden army. And there he made his greatest, most serious mistake and sealed the doom of Fascism.

STERN YOUNG SOLDIERS.

Ilya Ehrenburg, writing in *Soviet War News* a year after Hitler's invasion of Russia, said :—

“ Before the war life was difficult and easy at the same time. It was difficult because we had to overcome the routine and technical backwardness of pre-revolutionary Russia. It was easy because every road and every opportunity were open to our young people. Yes, for our boys and girls the road of life was a broad highway. But now a year has passed, and our children have become stern-faced soldiers, advancing fire-bottle in hand to destroy enemy tanks and giving their lives to ram the enemy in the air.”

Stern-faced soldiers !

From the very first moment of their country's danger, at the first call, they responded in millions : they left the joyful, prosperous life they had been building for themselves and became soldiers, sailors, airmen, guerilla fighters, shock workers. They became heroes and heroines.

In eight months 22,000 members of the Young Communist League were given awards for heroism on the Western, Leningrad, South-western and Southern fronts alone. When Leningrad was in danger, half the membership of the Y.C.L. in the city went to the front line with the Red Army. In the same eight months, youth in the rear became shock-workers, increasing the rate of production by 100 per cent., 200 per cent. and even by 1,000 per cent.! Four hundred million roubles were collected for the Government's Defence Fund.

The poet, Konstantin Simonev, put the thoughts of the Soviet youth into words when he said :—

“ We love life, but only the kind of life we ourselves build.”

For this life, for the life they have built and will build again the Soviet youth are giving all, without stint.

HEROES OF LABOUR.

At the end of 1939, the Soviet Government, with its eye, as always, on the future, called for volunteers for special vocational schools to train new skilled workers for industry.

Over two million youth volunteered. Thousands of schools were organised all over the country. Now these youth, together with hundreds of thousands of others, have become world-famous Soviet shock-workers. New people have taken their places in the schools.

Leonid Morev was one of the students. He took his place in the Sergo Ordzhonikidze Works as a millwright. First he made a thorough study of his machine, of his own movements and the methods of his fellow-workers, and began systematically to increase output. Then he asked the engineers to make certain adjustments to his lathe. He revised the whole process of his work, and began milling twelve parts simultaneously. He began to exceed his daily quota *twenty* times over!

His example was soon followed by others, and the factory became a stronghold of Thousand Per Centers.

In the Kuznetsk Coal Basin, there is a war factory in which nine out of every ten workers are young men and girls. It is called the Kemerovo Youth Works. In all parts of the Soviet Union there are similar works, employing mainly young people. In the Kemerovo Youth Works, the machine tool department recently completed in two months a job which would have taken skilled operatives several months before the war. A Bureau of Inventions has been set up in this factory, and in three months over 300 suggestions were sent in from young workers. Some of these increased output of lathes by from 20 per cent. to 100 per cent.

The young workers in the "Stalin" factory took the lead soon after the war in organising a competition between the various workers, shifts, and departments. The Socialist Emulation move-

ment, which was a feature of Russia during the Five Year Plans, reached new heights in war time. Factory challenged factory, and the Soviet Press devoted much space to the results of the various competitions.

In the "Stalin" factory the following aims were set by youth in order that they could emulate other factories and the older workers in their own factory :—

Each individual young worker to complete not less than one and a half times his usual output.

To double the number of "two hundred per centers."

Devote special attention to inventions and proposals for saving fuel and material.

Not only in the factories, but on the collective farms and in other ways, youth took the lead in labour for their country.

TRAINING AND SERVICE.

Voluntary labour and training after working hours became the order of the day for thousands of Soviet Youth.

In the "Stalin" factory mentioned above, the young workers also set themselves the aim of training from among their ranks 100 tank-destroyers and 60 skiers. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet Youth participated in the programme of compulsory military training for all citizens which was organised by the Government.

New pilots for the Red Air Force undergo preliminary training in the Ossoaviakhim, the largest voluntary organisation—it had 16,000,000 members—in pre-war Soviet life. In those days it trained men and women, boys and girls in civil defence and anti-gas warfare. Now its scope has been considerably widened.

February 15th was set as a Voluntary Labour Day by the Young Communist League of the Soviet Union. Typical of the results was that from the small Soviet Republic of Komi, where 53,000 tons of metal scrap were collected by youth in one day.

And in the difficult days of last autumn, when the enemy came nearer to Moscow and Leningrad, young people in hundreds of thousands, school-children among them, went out to work on the fortifications.

After a hard shift in the factory, after a day at school, out they came to the fortifications and worked for hours, digging, entrenching, fortifying. Many of these young workers, as the situation became more serious, were kept on the job of fortifications full-time, living on the collective farms outside Moscow. One of these young workers, a girl, was interviewed by a Soviet Pressman. This is what she said, pointing to where Moscow's chimneys and spires pierced the sky.

“Take a look at our Moscow. This was all built by us and for us. Our labour and our future breathes in our city. Moscow is our pride and we will never give her up.”

She said it quietly, modestly, with pride. As quietly and modestly and proudly as the Soviet youth marched out to make her words a reality.

Moscow was not given up. She will never be given up while girls like this have breath in their bodies.

RED ARMY FIGHTERS.

On that same Moscow front, a certain Nazi, Otto Hiller, was taken prisoner. He made a statement to his captors. This is what he said :—

“The soldiers no longer believe that this war will end soon. Many think that the vast Russian territory will swallow up the German army, and the Soviet troops and guerillas will gradually annihilate it.”

Stalin put a similar thought into different words, when he promised Hitler that the Red Army would become the terror of the Nazis.

Used to joy rides, to easy victories, to easy plunder, the German soldiers found a different proposition awaiting them in Russia. The Soviet youth loved their country, and learned to hate with a bitter, burning hatred the hordes of invaders who marauded through their beloved country.

They had behind them the faith and strength of a mighty nation ; and they taught the Nazis for the first time what it meant to face any army " that knew what it fought for and loved what it knew." They taught the Nazis that Soviet spirit is stronger than Nazi steel.

Here is an extract from the diary of Oberleutenant Alfred Ruehle, who was killed on the Central Front :—

" It is hard to understand what is happening. We are retreating. We did not retreat from Poland. We did not retreat from France or Greece, but here in Russia instead of advancing we have begun to retreat.

" This is all the harder to understand, since the Fuehrer assured us that the Russians would be smashed and the Eastern Campaign over by 1941. That would have enabled us to finish with the Tommies in 1942. All these hopes have collapsed like a house of cards."

It *was* hard for the Oberleutenant to understand ! A photograph found with the diary revealed him to be a well-built fair-headed young man, quite different from the gaunt, aged looking soldier into which the Russian war had turned him.

Soviet youth in their millions filled the ranks of the Red Army, and, armed with the finest weapons of war, hurled back the invaders.

From the first days of the war the communiques issued from the various fronts contained supplements in which they described the valour and heroism of the Soviet soldiers, holding up as an example the deeds of many of the young fighters.

The order of the Red Star was awarded, for example, to Nikolai Ovsin, several times holder of all-Union boxing championships. His ability with his fists served him in good stead. Fighting his way back from an operation in the enemy's rear, Ovsin ran out of ammunition. He used his fists and won his way back to his own lines by breaking Nazi jaws! Alexander Bindanov, famous dirt-track rider, known to Soviet audiences as the "Red Devil," won an award for lightning, individual reconnaissance raids in the enemy's rear on his motor-cycle.

Thousands upon thousands of young Soviet citizens followed Stalin's call to become "tank-destroyers." They developed to a new high art the methods of destruction of tanks; learned to wait until the enemy tanks were almost on them, and then with bunches of hand-grenades, anti-tank guns, they put hundreds of them out of action.

Not one, but many, sacrificed their lives to destroy the German mechanised units, rolling their bodies, around which they strapped grenades, under the enemy tanks.

Soviet artillery men have amazed the experts and confounded the Germans by their accurate and skilful fire. Perhaps the strongest of all Soviet arms is the artillery; but here, too, fine weapons are backed up by understanding and the unconquerable spirit of the lads who fire the guns.

One Moscow battery of anti-aircraft gunners which was visited by a newspaper reporter consisted of young people entirely, the Commander being the oldest at 22 years of age. They were having a Socialist competition with a neighbouring battery, and were very proud that they were three bombers ahead of their rivals! The effectiveness of the Ack-Ack work was demonstrated on November 6th, when 250 German bombers made a mass raid on Moscow. Not one of them even reached the outskirts of Moscow.

“Tell the British gunners,” said one of the men of this battery, “that we Muscovites have watched with pride their struggle against the German night raiders; and assure them that we too are making things hot for the Germans whenever they show their noses over Moscow.”

Visitors to Russia have been struck with the youthfulness of the Soviet Commanders and High Officers. Ability, courage, are the tests in the Soviet Union, and youth are given positions of trust because they deserve them, have earned them.

In the army, as elsewhere, the accent is on youth; the pride and joy of the Soviet Union is its youth.

SOVIET FALCONS.

The air force in the Soviet Union is attached to the Army, and operates as part of the Army.

The Red Air Force has been wiped out two or three times by the Germans—on paper. It is dead, but it won't lie down. And perhaps in the Air Force, more than anywhere else, youth leads.

Most famous of Soviet planes is the Stormovik dive-bomber and tank-buster, and these planes have some really incredible feats to their credit.

One pilot named Molotov lived up to his great name. In three months he put out of action 70 German tanks, 130 lorries, over 700 enemy soldiers, five transport and two fighter planes. He had one hundred pieces of shrapnel removed from his body, and then took the air again, when he left hospital!

Soviet pilots have shown greater skill in their encounters with the Germans. Three planes to one is the average, and recently the rate has increased, showing improved skill of the young Soviet pilots and the effect of continued losses on the Nazi trained personnel. Losses amounting to the total number of all their pre-war trained air force personnel have been sustained by the Nazis in Russia.

It was in Russia that the art of ramming enemy planes was developed. A twenty-year-old lad was the first to do it. He ran out of ammunition ; rammed the German bomber and sliced off one of the wings ; then baled out unharmed. A bomber is a good bargain in exchange for a fighter. He was made a Hero of the Soviet Union. Since then ramming and slicing have become part of Soviet fighting tactics, and, more often than not, it is accomplished now with little damage to the Soviet machines.

“ Red Falcons ” they call them in Russia, eagles of the air. The Nazi pilots and the Nazi soldiery know something of their sharp beaks !

BEHIND THE LINES.

Backing up the Red Fighting Force is an armed nation. Occupation of their town or village is not a signal for surrender. The townsfolk fight too, alongside the Red Army ; and when this is not possible, they form their own guerilla squads and detachments, even whole battalions. The Soviet guerillas or partisans are the Nazis' nightmare. No one is safe, anywhere, in Russia. The struggle goes on, ceaselessly.

Soviet youth have distinguished themselves by their heroism and self-sacrifice in the ranks of the guerillas. Even the small children help the fighters, and, where need be, fight themselves.

Terror and cruelty, practised in such a way and on such a scale that it makes the heart contract to hear of it, only serve to raise the partisan movement to new heights.

The story of Zoya, the guerilla girl, has now become famous the world over. She is but one of many thousands of heroes and heroines among the young guerillas. She was an eighteen-year-old schoolgirl. When the German hangman put a rope around her neck she cried : “ I am not afraid to die. It is happiness to die for one's people.”

Field Marshal Von Kluge had to issue a special Order of the Day, warning his men against the Soviet children.

“Special vigilance,” ran the Order, “should be exercised with regard to little boys, members of the Soviet Children’s organisations the ‘Pioneers,’ who snoop around everywhere. Any one of them caught on the railway line is to be shot on the spot.”

The Soviet people remember with honour the lad of twelve who was thought too young to be with the guerillas. He went to German Headquarters with a hand-grenade under his coat, and said that he wanted to report the whereabouts of the guerillas. When he was admitted to the room he threw the grenade, destroyed the Headquarters and was himself killed.

And they remember, too, thirteen-year-old Manya, who was taken before the German commander, after her mother had been hanged in the village square.

The Commander said: “Sit down there, my dear. Don’t be afraid.”

Manya said: “I’m not afraid.”

“You’ll help us, won’t you?” said the Commander.

“Yes, I’ll help you,” said Manya.

“Good. Now tell me where your father is. We don’t want to hurt him, only speak to him,” said the Commander.

Manya approached the table, sat down in a chair by the officer and twirled a pencil in her fingers as though about to write. Then suddenly she seized the clasp-knife on the table and plunged it with all her might into the officer’s chest.

The village was recaptured by the Red Army later. Manya’s body was never found, but near the hut where she was questioned the Red Army have erected a modest memorial. A small mound stands there with a wooden head-piece bearing the Red Star and the inscription: “To Manya—from the Red Army.”

Yes, the Germans have found something stronger than steel. They have come across a nation of Manyas, and they feel them all around them. In the rear and in the front, on the flanks, in the air and on the sea, millions of people with the spirit of Manya go forth to battle.

Danger, disaster, and set-backs cannot daunt them, or weaken their faith in their leaders, in themselves. "Danger can be met by solidarity, courage, calmness," said Lenin, and this watchword has been echoed by the Soviet Youth in the dangerous months behind, and will be with them in the dangers ahead.

Out of their faith and in their young blood, they wrote the flaming epic of Sevastopol. In all history, never was a city so defended. It will be recalled in the days to come with awe, and for ever be a symbol of courage and valour.

Honour and glory to the youth of Russia, the heroic generation who does not know the meaning of surrender, who have shown the free people of the world how to love and how to hate, how to fight and how to die!

Let the youth of Britain say to themselves, modestly and quietly as the Soviet youth would say it, that we shall match that valour and equal that example!

Match it in the factories, on the ships, on the railways!

Match it in the air, on the sea, on the land!

Match their fierce, unquenchable hatred for Fascism!

Match their love for their country, their self-sacrifice, their selfless devotion!

Alexei Tolstoy, the famous Soviet writer, said the following and he said it for the youth of Russia more than for anyone:—

"The land of our forefathers has swallowed not a few hordes of invaders striving to conquer it. In the West empires rose up and perished. The great were debased.

The rich were made poor. Our native land grew and strengthened and nothing can shake it. Our land will swallow the German hordes.

“ Thus it was. Thus it will be ! ”

We are partners with the Soviet youth in this great war of liberation.

Pravda wrote :—

“ Let sacred hatred for the enemy be our chief and only emotion. Let this hatred be a force which moves mountains, which performs miracles at the bench and in the fields. We have every opportunity not only to halt the enemy, but to rout him, to exhaust him, to bleed him white and crush him.”

Yes, we are partners with the Soviet youth. And we can say with all our hearts : **THUS IT WILL BE !**

In action, with flaming deeds, we will pay our debt to Russia's Heroic Generation !

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