



## Heroes or Perpetrators? How Soviet Collaborators Received Red Army Medals<sup>1</sup>

Irina Makhalova

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# Heroes or Perpetrators? How Soviet Collaborators Received Red Army Medals<sup>1</sup>

Irina Makhalova

National Research University Higher School of Economics

## ABSTRACT

This article focuses on an analysis of the culture of memory that has developed in contemporary Russia. At the center of the research are the biographies of former collaborators who took part in Nazi crimes and then, after the liberation of Soviet-occupied territories, were mobilized into the Red Army and subsequently performed exploits honored by awards. Information that these men were arrested by the NKVD after the war can be found in their personal files, which are not accessible to the broad public. Instead, the fact of their awards and a brief description of their exploits can be found on the site 'Podvig Naroda' [Exploits of the People], which has open access. The state memory policy in contemporary Russia, as in the Soviet era, is aimed at emphasizing the heroism of Red Army soldiers; their criminal activities remain in the shadow of the medals they received.

## Introduction

Grigorii Kirillovich Kozhan was born in 1916 in the village of Ustinovka, Kirovograd *Oblast*, into a family of middle-class peasants.<sup>2</sup> In June 1941, he was mobilized into the Red Army, and in autumn 1944 he performed exploits in the name of the Soviet state, having taken '7 enemy soldiers' prisoner<sup>3</sup> and having killed '5 enemy soldiers'.<sup>4</sup> On 5 February 1946, Kozhan was arrested at his home;<sup>5</sup> subsequently, the court sentenced him to death. During the investigation it was discovered that in September 1941 Kozhan had been

**CONTACT** Irina Makhalova  [imakhalova@hse.ru](mailto:imakhalova@hse.ru)  105066 Moscow, Staraya Basmannaya st., 21/4, room L-415, 105066 Moscow, Russian Federation

I would like to thank Seth Bernstein from the National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow) for his very helpful advice and suggestions. Also, I am very grateful to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum for the opportunity to work with the collection of post-war trials against Soviet collaborators.

<sup>1</sup>Geroi ili prestupniki? Kak sovetskie kollaboratsionisty poluchali sovetskie medali', translated by Dr. H. Orenstein, Leavenworth, KS.

<sup>2</sup>Personal file of G. K. Kozhan, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), RG-31.018M, reel 6, images 1153–1252.

<sup>3</sup>His exploit was performed as a Red Army soldier on 8 November 1944 as part of 748th Rifle Regiment of 2nd Ukrainian Front's 206th Rifle Division near Barakhoz (as in the document) Farm; for this, Grigorii Kozhan was awarded the medal 'For Courage'. Kozhan Grigorii Kirillovich, profile on 'Exploits of the People', <http://podvignaroda.ru/?#id=1270939398&tab=navDetailManCard> (accessed 10 October 2018).

<sup>4</sup>His exploit was performed on 2 October 1944 as part of the same sub-unit, near the populated area of Kumpia-Turzia (as in the document); Grigorii Kozhan received the medal 'For Courage' for this as well.

<sup>5</sup>From the testimony of defendant G. K. Kozhan, USHMM, RG-31.018, reel 6, image 1240.

taken prisoner, from where he returned to his native village. From November 1941 through March 1944, that is, for the entire period of occupation, Kozhan worked in the Ustinovka Regional Police in the Kirovograd *Oblast*.<sup>6</sup> During the interrogations and at the trial he recalled how in autumn 1942 Jews were assembled in a school building, how they were convoyed to a place of execution, stripped naked, and brought in groups of 10 to an execution pit. He recalled how the women and children cried, how none of the Germans or police paid any attention to this. Having fled the Germans to Romania in 1944, Kozhan subsequently declared himself to be a prisoner of war and was remobilized into the Red Army. Neither his awards for action in the ranks of the Red Army nor the fact that he was twice wounded (in September 1941 and November 1944) while defending the Soviet Motherland, saved his life.

Information that Kozhan was arrested can be found in his personal file, which is not accessible to the broad public and is represented as a copy in the archive of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum [hereafter cited as USHMM]. Conversely, the fact of Kozhan receiving awards and a brief description of his exploits can be accessed openly on the 'Exploits of the People' [Подвиг народа] website. In other words, it is much simpler for the broad public to find out that he was a hero, but it is extremely difficult to find out that he was arrested.

This article aims to show how contradictory today's memory about the Great Patriotic War is, especially when the issue is heroism with respect to those who were mixed up in Nazi crimes. In the center of this research are the biographies of former collaborators who were mobilized into the Red Army and subsequently performed exploits honored by awards. According to Soviet award documents, these Red Army soldiers fought bravely for the USSR; according to documents of post-war Soviet trials, they were cowardly criminals. In this case, both statements are true and do not contradict one another.

Collaborators who were awarded for bravery in battle fighting for the Red Army carried out various functions during the occupation and subsequently because of this, received various prison terms in correctional labor camps. On 13 November 1946, a court session was held in which the case against Fedor Ivanovich Danil'chenko was examined.<sup>7</sup> The accused, who was born in Crimea and spent the occupation years there, received the medal 'For Battle Merit', because 'on 8 October 44 in the battle for the village of Bogovina (Yugoslavia), precisely carrying out the instructions of his commander, captured three Germans'.<sup>8</sup> Fourteen men testified against him at the trial,

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., images 1242–1243.

<sup>7</sup>Personal file of F. I. Danil'chenko, USHMM, RG-31.018, reel 58, images 6–91.

<sup>8</sup>His exploit was performed as a private as part of 1041st Rifle Battalion of 2nd Ukrainian Front's 223rd Rifle Division. Danil'chenko Fedor Ivanovich, profile on 'Exploits of the People', <http://podvignaroda.ru/?id=25178642&tab=navDetailManAward> (accessed 10 September 2018).

each of whom confirmed his guilt before the Soviet state. During the occupation, he worked as a policeman in the village of Kalinovka (Crimea), having passed training courses before this in the Sak German Gendarmerie.<sup>9</sup> Apparently, Danil'chenko, wishing to curry favor with the occupation authorities, oppressed in every way possible residents of the village, who had come forward as witnesses in the trial.

According to their testimony, Danil'chenko regularly went to the homes of the village residents and took away their food;<sup>10</sup> contributed to the forced transfer of the local population to Germany for forced labor;<sup>11</sup> reported on partisans;<sup>12</sup> and removed cattle from the village.<sup>13</sup> The functions named by the witnesses were carried out by the majority of the police in village settlements in occupied Soviet territory. For his work, Danil'chenko received 40 German marks per month, a regular ration, and a security guarantee for his family (at that time he was married and had two children).<sup>14</sup> Fearing punishment on the part of the Soviet authorities, Danil'chenko left with the German army on 15 April 1944 for Romania across Sevastopol Port, where he had worked for a landowner near Buzava Station before the arrival of the Red Army.<sup>15</sup> In the summer of 1944, as a former prisoner of war, he was reenrolled into the Red Army, and in October he was awarded the medal 'For Battle Merit' for the aforementioned exploit. Danil'chenko received 10 years in corrective labor camps according to Article 58-1 b — the usual punishment for former collaborators who worked as policemen and were involved in the killing of the local Soviet population.<sup>16</sup>

The pursuit of collaborators continued during the entire Soviet period, although the majority was conducted before Stalin's death in 1953. Those collaborators whose activities had taken place in a geographical location different than where they had lived before the war had the greatest chance of not being caught. These were the majority of cases examined in Soviet trials in 1960–1980. The previous examples show that people who worked as police or guards where they lived before the war were caught 8–10 years after the war ended, inasmuch as it was much more difficult to hide in a small populated area where neighbors knew one another than to lose oneself in

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<sup>9</sup>From testimony by F. I. Danil'chenko, USHMM, RG-31.018, reel 58, images 10, 14.

<sup>10</sup>From testimony by M. A. Shikoplias, USHMM, RG-31.018, reel 58, image 23.

<sup>11</sup>From testimony by S. E. Futkova, USHMM, RG-31.018, reel 58, image 36.

<sup>12</sup>From the closing indictment, dated 18 October 1946, USHMM, RG-31.018, reel 58, image 71.

<sup>13</sup>From testimony by E. S. Kirienco, USHMM, RG-31.018, reel 58, images 39–40.

<sup>14</sup>From testimony by F. I. Danil'chenko, USHMM, RG-31.018, reel 58, image 10.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, image 12.

<sup>16</sup>On the post-war trials of former collaborators, see S. Kudriashov and V. Voisin, 'The Early Stages of the "Legal Purges" in Soviet Russia (1941–1945)', *Cahiers du Monde russe* 49(2–3) (2008), pp. 263–296; A. E. Epifanov, *Otvetstvennost' gitlerovkikh voennykh prestupnikov i ikh posobnikov v SSSR: istoricheskopravovoi aspekt* [The Responsibility of Nazi Military Criminals and Their Accomplices in the USSR: Historical and Legal Aspect] (Volgograd, 1997); T. Penter, 'Local Collaborators on Trial. Soviet War Crimes under Stalin (1943–1953)', *Cahiers du Monde russe* 49(2) (2008), pp. 341–364.

another region or even different Soviet republic (which was typical for the Crimean Tatars who collaborated).<sup>17</sup>

The most dramatic story exploded in 1968–1970 in Crimea, when Ivan Semenovich Marusich came before the Soviet court. Born in 1918 in Kirovograd *Oblast*, by the beginning of the 1930s he lived in the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) and worked as an artificial insemination technician in a state farm in the Leninski region. In August 1941, he was mobilized into the Soviet Army, and in October 1941 he was taken prisoner together with other servicemen. He was sent from Feodosia through Dzhankoi to a POW camp in Oleshki (Kherson *Oblast*). Marusich spent 2–2.5 months here, working in road construction; the entire camp was then sent to Kherson, where the POWs were put in prison. He spent around two months here and was then sent to another camp in Oleshki, where he spent two months, after which he escaped. The Romanians arrested Marusich in Perekop and brought him to a POW camp in Dzhankoi.<sup>18</sup> His floundering ended a month later, when the Germans mobilized him for work in one of the larger concentration camps in Crimea — ‘Red Camp’ near Simferopol, where 8,000–10,000 prisoners were killed during the Nazi occupation.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, around the spring of 1942, Ivan Marusich began to work as a guard in the camp, which he left with the German Army in April 1944, having first killed all the prisoners who at that moment were being held in the camp. As with other collaborators, he was again accepted into the ranks of the Red Army in Romania and took part in the fighting in Yugoslavia, Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia,<sup>20</sup> from where he wrote letters to Aleksandra Markovna Tarakanova, the woman with whom he had cohabited when he worked in the concentration camp in Crimea.<sup>21</sup>

As a Red Army soldier, Marusich performed five exploits in March and April 1945 in the territory of Austria and Poland, for which he was awarded the Order of Glory (3rd degree)<sup>22</sup> and the medal ‘For Courage’.<sup>23</sup> He was

<sup>17</sup>S. Bernstein and I. Makhlova, ‘Aggregate Treason: A Quantitative Analysis of Collaborator Trials in Soviet Ukraine and Crimea’, *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 46(1) (2019), pp. 30–54 [this particular reference can be found on pp. 49–50].

<sup>18</sup>From the testimony of I. S. Marusich, USHMM, RG-31.018, reel 36, images 761–762.

<sup>19</sup>S. Aristov, ‘Natsistskie kontsentratsionnye lageri na okkupirovannoi territorii Ukrainy’ [Nazi Concentration Camps on Occupied Territory of Ukraine], in O. V. Budnitskii and L. G. Novikova (eds.), *SSSR vo Vtoroi mirovoi voine: Okkupatsiia. Kholokost. Stalinizm* [The USSR in the Second World War. Occupation. Holocaust. Stalinism] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2014), pp. 112–133.

<sup>20</sup>From the testimony of I. S. Marusich, USHMM, RG-31.018, reel 36, images 773.

<sup>21</sup>From the testimony of A. M. Tarakanova, USHMM, RG-31.018, reel 36, images 893–896.

<sup>22</sup>He received this award for four exploits. The most famous one was performed on 13 April 1945 in the fighting for Gross Zbersdorf [spelled this way in the document] as part of 191st Guards Artillery Regiment of the Southern Group of Forces 86th Guards Rifle Division as a junior guards sergeant. Marusich Ivan Semenovich, profile on ‘Exploits of the People’, <http://podvignarodu.ru/?#id=42490996&tab=navDetailManAward> (accessed 15 September 2018).

<sup>23</sup>He received the medal ‘For Courage’ for the exploit performed on 11 April 1945 as part of the same regiment and with the same rank. Marusich destroyed three enemy machine gun posts near Vienna. Marusich Ivan Semenovich, profile on ‘Exploits of the People’, <http://podvignarodu.ru/?#id=36965966&tab=navDetailManAward> (accessed 15 September 2018).

demobilized in July 1946. Ivan Marusich worked until November 1947 as a cutter in a brick factory in Kirovograd *Oblast*; in February 1948, he transferred to work on a state farm in the village of Luganka (Petrov Region, Kirovograd *Oblast*). From 1949 to 1952, Marusich worked as the manager of a cattle farm at this state farm. Then he worked as an artificial insemination technician until the day of his arrest.<sup>24</sup>

On 6 November 1970, during the investigation of Marusich, a face-to-face confrontation took place with a former colleague — concentration camp guard Petr Romanovich Gaidai. On 9 November 1970, at 9:12, 'prisoner under investigation Marusich Ivan Semenovich committed suicide in a detention facility cell by cutting his throat with the blade of a safety razor, damaging his larynx and a neurovascular bundle'.<sup>25</sup> Most probably, the reason for the suicide was not specifically the last face-to-face confrontation but rather the trend of the investigation as a whole, inasmuch as since autumn 1970 Marusich had had a number of face-to-face confrontations with several former camp guards. Witnesses stated that Marusich personally had killed prisoners when the camp was shut down in April 1944 — he had shot them in the back of the head, almost at point blank range, and threw the bodies in the well that was located near the camp workshop.<sup>26</sup>

### Presenting the Great Patriotic War through the history of heroes

The total number of Soviet collaborators who afterwards served in the Red Army is unclear. In recently opened Ukrainian security services archives, there is information regarding the Ukrainian SSR, which makes it possible to determine the approximate scope of this phenomenon. By January 1946, a total of 22,375 people throughout Ukraine were identified as having served in the German Army and in various collaborator formations. Of them, 5,095 (or 23 percent of the total number) then served in the Red Army.<sup>27</sup> Among them, the absolute majority — 4,816 people (94.5 percent) — served as policemen. In turn, the majority of them were from the Kiev and Vinnitsa *Oblasts*.<sup>28</sup> How many collaborators in all were awarded medals is unlikely to ever become known. However, of those who were awarded, one can find out only about the heroic episode of their military biography, while their criminal activity is hidden in the security services archives.

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<sup>24</sup>From the testimony of I. S. Marusich, USHMM, RG-31.018M, reel 36, images 840–841.

<sup>25</sup>From the directive about the cessation of the criminal case, dated 27 November 1970. USHMM, RG-31.018M, reel 36, image 932.

<sup>26</sup>From the testimony of S. Kurtmambetov. USHMM, RG-31.018M, reel 36, images 913, 919.

<sup>27</sup>Memorandum of Ukrainian SSR People's Commissar of State Security Savchenko to Chief of the 2nd Directorate of the USSR NKGB Fedotov, dated 14 January 1946, KhDA SBU, f. 16, d. 553, ll. 26–27. I am very grateful to Seth Bernstein for his sharing this source with me.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

A special memory policy about the Great Patriotic War was formed in the Soviet era, which has been maintained almost unchanged to the present day. Twenty years after the end of the Great Patriotic War, in 1965, the Soviet Union began to celebrate Victory Day. As Russian sociologist Lev Gudkov notes, it is from this time that the creation of a myth about the war began, which until now has been presented as heroic episodes, while ambiguous aspects of this event are kept silent.<sup>29</sup> The collaboration of Soviet citizens, among others, still remains a taboo topic in the history of the war, despite the fact that in the 1990s this theme was worthy of the attention of several researchers.<sup>30</sup>

The 'Exploits of the People' database, in which profiles of the aforementioned collaborators are given, was created in 2010 on the initiative of the Russian Ministry of Defense's Department for the Development of Information Technologies. The source contains 12.5 million notes on the awarding of the medals 'For Courage' and 'For Battle Merit', and 22 million award card files and files on the conferring of the Orders of the Patriotic War, 1st and 2nd degrees, on the 40th anniversary of the Victory. As is pointed out on the official site of the base, 'the goal of the project is to provide open access to complete information that is available in the Russian archives on combat awards for exploits during the Great Patriotic War'.<sup>31</sup> The originals of the documents are located in the Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense, access to which is restricted for the majority of researchers, both foreign and domestic.<sup>32</sup> Apparently, the reason lies in the presence of classified documents capable of affecting the study of the war and dispelling the myths about it.

In addition to memory about heroes, the Russian Ministry of Defense created a source dedicated to the memory of those who died in the war, the 'Memorial' generalized data bank.<sup>33</sup> Both resources are aimed at supporting the heroic narrative and forming a one-sided understanding of the history of the war. In turn, the Ministry of Defense provides open access to a limited selection of documents, aimed at forming a specific understanding of the events of the war for Russian society.

The question of how and to what extent an award obtained corresponds to the behavior of a man in war has been raised several times in the memoirs of former front fighters. In one of his interviews, well-known writer V. P. Astaf'ev once said:

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<sup>29</sup>L. Gudkov, "'Pamiat'" o voine i massovaia identichnost' rossiiian' ['Memory' About the War and the Mass Identity of the Russians], *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* [Emergency ration], 2–3 (2005, <http://magazines.russ.ru/2005/2/gu5-pr.html> (accessed 10 September 2018)).

<sup>30</sup>S. V. Kudriashov, 'Predateli, "osvoboditeli", ili zhertvy rezhima? Sovetskii kollaboratsionizm (1941–1942)' [Traitors, 'Liberators,' or Victims of the Regime? Soviet Collaboration (1941–1942)], *Svobodnaia mysl'* [Free Thought], 14 (1993), pp. 84–98.

<sup>31</sup>'Podvig naroda', 1941–1945, <http://podvignaroda.ru/?#tab=navAbout> (accessed 10 September 2018).

<sup>32</sup>S. Bernstein, 'Remembering War, Remaining Soviet: Digital Commemoration of World War II in Putin's Russia', *Memory Studies*, 9(4) (2016), pp. 422–436. This citation is found on p. 426.

<sup>33</sup>'Memorial', <https://obd-memorial.ru/html/about.htm> (accessed 20 December 2018).

Not everything was okay in the war. I know soldiers who bore on their shoulders the hardest of times — '41 and '42. They only have the medals 'For Victory over Germany'. On the other hand, when the fighting became easier they were carrying medals away by the sackful. Those who themselves did not fight on the front lines received plenty of them.<sup>34</sup>

Alexandr Zinov'ev also writes about the fact that by the end of the war it was easier to get awards:

It was going to be a victory. For this reason there was a state of exultation in the army. It was a time of awards. It became not so dangerous to fly, and it became easier to get awards. An orgy of awards began. Awards flowed as if out of a horn of plenty for the higher-ups and for those who, in general, had not taken part in the fighting. I made my calculations and discovered that more than 70 percent of the awards had been given to people who, in general, had not taken part in the fighting in the strict sense of the word.<sup>35</sup>

It is difficult to say how much this corresponds with reality, but there are no objective grounds to doubt that the men presented within the framework of this article really did prove themselves to be brave soldiers. By the end of the war, however, the number of awards really had increased several times in comparison with the initial period. Whereas from June 1941 through November 1942 a total of 625 men had been awarded the Hero of the Soviet Union, from January 1944 through May 1945 this number was 7,008, out of a total of slightly more than 11,000 men who had received this honor over the entire period of the Great Patriotic War.<sup>36</sup>

Presenting the war through the history of heroes is, however, only part of the history. The fact that the Soviet population heroically resisted the Nazi occupation regime cannot be denied. During the Great Patriotic War, however, according to calculations of historians, 1–1.5 million Soviet citizens went over to the German side, including cooperation in the administrative sphere.<sup>37</sup> They did this for various reasons, but both desertion and collaboration in the occupied territories are a component of this war and are material for understanding the nature of pre-war Soviet society.<sup>38</sup>

Within the framework of this article, only a few cases have been examined; how many of them in all there were is unknown. Post-war court cases against former collaborators still remain closed to researchers. Even if these archives were open not only on the territory of Ukraine, which occurred a couple of

<sup>34</sup>Quoted in O. S. Smyslov, *Nagrady Velikoi Pobedy* [Awards of the Great Victory] (Moscow: Veche, 2010), p. 187.

<sup>35</sup>A. Zinov'ev, *Russkaia sud'ba, isповed' otshchepentsa* [Russian Fate: Confession of a Renegade] (l.: ZAO Izdatel'stvo Tsentrpoligraf, 2000), pp. 214–215.

<sup>36</sup>O. S. Smyslov, *Nagrady Velikoi Pobedy*, pp. 262–263.

<sup>37</sup>I. Ermolov, *Tri goda bez Stalina. Okkupatsiia: sovetskie grazhdane mezhdu natsistami i bol'shevikami. 1941–1944* [Three Years Without Stalin, The Occupation: Soviet Citizens Between the Nazis and the Bolsheviks. 1941–1944] (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2010), p. 8.

<sup>38</sup>M. Edele, *Stalin's Defectors. How Red Army Soldiers Became Hitler's Collaborators, 1941–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

years ago (this, however, does not mean the possibility of freely obtaining and working with any court case) but also on the territory of Russia and Belarus, the creation of a base similar to 'Exploits of the People' would require the investment of an enormous amount of monetary and human resources. The creation of a collection of post-war trials of collaborators, which are in open access in the Holocaust Memorial Museum, was the result of the efforts of archive workers at the museum, who in the 1990s managed to collect a part of these materials. The collection of post-war Soviet trials includes material on 955 men.<sup>39</sup>

According to the most superficial calculations, a minimum of 15 men (barely more than 4 percent) from this database are represented on the 'Exploits of the People' website — that is, they have awards for exploits performed during the Great Patriotic War. Despite the fact that in each criminal case the accused was to be deprived of his awards (which was evidently done), the 'Exploits of the People' database does not reflect this information.

This article claims that the behavior of a Soviet man in the Second World War was not determined by some ideology.<sup>40</sup> The decision to cooperate with the enemy was most often made under extreme conditions. This article looked at POWs who began to cooperate with the occupation regime for various reasons: Some wanted power and saw in cooperation with the occupiers the opportunity for a kind of social mobility; some were trying to improve their material conditions to protect themselves and their family from starvation; some, possibly, did not like Soviet authority and cooperated with the Germans for ideological reasons. As military operations developed and the Red Army successfully advanced to the West, the prospect of mobilization into its ranks began to be more attractive. These men probably fought honorably and were awarded for actual exploits. In precisely the same way, they guarded concentration camps, took part in driving away the Soviet population, looted civilians, and executed Jews. Their choice depended not on adherence to some ideology but rather on a situation that, under military conditions, was natural to change.<sup>41</sup> The local Soviet population that remained in occupied territory also had the characteristic of changing its relationship to the partisans, depending on the situation at the front.<sup>42</sup>

The 'Exploits of the People' database memorializes the heroes who fought and won victory in one of the bloodiest wars in the history of mankind. In fact, there is no similar database in the world, neither with respect to volume nor social significance. On the other hand, it presents only a part of the

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<sup>39</sup>S. Bernstein and I. Makhalova, 'Aggregate Treason'.

<sup>40</sup>See M. Edele, *Stalin's Defectors*, pp. 165–178.

<sup>41</sup>See S. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>42</sup>A. Hill, 'The Partisan War in North-West Russia 1941–1944: A Reexamination', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 25(3) (2002), pp. 37–55.

history of the war; it does not treat in fullness the phenomenon of the behavior of Soviet people under the extreme conditions of war.

### **Notes on contributor**

*Irina Makhlova* is a Ph.D. candidate at the National Research University Higher School of Economics and a research assistant at the International Center for the History and Sociology of World War II and Its Consequences. The publication was prepared while conducting research within the framework of the Academic Fund Program of the National Research University Higher School of Economics in 2018 and of the Russian Academic Excellence Project '5-100'.