

### What is this research about?

This research focuses on the assessment of Red Army veterans in the Soviet Union, ultimately posing the question of whether the post-war experiences of these veterans epitomises a fundamental return to what has been coined 'pre-war normality' in the Soviet Union. Pre-war normality in Soviet Russia was engulfed by a repressive regime in the shape of the Stalinist dictatorship, fraught with harsh political, social, and economic policies. One of these policies was 'Collectivisation', a punishing regime where vast labour forces were reluctantly coerced into compulsory collective farms, or '*kolkhoz*'. The purpose of this research is to appraise and determine whether Red Army veterans experienced a return to pre-war normality upon their demobilisation, or instead witnessed a distinct break away from it. Firstly, evidence demonstrating the remobilisation of veterans in the post-war Soviet labour forces through the already mentioned kolkhoz regime was heavily considered. This assessed whether there existed a goal and overarching agenda by the Soviet state to re-establish pre-war normality, and to also substantiate possible answers as to why this may have been the case. Secondly, we provide an analysis into the transformative societal positions of demobilised veterans, assessing whether they witnessed an influx of privileges and opportunities in post-war society as a result of their military service, and to also consider any possible declines in their social standings from pre-war conditions. This area of the research was far more individuated, analysing the changed social positions of veterans as a newly emerged social grouping as well as certain minorities that were found within such as disabled and permanently maimed veterans.

(Note: The content of this project and the extent of the discussion has been reduced)

### A Forceful Push Back to the Kolkhoz

After Victory Day on 9th May 1945 there was a shared hope that fundamental changes to all levels of society would replace the old, tarnished regime that stood prior to the outbreak of war. This predominantly related to the repressive measures founded in collectivisation during the 1930s through the kolkhoz regime. Upon their return to the Motherland, Red Army veterans were far more apt to question the existing systems in Russia after witnessing social and political freedoms in European countries. The aftermath sparked a rise in expectations that institutions like that of the kolkhoz regime would be dismantled. Historian David Hoffman makes a bold claim, stating that government reports critically explained how veterans were spreading anti-collectivisation sentiments, with Soviet leaders fearing that they were becoming a destabilising and potentially revolutionary force. In response to this, this research has discovered that the Soviet government utilised the very regime being scrutinised by veterans to re-establish their control over the group, and essentially turn the post-war period back to pre-war conditions. The government came to realise that the kolkhoz was a unique method that permitted them to draft millions of veterans back into the labour forces. In order for this to be in any way successful, the minds of veterans had to be forcefully transformed back to pre-war subservience. How was this achieved?

The Soviet state needed to portray the kolkhoz regime in a far more positive light to essentially quell the veteran mob, ultimately undoing much of the envisaged terror experienced in the 1930s. The article featured here taken from *Pravda* (Figure 1 Above), the official newspaper of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, offers sophisticated insights into how the state intended to portray the kolkhoz and offers further opportunities to envisage why they used such an approach. The article entitled 'A Year Later' (год спустя) issued in May 1946 tells a story of a demobilised Red Army veteran returning to his collective farm after the war. The main goal of the piece is to portray the kolkhoz as being 'Eden-like'; the weary soldier returning to the comfort and relief of the kolkhoz, reminiscent of time before war, carnage and destruction. There is an attempt to enshrine the kolkhoz as a fundamental cog in the machine of post-war Soviet society, creating the desired positive association with the regime. The article depicts the kolkhoz as an opportunity that should not be squandered, one that should be appreciated and rebuilt in the aftermath instead of the target for social unrest. Historian Stephen Lovell sees this exploitation of the kolkhoz as a systematic necessity for the preservation of pre-war Soviet normality in a post-war society, asserting that veterans could never return to being loyal servants to the Soviet cause in post-war society after what they had witnessed abroad if they did not view Soviet policies with the same positivity. Thus, the logical line of 'attack' for the government was to change the overall appearance of significant labour policies, like the kolkhoz regime, in order for veterans to not just accept it but more importantly embrace it as a fundamental piece of their society and culture. With such acceptance in place, calls for drastic changes in post-war Soviet society by veterans were quashed and a return to pre-war normality fostered during the 1930s could be re-established.



Figure 1: Petrus Browka, 'A Year Later', *Pravda*, No. 111, 10 May 1946, Pravda Digital Archive



Figure 2: Viktor Koretsky, 'Both in Battle, and in Labour', 1946, Soviet Art: USSR Culture Archive



Figure 3: 'Demobilised Veterans to Work', 1946, Seventeen Moments in Soviet History Archive

### Cultural Imbedding

For this new imagining of the kolkhoz to be even more effective, the Soviet state influenced a litany of popular cultural materials, ranging from songs and films with direct links to veteran exploits. Grace Huxford *et al* have agreed that veterans are conceptualised as a separate entity in all societies, with the potential to be directly targeted and manipulated. As such, research dictates that the Soviet state, continuing to adopt a forceful push and new appropriation of the kolkhoz regime, targeted veterans through cultural materials relating to 'veteranhood', arguably to return to pre-war normality. The lyrics included in a poem turned popular song by Aleksei Fatyanov entitled 'Where are you now, fellow soldiers?' (Где же вы теперь друзья-однополчане) portrays the kolkhoz as a reward and symbol of the veteran's heroic service. The poem displays the kolkhoz in such grandeur that it is to be shown off as a prize, and highlights that a veteran is the only one who possesses the strength to lead the kolkhoz and the Soviet Union forwards. Linking to the article 'A Year Later' (Figure 1), the story forces the reader to think of their personal contributions to society, the system, and the Soviet state during the aftermath. The veteran is set as the exemplary soldier turned civilian, willingly taking up the challenge to govern the kolkhoz as he continues to strive forwards in service of the Soviet Union. This personifies the veteran as an ideal to strive towards, provoking other veterans to bare witness and realise that their purpose is also to continue serving the Soviet cause within the labour forces. This is clarified through propaganda posters featured above. 'Both in Battle and in Labour' (Figure 2), by notorious Soviet artist Viktor Koretsky, and 'Demobilised Veterans to Work' (Figure 3) both evidence a goal to incur greater influence over the minds of Red Army veterans. The sternness of the individuals, both of whom are Red Army veterans, signals a continuation for the drive forwards in the aftermath, symbolising that the common veteran should be a dedicated servant of the nation, supporting the system. Take Figure 2 for example: the key use of shade to depict the war (the past) and the light behind the soldier turned worker, lighting the way forward with his head torch, can be seen as speaking directly to veterans as it coerces an acknowledgement that their purpose lies solely within the labour forces, displaying it as a grand responsibility that can only be done properly by the veteran. Historian Robert Tucker has stated that for post-war Soviet Russia, 'culture had thematic content, and its master theme was heroism in struggling for the right cause against all obstacles.'. The right cause for veterans was to contribute to the reprisal of pre-war normality and state control through the rigorous task of transitioning to the civilian workforces. This research makes it prudent to suggest that not only is there clear evidence of the state pursuing a forceful push back to pre-war normality, but the methods in which they have developed such a scheme is to ensure veterans realise their place in post-war society for themselves in order to produce a more effective result. By imbedding these ideas in popular post-war culture, the appropriation of the social place for veterans through these methods denotes clear connotations that they did indeed experience a dramatic shift back to pre-war normality. There was a focus on remobilising the demobilised veterans back into the workforces, yet there are blatant social and political connotations making direct influence. The materials brought forward by this research portray a decisive and definitive push by the Soviet state to not only coerce veterans towards the kolkhoz regime but to also transform its overall perceived image so that it could become a fundamentally accepted piece of post-war society. Research has evidenced that there was not a break from pre-war normality in the post-war period, but rather a much desired resumption of pre-war conditions. There was no real change to the position of demobilised veterans in that there was the inherent existence of the drive to revert back to pre-war, 1930s Stalinist control through the assertion of the kolkhoz regime.

### Upward Mobility or Social Decline: The Debate

The social positions of veterans in the Soviet Union also changed dramatically, contributing to the overall debate concerning whether they experienced a return to pre-war normality. There are two schools of thought: historian Sheila Fitzpatrick coined the term 'upward mobility' to describe the sheer number of rewards, benefits and privileges enjoyed by all veterans in post-war society, and on the other side of the spectrum, historian Robert Dale strongly criticises scholars who agree with Fitzpatrick, claiming that they contribute to the so-called 'official myth'. Incorporating transcribed interviews provided by The Harvard Project revealed that the Soviet state wanted it known that veterans had access to greater material rewards, and as such we see a pattern of change for veterans. If we consider this alongside the aforementioned article 'A Year Later' (Figure 1), the story celebrates the newfound position of the veteran as chairman of the kolkhoz, making it well known that he only received this honour because of his military service. Some argue that veterans became the pinnacle of upward social mobility in the Soviet Union, emphasising the importance of military service in WWII in acquiring positions of authority, reasoning that soldiers had been inducted into the Communist Party during the war and continued to hold this position to climb the social ladder. Mark Edele supports the notion that social success was clearly part of the veteran experience in the post-war decades, enjoying greater employment opportunities and even access to higher education. First-hand accounts reveal that veterans confirm the argument that military service became a necessity for government aid in the pursuit of higher education, with many becoming exclusive opportunities for WWII veterans. If we follow these thoughts alone, we do see evidence of upward mobility in social rank, and as such veterans did not witness a return to pre-war normality in this case. The evidence points to veterans finding themselves in a channel where their lives improved in post-war society when compared to pre-war conditions, evincing a pre-war/post-war divide in social positions. Yet following the idea of an 'official myth', Dale argues that while veterans were reintegrated heavily into the civilian labour forces, only very few actually enjoyed any real privileges and social advantages in post-war Soviet society. The 'official myth' idea suggests that the Soviet state conjured a false narrative and portrayal of veteran benefits, of which were scarce or completely non-existent in some cases, with certain historians contributing to this myth by maintaining the veteran as a symbol of upward mobility. Harvard Project interviews with veterans reveal that any 'official' narratives were laughable, with many of the rewards and privileges recognised as being completely fanciful: "*only one veteran in a thousand received cattle, twelve in a thousand a pair of shoes, and six in a thousand one piece of clothing.*"

None would feel more disparity to pre-war life than 'war invalids'. The permanently wounded and disabled veterans witnessed a sharp decline in social stature, engaging with altogether different experience in post-war Soviet Russia. Research concludes that invalid veterans became social outcasts, relegated to the street corners as the Soviet state evinced a great deal of discomfort regarding their damaged bodies. War invalids were purposefully cast aside as the state recognised them as a very real threat to the desired narrative being fabricated, one with the purpose of reinstating pre-war normality. War invalids served as a reminder of the losses, destruction and suffering of wartime under the Soviet regime, and granting them any recognition in society would be counterproductive to post-war aspirations seeking to reinstall the vigour of the 1930s. Research dictates that the Soviet state was active in deploying a new narrative that saw freeloaders in post-war society as evil plights, chiefly placing war invalids at the top of this category. They could not contribute to post-war state goals and were thus repainted to be viewed as a hindrance and encumbrance. Such association triggered a rapid decline in their social standings, presenting a clear counter-argument to Fitzpatrick's suggestion of universal upward mobility experienced by all Red Army veterans, and manifests a nuanced perspective showing a distinct break away from the supposed pre-war normality in the post-war Soviet Union.

### Concluding Points

Overall, this research has evidenced the Soviet state as perpetually enforcing pre-war normality in the post-war aftermath upon Red Army veterans through various guises. The state was taking active steps to reinstate veterans upon their demobilisation through a renewal and forced acceptance of the kolkhoz regime, achieved through constant pressure to serve the country as well as through a manipulation of cultural materials. Crucially, however, we also see minorities within the veteran social group witnessing a transformation to their social positions during the post-war period, whether it be positive or negative, showing a break from pre-war normality. Despite this, positive opportunities and privileges were scarce, resulting in what can only be described as the manifestation of a false pretence conjured by the Soviet state. The further negative outcomes for war invalids also demonstrates a break from their individual pre-war normalities, however the ultimate goal of the state when inducing a premeditated decline to their social standings came as a result of their drive for a fundamental return to pre-war conditions. For the majority of Red Army veterans, in conjunction with the forceful push back to the kolkhoz, a return to pre-war normality was the vast result in post-war Soviet Russia, with the exception of a minority that either experienced momentary privileges and opportunities, or a distinct deterioration in their social standings.