



## Russian World War II Dictionary: A Russian-English Glossary of Special Terms, Expressions and Soldiers' Slang

By Isaak Kobylanskiy, Stuart Britton



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The Great Patriotic War (GPW) of the Soviet people against Nazi Germany, known in the West as the Eastern Front of WWII, continues to attract a number of military historians from different countries around the world. The frontline veterans' reminiscences occupy a prominent place among most important documents of that time. In contrast to official documents, these recollections reproduce the so-called truth of the foxholes, the genuine spirit of the war. Along with their honesty, the WWII veterans' reminiscences are full of idiomatic expressions, specialized terms and abbreviations peculiar to that war. Regardless of their language, the memoirs reproduce the wartime vocabulary of the authors' nationalities, and reading them can be a difficult task for uninformed readers. Consequently, special dictionaries appeared in print and later on Internet web sites. Unlike most of the Allied countries, no war jargon/slang dictionary has been published in Russia. This glossary is intended to begin to fill that gap. Several sources of the Red Army serviceman's slang were peculiar to the Soviet experience. The upheaval of the 1917 October Revolution and following Civil War, and the fundamental changes wrought by the political and social reforms and campaigns in the 1920s-1930s affected the Russian vocabulary substantially. The fact that the overwhelming majority of Red Army soldiers and officers came from rural households, and brought their local idioms and expressions into the trenches, also enriched the war vocabulary. Another set of figurative expressions arose because of Stalin's terrible purges of the 1930s, when people created euphemisms to avoid saying words like search, arrest and execution. Such expressions came into general circulation and contributed to Russian wartime slang. Some words also appeared under the harsh conditions of the USSR far rear, where civilians struggled under conditions of hard labor and malnutrition. Lend-lease items entered the soldiers' parlance, often in the form of nicknames. Finally, any army has its traditions and slogans, many of which were revived in the Red Army during WW II. All of the aforementioned sources and others contributed to the Russian wartime vocabulary. The authors began this glossary as a translators' aid, but now they believe it will also be of interest to military historians and linguists who work with original Russian military sources, especially of the Second World War period.

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- Rank: #2159529 in eBooks
- Published on: 2013-07-19
- Released on: 2013-07-19
- Format: Kindle eBook

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### Editorial Review

#### About the Author

Isaak Kobylyanskiy, an Ukrainian Jew, was an 18 year old freshman attending the Kiev Industrial Institute when the Axis suddenly invaded his country on June 22, 1941. He volunteered for the Soviet Red Army the next morning and left his home of Kiev on July 9, 1941. In August 1942, Kobylyanskiy was assigned to the 300th Rifle Infantry Division's 1049th Rifle Regiment (later renamed the 87th Guards Rifle Division). He served as a guncrew commander in a 76mm field-gun battery, later the battery's fire platoon commander, and finally served as a battery commander from January 1945 until the end of the war. He saw combat at Stalingrad, the Don steppes, the Donbass, the North Tavria, at Perekop, at Sevastopol, in Lithuania, and East Prussia (Konigsberg and Pillau). Kobylyanskiy returned home on New Year's Eve 1946 with four military orders and three medals. In 1994, he immigrated to the United States at the age of 71. Stuart Britton is a freelance translator and editor residing in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He has been responsible for making a growing number of Russian titles available to readers of the English language, consisting primarily of memoirs by Red Army veterans and recent historical research concerning the Eastern Front of the Second World War and Soviet air operations in the Korean War. Notable recent titles include Valeriy Zamulin's award-winning 'Demolishing the Myth: The Tank Battle at Prokhorovka, Kursk, July 1943: An Operational Narrative' (Helion, 2011), Boris Gorbachevsky's 'Through the Maelstrom: A Red Army Soldier's War on the Eastern Front 1942-45' (University Press of Kansas, 2008) and Yuri Sutiagin's and Igor Seidov's 'MiG Menace Over Korea: The Story of Soviet Fighter Ace Nikolai Sutiagin' (Pen & Sword Aviation, 2009). Future books will include Svetlana Gerasimova's analysis of the prolonged and savage fighting against Army Group Center in 1942-43 to liberate the city of Rzhev, and more of Igor Seidov's studies of the Soviet side of the air war in Korea, 1951-1953.

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