

Spirit of the Elbe Day Honored in Washington and Moscow

by Bill Jones

April 29—U.S. and Soviet forces met during World War II, on April 25, 1945, at the Elbe River, which flows through central Germany. This meeting of the allied offensive coming from the West and the Soviet forces coming from the East was a clear indication that the war was coming to an end. Berlin was surrounded by the Soviet forces and would fall within a few days; the Germans would surrender on May 9. There was also a clear recognition by the U.S. and its Western allies that the war against Hitler was a success only because the Soviet Union, which had been invaded in 1941, had held out against the Nazi onslaught. This was done at the cost of more than 30 million casualties, far more than the combined total casualties of the other Western nations. Only China, suffering 20 million casualties in its lengthy war with Japan, had a loss in league with the Soviets.

The policy of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was to create a working relationship with the often mercurial Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, which he succeeded in doing in spite of the attempts by his other “partner,” UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill, to sabotage that relationship. Roosevelt’s intention was to use that wartime partnership to cement a stable postwar collaboration with the



U.S. NARA/ Pic. William E. Poulson

In an arranged photo commemorating the meeting of the Soviet and American armies, 2nd Lt. William Robertson (U.S. Army) and Lt. Alexander Silvasenko (Red Army) embrace one another in Torgau on the Elbe.

where Eisenhower was visiting at that time, changed abruptly. It was clear to the Soviets that using the bomb was a message from the Truman Administration to the Soviet Union as well.

Soviets.

With the death of Roosevelt on April 12, 1945, the influence of that doyen of imperialism, Winston Churchill, effectively captured the next U.S. president, the former haberdasher, Harry Truman, who assumed office April 12. General Dwight Eisenhower, however, was in full agreement with the Roosevelt policy, and established a solid and very warm relationship with his counterpart on the Soviet side, General Georgi Zhukov. As Eisenhower noted, however, at the point when the U.S. used the atomic bomb against Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, the mood in Moscow,



cc/Reinhard Dietrich

Plaque commemorating the 1945 Elbe River meeting in Arlington National Cemetery.

Since that fateful year, Elbe Day has come to be commemorated for the profound amity between the American and Soviet forces, with the “Spirit of the Elbe” connoting diplomacy for mutual benefit. In 1995, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, the World War II Commemoration Committee placed a plaque in Arlington National Cemetery, entitled the Spirit of the Elbe, commemorating that event. When the U.S. finished the

construction of the World War II Memorial on the National Mall, a plaque commemorating the event was placed there as well. Every year, the Russian Embassy in Washington, with the participation of representatives of the Third U.S. Infantry Regiment, the U.S. Army unit responsible for Arlington, would hold a formal ceremony honoring that occasion. But in 2022, after the beginning of the Russian special military operation in Ukraine, the State Department pressured Army authorities to cancel the ceremony.

This year three organizers from the LaRouche movement, Army veterans Bill Salisbury, a Vietnam combat soldier awarded the Purple Heart; Bob Baker, who served during Vietnam; and Bill Jones, went to Arlington Cemetery on Elbe Day to lay flowers. They were also in contact with a group in Moscow who organized a similar commemoration at the Elbe memorial there. As the three Americans approached the Memorial plaque in Arlington, they were on a video call with those watching from the Moscow event. When the Americans arrived at the memorial, there was a Russian student, the only other person present, who had taken upon himself to lay flowers at the memorial. Happy to see the three Americans, the young man, studying in Washington, D.C., stayed for the short ceremony.

The three also made short comments to the gathering in Moscow. Bill Salisbury underlined the fact that the United States would never have been able to remain a united republic and defeat slavery during the Civil War without the Russia of Czar Alexander II, who sent a Russian fleet to New York and one to San Francisco, which kept the British from entering the war on the side of the Confederacy. Unbeknownst to the three, the group in Moscow was gathered



Courtesy of Edward Lozansky

Ceremony in Moscow for the commemoration of the 1945 Elbe meeting between U.S. and Russian forces. Behind the honor guard are statues of Abraham Lincoln (left) and Czar Alexander II.



EIRNS/Stuart Lewis

Three U.S. Veterans at the Elbe Memorial Plaque in Arlington National Cemetery. Placing the flowers at the plaque is Vietnam War Purple Heart recipient William Salisbury. Behind him are William Jones (left) and Robert Baker.

at their Elbe memorial, where there were two marble statues, one of Alexander II and the other of President Abraham Lincoln.

The reaction of the Russians gathered in Moscow to the Arlington Cemetery ceremony was, according to firsthand reports, very emotional. The Russian gathering also released peace doves as a symbol of their intent to create a peaceful and harmonious relationship with the United States of America.

As we approach that other important anniversary on May 9, commemorating the end of World War II, it is important that Americans, despite the “cancel Russia” mood being fomented in the U.S., know the realities of how the war against fascism was actually won. Celebrations which ignore the crucial Russian contribution would be worse than a farce and a gross distortion of history.