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Letters Speak of Raw Grief for Lives Lost in Kursk Submarine Tragedy

By The Moscow Times

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Relatives of the crew members of the Kursk submarine mourn the loss of their loves ones during a 2002 commemoration ceremony on the Barents Sea.

As Russia prepares to commemorate the 14th anniversary of the sinking of the Kursk nuclear submarine, we take a look back at some of the letters received from Moscow Times readers in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy — letters of grief and criticism but also overwhelming compassion and calls for peace.

Editor,

As a former member of the U.S. military I spent most of my time training for a conflict against the Soviet Union. Also growing up, I never saw the Russian people just the "evil empire" that I feared. However with the ending of the Cold war, and the opening up of both our countries I

see now how human we all are. I have been watching the tragedy from the start, hoping for a quick rescue, then praying for the crew and their families. I salute the crew and officers of the Kursk who gave their lives for their country. To the family and friends of the Kursk, my thoughts and prayers are with you.

God bless,

D Thorpe

United States

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Editor,

As a former submarine wife my heart goes out to the wives, mothers, girlfriends, and all family members of the crew of the Kursk. I understand the pride in watching your men serve their country. I watched and prayed every day, believing they could be saved. The tragedy is too great for words. If there is any comfort to be had, it's knowing how close-knit a submarine community can be and how much you each will support each other. Please know that others care too. The accident just points out how small this world is and that we are truly a family with no borders. My prayers remain with you.

Mary Simonsen

Kremlin

Vladimir Putin speaks with Irina Lyachin, the widow of the commander of the submarine 'Kursk' Gennady Lyachin, and his daughter.

Editor,

It is a terrible thing that has occurred with the sinking of the Kursk and the resultant loss of her crew. The 118 Russian sailors that comprised the crew of the submarine Kursk willingly gave their lives for their country. And they would go out and do it again.

There will be recriminations and blame enough to go around, and one can only hope some of it will point in this direction. How can conducting these types of military exercises against the West in any way be beneficial to the Russian people? The West had done much for Russia and they're prepared to do a lot more. So how can this incident do anything but raise suspicions; and to give pause to even those most determined to reach out and give a hand?

The U.S. is moving in the direction of building a missile defense system and this tragic incident will do much to silent those who opposed it. It would have been well to have debated the issue on the grounds it wasn't needed, but for now any serious debate will most likely focus on the financial considerations, virtually ensuring that a robust and multi-faceted system will be built.

The world can't afford another nuclear arms race and that is all there is to it, period. Let us all give some pause and reflect on what might be well be the end result if we continue down the present path we're on. The men and women we have called upon to serve in our military (on both sides) deserve at least that much consideration, never mind that of our children.

John Hailey

United States

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Dear Sir or Madam,

I am sorely grieved at the senseless loss of lives aboard the stricken vessel the Kursk. My condolences to the many families and friends who suffer with the pain of separation from their loved ones. Upon reflection, this tragedy marks a momentous change in the 'collective consciousness' of Russia. Your government will (and must) respect the press, the media, and most importantly respect the people when faced with national crises in the future. Too many inconsistencies have come to light in how this horrid tragedy was handled. The government must show more respect and the people of Russia, hopefully disgusted with this travesty, must demand it.

Helene M. Jones

Dover, New Hampshire, United States.

North Fleet Press Service

A Russian Orthodox cross is lowered into the Barents Sea at a 2002 commemoration ceremony to mark the spot where a torpedo blast ravaged the submarine's hull.

I wanted to express my condolences to the Russian people on the loss of the Kursk and her crew. As a former U.S. Navy submarine, I view the submarine service as an elite group of the military and even though we have worn different uniforms, I mourn the loss of 118 of my undersea comrades. It would not surprise me if other submariners, no matter what Navy they serve, also mourn the lost of the Kursk and her crew.

Terry Wirick

Girard, Pennsylvania, United States.

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Editor,

For many days I have been following the tragedy that has unfolded in your country. The one thing that struck me is how alike our two peoples are. I was touched in an intimate way, the way I was touched when President Kennedy was assassinated, the way in which we all waited for news of Princess Diana's condition following her accident, and the way in which our hearts melt and we all become one world. I was sick when I heard of the men who might be terrified in the vessel as escape became more and more impossible.

We wanted to be a part of helping you rescue the fathers and sons on the Kursk. Politics became unimportant and I wished that you could have the security of knowing that everything possible was being done to help those who may have had survival chances. Whatever transpires in the day and weeks to come, please know that many American are spiritually and compassionately sending you their hope and concern that such a tragedy will forever erase boundaries that separate our countries and that we will work together to see that human life is of immeasurable value.

Angela Vincent

North Fleet Press Service

Editor,

The nation's response to the Kursk tragedy exposes the depths of change taking place in Russia, not in policy but in paradigm. This is not simply the shedding of communism or the mentality of the Cold War. For the first time, perhaps since the fall of the Kiev Rus, the narod (the heart of the Russian people) have spoken and successfully held the state accountable.

For centuries, the welfare of the narod have been the object of intellectual discussion while the people, living in the squalor of serfdom or repression of communism, fed the nation and served in her military ranks. Peter the Great sought to modernize them, Catherine the Great sought to civilize them, Nicholas I sought to martialize them, the populist revolutionaries sought to liberate them, and the communists sought to lead them. Now, for the first time, the president and his officers must listen to them.

After centuries of governments who "know better what is best for the people than the people do themselves" the paradigm shift for those in power is likely to be slow and painful. Remember that it was in an environment of popular accountability that such leaders as Vladimir Monomankh and Alexander Nevsky arose. If such leadership is in Russia's future then there is much to hope for.

Our prayers go with all of you.

Craig Mclaren

Fullerton, California, United States.

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Editor,

I left the U.S. submarine force 20 years ago as a Chief Petty Officer. The events of the last two weeks have brought the vivid reality of serving in the depths of ocean. Although these men were from across the Atlantic, I still mourn the loss of 118 fellow submariners. I have asked the leaders of my country to acknowledge this loss by flying the U.S. flag at half mast. It is my hope that your country will ensure that all 118 men receive their "dolphins" (submarine designation). Regardless of their length of submarine, they will forever be on patrol serving in the best traditions of the Silent Service.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my condolences,

John B. Algee (Former EMC/SS)

Monroe, North Carolina, United States.

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Editor,

When will Russians and Americans, as well as the rest of the world, learn to live in peace? Were it not for hostile intentions and the need for the machines of war, the young men aboard the Kursk would be alive today.

While they died honorably in the service of their country, it did not have to happen.

If the politicians are sincere in their sorrow for these lost men, they will find a way to forge a lasting peace and will find a way to bring true peace to the world. A peace that doesn't need to be enforced with the weapons of war.

They have the power. They just don't have the desire. Or more importantly, the trust.

Robert Cairns

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, United States.

North Fleet Press Service

The Chairman of the All-Ukrainian Association of Submarine Veterans, Vladimir Papizhuk (R), holds up a Russian Orthodox icon at a commemoration ceremony in 2002.

Editor,

From 1991-1995 we had the pleasure to be stationed as diplomats in Moscow and truly lived through history in the making. The story (tragedy) of the Kursk soldiers did not come as a surprise. It is not my intention to criticize the handling of this crisis but rather to sympathize with the mothers, sisters, friends, and wives of those who perished.
The Russian mother I have always held in highest esteem. She has fought to educate, feed and clothe her sons under sometimes impossible circumstances and had to give up the little luxuries for herself in order to give that child his chance in life. I can understand her anger at the "system" as her son lays frozen at the bottom of the Barents Sea. Anyone who has ever visited Volgograd and seen the huge statue of Mother Russia thrusting her fist in the air should know not to anger the mothers of Russian boys serving their country. These women deserve our respect and our prayers. Their sons deserve our tears.

L. Rast

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Admiral Popov,

You have been quoted here in America as saying that you are certain that the entire crew of the Kursk "died within three minutes of the collision."

Admiral, first of all there is more evidence of an explosion than a collision. Second, if the entire crew died within three minutes, who was banging on the hull on Tuesday? We in America watch in awe as you of the Soviet old guard continue to act as though the world cannot see you.

The information age is upon you, admiral, and you cannot stop it. You cannot put the genie back into the bottle. The world is watching you and comparing your words with the facts. You will forever be exposed, and you will answer now to the people of the world. Chernobyl will never be able to happen again. There are no more cover-ups. There is nothing you can do about it except to tell the truth.

S. Epperson

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To the Russian people:

We have come a long way from the days of the Cold War, where neither East nor West was willing to trust one another, to now, where I can send my thoughts directly to you.

I am a former U.S. Marine, and I served at the time when my comrades and I were training to counter the forces of the former USSR. I am elated that we never saw that event, and it is with a bitter-sweetness that I offer you the sympathies of one American fighting man to the families and friends of the submariners aboard the Kursk. Regardless of the country, the loss of a nation's warriors is a tragedy indeed. As an honored enemy, the Soviet Naval Forces enjoyed my highest respect, and now, as a new friend, please allow me to mourn with you the loss of those hardy souls who put their lives in harm's way for their people and their country. They are heroes indeed.

I hope that the events that follow this will open new opportunities for mutual learning between our peoples, to further bring together our two nations, as well as all nations, so that my counterpart in some Russian Naval Infantry Brigade and I may someday meet, not in the conflict of war, but in the comradely argument of who shall buy the next round.

God Bless you, and bring you comfort,

William R. Benson

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Editor,

The seemingly genuine, heartfelt and moving apology by the Navy was likewise more than an empty gesture: accountability goes a long way in ensuring a disaster of this magnitude will be less likely to reoccur. Joint assumption of responsibility for the tragic loss of the Kursk's crew went further toward restoring Russia's credibility as a world power than a modern fleet would do, at least from my viewpoint.

I still intend to donate to the funds that support the families of the Kursk, as well as the families who lost sons, brothers, husbands and fathers in the Chechen conflict, but it is heartening to see the country treating these victim families with the respect and compassion that is no more than their due. Again, I apologize for my rudeness.

Mark Chapman

Victoria, British Columbia

Canada

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