History 410 (CRN 33517): **World War Two**

Instructor: Alexander Kashirin  
Time: 9:00-9:50 a.m., MWF  
Place: 229 MCK  
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Office Hours: 10:00-11:00 a.m., MW, or by appointment  
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**Course Description:**

The course’s aim is to give students a comprehensive understanding of an impact of total war on the various strata of human society—men, women, and children of countless nationalities and races who, in different capacities, had become both the agents of war and its victims. Although the First World War had already given the mankind a taste of brutalities and privations a modern war could unleash and imbued some idealists with fervor to do what was in their power to prevent future wars, the actual postwar settlement—the Versailles Treaty—did more to precipitate a new conflict than to ensure peace and stability. Whether or not “The Thirty Year War” model, conflating the two wars into a single continuous conflict, is sustainable, Europe’s misguided quest for liberation and emancipation had certainly taken turn for the worse during the 1930’s, giving rise to ideologies which ensured that any future military conflict would be merciless and almost utterly devoid of the old-fashioned gallantries which were still possible during WW I. When the horrific abattoir of the Second World War was finally over in the spring of 1945, with Hitler dead and the Soviet red flag flapping on the roof of Reichstag, the world had hardly become a safer place as the mushroom clouds above Hiroshima and Nagasaki introduced the nuclear arms race and as the short-lived “shotgun marriage” between the Soviet dictator Stalin and Western allies disintegrated into Cold War.

The course is structured to give as much attention as possible to the three main theaters of war—the Eastern Front, the Western Front, and the Pacific. Although the roughly similar weaponry employed by the belligerents made the reality of combat equally deadly for the soldiers fighting on either one of these fronts, and although the conditions of warfare in the sweltering jungles of the Pacific were just as taxing on a soldier as the subzero temperatures of Russia’s wintry plains, both the scale and the ferocity of fighting in these theaters differed. Most historians would agree with the following statement by Richard Overy: “The Soviet Union bore the brunt of the German onslaught and broke the back of German power. For years the western version of the war played down this uncomfortable fact, while exaggerating the success of democratic war-making.” The Eastern Front also witnessed some of the deadliest of Nazi practices—the Holocaust and deliberate and systematic extermination of the inferior Slavic untermenschen, Red Army POWs and civilians alike. The clash of opposing Nazi and Soviet ideologies ensured that the Eastern Front would become the site of the Second World War’s largest battles and its most horrific atrocities. It is for this reason that considerably more attention will be given in this course to the developments on the Eastern Front.

The course readings are selected from a broad base of contemporary studies focusing on the various aspects of wartime experiences, ranging from strategic planning and operational realities of war to soldiers’ eye-witness accounts of combat and survival in the POW camps; from experiences
of home front workers to the plight of civilians in the occupation zones and besieged cities; and from the accounts of atrocities committed by the Nazis to the stories of pillage and rape perpetrated by the red Army soldiers. The course culminates in the analysis of factors accounting for the Allied victory and the Axis powers’ defeat. Since contemporary historiography of World War II poses more questions as it seeks to provide answers, and since there are still ongoing controversies surrounding diverse interpretations of the war’s origins, prosecution and legacy, there will be plenty of opportunity for students’ individual research and in-class discussions.

**Course Requirements:**

The students are expected to regularly attend lectures, actively participate in the discussion of weekly readings (and thus earn a few extra points), write a 3-page book review (10%), a 10-12 page research paper (40%) on a pre-approved topic (see paper topic assignment on Blackboard), and take a midterm (20%) and a non-cumulative final (30%).

- **Book Review**—10%
- **Midterm**—20%
- **Paper**—40%
- **Final**—30%

**Required Readings** (available in bookstore)

- Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won*
- Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*
- Anthony Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*
- Alex Kershaw, *The Longest Winter: The Battle of the Bulge and the Epic Story of World War II’s Most Decorated Platoon*

Additional required readings for each week are posted on Blackboard.

**Week One**

*Origins of the Second World War*

April 1:


April 3:

April 5:


**Familiarize yourselves with the paper topic proposal assignment on Blackboard.**

**Week Two**

*The War’s Outbreak, 1939-1941: A New Division of Europe and the Initial Stages of Barbarossa*

April 8:

Manfred Zeidler, “The Strange Allies—Red Army and Reichswehr in the Inter-war period” in *Russian-German Special relations in the Twentieth Century: a Closed Chapter?*, edit Karl Schlogel. (on Blackboard)


April 10:

“Prelude” and “Four Invasions” from Andrew Roberts, *The Storm of War: A New History of the Second World War*, pp. 1-47. (on Blackboard)

“Prologue” from Andrew Shennan, *The Fall of France, 1940*, pp. 1-23. (on Blackboard)


April 12:


“The Goths Ride East: Barbarossa, 1941” from Richard Overy, *Russia’s War*, pp. 73-98. (on Blackboard)

**Over the week end, start reading Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, for your Book Review Assignment due at**
the end of Week Four. Instructions for the Book Review Assignment are posted on Blackboard.

**Week Three**

**The Eastern Front: The Holocaust and the Plight of Civilians and POWs**

April 15:


April 17:


“Between Life and Death: Leningrad and Moscow” from Richard Overy, *Russia’s War*, pp. 99-124. (on Blackboard)

April 19:


**Finish reading Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, and start writing your Book Review.**

**Week Four**

**The Eastern Front: The Red Army Rebounds**

April 22:

April 24:

“The Hero Fortress” (pp. 21-42), “Cabbage Soup in Hell” (pp. 169-173), “The Thirteenth Commandment” (pp. 193-208), and “The Snipers” (pp. 101-120), from Albert Axtell, *Russia’s Heroes, 1941-1945*. (on Blackboard)

April 26:

Gennadi Bordiugov, “The Popular Mood in the Unoccupied Soviet Union: Continuity and Change during the War” in *The People’s War: Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union*, pp. 54-70. (on Blackboard)


**Book Review of Christopher Browning’s Ordinary Men is due in class.**

**Week Five**

**The Western Front: From North Africa to D-Day**

April 29:

“The Battle of the Atlantic, 1939-1943” (pp. 234-261), “Year of Decision for Germany, 1942” (pp. 262-273), and “The Killing Time, 1943-1944” (pp. 374-387) from Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, *A War To Be Won*. (on Blackboard)

May 1:


May 3:

**Midterm Examination**

**Week Six**

**The Western Front: From the Bulge to Berlin through the Eyes of American Soldiers**

May 6:

Alex Kershaw, *The Longest Winter: The Battle of the Bulge and the Epic Story of World War II’s Most Decorated Platoon*, pp. 3-123.

May 8:

Mat 10:


**Paper Topic Proposals are due in class.**

**Week Seven**

**Red Storm on the Reich**

May 13:


May 15:


May 17:


**Week Eight**

**Red Storm on the Reich Continued**

May 20:


May 22:


May 24:

Week Nine

The War in the Pacific: Fighting a Different Kind of Enemy

May 27: No class in observance of the Memorial Day, but please read the assigned texts below


May 29:


May 31:


Week Ten

Analyzing the War and Its Aftermath

June 3:

“The Demodernization of the Front” and “The Destruction of the Primary Group” from Omer Bartov, Hitler’s Army, pp. 12-58 (on Blackboard).

June 5:

Richard Overy, Why the Allies Won, Chapters 1, 6, 7, pp. 1-24; 180-244.
June 7:

Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, Chapters 8, 9, 10, pp. 245-330.

Papers are due in class.

**Final Examination scheduled for Wednesday, June 12, at 10:15 a.m.**