Preface

This book is not unlike Topsy, since in many respects 'it just grow'd'. It had its distant origins in a conference held in Leeds in June 1991, organised by the Institute for International Studies in the University of Leeds in conjunction with the British National Committee for the Second World War. The theme was Operation *Barbarossa*, the Soviet Union, Germany and World War; the occasion the presentation of some nineteen papers on the military, diplomatic, intelligence and even the 'psycho-political' aspects of the German invasion of the Soviet Union. The conference also examined the Soviet response – or the lack of it – and the crisis which speedily beset alliances and strategies. In what became the greatest land campaign in the history of the world, with all its strategic complexities and military variations, it was imperative to take account of the calamity which this gigantic encounter produced in human terms, the scale of the losses, the unimaginable excesses generated by the barbarisation of the warfare in the east, the deviousness and dilemmas of collaboration, not to mention the quest for slave labour.

To bring this assembly of scholars, specialists, diplomats and senior soldiers from the United Kingdom, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Soviet Union, Belgium, Israel and Yugoslavia together would have been impossible without help on a substantial scale. Such assistance was generously forthcoming from individuals – including Mr J. Paul Getty jun., Prince Vasilchikov and Mr H. H. Nathaniel – and from organisations – the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the British Council, Anglo-Soviet Shipping, Barclays Bank, British Petroleum, the Koeppler Trust, the British Academy, the Economic and Social Research Council and the University of Leeds itself.

While this present work grew largely out of the 1991 conference, it should not be construed as a 'conference report'. It is, as a sub-title might suggest, a work combining retrospect with recollection, not least on the part of those whose lives were scorched by the grim realities of the war itself. Not that this excludes an element of revision; indeed that is the express purpose of most of these chapters but without any excess of ideological rigour or commitment.

A number of chapters printed here were presented in a rather different form at the conference itself, and have been revised as new source material became available or as recollection took precedence. Others have been specially written as this inquiry widened, and dialogue, discussion and debate continued for many months. There is also the thread of the difference in generations, ranging from the impassioned view of a battle-hardened veteran of the fearsome encounters of Moscow, Stalingrad and Kursk – more than ever painfully aware of what calamity Stalin and Stalinism brought down on the heads of the Soviet people – to the researches of younger Russians, able to peer into hitherto inaccessible archives, uncovering the minutiae of wartime collaboration – some commitments to the enemy side plainly sordid, self-seeking; others simply an inescapable response to the exigencies of day-to-day life under enemy occupation. What in wartime and in the post-war period was damned as heinous treason is now being hailed in some of its manifestations by certain quarters as laudable rebellion, transfigured from dereliction of duty or abandonment of obligation into a political crusade abhorring the norms and the abnormalities of the Stalinist state. Yet all is submerged in the endless bestial killings and the vast premeditated degradation from which there is no escape even at a distance of half a century, to account for which continues to torment scholars and ignite political passions – whether out of shame, condemnation or exculpation.

The compilation of losses continues, a doleful task which has lost none of its power to shock and disturb with its findings. Even now the whole enterprise is not free of political manipulation, as if some grotesque bargain might be struck with the mountains of the dead over the forms and terms of their annihilation, all to heap yet further blame on the leaders and their systems or else to evade responsibility.

Strategies all too soon became tattered, torn apart and trampled down by battlefield realities, by time, distance and inconsistencies. Behind the wartime screen of diplomatic formulae and propagandistic flourishes, 'Big Three' alliance politics were strained affairs barely concealing fundamental antipathies and animosities, at best momentarily smothering them in the interests of bargaining for or buying the immediate prospect of survival and possibly nurturing hopes for a better post-war world. As the German army's *Blitzkrieg* first slithered in autumnal mud and was then gripped in a Muscovite winter, Japan played its national cards cannily enough, widening the war at a time and place of its own choosing, playing havoc with pretensions to global strategic co-ordination on the part of the Axis powers, adding only to the holocaust.

Of revision there is much which is largely subliminal. This is no attempt to overturn history outright. Adolf Hitler was bent on the destruction of

Russia. Stalin, in attempting to outmanoeuvre Hitler, was catastrophically outplayed, for which the people of the Soviet Union paid an appalling price in blood and treasure. A war of extermination was begun, to be continued almost mindlessly. Human misery grew to apocalyptic proportions, the bitter memories and harsh consequences of which have to this day been neither eased nor fully erased.

The young and the old have combined here to present research, recollection and reflection on this tempest in world affairs.

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