

Manchester Evening News dubs Ukrainian World War II Nazi collaborator a “hero”

Robert Stevens
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The *Manchester Evening News* (MEN) published an interview with 98-year-old Ukrainian nationalist Iwan Kluka in which he boasted that he “fought against Stalin’s Red Army as it took the country in the Second World War.”

That Kluka was a Nazi collaborator is clear from his comments to the newspaper. It reports, “[H]e tells the MEN that 30,000 of his fellow volunteer soldiers were executed by the Soviets after the fall of Berlin.”

The newspaper states: “Iwan was one of the lucky ones, being given refuge by the British Army in Glossop [England] shortly after the end of the war.” How shortly is not explained.

The interview continues: “And now, he [Kluka] says, Russia’s ‘inhumane’ invasion might have claimed the life of his nephew.”

“It’s terrible,” he says. ‘I live here, but in my heart I am Ukrainian—that’s my country. What Putin is doing is unbelievable. It’s inhumane.

‘What I experienced [in the 1940s]... to see those atrocities... they just don’t have any feeling for the human being.’”

From the moment the article was published on the MEN’s online site on March 5, replete with praise from the journalist responsible, including that Kluka was “the most remarkable man I’ve ever met,” it evoked a justly hostile response. Hundreds attacked the article on social media, noting immediately that as Kluka had “fought Stalin” in World War Two, this meant he had been fighting alongside Hitler’s fascist forces.

Kluka has no right to speak of “atrocities” or inhumanity. The crimes carried out by the Ukrainian nationalists and outright fascists in alliance with Hitler in World War II are well documented. One of the key elements of Operation Barbarossa, Hitler’s June 22, 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union, was the offensive launched from southern Poland into Ukraine. Barbarossa resulted in the loss of 27 million Soviet lives, half of them civilians. On Ukrainian territory alone, according to the German DPA news agency—citing Ukrainian sources—between 8 and 10 million Soviet residents perished between 1939 and 1945.

Ukrainian fascism in World War II

In its two-part series Nationalism and fascism in Ukraine: A historical overview, the *World Socialist Web Site* noted: “Among the most significant organisations that collaborated with the Nazis was the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). Its members were

recruited mainly from veterans of the Civil War who had fought on the side of [Supreme Commander of the Ukrainian Army Symon] Petliura against the Bolsheviks.”

The article explained that Petliura, “one of the many Social Democrats who became nationalists, headed a directorate that took power in Kiev.” It continued: “This body also sought the backing of the Western powers in its war against the Soviet government and was responsible for the murder of more than 30,000 Jews. Both Petliura and Stepan Bandera, who emerged later as a leading figure, are regarded as role models by present-day Ukrainian nationalists.”

The WSWS article noted: “In 1940, the OUN split into the Bandera (B) and [Andriy Atanasovich] Melnyk (M) factions, which bitterly fought each other. Bandera’s more extreme group was able to attract more followers than Melnyk’s. It began by establishing Ukrainian militia (the Roland and Nightingale Legions) on German-occupied territory in Poland, which, in league with the Wehrmacht (German army), invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941.

“After the withdrawal of the Red Army from areas conquered by the Germans, the legions and special militias acted as auxiliary troops in countless massacres of Jews. Following the entry of the OUN-B into Lviv on June 29, 1941, the Bandera militias (Nightingale Legion) unleashed murderous pogroms against the Jews lasting several days. Ukrainian militia continued massacring Jews in Ternopil, Stanislau (today Ivano-Frankivsk) and other places. Documentary evidence relating to the first few days of the Wehrmacht’s advance reveals that about 140 pogroms were perpetrated in western Ukraine, in which 13,000 to 35,000 Jews were murdered.

“On June 30, 1941, Bandera and his deputy head of the OUN-B, Yaroslav Stetsko, proclaimed the independence of Ukraine in Lviv. Stepan Lenkavski, the OUN-B government’s director of propaganda, openly advocated the physical extermination of Ukrainian Jewry.

“The Nazis used their Ukrainian collaborators to commit murders and acts of brutality that were too disturbing even for the SS units. For example, SS task force 4a in Ukraine confined itself to ‘the shooting of adults while commanding its Ukrainian helpers to shoot [the] children.’”

The article continues: “When Hitler’s armies went into retreat after their defeat at Stalingrad, members of the OUN legions returned to Ukraine and formed the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) in 1943.

“The UPA was supplied with German weapons and attempted to implement an extensive ethnic cleansing program in order to create the conditions for an ethnically pure Ukrainian state. In 1943 and 1944, the UPA organised massacres that claimed the lives of 90,000 Poles and thousands of Jews. It also brutally terrorised, tortured and executed Ukrainian peasants and workers who wanted to join the

Soviet Union. The UPA went on to kill some 20,000 Ukrainians before the insurrection was completely crushed in 1953.”

Given the hostility the article elicited from MEN readers, who live in a city that was itself heavily bombarded in 1940 by Hitler’s Luftwaffe—with almost 700 killed in the raids and more than 2,000 injured—the MEN was forced to take down the article from its website. The journalist involved, Ethan Davies, then removed his tweet publicising the article.

“An absolute failure of critical thinking and a serious dereliction of editorial staff duty”

The main discussion thread on Kluka’s endorsement by the MEN began on March 7 on Twitter. Showing images of the deleted article and Davies’s deleted post, it was retweeted 4,000 times, eliciting 497 quote tweets and over 21,000 likes.

Among the comments in opposition were:

- “An absolute failure of critical thinking and a serious dereliction of editorial staff duty. What in the absolute f*** was Ethan Davies MEN playing at here?”

- “So the people who literally machine gunned Jews and buried them alive in mass graves are getting platformed by mainstream media now?”

- “This guy would be right at home with the [fascist Ukrainian] Azov Battalion”

- “If nice cuddly Iwan ‘fought Stalin’ & was given refuge in Britain shortly after WW2, it’s possible he was one of the 8,000 strong-division of Ukrainian Nazi Waffen SS war criminals settled in the UK by the Atlee [Labour] gov in 1947. Some were later recruited into British intelligence.”

- “Iwan Kluka fought Stalin’s Red Army as it took [Ukraine] in the Second World War ... you mean he fought with the Nazi’s?”

- “I dread to think what comes next after this ‘Nazi collaborators were good actually’ stage of the propaganda war”

- Andy Bell, a former investigative journalist for ITV’s *World In Action* and BBC’s *Panorama*, and ex-editor of the Searchlight anti-fascist magazine, tweeted on another thread in reply to Davies and the MEN, “You mean he was a nazi collaborator? You utter moron.”

Comments on the MEN’s Facebook page included:

- “Wait, one sec. He was part of a volunteer fascist brigade fighting with the nazis? ... Let’s hope his grandson isn’t part of the Azov brigade”

- “Wait a sec. If he was fighting against Stalin in WW2, who was he fighting for?” A reply noting that the MEN had taken down the story read, “judging by the current state of the web page.. I would guess the Nazis”

- Another comment, “Erm.... doesn’t that make him a Nazi?” was responded to, “pretty much yes, isn’t it clever how the story was subverted to ‘fighting stalin’ instead of ‘fighting for the nazis?’”

Defending Kluka was at least one fascist group, *Hope and Destiny*. It wrote describing Kluka as a “hero” and opposing the MEN taking down its article: “Meanwhile Mr Kluka’s fellow Ukrainians—including the Azov Regiment whose official video we posted this morning—bravely continue their remarkably successful defence against Moscow aggression.”

Before being forced to take down the article after two days delay,

the MEN ran it under two separate headlines knowing that it was boosting a Nazi collaborator. The article was first published online, as verified by the Way Back Machine archive, at 20:02 on March 5, 2022, under the headline, “He fought Stalin... now this Ukrainian hero doesn’t know if his nephew has been killed in combat.”

MEN published the piece in the newspaper’s print edition on March 7, 2022 with a headline omitting the description of Kluka as a hero: “I fought Stalin—what Putin is doing is unbelievable...”

The author of the article is a young journalist. But even assuming he came out of university with a BA in Politics, Philosophy and Economics still ignorant of the basic facts of the Second World War—and no one in the MEN editorial staff was competent to inform him—the paper was warned by its readers of what it had done. It republished in print anyway.

The newspaper’s overarching imperative was to contribute to the media crusade against all things Russian, drumming up support for the pro-NATO forces in Ukraine and the broader campaign for regime-change in Moscow. Nothing was going to stand in the way, even if it required whitewashing some of the worst crimes of the 20th Century.

Kluka’s interview is of a piece with the MEN’s record of promoting such elements to this same end. In an article published online on February 26, the paper drew attention to a “Stefan Jajecznyk, 32, from Salford,” who “took part in the 2014 revolution and later followed army volunteers bringing supplies to soldiers fighting Russia-backed separatists in the east of Ukraine.”

The 2014 “revolution” is a reference to the overthrow of the pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych in a US-backed coup, led by far-right and openly fascist military and political forces, including the Azov Battalion, the Right Sector and Svoboda.

The MEN article continued: “Stefan’s grandparents, from the village of Hajvoronka in the Ternopil region of west Ukraine, settled here after World War II. Grandad Mychailo had served in a Ukrainian army unit which fought the Russians *and which was co-opted by the Nazis*—he and it surrendered to the British, and he ended up making a life for himself here, from 1948, working on farms and in factories (emphasis added).”

“Grandad Mychailo” is photographed in the MEN piece sitting alongside the first president of Ukraine (1991-94), Leonid Kravchuk. Kravchuk is one of the three Stalinist officials, along with then-Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Stanislav Shushkevich of Belarus, who announced the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. This was the final act of treachery in the decades of betrayal by the Stalinist bureaucracy of the October 1917 Revolution, which created the world’s first workers’ state, and of the socialist and internationalist programme upon which the revolution was based.

The MEN provided no explanation for why it took down the Kluka article, let alone an apology to its readers for publishing it in the first place. It gave no response to a March 14 letter from the WSWS that asked a series of questions and offered a right of reply.



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