

# FROM CZARS TO COMMISSARS

From the days of the first Russian Revolution to the Soviet Union's demise and the resurgence of a new democratic Russia at the end of the 1990s, the photographs in this exhibit are a record of the Russian news agency, ITAR-TASS, over 100 years of its existence.

Established on 1 September 1904 by a royal decree of Czar Nicholas II, the last of the Romanovs, the first Russian official news organization has had several names. At first it was known as the St. Petersburg Telegraph Agency; later, with the renaming of the city, as the Petrograd Telegraph Agency, then the Russian Telegraph Agency and finally the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union, or TASS. When Russia proclaimed its sovereignty in 1992 it was renamed once more, this time as the Information Telegraph Agency of Russia, or ITAR-TASS.

Through the years, the Agency's photo correspondents witnessed truly monumental events. In 1918, when Mark Grinberg took pictures of the dismantling of the monument to Czar Alexander III in Moscow with the advanced German-made Leitzkamera, it took him hours to develop and print the film. Seventy-seven years later, Alexander Chumichev, while covering the Yeltsin-Clinton Summit in Washington, D.C., was able to send images of their joint press conference back to Moscow immediately with his digital camera.

TASS cameramen witnessed the first military and athletic parades in Red Square and the controversial push to collectivization in the late 20s; they recorded the industrialization of Russia and the illiteracy eradication campaign of the early 30s.

When the Second World War began with the Nazi invasion of 22 June 1941, TASS military correspondents were in the forefront of the battle against advancing German troops, sending back to Moscow sharp black and white images of fierce fighting raging from the Baltic in the North to the Black Sea in the South.

They were among the heroic citizens of the 900-day Siege of Leningrad. TASS pictures of people dying of starvation in the streets, growing cabbage in front of St. Isaac's Cathedral, or listening to a performance of Dmitri Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony while the city was surrounded – shocked the unsuspecting outside world, eliciting sympathy and compassion.

The Yalta and Potsdam Conferences, the uniting of the Soviet and American troops on the Elbe, the signing of Germany's Unconditional Surrender in Karlshorst, the Victory Flag hoisted over Berlin –

these are but a few of the truly historic milestones captured on film by the war correspondents on the Eastern Front. They followed in the footsteps of the victorious Red Army from the banks of the Volga River in Stalingrad to the outskirts of Berlin, to the notorious Oswiecim and Buchenwald concentration camps, and to the Warsaw ghetto.

It was the enormous suffering of the people of the world caused by World War II that strengthened their determination "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind" and ultimately gave birth to the United Nations.

And TASS photo correspondents were there in 1945 when the UN founding conference got under way in San Francisco and resulted in the signing of the UN Charter on 26 June.

In the post-war years, at the height of the Cold War, the battlefield shifted to a race over technological supremacy. Space exploration offered a series of historic moments for Russian correspondents, starting with Sputnik in 1957, the first man-made satellite launch, followed by the first-ever manned space flight by Yuri Gagarin in 1961, and culminating with the successful orbital link-up of a Soviet "Soyuz" capsule and a U.S. "Apollo" spacecraft in 1975.

During the Cold War and in the succeeding decades, TASS photographers not only recorded numerous appearances of Soviet and Russian officials at United Nations General Assembly sessions and Security Council meetings, but also followed the wide-ranging activities of the United Nations aimed at strengthening world peace and security, promoting social progress, human rights and sustainable development.

ITAR-TASS photographers traveled around the globe to cover Russian participation in United Nations peace-keeping operations in Africa, the former Yugoslavia, the Middle East, Southern Asia and the former Soviet republics.

And in 2004, they capture a split-second moment of human excellence, the triumph of the individual athlete at the Olympic Games.

The daring, bravery and skill of these photographers, both in war-time and in peace has resulted in a century's worth of images which have informed and moved people all over the world. They provide an invaluable testimony to pivotal events in human history, to painful moments of the past and to powerful events in the present.