

# [***Fact Check: Putin Claims Zelensky's Father Fought in WWII***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B95-NSX1-DY68-10M3-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Length:** 628 words

**Byline:** Tom Norton

**Highlight:** Vladimir Putin told Tucker Carlson that President Zelensky's father had fought Adolf Hitler's Nazi forces

**Body**

Russian President [*Vladimir Putin*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/vladimir-putin?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)'s interview with Tucker Carlson saw the Moscow leader speak at length about the history of Ukraine, Ukrainian leader [*Volodymyr Zelensky*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/volodymyr-zelensky?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), and Putin's historical justification for his invasion of the country.

The interview—recorded on Tuesday and first released exclusively online via the [*Tucker Carlson*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/tucker-carlson?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) Network—ran for more than two hours, during which Putin also shared his thoughts on topics such as AI and on the next president of the U.S.

During the interview, Putin said he had once directly appealed to Zelensky to address right-wing influences in Ukraine, claiming that Zelensky's father had fought against Nazism during World War II.

The Claim

According to a Kremlin translation of his interview with Tucker Carlson, posted online on February 8, Vladimir Putin was asked: "Do you think Zelensky has the freedom to negotiate the settlement to this conflict?"

Putin replied: "I don't know the details, of course it's difficult for me to judge, but I believe he has, in any case, he used to have. His father fought against the fascists, Nazis during World War II, I once talked to him about this.

"I said: 'Volodya, what are you doing? Why are you supporting neo-Nazis in Ukraine today, while your father fought against fascism? He was a front-line soldier.' I will not tell you what he answered, this is a separate topic, and I think it's incorrect for me to do so."

The Facts

Putin's claim that Zelensky's father fought Nazis in World War II is not true.

Oleksandr Zelensky was born in 1947, two years after the end of World War II.

In 2023, Oleksander Zelensky was awarded a lifetime scholarship by Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers for, according to an online translation, "outstanding merits in the field of higher education to scientific and pedagogical workers." A list of recipients, released by the Ukrainian government stated their name, year of birth, professional title and workplace.

The entry for Zelensky's father stated "ZELENSKY Oleksandr Semenovych — born in 1947, professor at the State University of Economics and Technology."

The same date was reported by French newspaper *Le Monde,* in a biography of Zelensky's childhood, published in February 2023.

"After the war, the future president's grandmother left her refuge in Central Asia with a teaching background and gave birth to Zelensky's father in 1947," *Le Monde* reported.

*Newsweek* has contacted the Kremlin for comment.

Zelensky's grandfather, however, did fight in World War II. In 2019, President Zelensky traveled to his native city Kryvy Rih to visit the grave of his grandfather, Semyon Ivanovich Zelensky, as part of Victory Day, marking the defeat of Adolf Hitler's forces.

*The Washington Post* translated a statement from Zelensky's [*Facebook*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/facebook?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) page that accompanied the visit.

"[Semyon] went through the whole war and remain[s] forever in my memory one of those heroes who defended Ukraine from the Nazis," he wrote.

"Thanks for the fact that the inhuman ideology of Nazism is forever a thing of the past. Thanks to those who fought against Nazism—and won."

Whether Putin meant to refer to Zelensky's grandfather can only be speculated upon. Putin has long maintained claims of [*neo-Nazi influence in Ukrainian* ***politics***](https://www.newsweek.com/putin-partial-mobilization-liberate-ukraine-neo-nazi-regime-1744860?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships). While far-right extremism and anti-semitism influence in Ukraine's history and society[*is well known*](https://www.newsweek.com/why-have-so-many-neo-nazis-rallied-ukraines-cause-opinion-1804642?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), including the genesis of the [*Ukrainian paramilitary Azov Brigade*](https://www.newsweek.com/fact-check-was-russian-delegate-censored-sky-news-over-nazi-claims-1705761?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), [*Putin's characterization*](https://www.newsweek.com/putin-partial-mobilization-liberate-ukraine-neo-nazi-regime-1744860?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) of Nazi influence in wider Ukrainian society, [*history*](https://www.newsweek.com/russian-state-tv-wwii-battle-stalingrad-europe-nazis-1779412?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)and ***politics*** has been widely disputed.

The Ruling

**False.**

Volodymyr Zelensky's father did not fight in World War II. As records and other reporting states, he was born in 1947, two years after the war. However, Zelensky's grandfather did fight against the Nazis.

**FACT CHECK BY Newsweek's Fact Check team**

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2346863/vladimir-putin.jpg)

**Graphic**

Vladimir Putin

Gavriil GRIGOROV/POOL / AFP

In this pool photograph distributed by Russian state agency Sputnik, Russia's President Vladimir Putin gives an interview to US talk show host Tucker Carlson at the Kremlin in Moscow on February 6, 2024. (Photo by ) (Photo by GAVRIIL GRIGOROV/POOL/AFP via Getty Images)

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