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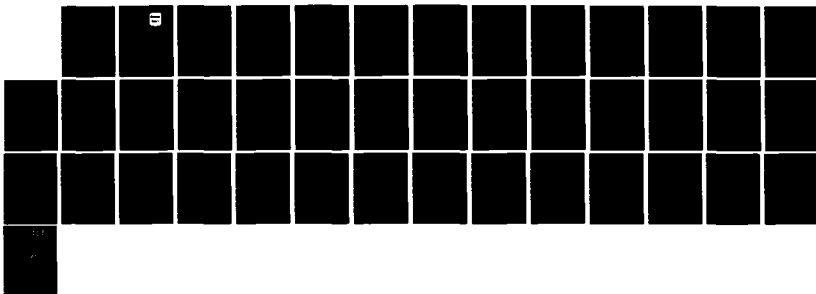
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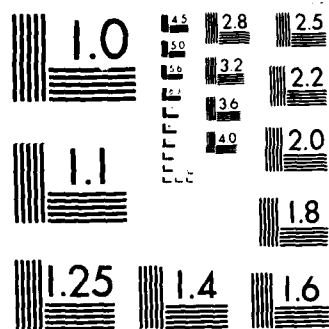
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CONVERSATIONS WITH A SOVIET OFFICER--
TOWARDS A MORE BALANCED VIEW OF HISTORY (U)

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL BRIAN P. MULLADY, AV

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

CONVERSATIONS WITH A SOVIET OFFICER --
TOWARDS A MORE BALANCED VIEW OF HISTORY (U)

INDIVIDUAL ESSAY

by

Lieutenant Colonel Brian P. Mullady, AM

Colonel David M. Glantz, FA
Project Adviser

US Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013
15 April 1985

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Brian P. Mullady, LTC, AM

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While assigned to the U.S. Military Liaison Mission in Potsdam, East Germany, the author had several conversations with Soviet officers concerning the Second World War. Building on this experience, the Soviet version of the war is presented using a variety of Soviet sources and emphasising differences with the Western version. The author then discusses the problems with both versions and concludes that the truth is somewhere between the two accounts. The most serious problem is that our deemphasis of the Great Patriotic War has allowed U.S. Army officers to overlook the major campaigns and main course of the war as well as fail to study the tactics, strategy, and doctrine of our most powerful potential enemy today. Military officers need to know this war far better than they do.

Conversations with a Soviet Officer -- Towards a More
Balanced View of History

"To be a successful soldier you must know history.... What you must know is how man reacts. Weapons change but man who uses them changes not at all. To win battles you do not beat weapons -- you beat the soul of the man of the enemy man." -- Letter to Cadet George S. Patton IV from his father (6 June 1944) (1)

"If you want a new idea, read an old book." -- An anonymous historian (2)

In 1980 I was assigned to the U.S. Military Liaison Mission in Potsdam, East Germany. As a Liaison Officer to the CINC, Group of Soviet Forces in Germany (GSFG), I had an opportunity shared by very few U.S. Army officers to engage in frequent conversations with Soviet officers. These opportunities occurred at both formal and informal social functions as well as in the conduct of business. Most Soviet officers were uncomfortable in the presence of Westerners and were usually reluctant to discuss any topic with political overtones. However, one officer did not shy away from controversial subjects and was particularly interested in the Western "interpretation" of events, current as well as historical. I made it a point to single him out whenever possible to hear the "Russian viewpoint" on events of the day ranging from Afghanistan and Poland to the quality of the GSFG Dependent School System. He always had

an opinion. Often our conversations concerned events which had occurred during the Second World War. This was natural. He knew I was interested in this period for it was a time of cooperation and collaboration between our countries and armies. There were several pictures around the walls of the Mission Residence of American and Red Army soldiers celebrating the meeting of forces along the Elbe river in April, 1945. Furthermore the Military Missions themselves were an outgrowth of the war.

His remarks about the Second World War bothered me because, although some of what he said is completely false, much of it is correct. More important, the Soviet version of the war has somehow become lost in the West. It is simply history we do not teach in our schools. The key Soviet assertions are either missing or completely deemphasized in our study of the war years. I was also bothered that so few U.S. Army officers have even been exposed to the Soviet version of the war. More than anything else the events surrounding the Second World War have provided the basis for our relationship with the Soviets for the past forty years. Their interpretation of these events has much to do with the way they see us today. No matter how strongly we disagree, we cannot avoid the fact that after June 1941 Russia was the principal theater of the Second World War and the startling fact that 94 per cent of German Army casualties suffered between June 1941 and December 1943 occurred on the Eastern Front alone. That

figure is based on documents we captured from the Germans.(3) Given these facts, how do the Russians view the war?

The Russian Officer's Version of the Second World War:(4)

The first thing you hear from a Russian is that the Soviet Union that won the war against Germany. They feel that our war on the Western Front was minor, even diversionary in nature, compared to what was happening and, for the most part, had already happened on the Eastern Front. Not only were the contributions of the U.S. and Great Britain insignificant in comparison with the Soviet effort, the efforts came later than promised and far later than needed. According to the Soviets, the typical American thinks of World War II as "Victory at Sea," the invasion at Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge -- a war fought in cold blood on someone else's soil. To the Soviet, The Great Patriotic War was twenty million lives lost to a hated aggressor in a desperate struggle for the very survival of the homeland. Politically and ideologically, the Great Patriotic War was a war within a war -- a war apart from, and both militarily and morally above, the World War among imperialist powers.

The Eve of the Second World War

For a Russian, the Second World War was an inevitable result of Western imperialism. The economic ills in the West which had caused the First World War had not been eliminated.

Both Germany and Japan wanted to destroy the Soviet Union and divide its territory between them. They also wanted colonies, markets and raw materials which belonged to their rivals -- England, France and the United States. The aggressive tendencies of Germany, Italy and Japan were not discouraged by the Western imperialist powers. In fact, there is evidence to indicate that aggression was encouraged so long as it was directed from Germany into the Eastern countries. When the Germans began to talk of the need to find "Lebensraum" (living space) in the East and, at the same time, free Europe from the "dangers of Bolshevism," there was a sympathetic reaction in many ruling circles in the West. For example, when Germany marched into Austria to "unify" the German lands in 1938, England, France and the U.S. quickly recognized the takeover. The Soviet Union was the loudest voice criticizing Hitler's aggression and asked for an international conference to find ways to guarantee the independence of other threatened countries. The Western Powers, unfortunately, had decided to adopt a policy of bargaining with Hitler. This encouraged Germany to look in the direction of Czechoslovakia. Germany demanded Czechoslovakia give up the Sudetenland (clearly a part of the sovereign state of Czechoslovakia) on the pretext that it, too, was a part of the "German lands." Again, the Soviet Union raised its voice in defense of the peoples of Czechoslovakia and even positioned a significant part of its armed forces to help the Czechs defend their country from

German aggression. Again, however, the governments of England and France, anxious to appease Hitler, told the Czechs they would not give them any military support against Hitler. Along with the United States, England and France demanded the Czechs give in to Hitler. In spite of the patriotic feelings of the Czech peoples, the Western Powers increased their pressure on the bourgeois Government of Czechoslovakia neither to resist nor to accept the help offered by the Soviet Union.

However, the Western Powers were still worried that the Soviet Union might try to block Germany's seizure of Czechoslovakia and therefore called for an anti-Soviet agreement at the expense of the Czechs. On 29 and 30 September, 1938, Hitler, Mussolini, Chamberlain and Daladier met in Munich. The meeting decided how Czechoslovakia would be dismembered. Betraying their own people, the rulers of Czechoslovakia agreed. This was an obvious betrayal since the Czechs could have mobilized seventy divisions compared to only fifty-two in Germany. But they did not resist. Although the United States did not participate directly in the Munich agreement, it approved the results. The aims of the Western Powers at Munich were clear: appease Hitler so that he would renounce aggression in Western Europe and instead turn eastward where he would surely start a war against the Soviet Union. The plan backfired. By attempting to turn the Fascists against the Soviet Union, the Western Powers only increased Hitler's appetite. In

March, 1939, Hitler seized the remaining part of Czechoslovakia. Bohemia and Moravia became German "protectorates," and a puppet government was created in "independent" Slovakia.

After Germany seized the Lithuanian port of Memel and demanded Poland hand over Danzig, and the Italian Fascists invasion of Albania, the Western Powers were finally forced to change their tactics. First, they gave assurances to a number of European countries, including Poland, in case of a German attack on them. Second, England and France entered into negotiations with the Soviet Union in order to conclude a military agreement and a pact of mutual aid in case of aggression. The policies followed by both the Western Powers and the Fascist states had led to a deep-rooted conflict of interests which made open war between them nearly inevitable. Even so, the Governments of England and France refused to accept any treaty with the Soviet Union based on principles of equality and reciprocity. What followed is one of the most misunderstood periods in the history of the Soviet Union. Historians in the West allege the Soviet Union did not make sufficient effort to conclude an agreement with England and France. They describe the signing of the 10-year Non-Aggression Pact between Russia and Germany on 23 August 1939 as some kind of underhanded betrayal of world peace. As every Russian will tell you, nothing could be further from the truth.

Negotiations Between Britain, France and the Soviet Union

According to Soviet claims, in March, 1939, the Soviet Union could clearly see Germany's intentions to attack Poland. It was simply a question of when the attack would occur and whether Germany would then continue her aggression to the East or turn around and launch a westward attack. It was a fear of the latter that caused Britain and France to enter into negotiations with the Soviet Union.

The USSR sincerely tried to reach an agreement. However, the British and French did not see the danger as clearly. They tried to saddle the Soviet Union with commitments which would inevitably draw the USSR into a war with Germany. They tried to obtain a guarantee of Soviet aid in the event of Germany's turning westward, without any commitments on their part if the Soviet Union were attacked. Not only were the Western Powers insincere, they were conducting secret talks at the same time in London during the June and August 1939 in order to form an Anglo-German alliance against the Soviet Union.

Although every minute counted, the British and French delegations did not fly to Moscow, nor did they even take a fast ship. They arrived on 10 August aboard a very slow passenger-freighter from London to Leningrad. Then it turned out these Western delegations were made up of second-level officials who could neither decide any vital military issues nor sign any agreement. The Soviet delegation, headed by General Voroshilov, outlined detailed plans for Soviet military operations in the event Hitler

false premises, would stiffen the Soviet will." (7) Thus, although the Russian was correct that there was a public pledge, the western version is also correct in that Roosevelt had been pressured by the Russians into a "promise" they knew he could not keep so they could offer something to their war-weary people and, probably, to gain a future bargaining point. (8)

However, a short article is simply not the medium to investigate such charges and counter-charges. The compression of six years of world history into a few pages omits more than a few details. Books have been written about nearly every paragraph in the Soviet version as I have described it and the "truth" may never be known. At best, the Soviet version is an accurate "Soviet version" in its most basic form, in spirit and in slant. If I have changed anything, it is that I have stressed the points of contradiction with the western version and I have edited out the everpresent "puppet-of-the-imperialist-powers" phrases that Westerners find so unpalatable. Since 1917, when translating from the Russian language, the translation is not complete just because the words are changed to English.

Even with such a summarized history of the war, several problems are evident with the Soviet version. As with every version of Soviet history, the historians have tried hard to avoid the "mistake" of "bourgeois objectivism." Bourgeois objectivism is something which occurs when historians, "while ignoring the concrete historical setting, attempt to

Problems with the Soviet Version:

The Soviet Officer would not be happy with this rendering of his version of the war. He would claim that I have omitted many elements of proof he gave me, and have, therefore, weakened the Soviet's "case." For example, he told me that President Truman admitted he stopped the lend-lease operation on the day the War in Europe ended and that ships enroute to Russia even turned around. Yes, Truman does admit signing the order to end lend-lease and wrote in his memoirs "The manner in which the order was executed was unfortunate. Crowley [Foreign Economic Administrator] interpreted the order literally and placed an embargo on all shipments to Russia and to other European nations, even to the extent of having some of the ships turned around and brought back to American ports for unloading. The British were the hardest hit, but the Russians interpreted the move as especially aimed at them." (5) The Soviet Officer would have asked about citing his evidence of Roosevelt's promise for a Second Front in 1942. And yes, during his 29 May 1942 meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov, Roosevelt did authorize Molotov "to inform Mr. Stalin that we expect the formation of a second front this year." (6) Despite Marshall's fears, the president insisted that the 1942 date be included in the public announcement. He apparently felt, in the words of Charles Eohlen, that "encouragement, even when based on

than 176 divisions. In the war against the USSR, Germany had lost 10 million men, which constituted three-quarters of overall losses in World War II.

July, 1945, the USA, England and China demanded Japan's unconditional surrender. When Japan refused, the Soviet Government, having already abrogated the Soviet-Japanese neutrality agreement on 5 April, 1945, announced to the other three powers that the USSR would enter the war against Japan.

On 9 August, in response to Allied calls for assistance, 1.5 million Soviet troops in the Far East launched an offensive against the Japanese Kwantung Army. The ships of the Pacific Fleet and the troops of the People's Republic of Mongolia joined the offensive at the same time. By the end of August, the Red Army had forced the Japanese from Manchuria, Southern Sakhalin, the Kurile Islands, and North Korea. As the Soviet Union was preparing to enter the war with Japan, the Americans dropped two atomic bombs, on 6 and 9 August, on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing and maiming a quarter of a million of the inhabitants. This, the Soviets say, was a barbaric example of the use of an atomic weapon, not provoked by military necessity. By dropping the bombs on the Japanese cities, the U.S. was trying to frighten the entire world, especially the Soviet Union.

The Second World War, which lasted six years, ended with the complete defeat of the Fascist aggressors. The Soviet armed forces, in the course of the war, had destroyed 506 1/2 German divisions and 100 divisions belonging to German satellites. The Allies, however, destroyed no more

troops in a very difficult position. Responding to a 6 January, 1945, request for help from Prime Minister Churchill, the Red Army launched a large-scale offensive on 12 January, eight days earlier than planned. As a result, the Germans cut short their attack on the Western Front and began moving divisions with all speed into the battle on the Eastern Front. The parallel between Stalin's response to a request for help and the Allied response to a request for a Second Front is not stated but is obvious.

In the forty days of the 1945 winter offensive, the Red Army drove the German Fascists from three hundred towns, took more than 2,400 railway stations, seized about a hundred munitions factories and took prisoner more than 350,000 enemy officers and men.

On 16 April Soviet Forces were in place to begin the final assault, the attack on Berlin. The troops commanded by Marshalls Zhukov and Konev met fierce resistance. On 23 April the soldiers of the 1st Byelorussian and 1st Ukrainian fronts, meeting in the region of Potsdam, surrounded all the enemy forces in Berlin. On the River Elbe, near the town of Torgau, units of the 1st Ukrainian front met up with units of the 1st American Army. On 2 May the Berlin garrison surrendered and Hitler committed suicide. The Soviet troops took prisoner a second group of more than 300,000 German soldiers and officers in the Berlin region.

Although the Great Patriotic War was over, the Second World War had not ended with the defeat of Germany. In

The Battle of Kursk, in the Soviet view, made Hitler's defeat inevitable.

Between 28 November and 1 December, 1943, Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill met in Teheran and, over Churchill's opposition, decided to open the Second Front in Western Europe in May 1944. From the Soviet viewpoint, it was clear that the USSR was now capable of defeating Germany with its own forces and the Americans were just as interested in establishing their influence (and, at the same time, blocking Soviet influence) in Western Europe as they were in taking pressure off the Red Army.

Finally, two years late, the Anglo-American troops commanded by General Eisenhower landed in Normandy, met with practically no opposition and advanced into the heart of France. Almost simultaneous with the Normandy operation, a massive Soviet offensive cleaned Byelorussia of German forces and utterly destroyed German Army Group "Center." At the call of the French Communist Party, an armed uprising began on 19 August and defeated the Fascist forces in Paris. In a few days the Allied forces entered Paris which had already been liberated by the Patriots.

In December, 1944, there were 204 enemy divisions, 180 of them German, on the Eastern Front. On the Western Front fewer than seventy German divisions opposed the Anglo-American troops. However, even with these limited forces, Hitler was able to organize a counter-attack on the Western Front in the Ardennes, which put the Anglo-American

war, but Stalingrad was the psychological and political turning point.

However, there was an agreement, a "promise," to open a Second Front in Europe. In 1942 the USA and England had enormous military and technical reserves for waging war in Europe. Besides that, seventy per cent of the German Army was concentrated on the Eastern front. However, there was no Second Front in 1942. And there was no Second Front in 1943. The Soviets are very blunt about this. The 8 November, 1942, Allied landings and military operations in North Africa did not cause Germany to move one division from the Eastern Front. In their version, the Western Powers "deliberately" deceived the Soviet Union. The U.S. and England preferred to "watch" the course of events and expected exhaustion to set in on both sides. As the Russians see it, and are taught today to see it, the delay in opening the Second Front only postponed Hitler's defeat and condemned millions more to death. For three years the Soviet Union fought practically on her own against Hitler's forces.

Following the victory at Stalingrad the Soviet forces launched successful offensives against Kursk, Kharkov and the Basin of the Don. From July 1942 to February 1943 the Germans, according to the Russians, lost approximately one and a half million men killed and wounded. In the later campaigns of 1943, nearly two-thirds of the Soviet soil temporarily occupied by the Fascists had been liberated.

during the first critical year of the war, they had little practical significance for the Soviet Union. In fact, in the spring of 1943 the United States and Great Britain suspended their delivery of supplies to the northern ports of the USSR and did not start them up again until eight months later. Delays such as this occurred repeatedly and seriously impaired relations with the Allies. Worse yet, Lend-Lease supplies were abruptly terminated the very day the war ended, and some ships on the way to the USSR were actually turned back. The promise of a massive reconstruction loan was broken.

Although casualty figures differ greatly between the German accounts and those of the Red Army on the Eastern Front, the basic accounts of the ferocity of fighting and the magnitude of the battles from the Brest fortress, through Smolensk, Kiev, and on to Odessa, Moscow, Leningrad and, eventually, Stalingrad are not in dispute. Clearly the Battle for Moscow brought an end to the legend of the "invincible" German Army. It was the first great defeat of Hitler's forces in the whole course of the war.

One will not hear or read much about the battles on the Eastern Front in Western accounts of the war. But there is no question that the heaviest burden of fighting the Germans fell squarely on the shoulders of the Red Army. Normandy was never the turning point of the Second World War. The Battle of Stalingrad alone deserves that honor. The battles for Kursk and Byelgorod were the decisive battles of the

the European countries it had already occupied. The Germans were fully mobilized and already had two years of combat experience. Since the Germans had no other pressures on them in the West they were able to concentrate the bulk of their armed forces on the Eastern front. The Germans were fighting side by side with forces from Italy, Finland, Rumania, and Hungary and were receiving as well aid from Japan, Spain, Bulgaria and Turkey. Additionally, the possibility of a sudden attack from Japan forced the Soviet Command to maintain armed forces ready in the Far East as well as in the Caucasus to block a possible attack by Turkey.

The German attack on the Soviet Union was greeted with undisguised glee in reactionary circles of the United States and England. Clearly, it was felt, the USSR would be bled white as a result of the war and become dependent on the Western Powers. However, there were still politicians in the U.S. and England who realized that collaboration with the USSR was in the long-term interests of their countries. At the Moscow three-power conference, the USSR, USA and England agreed to include the Soviet Union in the Lend-Lease Act. Additionally, the USA gave the Soviet Union credit in the amount of 1,000 million dollars. The USSR would supply the U.S. and England with raw materials for war production.

The West has made far too much out of their support through the Lend-Lease Act. The supplies of munitions and war materials were irregular, there were long delays and,

betrayed the French nation. Paris was declared an "open city" and surrendered to Hitler without a fight. Also in June, Italy entered the war and began her offensive in North Africa three months later. German troops joined the "Italians and, in the spring of 1941, the Fascists began an offensive in Libya. However, there were no reserves available for the offensive in North Africa since the Germans already were concentrating their forces to attack the Soviet Union.

In preparing for this attack, Hitler established control over Rumania (October 1940), and subjugated Hungary under the rule of the Fascist Admiral Horthy. The Germans entered Bulgaria (March 1941) and in April, 1941, Yugoslavia and Greece were occupied and dismembered. In the spring of 1941, almost the entire European continent had been overrun by Hitler. The Germans had acquired enormous reserves of both men and materials. And now Hitler looked to the East.

The Great Patriotic War

On the morning of 22 June, 1941, Germany attacked the Soviet Union with 190 divisions. The front-line units of the Red Army fought under the most difficult conditions. During these early days the Red Army had to fight alone against Germany and her allies. The Fascists took advantage of their superiority in men and equipment. The German economy had, up to the moment of attack, been directed towards war production. Germany had at its disposal the resources of

three weeks of fierce fighting defeated the Finnish armed forces. It is important, the Soviets stress, that they ended the war and signed the peace treaty on the same day -- 12 March, 1940. Thus the Russians limited themselves to making only the "minimum demands" consistent with security of the border area.

For seven months after the invasion of Poland there was virtually no military activity on the Western Front. Although the resources of France and England were far superior to those of Germany, the Western Powers kept true to their Munich policy and led Hitler to believe he would be allowed a free hand in the East. This period is rightfully called "The Phoney War", even in the West.

In April, 1940, Hitler's forces occupied Norway and Denmark which provided further proof of the failure of the Munich policy. Chamberlain was forced to resign and was replaced by Churchill. In May the Germans seized the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. Having passed north of the Maginot Line, they pushed to the North Sea and channel coast driving approximately 340,000 British troops back to the sea at Dunkirk. Hitler stopped his advance and allowed the British to evacuate their soldiers still hoping to be able to make a temporary peace with Churchill to safeguard his rear in the west.

On 5 June, Hitler swung south toward Paris. Although the French were ready to fight, particularly the French communists, the Government of bankers and industrialists

protect the life and property of the Western Ukrainians and Byelorussians (which had illegally been included as a part of Poland in 1920) the Soviet Union kept the Germans out of the eastern third of that country, by occupying it.

The war was spreading and the Soviet Union was becoming increasingly concerned over its own security. Of special concern was the so-called "Mannerheim Line," a series of huge fortifications in Finland which could be used as a springboard for an attack on the USSR. At that time, it should be noted, the Soviet-Finnish border was just 32 kilometers from Leningrad. The Finnish government refused offers of a mutual aid agreement and rejected negotiations concerning the exchange of Finnish territory near Leningrad for twice as much territory northwest of Lake Onega. At the end of November, 1939, the Finns shelled a Soviet village and the Soviets were forced to take retaliatory measures.

The Soviet-Finnish war was a difficult war for the Soviet Union. Much of the fighting was in extremely cold weather (-45C), deep snow drifts, and in a region of lakes and dense forests which prevented massive maneuvers and flanking movements. The Mannerheim Line was much more formidable than originally thought and the Finns received a large amount of supplies from the anti-Soviet circles in the USA, England and France. The USA alone lent Finland ten million dollars, against which that country was supplied arms at give-away prices. The renewed Red Army offensive on the Karelian isthmus began 11 February, 1940, and after

Stalin consented to the German proposal. In stark contrast to the procrastination and mode of travel of the Western powers' representatives, Ribbentrop arrived in Moscow by plane on 23 August. Negotiations were opened immediately and an agreement was signed on the evening of the same day.

The Soviets are adamant about this interpretation of the history leading to the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Non-Aggression Pact. It is the basis for their claim that the causes of the Second World War lay in the inability of the British, French and bourgeois government of Poland to conclude a defensive agreement with the Soviet Union. These countries could not do so, the Soviets maintain, because of their blind hatred for the world's first socialist state. The real pity of the failure to reach agreement, and all sides agree on this, is that such an agreement could very easily have prevented the Second World War.

The Start of the Second World War

On 1 September, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Having promised aid to Poland, both England and France declared war on Germany on 3 September. However, just as they had betrayed Czechoslovakia earlier, one hundred and fifteen French and English divisions stood idly by, opposed by, at the most, only twenty-three German divisions. The Soviets believe that the Western Powers both expected and hoped Germany would move against the Soviet Union after its defeat of Poland. In order to prevent this possibility and to

attacked Britain and France, in the event he attacked Poland and Rumania, and in the event of an attack on the USSR using the routes through Finland, Estonia and Latvia. These plans included exact numbers of Soviet divisions, by type, the numbers of guns, tanks, planes, etc. The French and British delegations had no similar plans. They were interested in establishing only general principles.

In the Soviet view, the real stumbling block in the negotiations was the British and French procrastination concerning the Soviet demands for transit rights for Soviet troops through Polish and Rumanian territory. Apparently, the British and French Governments expected the Soviets to wage war with Germany from the air, but under no circumstances would she be allowed to move her forces through Polish territory. The talks were suspended for three days beginning on 18 August while the Soviets waited for a reply to their proposals and, finally, were broken off on 21 August when no reply was received.

On 20 August Hitler sent a cable to Stalin offering a non-aggression pact. Stalin faced a difficult decision. He could attempt to reach a potentially fragile agreement with France and Britain or he could accept Germany's offer. By virtue of an agreement with Germany, the Soviet Union would be able to avert the dangerous threat of war on two fronts, to neutralize the anti-Soviet bloc which the imperialists were secretly negotiating, and, at the same time, to gain the time necessary to strengthen Soviet defenses. Thus,

argue this or that proposition, arbitrarily selecting isolated factlings [faktiki - "small facts"], citing them out of context, without relation to the whole." (9) The problem with this, as George F. Kennan has pointed out, is one would suspect that "facts" are historical circumstances, or alleged or suggested circumstances, which serve a preconceived ideological interpretation of the historical process and are therefore to be treated with respect, whereas "factlings" are circumstances which, though they may be marked by the awkward quality of having actually occurred, fail to serve this preconceived interpretation, and are therefore to be despised. (10) It is understandably hard for western historians to accept this type of history.

Another major problem with the Soviet history concerning the Second World War was caused by a lack of published material before 1956. In that year (three years following Stalin's death) Khrushchev denounced Stalin in his "secret speech" at the 20th Party Congress. What little was published before 1956 gave Stalin credit for masterminding nearly every detail of the Soviet campaigns. For example, the speed of the German advances in 1941 and 1942 was "planned" by Stalin to draw the Wehrmacht deep into Russia, exhaust the Germans and defeat them by encirclement and crushing blows. Stalin's name was mentioned at least three times a page. (11) It is no wonder most Western versions written before 1956 had trouble finding, let alone evaluating, differences of interpretation.

Even after 1956 there was a sense of secrecy and remoteness surrounding the Eastern Front. It was assumed all Russian writings were nothing but ex post facto rationalizations since believable Soviet versions did not appear until the cold war had already heated up. The German versions of the battles on the Eastern Front were all that Western historians had to go by for a long time. Although the Germans wrote prolifically, and accurately, about the years 1941-1943, there is very little in the German memoirs about the "years of defeat" after 1943. German accounts blame failures along the Eastern Front on Hitler -- the familiar "stab in the back." Also, it is possible the Germans were telling us what we wanted to hear.

The Russian version surely must have angered Western historians by frequent ethnocentric assertions, such as the Allied forces advanced into Normandy after D-day "with practically no opposition." In fact, there's something to upset someone in the West in just about every paragraph of the Soviet version. Couple this with the annoying Soviet habit of using communist terms and expressions which are not accepted in western circles as having any established scientific meaning, and you have "history" that is hard to believe and easy to ignore.

Finally, there is no small problem with the facts, as we know them. For example, the Soviet figure of total Germans killed on the Eastern Front is ten million. That is about three times greater than German claims of the losses

suffered on all fronts of the war. (12) Additionally, much is omitted from Soviet accounts. The military purges which caused three out of five Marshalls of the Soviet Union to disappear, to say nothing of the rate of disappearance of the Army and Corps commanders is simply not discussed. To use the Soviet euphemism, in operational units there was a "severe shortage" of trained commanders. (13) Not untrue, but also not particularly helpful to historians. And no one has been able to calculate how many Russians Stalin himself killed. Those who have tried give twenty million dead during Stalin's reign, as a conservative estimate. As Stephan Cohen has said so well, "Judged only by the number of victims and leaving aside important differences between the two regimes, Stalinism created a holocaust greater than Hitler's." (14) That Soviet historians fail to notice such things as the murder of twenty million of their fellow countrymen in their open accounts causes an understandable credibility gap in the West.

However, even paranoids have real enemies. And the Soviets can make a case against our version of the Second World War as well.

Problems with the Western Version:

Our version of the Second World War could provide a "case study" of the problems created by ethnocentrism. To a certain extent it has. Mr. Ken Booth, at the University College of Wales, uses the war and the cold war following it

to outline many of his arguments in his book Strategy and Ethnocentrism. For example, he points out that in Liddell Hart's The History of the Second World War "...the campaigns in Russia, which settled the issue, were virtually treated as a side show. Essentially it reads as a volume in the history of the British Army." (15) He goes on to point out that "all the elements of ethnocentric perception were brought together in the cold war." We did not appreciate the Soviet's problems, feel their pain, understand their ambitions, or internalize their experience. Nor did they when they looked west. (16) In The Russo-German War, 1941-1945, Albert Seaton wrote 350 pages on events occurring up to 1943 and only 50 pages to cover the period after 1943. Simply stated, our fathers, uncles and brothers did not fight on the Eastern Front. Therefore, no matter how much of the Second World War happened in Russia, our version will always be the war in the Pacific and in Western Europe. That is the war to our fathers, and to us, their children.

In all fairness, our ethnocentrism has resulted more in a deemphasis and series of omissions than in outright falsification. And, given Soviet sources before 1950 as already discussed, this is partially understandable. Additionally, as military historians frequently point out, there are numerous problems regarding the size, as well as the availability of unpublished research materials. U.S. Army records alone weigh 17,120 tons and fill 188 miles of filing cases. (17) Since the history based on these records

is scheduled to include eighty volumes, one must, of necessity, be highly selective and rely heavily on official histories. It is in the process of "selection" that historians tend to overemphasize the battles of Western Europe. Ethnocentrism aside, the available material is on "our" war in the West, and there is plenty to keep historians busy there.

It has only been in the last ten years that many documents on the Second World War have been declassified. And the process goes on today. As documents are declassified, the historian is frustrated by having to make manuscript revisions as the research becomes dated. Furthermore, many documents simply remain closed to unofficial researchers. (18) We had suppressed much of the Second World War because of the role of ULTRA, MAGIC and various intelligence operations during the war. As this information finds its way into the open following declassification at 30, 35 and 40-year intervals, it would appear, that the more important the contribution of ULTRA to the war, the less effective our military forces would appear to have been. This, coupled with Soviet claims of having won the war, together with our timing our entrance into the war in Europe so as to get to Berlin and draw a line across Europe before the Soviets went "past" Berlin headed west, might encourage some hard questions. First, was our invasion of France intended to "help" the Soviets or to

"stop" them from spreading their influence, if not their forces, throughout Europe, or both?

Another problem with the Western version of the war is more difficult to understand than ethnocentrism, which can happen by accident. The study of the Soviet Union became a large academic profession during the worst years of the cold war. There was some study, mostly language, literature, and history before the Second World War, but serious funding, organizations, etc. did not occur until the 1940s and 1950s when the U.S. and U.S.S.R. were confronting each other from Korea to Europe, and again, after Sputnik was launched in 1957. As a result, Soviet academic studies became a highly politicized profession. The main reasons to write about the Soviets after the war was to show that "Communism was evil" or that we needed to "know the enemy better." As Stephan Cohen points out, the field of Soviet studies "...took shape, after all, in a poisonous atmosphere of witch-hunt in the educational profession that included House Un-American Activities Committee's investigation into "Communist Methods of Infiltration" in 1953, the firing of at least six hundred professors and teachers across the country, disloyalty allegations against many more..." "Lower-level teachers of Soviet and other Communist affairs particularly felt the political stress and need to conform." (19) Cohen notes the problem is still with us today. "Not surprisingly," he writes, "revisionist scholars still worry about appearing to

be "softheaded" or "soft on Communism," if only because that might jeopardize their access to policy circles." (20)

Can we really be writing accurate history that says anything even neutral about a country our President is calling "an Evil Empire?" "Focus of Evil" and "ash heap of history" remarks are pretty rough on an academic community still trying to unwrap the "mystery inside an enigma" but it probably doesn't make that much difference because few are influenced by the academic writers anyway. Unlike any other country in the world, the basic literature of the Soviet Union is dominated by non-academic writers, from lapsed Communists and emigres to government analysts and journalists. Think back to the books that have had the greatest impact on the way you feel about the Soviet Union. Could they include Hedrick Smith's The Russians, Andrew Cockburn's Inside the Soviet Threat, Arkady Shevchenko's Breaking with Moscow, or the books by Viktor Suvorov or Alexander Solzhenitsyn? Where are the historians and academic writers?

Finally, there is another good reason why we may have a distorted view of the history of the war -- ignorance. In the August-September 1983 issue of "Public Opinion," Benjamin J. Stein reports on, as he calls it, the astounding level of ignorance of the Southern California teenager. Granted, it was not a scientific survey, but he described talking to a student at USC who did not have any clear idea when the Second World War was fought. She believed it was

sometime this century (a journalism major!). Even more difficult to understand, she was not sure which side Russia was on and whether Germany was on our side or against us. In fact, Mr. Stein writes, "I have not yet found one single student in Los Angeles, in either college or high school, who could tell me the years when World War II was fought." "Of the teenagers with whom I work, none had ever heard of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. ("Was he the drummer with the Beatles before Ringo Starr?") Only one could identify Josef Stalin. ("He was president just before Roosevelt.") None had ever heard of the Warsaw Pact. None could tell me what NATO stood for. ("Aren't they the ones who put up the space shuttle and all those things?") (21)

"If a student has no idea when World War II was and who the combatants were and what they fought over, that same human being is likely to be ignorant of just what this society stands for. If we are going to upgrade our educational system, if we are going to start teaching again, I hope we will begin by instructing young Americans with historical facts and with concepts about why the society is worth preserving. People who do not value what they have rarely keep it for long, and neither will we." (22)

If all of this sounds "made up" to you, I recommend you do what I did when I first heard of Stein's article. I asked twenty American soldiers in my unit if they could tell me when the Second World War was fought. I accepted any answer close to 1940 and two managed to get it right. The

answers I received confused World War II with the Revolutionary, Civil and Korean wars. Even though my unit did better than the city of Los Angeles, I was very disappointed.

High School and College students may not need to know what happened on the Eastern Front in the Second World War. U.S. Army Officers certainly do need to know what happened there.

Conclusion:

It seems strange to be saying on the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War that an accurate version of the war is somewhere in between the Soviet and the Western versions. No matter how free of bias our dedicated historians try to present their cases about the war, for Americans the war in the Pacific and the invasion of occupied France and the fight to Berlin will always be the key events of the Second World War. For the British it will be the campaigns in France, North Africa and Burma that will never be forgotten. For the Soviets who lived through the German invasion of their country, the 900-day siege of Leningrad, the siege of Stalingrad and the defense of Moscow are their memories of the war. For them the war on the Eastern Front will always be the decisive struggle of the war. Any attempt to establish an "international understanding" of the events of the war which disregards these differences of background will have little chance of

success. The best we can hope for is a history of the war that presents a more balanced picture than we have today -- a history that, at least, minimizes the distortions and presents all the facts.

We in the West will never fully understand the intensity of the hatred and the ferocity of the fighting between the Soviets and the Germans. This was no war fought in cold blood. A Soviet version of "Hogan's Heroes" is totally unthinkable. The Second World War was the most significant event in the history of the Soviet Union. The horrors of that war, the terrible losses, and the nearness to defeat have had their effect on all who survived it. When its citizens have been taught that Britain, France and the United States acted in ways strongly anti-Soviet before, during and after Russia's period of greatest need, it is easier to understand their suspicions of all Western initiatives. Their history, or their version of our common history, has taught them to distrust us. In this way their perceptions of history may be more important than the facts.

As George F. Kennan wrote twenty-five years ago, "Among those of us who work in...[the]...field of historical study, there is none, I am sure, who would not be free to admit that the western countries have from time to time made serious mistakes in the relations with the Soviet Union. I know of none of us who is committed to proving that our side was without fault and that the diplomacy of the other side consisted exclusively of villainy. If a corresponding

forbearance could only be shown on the other side, I for one could hope that the study of history might be, as it should be, one of the means by which each of our countries could gain a measure of perspective with regard to itself and by which we could begin to reduce the differences of outlook that now divide us." (23)

Listening to a knowledgeable Russian talk about the history of the Second World War as he understands it is an uncomfortable experience. It causes the westerner to reconsider some of the basic assumptions about the war which have been taught as unquestionable facts of history in our public and military schools. At first, it was easy to nationalize the difference in perspective. He knew less about the events outside the Eastern Front than I knew about the Eastern Front. His version of events was oversimplified. He undoubtedly suspected that some of the things he had been taught were not true -- although he never said so. However, it had always been clear to me that we had not given the Russians proper credit for their contributions to the war in Europe. Further, I began to feel that although I may not have been taught lies, as the Russians were, I had certainly not been taught the whole truth. What made me so very uncomfortable was the realization that there are many people in the West who are planning strategy, making assessments and policy decisions from very high positions who are not aware of the Soviet

version of the war years and admit to no problems with ours. It worried me then and it still worries me.

We have written our histories of World War II to emphasize our battles and neglected the major campaigns of the Allies and the main course of the war. On the other hand, the Soviets intensely study their war to gauge its applicability to the preparation and conduct of contemporary war. What better, more practical, reason to know more about "their" war. Our historians may quietly murmur "mea culpa," but our Army Officers in the 1980s are not studying the tactics and doctrine of the most prolonged and massive war in history. That, in itself, is painful to say to a U.S. military officer. It becomes more painful to say this also happens to be the history of the tactics, strategy, and doctrine of our most powerful potential enemy today. What makes it most painful is that it was a Russian Army Officer -- and he would be a good one in any Army -- who told me so.

ENDNOTES

1. "Patton" Bartlett's Familiar Quotations. 1980, 15th ed. p.791:16.
2. A contemporary rendering of a few lines of Chaucer.
3. Trumbull Higgins, Hitler and Russia, p. 282.
4. The Soviet version will not be cluttered with footnotes due to the variety of Soviet sources. The Soviet Officer was the source for the basic facts of the roots of the Second World War, the necessity for the Hitler-Stalin Pact, the "real" cause of the Soviet-Finish War, overestimating the lend-lease contributions, the broken promises for the Second Front, and the unnecessary use of nuclear weapons. Not surprisingly, his viewpoint is repeated in a number of Soviet publications. Whenever possible I have used the words of the Soviets themselves, editing only for brevity and to remove unpalatable "communist-sounding" phrases. Soviet sources (all published in English by Progress Publishers, Moscow) include the following: The Secrets of the Second World War by G. Deborin. Translated by Y. Markov. The Second World War by G. Deborin. Translated by V. Schneiersohn. They Sealed Their Own Doom by P. Zhilin. Translated by D. Fidler. Serving the People by K. Menetskov. Translated by D. Fidler. A Soldier's Duty by K. Rokossovsky. Translated by V. Talmy. Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union ed. by P. Pospelov and others. Translated by D. Skvinsky and V. Schneierenson. Also, two books published in the West were used: The Russian Version of the Second World War ed. by Graham Lyons. Translations by Marjorie Vanston. The Soviet Viewpoint by G. Arbatov and W. Oltmans.
5. Harry S. Truman, Memories by Harry S. Truman, Vol. 1, p. 228.
6. Robert Sherwood, Roosevelt and Hopkins, pp. 536-538.
7. Charles E. Bohlin, Witness to History 1929-1969, p. 128.
8. Mark A. Stoler, The Politics of the Second Front, p. 51.
9. George F. Kennan, "Soviet Historiography and America's Role in the Intervention" in Contemporary History in the Soviet Mirror, ed. by John Keep and Lilliana Brisby, p. 304.
10. Ibid.

11. Graham Lyons, ed., The Russian Version of the Second World War, p. xiii.
12. Earl F. Ziemke, Book Review of John Erickson's The Road to Buerlin: Continuing the History of Stalin's War with Germany, ARMY, Mar, 1985, p. 26.
13. John Erickson, The Road to Stalingrad, p. 6.
14. Stephan F. Cohen, Rethinking the Soviet Experience, p. 95.
15. Ken Booth, Strategy and Ethnocentrism, p. 37.
16. Ibid., p. 39.
17. Stoler, pp. 213-215.
18. Ibid.
19. Cohen, p. 18.
20. Ibid., p. 36.
21. Benjamin J. Stein, "The Astounding Ignorance of California Teenagers," Public Opinion, Aug-Sep 1983, p. 15.
22. Ibid.
23. Kennan, p. 305.

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