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American Perspectives on Eastern Front Operations in World War II

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One's view of historical reality is inevitably flawed. While most historians strive to preserve or recreate an objective picture of historical forces and events, a variety of factors affect their work all of which tend to warp objective reality and produce a subjective view of history. This process is inevitable, and it poses to the historian the principal challenge of his profession, a challenge which he seldom totally overcomes.

One of the most potent factors affecting objectivity is that of parochialism--in its milder form simply limited perspective--a narrowness of view produced by a natural concern for one's own history and reinforced by the remoteness of events occurring in distant lands. Parochialism on the part of historians also responds, in part, to demand - the demand of their reading public who are parochial in their own right and who seek information concerning their own past. Cultural and ideological differences that exist between governments and peoples exacerbate this tendency. These differences color the interpretation of events and tend to stifle understanding between peoples already separated by space and time.

The availability of sources upon which to base historical accounts contributes to the emergence of a parochial view. A historian must use what sources are available to him, and if those sources are limited, so also will his perspective be limited. Good historians will acknowledge those limitations as they reconstruct the events of the past.

A more extreme form of parochialism or limited perspective is bias, which can be either unintentional or intentional. Unintentional bias is a result of the same forces that produce a parochial view. Intentional bias can be a

manifestation of the historian's own internal beliefs or the product of ideological or political influence on the historian from external institutions, such as governments, religious bodies, or economic entities. Bias, especially in the deliberate form, creates a more twisted, and hence more harmful, view of historical events than simple parochialism. While parochialism implies that a historian was unable to tap a wide variety of sources, bias indicates that a historian selected the sources he would use and ignored those which did not fit into his preconceived notion of past events. In the former case, distortion of history, although regrettable, is natural and often hard to detect. In the latter case such distortion is unnatural, reprehensible, and usually obvious to the discerning reader.

Few twentieth century events have escaped the effects of parochialism and bias. Among the more important periods most severely affected by these phenomena is that of the Second World War, in particular the war on the Eastern Front--the Russo-German War. Diverging perspectives, parochialism, and outright bias from all quarters have obscured or distorted the history of the war and helped to produce long-standing misunderstandings and animosities. In fact, it is safe to say that we are still far from achieving an objective picture of the war, if in fact such a picture is achievable. The lack of objectivity has left a legacy of misunderstanding concerning the political and military events of the war. More important, since perceptions and policies of the present are based, in part, upon a correct understanding of the past, many of those perceptions and policies are founded on less than solid ground.

This paper focuses on only a narrow segment of World War II experiences --experiences on the Eastern Front--within the context of the war in general. In particular, it describes the U.S. perspective on the war and how events on the Eastern Front fit into that overall view of war. Further it surveys the forces (sources) that have shaped the current American perspective on that important segment of World War II combat, specifically what Americans have been taught or have read about the war. Finally the paper investigates the accuracy of that perspective in light of existing source materials. Thus, in essence, this is a critique of Eastern Front war historiography, a critique which will hopefully broaden the perspective and understanding of American and foreign readers and historians alike.

The American View of World War II

The American view of the war reflected the circumstances surrounding U.S. involvement in the war as well as long term historical attitudes toward European politics in general.¹ Despite strong public sentiment for assisting beleaguered Western democracies, after war broke out in 1939 equally strong neutralist sentiments blocked active U.S. participation in the war. As the American public noted with growing concern the fall of France in 1940, the expulsion of British forces from the continent at Dunkirk, and the struggle for supremacy in the air over Great Britain, the U.S. government was able to lend assistance to England short of actually joining the war. The German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, while lamented as an extension of the war, in some quarters was also viewed positively as it clearly diverted German interest from Britain toward what most assumed would be a more formidable opponent for the hitherto undefeated German war machine to deal with. Additionally, Germany now faced a two-front war, and Anglo-Soviet war cooperation against Germany was bound to ensue. In a sense, the German decision to attack the Soviet Union strengthened the hand of American neutralists who

could point to the reduced need for U.S. intervention, an argument quickly silenced by the extensive German advance in the East, which for a time seemed to threaten the viability of the Soviet Union. The war itself in the East was a shadowy affair signified by maps of the Soviet Union overlaid by large arrows and clouds of black representing advancing Nazi forces. Little detail of the conflict was available, setting a pattern which would endure during the future years of war.

Only the brash Japanese surprise attack on U.S. facilities at Pearl Harbor overcame this initial American reluctance to become actively involved in war. This act unleashed American's emotions to an extent that earlier American lukewarm commitment to the survival of the western democracies was converted almost overnight into a broad American commitment to rid the world of the menace posed by the Berlin-Tokyo axis. While early in the war the U.S. government's principal concern was for assisting in the defeat of Nazi Germany, the very fact that the Japanese surprise attack had catalyzed American war sentiments led to ever increasing U.S. attention to the war in the Pacific, a war which soon dominated U.S. newspaper headlines.

The combination of the U.S. government's focus on defeating Germany "first" and the reality of fending off Japanese advances in the Pacific set the tone for the U.S. perspective on the war and focused as well the attention of the U.S. press and public on those two themes. Hence U.S. military strategy involved the attaining of footholds on the European continent as a means for achieving the ultimate destruction of Germany while the realities of war in the Pacific and the overwhelming public sentiment to crush the nation which had provoked the hostilities in the first place drew American forces inexorably across the Pacific. The competing aims of America's two-front war, in the end, diluted the government's efforts to first deal with Nazi Germany and perhaps attenuated the achievement of victory in Europe. At a minimum, it made the establishment of a "second front" in Europe a more formidable task and led to the series of Allied operations in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy, preceded by a sobering test of Allied capabilities to land directly in France, conducted at Dieppe in August 1942. Military planners and the general public alike were transfixed by foreign locales such as Tobruk, El Alamein, Oran, Kasserine, Palermo, Salerno, and Anzio where America's military strategy unfolded.

Driven by popular demand and the inertia of ongoing operations, America's war in the Pacific in the summer of 1942 changed in nature from a defensive one to an offensive one complete with alternative strategies for the defeat of Japan. The names Guadalcanal, Midway, New Guinea, and a host of hitherto obscure islands dominated U.S. awareness--governmental and public alike.

It is axiomatic that where one's forces operate, one's attention follows; and where one's father, husband, or son fights and possibly dies, dominates a families thoughts. Human ties usually dwarf geopolitical considerations, and the piece of the mosaic of war with which a government or a public is involved naturally becomes the dominant piece. The remainder of that mosaic, for most remains a shadowy context of one's own struggle recognized as important only by the most perceptive of observers.

Thus, America's perspective on war remained riveted to the path undertaken by American forces in Europe and across the Pacific. To the earlier place names of combat were added the names Normandy, Falaise, Metz, and Aachen in Europe and Iwo Jima, the Philippines, and Okinawa in

the Pacific. As U.S. military efforts increased in scope; and as Axis power diminished, the impact of those operations on the American public's memory increased. Throughout this process the war elsewhere, the real global context for American military operations, remained cloudy and obscure, the obscurity reinforced by a lack of specific information as to what was occurring, in particular at the public level.

The war on the Eastern Front, however unfairly, was a part of this shadowy context. It is clear Americans knew in general about the war in the East. They knew it was a massive struggle with vast implications for the success of Allied strategy in the West. The names Leningrad, Moscow, Stalingrad, and Kursk were familiar ones, and Americans could appreciate the impact of Soviet victories at each location. But that was perhaps the sum of American understanding. Certainly, there was little in the American military experience to condition Americans to conceive of operations as large as those occurring in the East, and what is not experienced cannot be fully appreciated. Hence, the tendency of Americans (and others) to equate Stalingrad with El Alamein and Kursk with Anzio. The comparison in terms of result (victory) masked the issue of the contrasting scale and scope of these operations. As the issue of the second front became a focal point of dispute among the wartime allies, this context plus the real allied difficulties in effecting such a landing made the Allied decision to open such a front in France in 1944 reasonable and understandable to the American public.²

During the last year of war the American public's (and government's) attention was captured by the successful Normandy operation and the ensuing breathtaking advance across France. Likewise, the German counterstroke in the Bulge and the 1945 Allied advance into Germany dominated American public awareness. Concurrent and massively successful Soviet operations in Belorussia, Rumania, East Prussia, Poland, and Hungary were noted as part of a continuous, slow, but inexorable Soviet advance toward Germany. As before, details of the Soviet operations were lacking, hence they tended to recede into the background as a adjunct to successful Allied operations in the West and in the Pacific as well. In a sense, America's attentions were focused on the two great oceans and operations adjacent to them. The struggle in continental Europe remained remote, geographically and psychologically. The same tendency helped to relegate to obscurity Soviet participation in the final stages of the war with Japan (the Manchurian operation).³

Thus the war on the Eastern Front was acknowledged but never fully appreciated in wartime by the bulk of Allied public opinion. Initially the war served the function of distracting German military attentions from England eastward. Later the Red Army locked the German Army in a struggle which enabled the other Allies to reestablish themselves on continental Europe. Ultimately, the Red Army joined in the final victory assault on the German Reich. The American public appreciated the role played by the Soviet people; and, in fact, genuine feelings of warmth resulted. Americans, likewise, seemed to understand the suffering involved in such a struggle. Yet, despite these feelings, the details of those operations in the East remained obscure; and, hence, a full realization of their importance was lacking. This tendency persisted into the postwar years when it combined with other factors to create a sort of mythology surrounding the events of the war in the East.

Postwar American Perspective on Eastern Front Operations

If American wartime impressions of combat on the Eastern Front were vague and imprecise, there was some improvement in that picture during the first decade and a half after war ended. However, during that period a new tendency emerged that colored almost all future works describing events on the Eastern Front. That tendency was to view operations in the East through German eyes and virtually only German eyes. From 1945 to 1958 essentially all works written in English or translated into English about events on the Eastern Front were written by German authors, many of whom were veterans of combat in the East, works moreover, based solely on German sources.

This German period of war historiography embraced two genre of works. The first included memoirs written during those years when it was both necessary and sensible to dissociate oneself from Hitler or Hitler's policies. Justifiable or not, the writers of these memoirs did just that and essentially laid blame on Hitler for most strategic, operational, and often tactical failures. Thus, an apologetic tone permeated these works. Officers who shared in the success of Hitler's armies refused to shoulder responsibility for the failures of the same armies. Only further research will judge the correctness of their views.

The first of the postwar memoirs to appear in English was the by now classic work, *Panzer Leader*, by Heinz Guderian.⁴ Guderian's work, which casts considerable light on strategic and operational decisions while Guderian was a panzer group commander in 1941 and later when he became Chief of Staff in 1944, set the tone for future treatment by German generals of Hitler's leadership. Guderian laid at Hitler's feet principal responsibility for all failures of the German Army and for the dismantling of the German General Staff. The German General Staff was portrayed as both used and abused by Hitler throughout the war. Guderian's message was best conveyed by the chapter heading he chose for the section of the Polish War of 1939 which read, "The Beginning of the Disaster." As in most subsequent works, Guderian included little Soviet operational data.

One of the most influential postwar German war critiques was General von Mellenthin's *Panzer Battles* published in English in 1956.⁵ Mellenthin's work, an operational/tactical account of considerable merit, echoed the criticism of Hitler voiced by Guderian and showed how Hitler's adverse influence affected tactical operations. Beyond this, Mellenthin's work adopted a didactic approach in order to analyze operations and hence educate officers. Throughout the book are judgments concerning military principles and assessments of the nature of the Soviet fighting men and officers, most of which have been incorporated into the current "body of truth" about Soviet military capabilities. Hence, Mellenthin made such judgments as these: the Russian soldier is tenacious on defense, inflexible on offense, subject to panic when facing unforeseen eventualities, an excellent night fighter, a master of infiltration, a resolute and implacable defender of bridgeheads, and neglectful of the value of human life.⁶ As was in the case of Guderian, Mellenthin's experiences against the Red Army encompassed the period before spring 1944 and reflected impressions acquired principally during years of German success.

Mellenthin's work, written without benefit of archival materials, tended to treat tactical cases without fully describing their operational context. Opposing Soviet units, as in Guderian's work, were faceless. Mellenthin's classic account of XXXXVIII Panzer Corps' operations along the Chir River after the encirclement of German 6th Army at Stalingrad stands as an example of the

weaknesses of his book.⁷ In it he describes the brilliant operations of that panzer corps in fending off assaults by Soviet 5th Tank Army's units which included first the 1st Tank Corps and later 5th Mechanized Corps. On 7-8 December 1942, 11th Panzer Division parried a thrust of 1st Tank Corps at State Farm 79 while on 19 December, 11th Panzer checked the advance of 5th Mechanized Corps. Despite the vivid accounts of these tactical successes, Mellenthin only in passing describes the operational disaster that provided a context for these fleeting tactical successes. For, in fact, while Soviet 5th Tank Army occupied XXXXVIII Panzer Corps' attention, to the northwest Soviet forces overwhelmed and destroyed the Italian 8th Army and severely damaged Army Detachment Hollidt. Moreover, Mellenthin did not mention (probably because he did not know) that Soviet 1st Tank Corps had been in nearly continuous operation since 19 November and was under strength and worn down when it began its march across the Chir.⁸

Similar flaws appear elsewhere in Mellenthin's work, many of which result from a lack of knowledge of opposing Soviet forces or their strengths.⁹

Of equal importance to Mellenthin's work, but written from a higher level perspective, was the memoir of Eric von Manstein entitled *Lost Victories*.¹⁰ An important work by an acknowledged master at the operational level of war, Manstein's book viewed operations from 1941 to early 1944 at the strategic and operational level. Manstein's criticism of Hitler reflected active disputes which ultimately led to Manstein's dismissal as Army Group South commander. Manstein's account of operations is accurate although again Soviet forces are faceless, and opposing force ratios are in conflict with those shown by archival materials of *Fremde Heeres Ost* (Foreign Armies East), Gehlen's organizations, and of the OKH (the Army High Command).¹¹ Again Soviet superiorities are overstated.

These three basic memoirs dominated historiography of World War II in the 1950's and continue to be treated as authoritative works today even as unexploited archival materials challenge an increasing number of facts cited in the three works. Other works appeared in English during this period but were generally concerned with individual battles or operations.¹² Whether coincidental or not, most of these unfavorable accounts of Soviet combat performance appealed to an American audience conditioned by the Cold War years. Notably, few German commanders of the later war years, a period so unpleasant for German fortunes, wrote memoirs; and the works of those who did (for example, General Heinrici) still remain as untranslated manuscripts in the archives.

The second genre of postwar works included the written monographs based upon debriefings of and studies by German participants in operations on the Eastern Front. For several years after war's end the Historical Division of USEUCOM supervised a project to collect the war experiences of these veterans relating to all wartime fronts. Literally hundreds of manuscripts were assembled on all types of operations. All were written from memory without benefit of archival material. The Department of the Army published the best of these short monographs in a DA pamphlet series in the late forties and early fifties.

These pamphlets were of mixed quality. All were written from the German perspective, and none identified Soviet units involved in the operations. Some were very good, and some were very

inaccurate. All require collation with actual archival materials. All are still in use and are considered to be as a valuable guide to Soviet operational tendencies. A few examples should suffice to describe the care that must be employed when using these sources.

In 1950 a DA Pamphlet appeared assessing Allied airborne operations. The distinguished group of German officers who wrote the pamphlet were directed by Major General Hellmuth Reinhardt. The pamphlet critiqued German and Allied airborne experiences. In its chapter on Allied airborne landings in World War II was a subsection entitled, Reflections on the Absence of Russian Air Landings, which began with the following statement:

It is surprising that during World War II the USSR did not attempt any large-scale airborne operations. . . its wartime operations were confined to a commitment of small units.... for the purpose of supporting partisan activities and which had no direct tactical or strategic effect.¹³

The study went on to mention a rumored air drop along the Dnieper in 1943 but could provide few details of the drop.

A little over a year later Reinhardt discovered his error and put together another manuscript describing the extensive airborne operations the Soviets conducted within the context of the Moscow counteroffensive and adding details to his description of the abortive Soviet Dnieper airborne drop in 1943.¹⁴ Recently the Office of the Chief of Military History republished the original pamphlet describing the lack of Russian airborne activity. Reinhardt's revised manuscript remains unpublished.

A DA pamphlet entitled *German Defensive Tactics against Russian Break-throughs* contained similar errors.¹⁵ In a chapter describing a delaying action conducted between 5-24 August 1943 the authors mistakenly stated that German forces abandoned the city of Khar'kov on 18 August when, in fact, the correct date was 23 August.¹⁶ Such errors intermixed with accurate date cast serious doubt on the validity of these works as a whole. Despite these errors, most the pamphlets have been reprinted; and they remain one of the basic sources of data about the Red Army. Moreover, they provided impressions of the characteristics of the Russian soldier which have become an integral part of our current stereotype of the Soviet soldier.

- One of the principal deficiencies of all genres of German postwar accounts of fighting on the Eastern Front written during the 1950's was the almost total absence of Soviet operational data. The forces German army groups, armies, corps, and divisions engaged appeared as faceless masses, a monolith of field grey manpower supported by seemingly endless ranks of artillery and, by the end of the war, solid columns of armor. The facelessness of these Soviet masses, lacking distinguishable units and any individually concerning unit mission or function, reinforced the impression conveyed in these German works that Soviet masses, inflexibly employed in unimaginative fashion, simply ground down German power and finally inundated the more capable and artfully controlled German forces. The Soviet steamroller plod into eastern Europe leaving in its wake endless ranks of dead and wounded. That psychological image of the Soviets portrayed in German works has persisted ever since. Moreover, this panorama of operations against a faceless foe clouds the issue of correlation of forces and enables the writers

to claim almost constant overwhelming enemy force superiority, whether or not it really existed. All of these memoirs and pamphlets appeared before German archival materials were available, hence they were written without benefit of the rich archival data on Soviet forces and operational methods found in these wartime archives.

In the 1960's reputable trained historians began producing accounts of action on the Eastern Front. These works were better than the earlier ones but still lacked balance. They were based primarily on German sources but did contain some material on the Soviets obtained from German archival sources. Some were written by individuals who spent considerable time in the Soviet Union during the war.

Alexander Werth drew upon his experiences in the wartime Soviet Union to produce *Russia at War* and a number of shorter works.¹⁷ Although these writings contained little operational data they did present the Soviet perspective as they focused on the suffering and hardship endured by the Russian people and on the resulting bravery as they overcame those conditions.

Alan Clark's survey account of the war in the East, entitled *Barbarossa*, contained more operational detail.¹⁸ However, it still lacked any solid body of Soviet data. Moreover Clark displayed a tendency others would adopt - that is to cover the first two years of war in detail but simply skim over events during the last two years of war. In fact, of the 506 page book, over 400 pages concern the earlier period. This reflected an often expressed judgment that there was little reason to study operations late in the war because the machinations of Hitler so perverted the ability of German commanders to conduct normal reasonable operations.

The U.S. Army Center for Military History made a commendable effort to correct this imbalance by publishing Earl Ziemke's work entitled *Stalingrad to Berlin*.¹⁹ This work, given the available source material, was a sound and scholarly one. Ziemke surveyed operations from November 1942 to the close of war, generally from a strategic and high level operational perspective. While relying on German sources, he based his research on German archival materials and did include material from the, by now, emerging Soviet accounts of operations. In so doing Ziemke expanded the American view of the war in the East and began to dispel some of the more serious errors found in earlier German accounts.

Ziemke and others who followed him with writings on the Eastern Front were helped immeasurably by Soviet historians work on the war--work which began in the late 1950's and accelerated in the 1960's. Those new works, about which I will have more to say later, although of mixed quality, added a new but essential dimension to historiography of the war. Most good historians took cognizance of them in their work. By the 1970's enough of these works existed to provide a more balanced vision of the war.

In the early seventies Paul Carell, a German author writing under a pen name, finished publication of a two volume study of Eastern Front operations entitled *Hitler Moves East* and *Scorched Earth*.²⁰ These works, written in appealing journalistic style, contained more German operational detail and tapped numerous accounts by individual German officers and soldiers who served in tactical units. Although Carell's works were heavily German in their perspective, they

did contain an increased amount of Soviet materials. Their lively narrative form has made them influential works among the reading public.

In a more scholarly vein, Col. Albert Seaton published two works, *The Russo-German War* and *The Battle of Moscow* which projected Ziemke's work down to the tactical level.²¹ By exploiting the official records of particular German divisions Seaton added a new dimension to the descriptions of war at the tactical level. Like Carell, Seaton tempered his German perspective somewhat by using data from a limited number of Soviet sources.

The works of John Erickson have been the most influential ones to appear since 1960. They have broken the stranglehold which the German perspective had over Eastern Front historiography and have integrated into that historiography a comprehensive description of the Soviet perspective on the war, particularly at the strategic and operational levels. His first work, the *Soviet High Command*, for the first time shed light on the events of the summer of 1941.²² His subsequent two books, *The Road to Stalingrad* and *The Road to Berlin*, recounted in considerable detail the course of war from June 1941 to May 1945.²³ The principal value of these works derives from the fact that they distill information from literally thousands of Soviet works on the war and create from that information a detailed, sometimes frenetic, account of operations in the East. The overwhelming impact of the narrative on the reader reflects the overwhelming scale and scope of war in the East.

Erickson's works critically assess the Soviet sources and reject those that conflict with the most influential and accurate German records. The magnitude of Erickson's research efforts precluded his checking on the accuracy of every tactical detail found in Soviet accounts. Therefore, in some instances, Erickson's details do conflict with reputable German accounts. In addition, Erickson has accepted Soviet data concerning correlation of forces which, in some instances, have been inflated, in particular regarding German strength. Despite these minor faults Erickson's effort to produce a Soviet view of the war has accomplished the major feat of providing readers with more balanced sources upon which to reach judgments concerning combat in the East. Unfortunately the size and complexity of Erickson's works precludes their appeal to a broad readership among the general public. Future historians will have the task of integrating Erickson's view with those of the host of other memoir writers and historians who wrote from the German perspective.

Across the span of time from 1945 to the present, despite the work of Erickson and a few others, the German view of war on the Eastern Front has predominated. In part, this has resulted from a natural American parochialism that tended to discount or ignore the importance of operations in the East in the overall scheme of war. During the earlier postwar period the German view prevailed by default. Numerous German accounts appeared, and nothing in the way of Soviet material appeared to contradict them. By the 1960's, when Soviet accounts began to appear, the German view was firmly entrenched. Moreover, the cold war atmosphere often prompted out of hand rejection of the Soviet version of war. The German view, sometimes accurate, often apologetic or accusative, and usually anti-Soviet, prevailed. As a result, this view was incorporated into high school and college textbooks and into the curriculum of U.S. military educational institutions. Most important, is provided a context within which to judge the contemporary Soviet military. Only today is that view increasingly being challenged. Those

challenges are made possible by intensified Soviet publication efforts, efforts that are slowly raising from obscurity details of Soviet operations on the Eastern Front. These Soviet publication efforts, however, must overcome serious barriers if they are to produce a view which can complement the German perspective and produce a more balanced picture of war on the Eastern Front.

Soviet Sources: Perceptions and Reality

American perceptions of the war on the Eastern Front have been shaped in part by the course of Soviet historiography on the war. As stated earlier, the Soviet reticence of address operations in detail during the immediate postwar period left the field open for the German perspective, which in turn predominated. Soviet efforts to set the record straight began in the late 1950's and continue today but have only partially tempered that German view.

Three principal barriers exist to block or inhibit Soviet historical efforts from influencing the American perspective. The barriers are, in sequence: a lack of knowledge in the West concerning Soviet historical work, the language barrier, and a basic distrust of the credibility of Soviet works. The first two of these barriers are mechanical and can be easily addressed. The third is more fundamental and more difficult to overcome.

Most Americans and Westerners are soon unaware of the scope of Soviet historical efforts. They assume that the Soviet reticence to talk openly of operational matters, characteristic of the period prior to 1958, continues today. In fact, Soviet historical efforts have increased geometrically, and Western audiences need to be educated to that fact. The fact that most of these works are only in Russian inhibits that education. To remedy this problem more Americans need to learn Russian (an unlikely prospect), or more Soviet works will have to appear in English. Increased research by American military historians using Soviet sources can also contribute to overcoming this first barrier. The second barrier is a physical one regarding language. If a source cannot be read, it makes little difference whether or not it is available or, for that matter, credible. The only remedy to this barrier is more extensive translation and a publicizing of Soviet sources by their use in more detailed historical monographs.,

The third barrier, involving credibility, is more fundamental. It is, in part, an outgrowth of ideological differences which naturally breed suspicion on the part of both parties. It is also a produce of the course of Soviet war historiography which itself is subject to criticism, depending on the period during which the Soviet sources appeared.

In the immediate postwar years, from 1945 to 1958 few Soviet military accounts appeared about operations on the Eastern Front.²⁴ Those that did appear were highly politicized and did not contain the sort of operational detail which would make them attractive to either the casual reader or the military scholar. Indeed, they were of little use to the military student(Soviet or foreign), which may, in part, explain their paucity of accurate detail.

Beginning in 1958 more accurate and useful accounts began appearing in a number of forms. From its inception, Soviet *Military History Journal* has Bought to publish high quality articles on relevant military experiences at all levels of war.²⁵ The journal after 1958 immediately began

investigation of a series of burning questions, perhaps the most important of which was an investigation of the nature of the initial period of war, (*Nachalny period voini*), a topic noticeably ignored in earlier Soviet work. *Military History Journal* has since focused on practical, realistic questions within a theoretical context. It has personified the Soviet penchant for viewing military affairs as a continuum within which individual issues must be viewed in a historical context.

In 1958 the first Soviet general history of the war appeared, Platonov's *History the Second World War*.²⁶ This volume, for the first time, addressed Soviet wartime failures which had been almost totally overlooked in earlier years. For example, it openly referred to the abortive Soviet offensive at Khar'kov in May 1942, a subject hitherto apparently too sensitive to talk about. Platonov offered few real details of these failures but did break the ice regarding a candid reference to failures in general which represented a quantum leap in the candor of Soviet sources.

At the same time Soviet authors resumed a wartime tendency to teach by use of combat experience. Kolganov's *Development of Tactics of the Soviet Army in the Great Patriotic War*, published in 1958, contained a thorough review of wartime tactics by combat example.²⁷ This didactic work sought to harness experience in the service of education and did so by drawing upon a wealth of tactical detail, some of it relating to failure as well as success. Kolganov's accounts, although fragmentary, seemed to affirm a Soviet belief that one learns from failure as well as success; and, if one is to be educated correctly (scientifically), details must be as accurate as possible in both cases.

After 1958 a flow of memoir literature, unit histories, and operational accounts began that has continued, and, in fact, intensified, to the present. The Soviets have sought to capture the recollections of wartime military leaders at every level of staff and command. These include valuable memoirs of individuals at the *STAVKA* level (Shtemenko, Vasilevsky, Zhokov), *front* level (Rokossovsky, Konev, Meretskov, Yerememko, Bagramyan), army level (Moskalenko, Chuikov, Krylov, Batov, Galitsky, Grechko, Katukov, Lelyushenko, Rotmistrov), and at the corps level and below.²⁸ Soviet military historians have logged the experiences of many Soviet units including armies, tank armies, corps (tank, mechanized, and rifle), divisions, and even regiments and separate brigades, although with a few notable exceptions.²⁹ Memoir literature has also extended into the realm of the supporting services (air, navel, engineer, signal, etc).

Over time some excellent operational studies have appeared focusing on major operations (Moscow, Stalingrad, Kursk, Belorussia), on lesser operations (Novgorod-Luga, Eastern Pomerania, Donbas), and on specific sectors in larger operations.³⁰ Written by academic historians (Samsonov) or military historians (Zhilin, Galitsky, Sidorenko) many of these are first rate works containing massive amounts of, for the most part, accurate detail. Building upon the memoirs, unit histories, and operational studies were valuable functional works which distilled the sum total of those experiences. These studies included general military histories and histories of operational art (Semenov, Stokov, Bagramyan, Krupchenko), operational and tactical studies based on combat experiences (Radzievsky, Kurochkin), studies on the use of armored and mechanized forces (Rotmistrov, Babadzhanian, Radzievsky, Losik), treatises on operational art and tactics (Sldorenko, Savkin, Reanichenko), and studies on numerous other topics relating to combat support.³¹

New general histories of the Great Patriotic War and World War II, have appeared since 1960. A six volume history of the war in the East provided a more candid view of political issues of the war than earlier war histories and added some operational details hitherto not revealed.³² Its size, however, limited coverage of lower level operational or tactical detail. An eleven volume history of World War II was politically less candid but did add another measure of detail to accounts at the strategic and operational levels.³³

Thus it is apparent that massive amounts of Soviet military data concerning operations on the Eastern Front do exist. Moreover, the sum total of that information, as Erickson has demonstrated, forms an impressive picture of operations in the East. On balance much of that information is accurate as well.

There are however, some problems with these sources, just as is the case with German sources, that must be critiqued if one wishes to prevent creating a Soviet bias similar to the earlier German bias I described.

First, Soviet works tend to contain a high political or ideological content. In essence, they are intended to indoctrinate as well as teach. In theory, of course, war, in all its detail, is a continuum of the political and, hence, ideological context. Thus the political content is understandable, if not obligatory. A critical reader must recognize what is political and what is not and must not allow his judgment of the one to affect his judgment of the other. He must also realize that many of these works, especially the briefer and more popular ones, are written to inspire. Thus, interspersed with operational and tactical fact are inevitable examples of individual or unit self sacrifice and heroism (which may or may not be accurate). The tendency of the Western reader is to note the often romanticized single act and reject also the account of action surrounding it.

Soviet military works written before 1958 were highly politicized and focused heavily on the positive role of Stalin in every aspect of war.³⁴ Correspondingly, operational and tactical detail was lacking. After 1958 the political content of military works diminished as did emphasis on the "cult of personality," leaving more room for increasing amounts of operational and tactical detail. Since that time the political content of military works has varied depending on the nature of the work and the audience it intended to address. Hence the briefer the article and the less sophisticated the audience, the higher was the political content. First-rate operational and tactical studies limited political coverage to the role of the party structure in planning and conducting operations.

Soviet military writers also have tended to accentuate the positive, to cover successful operations in more detail than unsuccessful ones. Thus, until recently, little was written about the border battles of June-July 1941, about the Khar'kov and Kerch operations in May 1942, about the Donbas and Khar'kov operations of February-March 1943, and about the warning stages of many successful operations.³⁵ Likewise, few unit histories have appeared of armies which operated on secondary directions in the period 1943-1945.³⁶

The Soviets in the early sixties began noting these failures, saying, for example, that in May 1942 Soviet forces launched an offensive at Khar'kov but the offensive was unsuccessful. This is certainly correct but not very helpful to one who wishes to learn from failures. As time has

passed more material has appeared concerning these failures (for example, a chapter from Moskalenko's *Na yugozapadnom napravlenii* (On the southwestern direction) provides considerably more detail on the Khar'kov disaster.

A similar pattern emerged in Soviet treatment of their own airborne experiences, which were notable for their lack of success. There were few references to those failures prior to 1964. Yet by 1976 most of the unpleasant details were public, although romanticized a bit.

Very naturally Soviet interpretation of operations have often differed sharply from the German. In fact, over time differences in interpretation have appeared within the circle of Soviet military writers. In the case of memoir material this takes the form of debates over the rationale for and the outcome of operations - debates conducted by competing memoirs.³⁷

One is struck in Soviet accounts by the accuracy of facts, principally concerning unit, place, and time. Soviet sources in this regard invariably match up with the operational and tactical maps found in German (or Japanese) unit archives. It is apparent in some cases that Soviet military historians have made extensive use of such German archival materials in preparing their own studies.³⁸ Less unanimity exists over what actually occurred at a given place and at a given time. Just as is the case in some German accounts, towns abandoned by the enemy were "taken after heavy fighting," and units driven back in disarray simply "withdrew to new positions."³⁹

Especially striking are those frequent cases where low level Soviet accounts precisely match German accounts. In a history of the 203rd Rifle Division the author described the operations of that unit in the frenetic post-Stalingrad days of December 1942 when Soviet forces pressed German units southward from the Don and Chir Rivers toward the rail line running from Tatsinskaya to Morozovsk.⁴⁰ The 203rd Rifle Division was ordered to advance by forced march about 50 kilometers, cross the Bystraya River, and reach an encircled Soviet armored force at Tatsinskaya. The author described the action as the worn division, by now running short of ammunition, reached the ridge line north of the Bystraya. There it confronted an advancing force of German armor and infantry dispatched north of the river. The German force, estimated at 15 tanks, struck two regiments of the 203rd Rifle Division which, because of ammunition shortages, were forced to withdraw several kilometers. Just as he was fearing for the fate of his division the Soviet divisional commander contacted a nearby antitank company which provided the division supporting fire. Miraculously the German force broke contact and withdrew south of the river. This Soviet account did not mention the designation of the German unit.

In a casual interview with a former lieutenant from 6th Panzer Division, which fought along the Bystraya River in late December 1942, I asked the lieutenant about his unit's operations on the day of the events described by the Soviet account.⁴¹ He responded that 6th Panzer dispatched an armored *kampfgruppen* north of the Bystraya with about 15 tanks and supporting infantry in order to disrupt the Soviet advance to and across the river. He was in the task force. The force struck a Soviet unit, elements of which withdrew after desultory firing. The German unit pursued a short distance until it came under fire from an undetected Soviet artillery unit, fire which stripped the infantry away from the tanks. Fearing the loss of critical armored assets left unprotected by infantry, the Germans withdrew south of the river.

This isolated incident is often typical of the complementary nature of Soviet and German (and Japanese) accounts regarding unit, place, and time. It also vividly underscores the necessity, or at least the desirability of having both sides of the story.

A major discrepancy between Soviet and German sources concerns the number of forces at the disposal of each side. Examination of both sources and German archival material indicates several tendencies. First, Soviet accounts of their own strength seem to be accurate and reflect the numbers cited in documentation of *Fremde Heeres Ost*.⁴² Conversely, Soviet sources tend to exaggerate the strength of German forces they opposed. Moreover, Soviet exaggeration of German strength regarding guns and armor is even more severe than in regards to manpower. In part, this results from the Soviet practice of counting German allies, auxiliary forces, and home guards (*Volksturm*) units. But even counting these forces, Soviet estimates of German strength, when compared with the strengths shown by OKH records, are too high.⁴³ Just as the Germans exaggerate when they cite routine Soviet manpower preponderance of between 8:1 and 17:1, so also do Soviet sources exaggerate Soviet-German strength ratios as being less than 3:1 and often 2:1 up to 1945 when higher ratios were both justified and recognized by Soviet sources. For example, the Japanese armored strength of about 1500 tanks cited in Soviet works on Manchuria exceeded tenfold the actual Japanese armored strength, which, in addition, was comprised of armored vehicles scarcely deserving of the name (and apparently, for that same reason, never used in the operation).

Soviet sources also adversely affect their own credibility with regards to wartime casualty figures. The earlier practice of totally ignoring casualties has begun to erode, but one must look long and hard to find any loss figures, indicating that this is still obviously a delicate question for Soviet writers. Gross figures do exist for large scale operations (Berlin, S.E. Europe, Manchuria), and one can infer casualties from reading divisional histories which sometimes give percentages of unit fill before and after operations and company strengths.⁴⁴ Comprehensive coverage of this issue, however, does not exist; and the reader is left to reach his own conclusions (One of which is that the Soviet author has something to hide).

Thus, in addition to the general American (and Western) ignorance of the existence of Soviet source material and the presence of an imposing language barrier, Americans question the credibility of Soviet sources. While this questioning was once valid, it is increasingly less valid as time passes. Soviet sources have some inherent weaknesses; but these weaknesses, over time, have been diminishing. Unfortunately, the American perception of Soviet sources remains negative; and, hence, the American perception of the Eastern Front has changed very little. Only time, more widespread publication of candid operational materials (some of it in English), and more extensive use of those materials by American military historians will alter those perceptions. That alteration will likely be painfully slow.

Conclusions: The Reconciliation of Myths and Realities

The dominant role of German source materials in shaping American perceptions of the war on the Eastern Front and the negative perception of Soviet source materials have had an indelible impact on the American image of war on the Eastern Front. What has resulted in a series of gross judgments treated as truths regarding operations in the East and Soviet (Red) Army combat

performance. The gross judgments appear repeatedly in textbooks and all types of historical works, and they are persistent in the extreme. Each lies someplace between the realm of myth and reality. In summary, a few of these judgments are as follows:

- Weather repeatedly frustrated the fulfillment of German operational aims.
- Soviet forces throughout the war in virtually every operation possessed significant or overwhelming numerical superiority.
- Soviet manpower resources were inexhaustible, hence the Soviets continually ignored human losses.
- Soviet strategic and high level operational leadership was superb. However, lower level leadership (corps and below) was uniformly dismal.
- Soviet planning was rigid, and the execution of plans at every level was inflexible and unimaginative.
- Wherever possible, the Soviets relied for success on mass rather than maneuver. Envelopment operations were avoided whenever possible.
- The Soviets operated in two echelons, never cross attached units, and attacked along straight axes.
- Lend lease was critical for Soviet victory. Without it collapse might have ensued.
- Hitler was the cause of virtually all German defeats. Army expertise produced earlier victories (a variation of the post World War I stab in the back. legend).
- The stereotypical Soviet soldier was capable of enduring great suffering and hardship, fatalistic, dogged in defense (in particular in bridgeheads), a master of infiltration and night fighting, but inflexible, unimaginative, emotional and prone to panic in the face of uncertainty.

A majority of Americans probably accept these judgments as realities . In doing so they display a warped impression of the war which belittles the role played by the Red Army. As a consequence, they have a lower than justified appreciation for the Red Army as a fighting force, a tendency which extends, as well, to the postwar Soviet Army. Until the American public (and historians) perception of Soviet source material changes, this overall perception of the war in the East and the Soviet (Red) Army is likely to persist.

Close examination of Soviet sources as well as German archival materials cast many of these judgments into the realm of myth. Recent work done on Eastern Front operations has begun to surface the required evidence to challenge those judgments.⁴⁵ Continued work on the part of American historians, additional work by Soviet historians, joint work by both parties, and more extensive efforts to make public Soviet archival materials is necessary for that challenging process to bear fruit.

It is clear that no really objective or more complete picture of operations on the Eastern Front is possible without extensive use of Soviet source material. Thus definitive accounts of operations in the East have yet to be written. How definitive they will ultimately be depends in large part on the future candor and scope of Soviet historical efforts.

In the interim it is the task of American historians, drawing upon all sources, Soviet and German alike, to challenge those judgments and misperceptions which are a produce of past historical work. It is clear that the American (Western) perspective regarding war on the Eastern Front needs broadening, in the more superficial public context and in the realm of more serious historical study. Scholarly cooperation among Soviet and American historians, research exchange programs involving both parties, and expanded conferences to share the fruits of historical research would further this end and foster more widespread understanding on both sides.

Endnotes

1. This view is drawn from a review of newspaper coverage of the war by the *New York Times* but, more important, by local newspapers as well. It is also based on ten year's experience in teaching and listening to a generation of postwar students at the U.S. Military Academy, The U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and the U.S. Army War College.[BACK](#)

2. Despite efforts by the Communist Parties of the United States and Great Britain to publicize the Soviet role in war.[BACK](#)

3. Americans also believed, and still believe, the use of the atomic bomb in early August 1945 rendered Soviet operations in Manchuria superfluous.[BACK](#)

4. H. Guderian, *Panzer keder*, (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1957) First edition published in 1952.[BACK](#)

5. F. von Mellenthin, *Panzer Battles: A Study of the Employment of Armor in the Second World War*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972) First edition published in 1956.[BACK](#)

6. *Ibid.*, 185-186, 209, 233-234, 292-304. Mellenthin did, however, note the tremendous improvements in Soviet armored capability during wartime and noted, "The extraordinary development of the Russian tank arm deserves the very careful attention of students of war."[BACK](#)

7. *Ibid.*, 175-185.[BACK](#)

8. One of the few Soviet accounts of action along the Chir River is found in K. K. Rokossovsky, ea., *Velikaya pobeda na Volge* (The Great Victory on the Volga), (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1960), 307-309. An indicator of reduced 1st Tank Corps strength is apparent from German situation maps, see *Lagenkarte XXXXVIII Pz-Kps*, 7.12.42 through 12.12.42.[BACK](#)

9. Particularly in Mellenthin's brief account of operations in the Donbas in February 1943. The map and text provide incorrect positions for two divisions of II SS Panzer Corps.[BACK](#)
10. E. von Manstein, *Lost Victories*, (Chicago, Ill: Henry Regnery, 1958).[BACK](#)
11. Manstein cites force ratio as being 8:1 in favor of the Soviets opposite Army Groups Don and B and 4:1 against Army Groups Center and North. *Fremde Heeres Ost* documents dated 1 April 1943 give the ratios of just over 2:1 against Army Groups South and A and 3:2 against Army Groups Center and North. The overall German estimate of Soviet superiority on that date was just under 2:1. See *Fremde Heeres Ost Kraeftegegenueberstellung*: Stand 1.3.43.[BACK](#)
12. For example, H. Schroter, *Stalingrad*, (London: Michael Joseph, 1958).[BACK](#)
13. *DA Pamphlet No. 20-232*, Airborne Operations: A German Appraisal, (Department of the Army, October 1951), 36.[BACK](#)
14. H. Reinhardt, "Russian Airborne Operations," *Foreign Military Studies MS No. P-116*, Reproduced by the Historical Division, U.S. Army, Europe, 1953.[BACK](#)
15. *DA Pamphlet No. 20-233*, German Defensive Tactics Against Russian Break throughs, (Department of the Army, October 1951).[BACK](#)
16. *Ibid.*, 64-70. This article treated German defensive operations between Belgorod and Khar'kov from 5-23 August 1943 and subsequent delaying actions in late August and early September 1943 as a continuous delay, when, in fact, the Germans attempted to hold the Khar'kov area until forced to withdraw by heavy Russian attacks east and west of the city.[BACK](#)
17. A. Werth, *Russia at War 1941-1945*, (New York: E. P. Dutton Co., 1964).[BACK](#)
18. A. Clark, *Barbarossa: The Russo-German Conflict 1941-1945*, (London: Hutchinson, 1965).[BACK](#)
19. E. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East*, (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1968).[BACK](#)
20. P. Carell, *Hitler Moves East and Scorched Earth*, (New York: Little, Brown, 1965, 1966).[BACK](#)
21. A. Seaton, *The Russo-German War 1941-1945*, (London: Arthur Barker, 1971); A. Seaton, *The Battle of Moscow*, (New York: Playboy Press, 1980), original edition 1971.[BACK](#)
22. J. Erickson, *The Soviet High Command: A Political-Military History 1918-1941*, (London: St. Martins, 1962).[BACK](#)

23. J. Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad: Stalin's War with Germany*, (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1984), First edition in 1975; J. Erickson, *The Road to Berlin: Continuing the History of Stalin's War with Germany*, (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1983).[BACK](#)

24. General histories of the war included I. V. Anisimov, G. V. Kuz'min, *Velikaya Otechestvennaya voina Sovetskovo Soyaza 1941-1945 gg* (The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union 1941-1945), (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1952), and F. D. Vorobtev, V. M. Kravtsov, *Pobedy Sovetskykh vooruzhennykh sil v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941-1945* (The Victory of the Soviet Armed Forces in the Great Patriotic War), (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1953). All were highly political, focused on the role of Stalin, and lacking in any useful military details. A notable exception was one monograph, V. P. Morozov, *Zapadnee Voronezha* (West of Voronezh), (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1956), a work whose factual content and candor set the tone for subsequent studies published after 1958. During this apparently sterile period in terms of military details, substantial articles did appear in some Soviet military journals, in particular in the *Journal of Armored and Mechanized Forces* (*Zhurnal Bronetankovykh I mekhanizirovannykh voisk*), and in *Military Thought* (*Voennaya Mysl'*), but both of these journals were unavailable to the American reading public and historians as well.[BACK](#)

25. *Military History Journal* (*Voенно-istoricheskii Zhurnal*) is the official organ of the Soviet Ministry of Defense.[BACK](#)

26. S. P. Platonov, ea., *Vtoraya mirovaya voina 1939-1945 gg* (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1958).[BACK](#)

27. K. S. Rolganov, ea., *Pazvitie taktiki Sovetskai Armii v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny* (1941-1945 gg) (The development of Soviet Army tactics during the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945), (Moskva: Voenisdat, 1958). A companion book related the experiences of armored forces.[BACK](#)

28. Among the *front* and army commanders who did not write memoirs, either because they died during wartime or in the immediate postwar period or because of other reasons were Vatutin (Voronezh and 1st Ukrainian Front commander who died in early 1944), Chernyakovskiy (3rd Belorussian Front commander who died in February 1945), Bogdanov (2d Guards Tank Army), Rybalko (3rd Guards Tank Army), and Kravchenko (6th Guards Tank Army). Rotmistrov (5th Guards Tank Army) wrote half of his memoirs before death interrupted his work.[BACK](#)

29. Among which are most of the armies which operated on secondary directions, in particular in 1944 and 1945.[BACK](#)

30. These include operational studies by a single author or by a "collective" of authors or anthologies made up of made up of articles written by distinguished participants in the operation from all command and staff levels.[BACK](#)

31. All of these highly technical studies have been periodically updated to include the results of subsequent research. Most are used in the Soviet military education system.[BACK](#)

32. *Istoriya Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny Sovetskovo Soyuza 1941-1945* (History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union 1941-1945) in 6 volumes (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1960-1965).[BACK](#)

33. *Istoriya vtoroi mirovoi voiny 1939-1945* (History of the Second World War 1939-1945) in 12 volumes (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1973-1982).[BACK](#)

34. Stalin himself contributed to the military writings in the form of a short general history of the war. In the same period he established his claim as military theorist by enunciating 0a "permanent operating factors" which he claimed governed the conduct and outcome of war.[BACK](#)

35. Recently *Military History Journal* has published several articles on mechanized forces in the border battles of 1941. Moskalko was the first to cast light on details of the Khar'kov debacle in his work *Na yugozapadnom napravlenii* (On the southwest direction), (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1972). A. G. Yershov revealed details of the Donbas operation in his work *Osvobazdenie Donbassa* (The liberation of the Donbas), (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1973), but cloaked the material on the Soviet February-March 1943 defeat in details concerning the Soviet victories in the same area later in the year. Characteristically bits and pieces of details about these operations are found in individual unit histories. It is left to the historian to fit the pieces together into a coherent whole.[BACK](#)

36. Such as 3d, 3d Guards, 27th, 28th, 31st, 40th-49th, 52d, 53d, 60th, 70th, and other armies.[BACK](#)

37. For example, the debate between Zhokov and Chuikov over the feasibility of Soviet forces advancing on Berlin in February 1945 at the end of the Vistula-Oder operation and the manner of Zhukov's conduct of the penetration phase of the Berlin operation.[BACK](#)

38. In Soviet studies involving airborne operations west of Moscow in early 1942 Soviet accounts contain German order of battle data unobtainable in German secondary accounts. See I. I. Lisov, *Desantniki-vozdazhnye desanty* (Airlanding troops --air landings), (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1968).[BACK](#)

39. For example, a German account of the seizure of Barvenkovo in the Donbas in February 1943 talks of the Germans using a ruse to frighten Soviet defenders from the city without a fight. In actuality, Soviet accounts and German records indicate it took several days of heavy fighting to expel Soviet forces from the city. Conversely, what the Soviets described as "heavy street fighting" to secure Khar'kov in August 1943 turned out to be lighter action against German stragglers left behind as the Germans deliberately abandoned the city (albeit against the orders of the German High Command).[BACK](#)

40. This action is described in G. S. Zdanovich, *Idem v nastuplenie* (On the offensive), (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1980), 47-53.[BACK](#)

41. Interview with Oberst (Formerly Lt.) Helmut Ritgen at the U.S. Army War College in March 1984. Both accounts of the action are confirmed by *Lagenkarte XXXXVIII pz. kps*, 29.12.42; *Kriegs-Tagebuch, Gen. Kdo, XXXXVIII Panzer Korps*, 28.12.42, 29.12.42.[BACK](#)

42. For example, *Fremde Heeres Ost* (Foreign Armies East) assessed Soviet strength on the Eastern Front on 1 November 1944 to be 5.2 million men. Soviet sources claim the strength of their operating forces on the Eastern Front was 6 million men.[BACK](#)

43. OKH (Army High Command) strength reports show roughly 2.1 million German soldiers on the Eastern Front on 1 November 1944 plus about 200,000 men in Allied forces. The Soviets claim they were opposed by 3.1 million -men. On January 1945 Soviet sources cite German armor strength at 4,000 tanks and self-propelled guns. German records show about 3,500 tanks and self-propelled guns. The Soviets credit the Germans with 28,500 guns and mortars while German records show a figure of 5,700. Similar discrepancies between Soviet and German data exist throughout the war.[BACK](#)

44. For example, the Soviets claim they suffered 32,000 killed and wounded in Manchuria and have cited precise figures for some other operations or percentages of losses in particular units during specific operations. Similar figures are usually unobtainable for operations occurring earlier in the war. One can reach gross conclusions about losses from unit histories such as that of the 203rd Rifle Division which, by the end of the Middle Don operation, had losses which reduced the strength of rifle companies to 10-15 men each. In this case full TOE strength would have been 76 men, but most divisions began operations with from 40-60 men per company. Obviously, in this instance losses were high.[BACK](#)

45. This includes extensive analysis of operations done within the context of the U.S. Army War College Art of War symposium which has completed a three year analysis of selected Eastern Front operations from late 1942 through 1945. New Ultra information and material from the *Fremde Heeres Ost* archives cast new light on the actual intelligence picture upon which Hitler and the Army High Command based their decisions. New German works by such historians as H. Boog, G. Ueberscharl and W. Wette are also challenging traditional views concerning the rationale for German strategic and operational decisions. Most of these works however, are not available in English.[BACK](#)