

THE DECAPITATION OF THE RED ARMY:
WHY AND ITS EFFECT

by

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A THESIS

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THE DECAPITATION OF THE RED ARMY:

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

Sam Houston State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

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December 1971

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The writer wishes to express his sincere appreciation to Professors James J. Hagerty, Mary S. Owen, and John W. Payne, Jr., for their patience, guidance, and constructive criticism in the development of this study. The writer is grateful to Professor Owen for her translation of a valuable French language source.

Gratitude is also expressed to Charles L. Dwyer, the Director of the Sam Houston State University Library, and his staff, especially Miss Patricia (Sissy) Barr and Miss Gretchen Kottkamp, who obtained a large number of important sources through the Inter-Library Loan System.

To my wife, Ann, whose understanding and unselfish support were a source of strength during the months of research and writing, I affectionately acknowledge here my immense debt.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Though the "Great Purge" in the U.S.S.R. during 1936-1938 was not the first purge, nor the last, in Soviet history, it subjected the country to terror and slaughter on a scale unheard of in modern history. In his excellent study of the purge, Zbigniew Brzezinski has noted that the primary characteristic of the "Great Purge" was the unprecedented depth of its penetration into Soviet society, the Communist Party, and the State administration and the Red Army, with the trials of the leading political victims highly publicized.¹ In contrast to the trials of the political leaders, however, the case of Marshal Mikhail N. Tukhachevsky and seven other high-ranking officers of the Red Army in June 1937, which started the widespread 1937-1938 purge of the Soviet armed forces, was wrapped in silence broken only by an occasional vague and laconic official communique. As a result of the purge, from 20,000 to 35,000 Red Army officers were killed or imprisoned; that is to say that the loss represented from 25 per cent to almost 50 per cent of the officer corps, and the vast majority of these losses were inflicted on the higher ranks, the field grade officers and above.² Since this occurred at a time when the threat of war

was ever increasing, from both Germany and Japan, one cannot but wonder for what strange political reasons did Joseph Stalin decapitate the Red Army.

The purpose of this study is to examine the material on the U.S.S.R. and the Red Army in order to determine why Stalin took this drastic measure and what impact the loss of these key military personnel had upon the combat effectiveness of the Red Army during the period 1939-1941. In order to remain within acceptable limits of length and, hopefully, to cover fully one important aspect of the "Great Purge," this study is confined to the Red Army and its Air Force; it will not devote very much attention to the Red Navy or to the troops of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, the NKVD. However, in order to place the purge of the Red Army in perspective, a synopsis of the political purges will be presented. While it is recognized that there is a great deal of interaction between the military and political impacts of the purge of the Army, this study concentrates on the former.*

The method used to acquire the information needed in this study was to examine the primary and secondary source materials available in the Sam Houston State University

*For noted works on the political repercussions, the following are recommended: George F. Kennan's Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin and Memoirs, 1925-1950; Max Beloff's The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia: 1929-1941, volume II; and Hugh Seton-Watson's From Lenin to Khrushchev: The History of World Communism.

Library, the Rice University Library, and the University of Texas Library at Austin. Extensive use was made of materials available through inter-library loan from other universities. Although the writer does not read, write, or speak Russian, German, or French, many primary sources are in English or their works have been translated.

The study is limited by the secret nature of the so-called trial of Tukhachevsky and his fellow officers; it is questionable as to whether there ever was a trial, and the lack of access to the Soviet documents apparently hinders even historians in the U.S.S.R.³ However, this limitation is somewhat offset by the revelations of various "defectors," the memoirs of various Soviet military personnel since Stalin's death, and the useful observations of émigrés and ex-communists, such as Boris Nicolaevski, David Dallin, and Boris Souvarine. Another limitation is the degree of credibility, in reference to independence of thought and expression, that can be given speeches and publications made by Soviet military officials after 1928, when Stalin began to exercise quasi-dictatorial power. In this area, it is believed that the statements used reflect the opinion of the source, as amended or commented on by this writer.

Seldom, if ever, do events just occur; history consists of a series of cause-effect relationships. In the case of the purge of the Red Army, several causes emanated from events which occurred during the embryonic years of the Red

Army, 1917-1921. With the exception of authors in the Soviet Union during Stalin's dictatorship, the great majority of the authors who wrote about Stalin agree on at least one aspect of his character--his vindictiveness. During the formative years of the Red Army, there were several events which appear to have delineated certain military personnel as Stalin's friends and foes.

The Red Army, whose full title was the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, was founded by decree on January 12, 1918, and became a reality on February 23, 1918. Because of its repugnant association with Tsarism, the Soviet Government abolished the term "officer" and substituted the titles "military specialists," "instructors," "commanders," and "red commanders." The former Imperial officers were referred to as "military specialists," and of them Tukhachevsky was probably the most prominent.⁴ He came from an old aristocratic family, and graduated from the Tsar's Military Academy in 1914. He was captured by the Germans in 1915, imprisoned in the fortress of Ingolstadt in Bavaria, and on his fifth attempt finally escaped in October 1917. He is reported to have told a French fellow-prisoner, "In a year I shall be either a general or a corpse."⁵ Upon his return to Petrograd (now Leningrad), he was elected "company-leader," and shortly thereafter Leon Trotsky, recognizing Tukhachevsky's outstanding military talents, appointed him to a post in the Military Section of the Central Executive Committee

of the Soviets. He joined the Bolshevik Party in April 1918, and on June 2, 1918, by order of the Revolutionary Council of War and the Soviet Government, he called on all former Tsarist officers to join the Red Army.⁶ Erich Wollenberg, an ex-Red Army officer, wrote that, as a result of Tukhachevsky's proclamation, loud threats of "shoot the 'Guards officer' [Tukhachevsky]" were uttered by members of Klimenti Voroshilov's clique, which favored Red Army use of guerilla tactics and was against the use of Tsarist officers.⁷ Voroshilov was an old professional revolutionary, a member of the Red Guard, a guerilla leader, and finally an army commander. In addition to Voroshilov, the man who was later to become the dictator of the U.S.S.R. (Stalin) was vehemently opposed to the use of Tsarist officers.⁸ It was this opposition to the use of military specialists that led to the formation of the "Tsaritsyn group."

In June 1918, Stalin was sent to Tsaritsyn (now Stalin-grad) on a mission to organize the food supply system; however, upon his arrival, he and Voroshilov, who was the local commander, removed the "military specialists" and replaced them with Bolsheviks. Semyon M. Budenny, an ex-Tsarist regular cavalry sergeant-major remained the commander of the cavalry division that was there, and Semyon K. Timoshenko, an ex-Imperial Army NCO, was also with Voroshilov's forces. In August, the Revolutionary Council of War ordered the temporary evacuation of the Tsaritsyn sector of the Southern

Front, but Voroshilov refused. Stalin, acting as the local representative of the Council, supported Voroshilov. Wollenberg contends that the subsequent failure of the southern army on the battlefield of Simbirsk, which was within the Tsaritsyn sector, was the result of Voroshilov's refusal to temporarily evacuate the sector and regroup his forces. Wollenberg continues by writing that in 1922 Tukhachevsky, in his capacity as director of the Military Academy of Moscow, said that the Simbirsk defeat caused the Civil War to be prolonged by two years.⁹ Trotsky was incensed at Stalin's and Voroshilov's challenge to his authority, and on October 5, Trotsky persuaded Lenin to recall Stalin; Voroshilov was transferred to the Ukraine on December 14.¹⁰ The latter's transfer, however, was not merely political; Trotsky did not have much faith in Voroshilov's military abilities, as evidenced when Trotsky telegraphed Lenin that "Voroshilov is capable of commanding a regiment, not an army of 50,000."¹¹ The Tsaritsyn conflict deepened Stalin's hatred of Trotsky, especially since Stalin returned to Tsaritsyn on October 11, 1918, and several days later the besiegers were repulsed. Trotsky was to maintain that it was pressure from outside the area which defeated the enemy, and Stalin was to argue the opposite, claiming the credit belonged to the Tsaritsyn group. Most of the Red Army's ranking personnel agreed with Trotsky, at least until the "Great Purge,"¹² and this agreement and Tukhachevsky's 1922

statement at the Military Academy were not likely to be forgotten by Stalin in 1937-1938. Furthermore, the Tsaritsyn conflict seems to have bonded Stalin, Voroshilov, Budenny, and Timoshenko for years to come.

Tukhachevsky was next to cross paths with Voroshilov and Budenny in January-February 1920, during the battle of Bataisk Heights, when they served under Tukhachevsky's command. After the battle, Tukhachevsky berated them for disobeying orders. Budenny thought that Tukhachevsky was an arrogant youngster, and he and Voroshilov discovered that Tukhachevsky did not have a very high opinion of Budenny's 1st Cavalry Army in general and of Budenny in particular.¹³ John Erickson, in his monumental study of the Red Army, has written, "This mutual lack of confidence was to have enormous consequences some six months later in the course of the war with Poland."¹⁴

Poland was revived as an independent State as a result of the Treaty of Versailles; however, the "Curzon Line" had only established a temporary eastern frontier between Poland and Soviet Russia. The Polish Head of State and Supreme Commander, Marshal Joseph Pilsudski, wanted the new Polish State to have the same frontiers as that of the ancient kingdom of Poland, which, before the 1772 partition, included portions of Belorussia and the Ukraine.¹⁵ Pilsudski therefore decided to take these areas by force while the Russians were heavily engaged in civil war. On April 25, 1920,

Polish forces invaded Soviet Russia and by May 8 had captured Kiev.¹⁶ The Revolutionary Council of War established two army groups, under the Red Army's Commander-in-Chief, Sergei S. Kamenev, for the Polish campaign.

Though only twenty-seven years old, Tukhachevsky had already obtained the reputation of being a military genius and one of the most outstanding Red Army commanders to emerge from the Civil War. Therefore, he was given command of the main Soviet army, the Western Front, which was to advance on Warsaw from Belorussia. His forces consisted of the IVth, XVth, IIIrd, and XVIth Armies and the III Cavalry Corps. The South-western Front was commanded by Aleksander I. Yegorov, with Stalin as the political commissar. Its force structure included the XIIth and XIVth Armies and Budenny's Ist Cavalry Army. Voroshilov and Timoshenko were with Budenny's Ist Cavalry Army. Yegorov's forces were to recapture Kiev and then march on Lublin. Acting as a link between the two Fronts was a force of about two divisions, called the "Mozyr group," which was initially located in the marshy area of the Pripet.¹⁷ According to Wollenberg, the South-western Front was to have been subordinated to Tukhachevsky as soon as the meridian of Brest-Litovsk had been crossed. Wollenberg wrote that Tukhachevsky had wanted immediate subordination in order to insure unity of action, but "Kamenev . . . decided upon this temporary solution, because considerable friction had existed between Tukhachevsky

and the commanders of the South-western Front (Yegorov, Stalin, and Voroshilov) ever since the Czechoslovak Insurrection in the summer of 1918."¹⁸ Regardless of the initial command organization, Erickson emphasizes that both Fronts had "the single aim of destroying the enemy in the direction of Warsaw."¹⁹

Tukhachevsky's initial offensive in mid-May 1920 bogged down because of insufficient forces. To the south, however, Budenny's Ist Cavalry Army launched its attack on June 5 and rapidly scattered the Polish forces at Kiev and elsewhere in the Ukraine.²⁰ The head of the French Military Mission in Poland in 1920, General Maxime Weygand, wrote of the effect of the Ist Cavalry's June offensive: "Thereafter the very name of Budenny and the appearance of clouds of dust on the horizon sufficed to strike terror in the hearts of the Polish troops"²¹ Pilsudski shifted forces in order to counter the threat of the South-western Front, and Tukhachevsky launched his second offensive in early July. The march to Warsaw had begun, and Tukhachevsky's forces rapidly advanced. However, General P. N. Wrangel's White forces were gaining momentum in the south and posed a threat to the rear of the Soviet armies advancing in Poland. Therefore, elements of the South-western Front were diverted and sent against Wrangel, weakening the capabilities of that Front's actions in Poland.²² Yet the Red Armies continued to advance as the Polish forces fell back. On August 1,

Brest-Litovsk was captured,²³ but it was not until August 6 that Tukhachevsky was given command of the entire Polish operation.²⁴

August 6, 1920, was a crucial day in the Polish campaign, for it was on that day that Pilsudski noticed that there was a large, almost undefended gap developing between the two Soviet Fronts. Tukhachevsky had begun to concentrate the Western Front's forces in the area north of Warsaw, while the South-western Front was directing its actions against Lvov, instead of moving against its assigned objective, Lublin. Pilsudski decided that he would mass his forces in the north against this gap and thus hit Tukhachevsky from the rear. Therefore, on August 6, Pilsudski issued the order for the redeployment of the Polish forces. While Tukhachevsky noted that his left flank was dangerously exposed, he initially refused to believe that Pilsudski's main thrust would come from that direction; he was sure that any counter-attack by the Poles would come from Warsaw. When the III Red Army captured a copy of Pilsudski's August 6th order, Tukhachevsky believed it was merely a deception.²⁵ Therefore, the gap between the two Soviet Fronts continued to grow.

On August 11, the Soviet High Command realized that the Poles were concentrating their forces on Tukhachevsky's exposed flank and ordered Yegorov to cease the fighting at Lvov and shift the attack toward Lublin, which was the central area of the gap between the Fronts.²⁶ However, the order

was not clearly stated and, therefore, was not executed by Yegorov. On August 13, Kamenev sent another order, this one being quite specific. It demanded that the Lvov operations cease and that, effective August 14, the Ist Cavalry Army (less one division) and the XIIth Army would be under Tukhachevsky's control. On the 14th, Yegorov passed the order about the resubordination on to Budenny, but he did not tell Budenny to cease his engagement at Lvov.²⁷

Trotsky, in his biography of Stalin, wrote that Stalin refused to sign Yegorov's order, making it invalid without the political commissar's counter-signature. Trotsky continued by stating:

He [Stalin] wanted at any cost to enter Lvov at the same time that [Ivan T.] Smilga [Tukhachevsky's political commissar] and Tukhachevsky were to enter Warsaw. . . . Stalin was waging his own war. When the danger to Tukhachevsky's army became clearly evident and the Commander-in-Chief ordered the South-western Front to shift its direction sharply toward [the north], in order to strike at the flanks of the Polish troops near Warsaw, the command of the South-western Front, encouraged by Stalin, continued to move to the West. . . . Only after repeated demands reinforced by threats did the South-western command change direction, but by then the delay of several days had already played its fatal role.²⁸

While Trotsky cannot be evaluated as an unbiased commentator on Stalin, Boris Souvarine, whose biography of Stalin's life until 1938 is probably the most reliable, expressed a similar opinion when he wrote that Stalin wanted to gain glory for himself by capturing Lvov and, therefore, intentionally disregarded the order to have Budenny move to

protect Tukhachevsky's flank.²⁹ Similar opinions have also been expressed by numerous authorities on the Red Army.³⁰

The failure to have a force large enough to protect the Western Front's exposed flank was summarized by ex-Soviet army officer and diplomat Alexander Barmine: "The result was two defeats [Warsaw and Lvov] and the loss of the war."³¹ The Polish forces hit the exposed gap on August 16; Budenny's 1st Cavalry Army did not disengage from Lvov until August 20, and by then the Soviet forces had little choice but to retreat.³² An armistice was reached on October 12, 1920, followed five months later by the conclusion of the peace with the Treaty of Riga.³³ The failure of the Soviet's Polish campaign was probably best analyzed by William H. Chamberlin.³⁹ For the purposes of this study, however, the importance of the failure of the campaign lies in the subsequent charges and counter-charges which were leveled by the Soviet protagonists.

After the campaign, a commission of inquiry was set up in an attempt to determine why the offensive failed. In secret debates at the 10th Party Congress in March 1921, Mikhail Frunze, Kamenev, and "many of the 'military specialists'" supported the position of Tukhachevsky: that the primary fault lay with the August 1920 actions of the South-western Front's forces. Budenny sided with Stalin, who accused Smilga, and by implication Tukhachevsky, of promising to capture Warsaw by a specific date. Stalin claimed that

the actions of the South-western Front to capture Lvov had been based on the "promise" to capture Warsaw and were therefore justified. Trotsky refuted Stalin's position with his characteristic logic and harshness, which resulted in Stalin's argument hurting "no one but himself."³⁵ Other military leaders, like Boris Shaposhnikov, tried to "straddle the fence." According to Michel Garder's study of the Red Army, Shaposhnikov presented "a very complicated explanation which sought to absolve him from committing himself precisely in the matter."³⁶ In order to preclude any further Party dissension, Lenin closed the inquiry without specifically affixing the blame to anyone. Erickson, however, quotes a comment with which Lenin supposedly closed the meeting: "Eh! Who on earth would want to get to Warsaw by going through Lvov!"³⁷ This certainly appears to be a stab at Stalin.

Not content to "let a dead dog lie," and possibly in an attempt to remove what he considered a blemish on his and the Red Army's prestige,³⁸ Tukhachevsky proceeded two years later to rub salt in the wounds inflicted on Budenny and Stalin. In a series of lectures delivered to the Military Academy of Moscow during February 7-10, 1923, Tukhachevsky reviewed the Polish campaign and presented his beliefs on why the Red Army's offensive failed.³⁹ His presentation was marked by its revolutionary fervor, which echoed Trotsky's concept of exporting world revolution, for Tukhachevsky

seems to have strongly believed that the revolution was imminent in Western Europe. He frequently used phrases such as, "The world revolution was possible" and ". . . without our setback the revolutionary movement [in Western Europe] would have been crowned with complete success."⁴⁰ As far as Tukhachevsky's future was concerned, his comments about the actions of the South-western Front in general and the Ist Cavalry Army in particular were even worse, especially since his discussion of these organizations was characterized by a marked degree of asperity. In his references to Budenny, Tukhachevsky used very strong, harsh verbs in describing the Ist Cavalry Army Commander's actions. He said that Budenny was "engaging in futile effort" at Lvov and that Budenny's cavalry was "depleting itself," which was detrimental to Tukhachevsky's effort against Warsaw. He stressed that the attack against Lvov was in contradiction to the repeated orders of the High Command.⁴¹ Furthermore, in commenting on the August 16 Polish counter-attack, he lambasted Budenny by saying, "This situation [that of the Western Front after the counterattack] became critical for us, especially since the Cavalry obstinately insisted in operating in the direction of Lvov instead of operating in the direction of Lublin."⁴² Continuing, he said, "It was evident that the time lost [by the South-western Front's failure to comply with orders] prevented us from seizing the occasion of inflicting a disaster on the adversary and that

we had ourselves fallen into a critical situation. Retreat imposed itself."⁴³ Tukhachevsky concluded his presentation by stating that the failure of the South-western Front to coordinate in accordance with the previously arranged command organization was the key factor in "wrenching victory from our hands and in the last analysis brought on our catastrophe."⁴⁴

It must have been evident to Stalin that Tukhachevsky's analysis of the Polish campaign was an attack against him and his Tsaritsyn group. As Wollenberg noted, Tukhachevsky as much as accused the Tsaritsyn group of "deliberate treachery,"⁴⁵ not only to the Red Army, but also to the success of the European, and possibly the world, revolution. Furthermore, by advocating in 1921 that the Red Army form the nucleus of an "International Red Army" to achieve world revolution,⁴⁶ coupled with his statements that the failure of the Polish campaign prevented the "complete success" of "the revolutionary movement," Tukhachevsky must have been considered a Trotskyite in Stalin's mind. Whether valid or not, this conclusion was to have considerable importance during the Great Purge. The responsibility for the failure of the Polish campaign was further substantiated in 1930, when Stalin was in the midst of his problems with collectivization and the First Five-Year Plan, with Trotsky's publication of the orders to the South-western Front and his charge that Stalin deliberately disobeyed the orders.⁴⁷ Erickson has

noted that it was not likely "that Stalin chose to forget the harsh words and unfavorable judgments which fastened about his name and the part his friends played in the final debacle [of the Polish campaign]."48

By 1921, the Civil War was over, and peace was established between Soviet Russia and Poland. The situation in the U.S.S.R. was such that Moscow did not need and could ill-afford to maintain the Red Army at the large strength to which it had grown. The question became one of what size and type army should be formed.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, The Permanent Purge: Politics in Soviet Totalitarianism (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), pp. 65, 72.

² Erick Wollenberg, The Red Army: A Study of the Growth of Soviet Imperialism, trans. Claud W. Sykes (London, 1940), p. 253; Boris Souvarine, Stalin: A Critical Survey of Bolshevism, trans. C. L. R. James (New York, 1939), p. 635; Walter G. Krivitsky, In Stalin's Secret Service, 3rd ed. (New York, 1939), p. 177.

³ Umberto Cerroni, "Soldiers Who Didn't Fade Away," Atlas, 9 (Mar 1965), 169; Vladimir Petrov, ed. and trans., "June 22, 1941": Soviet Historians and the German Invasion (Columbia, S. C., 1968), p. 254.

⁴ Wollenberg, pp. 39-41; Dmitri Fedotoff-White, The Growth of the Red Army (Princeton, N. J., 1944), pp. 43, 59; Documents on Soviet Military Law and Administration, ed. and trans. Harold J. Berman and Miroslav Kerner (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), p. 7.

⁵ Wollenberg, p. 60.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 39, 60; Leon Trotsky, Stalin: An Appraisal of the Man and His Influence, ed. and trans. Charles Malamuth (1941; rpt. New York, 1967), p. 327.

⁷ Wollenberg, p. 39; Trotsky, p. 289.

⁸ Raymond L. Garthoff, Soviet Military Doctrine (Glencoe, Ill., 1953), p. 44; John Erickson, The Soviet High Command: A Military-Political History, 1918-1941 (New York, 1962), p. 39.

⁹ Wollenberg, p. 91.

¹⁰ Ernest Léderrey, "The Red Army During the Civil War," in Basil H. Liddell Hart, The Red Army (New York, 1956), pp. 36-37; Erickson, pp. 39-40; Leon Trotsky, My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography (New York, 1930), pp. 443-44.

¹¹ Trotsky, Stalin, p. 288.

¹² Isaac Deutscher, Stalin: A Political Biography, 2nd ed. (New York, 1969) p. 204. Since Voroshilov, Budenny, and Timoshenko were with Stalin at Tsaritsyn, it is very doubtful that they were among the military leaders who agreed with Trotsky.

- 13 Erickson, p. 74.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Maxime Weygand, "The Red Army in the Polish War," in Liddell Hart, The Red Army, p. 45.
- 16 Louis Fischer, The Soviets in World Affairs, 2nd ed. (Princeton, N. J., 1951), I, 259; Wollenberg, p. 122; Erickson, p. 86.
- 17 Wollenberg, pp. 122-25; Fischer, I, 260, 269; Erickson, p. 93; Weygand, pp. 47, 50. Weygand alone refers to the Western and South-western Fronts as the Northern and Southern Fronts, respectively; however, the objectives and structure of the forces are basically the same.
- 18 Wollenberg, pp. 124-25.
- 19 Erickson, p. 87. Emphasis in the original.
- 20 Ibid., pp. 88-90.
- 21 Weygand, p. 50.
- 22 Erickson, pp. 91-94.
- 23 Fischer, I, 264; Wollenberg, p. 136.
- 24 Erickson, p. 95.
- 25 Ibid., pp. 95-96; William H. Chamberlin, The Russian Revolution (New York, 1935), II, 314.
- 26 Wollenberg, p. 136; Mikhail Tukhachevsky, "Le Marche Au-delà de la Vistule" (The March Beyond the Vistula), in Joseph Pilsudski, L'Année 1920 (The Year 1920), trans. Bté Ch. Jeze and J. A. Teslar (Paris, 1929), p. 249; Erickson, p. 97.
- 27 Erickson, p. 97.
- 28 Trotsky, Stalin, pp. 296, 328-29.
- 29 Souvarine, pp. 246-47.
- 30 Erickson, pp. 97-98; Garthoff, p. 40; Wollenberg, pp. 133, 136-39; Michel Garder, A History of the Soviet Army, rev. ed. (New York, 1966), p. 66; Alexander Barmine, One Who Survived (New York, 1945), p. 79; Kenneth R. Whiting, The Development of the Soviet Armed Forces, 1917-1966 (Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala., 1966), p. 53.

31 Barmine, p. 79.

32 Ibid.; Tukhachevsky, p. 250; Erickson, p. 98; Chamberlin, II, 314.

33 Fischer, I, 274.

34 Chamberlin, II, 310-316. He presents a well-studied analysis of the military, political, and organizational factors which led to the Soviet defeat; each of these factors were equally important.

35 Trotsky, Stalin, p. 329; Garder, p. 66.

36 Garder, p. 66.

37 Erickson, p. 99.

38 A French officer, Pierre Fervacque, who had been Tukhachevsky's companion when both were prisoners in Germany in 1916, described Tukhachevsky as a courageous man, patriotic, sincerely nationalist, and extremely ambitious. Fervacque believed Tukhachevsky adhered to Bolshevism because of the prospect of new revolutionary wars and a resolve to obtain revenge for the shame of Brest-Litovsk. "Balticus," "The Russian Mystery: Behind the Tukhachevsky Plot," Foreign Affairs, 16 (Oct 1937), 55. Erickson contends that the military men, during 1921-1931, "attended more assiduously to their honour, refighting . . . the abortive campaign, searching for culprits both real and imaginary." Erickson, p. 99.

39 The complete text of the lecture, with maps, is contained in Pilsudski, L'Année 1920 (The Year 1920), pp. 203-55. See note 26, above.

40 Tukhachevsky, pp. 230-32.

41 Ibid., p. 250.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., p. 252.

44 Ibid., p. 254.

45 Wollenberg, p. 140.

46 Ibid., p. 200. For the text of the letter, see Erickson, pp. 784-85.

47 Trotsky, My Life, p. 458.

48 Erickson, p. 92.

CHAPTER II

THE MODERNIZATION OF THE ARMY

After the 1920 Polish campaign, the future form of the Red Army became the subject of violent discussions in the Party and within the ranks of the officers. As Roman Kolkowicz noted, the debates, which lasted until 1924, were "due to the simple fact that the Bolsheviks had no clear concept of what their military arm should be."¹ Initially, the Bolsheviks had visions of the imminent revolution of the world's workers. However, with the uprisings which did occur and were promptly crushed in Germany and Hungary, the Soviet leaders came to realize that they needed peace in order to consolidate their power and strengthen their economy.

Raymond L. Garthoff's point that the failure of the Polish campaign was the "watershed of decision" for the Red Army is well taken,² since it seems to have cast serious doubt on the feasibility, in the twenties and thirties, of exporting revolution on the bayonets of the Red Army. In fact, Trotsky, who was noted for his advocacy of world revolution, argued that the Red Army should be a defensive organization, consisting of territorial militia units. On the other hand, Frunze and Tukhachevsky were strongly in

favor of an offensive-minded, regular army.³ In January 1921, Tukhachevsky published The Red Army and the Militia,⁴ which Erickson described as "a brilliantly written pamphlet."⁵ Tukhachevsky contended that the militia's "war efficiency is . . . bound to be small," and "In our case the introduction of the militia system [to the exclusion of the regular army] would be tantamount to a crucifixion of Soviet Russia."⁶ Stalin sided with Frunze and Tukhachevsky, probably realizing it afforded a chance to discredit Trotsky.

As is frequently the case, domestic events were to lead to a compromise solution, the adoption of both a regular army and a territorial militia. The weaknesses of the territorial militia system were initially exposed by the 1920-1921 Tambov Province peasant uprisings and the 1921 Kronstadt mutiny, both of which Tukhachevsky had to suppress.⁷ However, since the years immediately after the Civil War witnessed crucial economic problems, one of the paramount factors in adopting the compromise solution probably was one of economy. It has been estimated that it cost about twice as much to train a cadre soldier as it did to train a militia soldier. Besides, except for his training periods of from six weeks to three months, the militia soldier was in productive work during his five-year enlistment.⁸ Therefore, in 1924, the Red Army was reorganized; 75 per cent of its force structure was territorial militia, and the remaining 25 per cent comprised the regular army. Furthermore, the

strength of the regular army was limited to 562,000, though this figure did not include the 100,000 frontier guards or the 150,000 troops of the NKVD (at that time called the GPU).⁹ In the same year, Frunze replaced Trotsky as Commissar of War.

Frunze had Tukhachevsky and Shaposhnikov appointed as his deputies, and, at that point, there was little doubt that the real talent of the Red Army was located on its staff. As Erickson said: "It was from this date that . . . the history of the Soviet General Staff--as it was to become--begins."¹⁰ Under Frunze, the initial steps were taken to modernize the Red Army.

Frunze stressed the necessity of building up the military during peacetime in order to be prepared for war, and he especially emphasized the need for the creation of the industries and stockpiles to support the military. He worked assiduously to promote the close integration of industrial and military needs. Concurrently, Frunze initiated basic reforms in the army, such as improving the educational level of the officers; urging the study of military theory; improving the staff system; and introducing the principle of unity of command, whereby the role of the political commissar was not as dominant as it had been earlier.¹¹ The modernization of the Red Army had begun. However, Soviet Russia was in no condition to accomplish this feat without outside help.

In 1920, General Hans von Seeckt, founder of the German Reichswehr, had initiated secret negotiations with Soviet Russia. Seeckt wanted to obtain an agreement with the Soviets whereby the Reichswehr could secretly rearm, and he proposed to build airplanes, motor and ammunition factories, and tank and aviation schools in the U.S.S.R.¹² Louis Fischer wrote that the Soviets wanted the military cooperation because the U.S.S.R. was "industrially ruined, technologically backward, and eager to build a modern army."¹³ The negotiations were extended over two years, and they were secretly concluded in July 1922, shortly after the Treaty of Rapallo.¹⁴

Soviet historians have yet to say much about the Soviet-German military relations,¹⁵ but other sources have revealed that the Red Army greatly benefitted from the exchanges. In the twenties, friendship and the mutual exchange of information between the Red and German armies were "the order of the day."¹⁶ The Soviets received the money to operate military bases for the development and training of the German air force, motorized corps, and gas-warfare units, and there was a free exchange of information between the two armies. This free exchange of information allowed the Red Army to benefit from the theoretical, technical, and tactical knowledge developed by the Germans on Soviet soil. Furthermore, Soviet military personnel were granted free access to German bases and maneuvers, and the

Germans instructed Red Army and Air Force officers, many of whom even went to the War Academy in Berlin. Tukhachevsky, I. P. Uborevich, Robert P. Eideman, and Georgi K. Zhukov were but a few of the Red Army officers who attended secret training programs in Germany.¹⁷

The construction of the first training center, the Lipetsk air base (250 miles southeast of Moscow), began in early 1924, and flying training commenced in 1925. Meanwhile, the Soviet-German collaboration also resulted in technical assistance for Soviet ammunition plants at Zlatoust (in the Urals) and Leningrad and the Tula arms plant. This German assistance to Soviet manufacturing ceased in November 1926, but the military cooperation continued. Even the September 1926 incident at the German port of Stettin, where several boxes of ammunition produced in the U.S.S.R. were dropped, and the subsequent report of the German-Soviet manufacturing agreement in the editions of the Manchester Guardian of December 3 and 6, 1926, did not interrupt the military collaboration.¹⁸ As a result of the Manchester Guardian articles, the German government of Chancellor Wilhelm Marx fell. However, as Fischer noted, "Politicians came and went, but the partnership of armies enjoyed a hallowed life."¹⁹ In fact, the military cooperation was intensified in 1927.²⁰

In 1927, the Soviets pressed for the establishment of a tank school near Kazan, which was in full operation by

1929, and numerous specialists in motorization, as well as Soviet tank personnel, attended courses in Germany.²¹ Soviet-German cooperation reached its peak in 1930,²² and by mid-1933 the military cooperation was about to collapse. Moscow declined to send officers to the German War Academy and demanded that the Reichswehr cease its activities in the U.S.S.R.²³ The fatal blow was delivered to the rapprochement when Hitler established cordial relations with Poland in January 1934.²⁴ The Soviet-German military collaboration seems to have benefitted the Red Army primarily in the training received by its personnel. There were, however, domestic factors which also stimulated the modernization of the Red Army.

Though Frunze died in October 1925 and Voroshilov was appointed his successor, the Red Army continued to progress --a progression that was more in spite of Voroshilov than because of him. Numerous authors agree that Voroshilov was fundamentally a political soldier, with little military qualification for his new job.²⁵ A former Red Army officer described Voroshilov's reputation within the army: "Voroshilov was the top man, officially the grand old man of the Red Army, but nobody for a moment imagined that Voroshilov was more than a sentimental figurehead. Everybody knew him as the loshadiny marshal--the equine marshal--a man with no more intelligence than a horse."²⁶ Though Voroshilov was the titular head of the Red Army, Tukhachevsky was the main

force behind the army's modernization.

As an old enemy of Tukhachevsky, Voroshilov was not initially in favor of allowing him to continue to have a leading role in army affairs. Therefore, Tukhachevsky was reassigned to Leningrad and then to Minsk. Prior to his reassignment, however, Tukhachevsky had been working on the new field service regulations for the Red Army, and the commission's members, especially I. E. Yakir, Uborevich, V. M. Primakov, and Eideman, protested that they needed Tukhachevsky's expert help. Therefore, he remained president of the commission which established the first tactical and strategic foundations of the Red Army, the Provisional Regulations for Field Service, which was published in 1925.²⁷

In his preface to the 1925 Regulations, Tukhachevsky described as "foolish chatter" the theory that the Red Army could not rise "to the technical standards of imperialist armies; it must win victories by its enthusiasm." He wrote that the Red Army must evolve and master "a still more powerful technique."²⁸ While striving to convince the officer corps that it must study and develop modern tactics, Tukhachevsky probably won no plaudits from Voroshilov, since the latter was one of the proponents of the "foolish chatter."²⁹ Probably because of this slap at Voroshilov and their earlier conflicts, Tukhachevsky was to remain in relatively minor posts until 1929, when the threat of

Japan in the Far East became more ominous. Upon his return to the Red Army Staff, he took over the Operations Section, which was a key position in the Red Army.³⁰ By this time, Stalin had initiated the First Five-Year Plan.

The influence of the First Five-Year Plan can hardly be overestimated, since it meant the beginning of a large-scale military industry. In fact, one of the main justifications for launching the Plan was the need to strengthen the Red Army against the threat of an "imperialist conspiracy" against the Soviet Union.³¹ Fischer, who was in the U.S.S.R. in 1929, wrote, "The Red Army's mechanical equipment falls far behind the requirements of modern war. Transport, in particular, is faulty, and motor vehicles are very few."³²

During the First Five-Year Plan, an effort was made to remove these deficiencies. Some 5,000 tanks were produced, and the production of steel, a basic necessity in the production of armaments, rose from four million tons a year in 1929 to 6½ million tons in 1932.³³ At the same time, emphasis was placed on increasing the number of technically trained officers. In 1934, Voroshilov admitted that the Red Army had had few qualified technicians in 1929-1930, and the low level of education among the non-military specialists was clearly portrayed by a 1929 investigation conducted by the Main Political Administration (PUR). Out of 243 commanders who contributed to the military literature in the U.S.S.R., 81.5 per cent were ex-Tsarist officers. Only twenty-one

non-military specialist commanders wrote on subjects such as strategy, tactics, military engineering, artillery, and mobilization, as compared to over 100 military specialists who wrote such articles.³⁴ Yet only 10 per cent of the entire officer corps at this time were military specialists.³⁵ To remedy this situation, the number of aviation, tank, and engineering schools increased six-fold during 1929-1932, and in May 1932 the Military Academy for Mechanization and Motorization was established. At the lower echelons of the army, education was taken through correspondence courses and at night-school.³⁶

Further improvements were made in modernizing the army as the subsequent Five-Year Plans were initiated. By 1937, steel production had risen to almost twenty million tons a year, tank production increased to over 3,000, and the output of artillery pieces jumped from under 2,000 guns in 1931 to over 5,000. In the education field, a faculty was recruited from the Frunze Academy to man a new Military Economic Academy in 1935. The year 1936 witnessed the creation of an Academy of the General Staff, whose function was to prepare officers for the higher commands in the Red Army. Better training practices, training aides, and more skillful instructors were introduced into the military training system in order to develop personnel capable of using the new weapons coming into the Red Army inventory.³⁷ In commenting on the Five-Year Plan, Erickson wrote:

The only consumer interest considered was that of the armed forces. This was the real transformation of the Red Army. . . . powerful secret weapons were about to be called into operation--the internal combustion engine and the caterpillar track.³⁸

Tukhachevsky was the leader of the group of Red Army officers which was anxious to develop the full potentialities of modern weaponry for the Red Army. Around his banner were the talented minds of young senior commanders such as Yakir, Uborevich, A. I. Kork, Eideman, Ya. I. Alksnis (military aviation), I. Khalepsky (armor), and A. Sed'yakin (artillery). Under Tukhachevsky's guidance, the Red Army gradually achieved greater firepower and mobility through mechanization.³⁹ The "technical revolution" of the Red Army, which characterized the army's history in the thirties, began its experimental stage in 1929.

In 1929, the Red Army had one "Experimental Composite Mechanized Regiment." In May 1930, the first mechanized brigade was established, with two tank and two motorized infantry battalions, and artillery and reconnaissance units. By 1932, the mechanized brigades were organized into corps, with two mechanized and one rifle brigade, and in 1934-1935 armored and mechanized units became a special branch of the army. As these units were formed, the preponderance of them was assigned in the west, mainly in the Belorussian and Ukrainian commands.⁴⁰ By 1935, it was estimated that the Red Army had expanded its armored strength to twenty-five mechanized brigades, with an estimated tank strength of 10,000,

and 150,000 military tractors and 100,000 military trucks. Furthermore, about one-third of the corps artillery, one-half of the anti-aircraft artillery, and all of the heavy artillery of the Main Reserve had been motorized.⁴¹ The size of the Red Army had increased to 1,300,000, not counting the frontier guards and NKVD troops, and by 1936 the ratio of regular army divisions to territorial militia divisions was reversed. The regular army now had 77 per cent of the Soviet divisions.⁴² By 1937, the Red Army had between 15,000 and 20,000 tanks and over 10,000 airplanes.⁴³ Along with the development of large formations of mechanized units, Tukhachevsky also began experiments with a concept in which he was years ahead of his foreign counterparts.⁴⁴

Using a 1929 report of a visit to the United States by Major Sergei Minov, who observed the use of the parachute as an amusement attraction at county fairs, Tukhachevsky began experimenting with the use of airborne troops in 1931.⁴⁵ The training of airborne troops was intensified in 1934,⁴⁶ and three airborne divisions were formed. Along with the development of airborne troops, the air force was also expanded. Transport planes were developed to carry the airborne troops and their equipment, and fighter and bomber airplanes were developed for support of the ground troops and strategic bombing.⁴⁷ The acquisition of modern arms, the training received from the Germans, and the organizational changes in the Red Army stimulated discussions about innovations in tactics and strategy, which Tukhachevsky had

begun in the twenties.

Tukhachevsky and his group had been espousing their views on modern military doctrine since 1925, and they continually up-dated them as technology progressed. In the 1925 Regulations there was a new emphasis on technology in modern war.⁴⁸ Tukhachevsky's virtual banishment from Moscow during 1925-1929 did not seem to have had any effect on his influence as a leading Soviet military theoretician. His view of future war, published in 1928, envisioned the employment of mass armies and total mobilization in action consisting of both offensive and defensive battles. He pointed out the necessity to disperse and strategically locate the U.S.S.R.'s industry, and he emphasized how industrialization would change combat equipment and the means of conducting warfare. Whereas Frunze's stress on the primacy of infantry was mainly a reversion to the "Russian steam-roller," or human wave, concept, Tukhachevsky accentuated the use of mechanization and firepower.⁴⁹

The year 1929 marked the turning point for the military theorists in Soviet Russia. In that year, the infantry and artillery "held pride of place in the Soviet armoury."⁵⁰ By the next year, the tank had gained equal status. Tukhachevsky's group propounded the concept of the cooperation of all arms, the formation of combined arms teams of tanks, artillery, and infantry, supported by the airplane. Tukhachevsky became Voroshilov's deputy in 1931. He was well

aware of the writings of foreign military theorists, such as Charles DeGaulle and B. H. Liddell Hart, but he formulated his own theories on the employment of tanks. He was against the complete independence of tank formations, stressing that tanks need anti-tank and artillery support. However, he was also against fragmenting tank units into small groups of several tanks for use as infantry support, believing it detracted from their shock-action and mutual protection. He emphasized that when attacking an objective, combined operations and artillery preparation were necessary in order to minimize losses.⁵¹

The maneuvers held during 1931-1933 represented the initial attempt to develop an effective use of Tukhachevsky's combined arms concept.⁵² During this same period, other Soviet military theorists were publishing their ideas. In 1932, S. N. Ammosov, one of the Soviet pioneers of mechanization, published Tactics of Mechanised Higher Formations, which presented a reasoned concept on the employment of large-scale armored units. In the same year, B. M. Feldman and Eideman wrote articles on the employment of the air force in direct support of combat units.⁵³

A study conducted by the Red Army Staff in 1933 foresaw the necessity for defense in depth in order to counteract an enemy's break-through with mechanized units. In addition to the defense in depth concept, the study recommended that Soviet units be made powerful enough to continue fighting

even if they were cut off by enemy forces. The study was followed by the 1933 maneuvers, during which time the Red Army continued to develop and test encirclement tactics.⁵⁴

In his notable study of Soviet military theory, Garthoff wrote that, to the best of his knowledge, the term "concentric maneuver," or double envelopment, a maneuver whereby the enemy is encircled, was first used by Tukhachevsky in 1921.⁵⁵ A study of Tukhachevsky's actions throughout 1918-1920 reveals his preference for attacking the enemy from the flanks whenever a frontal assault could be avoided. Tukhachevsky seems to have strongly believed in the use of maneuver and firepower in order to save manpower.

Tukhachevsky's pronouncements on strategy and tactics, unfortunately for the Red Army, were frequently destined to be disregarded. He advocated the positioning of forces in such a manner as "to destroy and annihilate" the enemy, not to be concerned "with covering the entire space of the borders between states,"⁵⁶ a concept that was to be violated in 1941. In a speech in January 1935, he said that perhaps the most important qualities for an army are flexibility and resourcefulness. He noted:

We need men who, facing an entirely new technique [such as mechanization], are capable of changing their concepts with lightning rapidity. . . . It is difficult to discard [cavalry and other concepts of the Civil War] and to utilize correctly the mobility of airplanes and mechanized troops.⁵⁷

As will be evident later, the qualities of flexibility and resourcefulness were woefully lacking in 1939 and 1941.

Tukhachevsky expressed a noted preference for offensive action, especially the use of combined arms operations and flank attacks, in his commentary on the December 1936 Field Regulations.⁵⁸ However, the 1936 Regulations also included a carefully worked out doctrine for defense in depth in the event the Red Army initially had to resort to the defensive. The 1936 Regulations emphasized that modern defense must be an anti-tank defense, and the defense was characterized, not by action fought "to the bitter end," but by falling back on new defensive lines. Again, initiative was stressed when he wrote, "All sensible initiative of subordinates must be encouraged through all possible means and must be exploited by the commander in the general interest of [success in] battle."⁵⁹ These concepts of defense in depth and allowing subordinates' initiative were also to be disregarded five years later. Another principle that was stressed in the 1936 Regulations and that was to be forgotten or ignored in 1939-1941 was the absolute necessity for continuous reconnaissance and effective intelligence.⁶⁰

To possess the mobility of aviation and mechanized troops and tanks and the doctrine to employ this mobility was one thing, but to utilize it--"to be able to adjust ourselves to a new level"--was, in the sober words of Tukhachevsky, "not so simple."⁶¹ The next logical question, therefore, is, "How effective was the Red Army in employing its newly developed modern force?"

The only true test of an army's effectiveness is its performance in actual combat. Other than the early border clashes with the Japanese troops in Manchuria, which were relatively small-scale in terms of the troops employed, there were no combat deployments of Red Army units. There were, however, several large-scale maneuvers which revealed many of the strengths and weaknesses of the Red Army, and the Spanish Civil War provided a testing ground for the actual employment of Soviet tanks and airplanes against a real enemy. At both the maneuvers and in the Spanish Civil War, there were relatively impartial, well-qualified foreign observers who reported their opinions of the Red Army from 1935 until early 1937.

In September 1935, the Red Army held a maneuver near Kiev. Yakir commanded the 3,500 men and the tanks and artillery employed. An airborne force of 1,200 men was dropped, and it secured a landing zone on which transport planes landed and off-loaded 2,300 airborne troops with light tanks and motorized light field guns.⁶² General Lucien Loizeau, the Chief of the French Military Mission, was favorably impressed, and he wrote, "The technical level of the Red Army is extraordinarily high."⁶³ Expressing his opinion at a time when General of the Army Weygand was opposed to the Franco-Soviet Mutual Assistance Pact, Loizeau concluded that on the basis of material, tactics, and enthusiasm, "the red army [sic] is probably at the present time one of the most

powerful armies of Europe."⁶⁴

In April 1936, U. S. Ambassador William C. Bullitt reported that:

[The Red Army's] material equipment in artillery, airplanes, and tanks is abundant in quantity though deficient in quality. It can not undertake offensive operations due to the fact that the railroads are still inadequate for the peace time needs of the country and to the equally important fact that there are literally no modern highways in the entire Soviet Union. But on the defensive, the Red Army would fight hard, well and long. . . . The single real fear of the communists is that their bureaucratic machine might break down under the strain of war. Dread of the Kremlin is so great that all Russian officials, except the highest, hesitate or refuse to make decisions.⁶⁵

In September 1936, the Red Army held maneuvers near Minsk, in Belorussia, under Uborevich's command. Max Werner described the exercise:

During the autumn maneuvers . . . combinations of various arms were demonstrated in forms which were either unknown altogether in other armies or known in theory only, for instance the coordination of tank and aeroplane action on a mass scale, the coordination of masses of cavalry with moto-mechanized units, and the coordination of all elements of a powerful and mobile shock army, including the air arm, the tank corps, cavalry and motorized infantry.⁶⁶

Whereas Werner's description implied a high degree of command control, Colonel (later Lieutenant-General) Giffard Martel, a member of the British Mission at the maneuvers, presented a more concise and objective evaluation.

Martel was very impressed with the airborne operation, and, after walking throughout the drop zone, he ascertained that no one had been hurt and that the troops were well controlled.⁶⁷ He was favorably impressed with Khalepsky and

his work with the Soviet tanks, noting that the tanks were well-built, sturdy, and well maintained. The actual tactical handling of the tanks and the command and control, however, demonstrated serious shortcomings. There was limited use of radio communications, and very little reconnaissance was performed. He wrote that "they would certainly have suffered heavy casualties."⁶⁸ He also thought highly of Alksnis and the air force. During the 8,000 flight-hours flown, "not a single mishap occurred. The fighter and medium bomber aircraft . . . were well armed, fast, and maneuverable."⁶⁹

Martel was extremely impressed with Tukhachevsky, both for his facile mind and his military expertise. His impression of Voroshilov, however, was another matter. Though Voroshilov was noted as being "friendly" and "a good horseman," he did not exhibit much military knowledge. Yegorov was described as able but lacking in drive and initiative. Of Budenny, Martel wrote that "his chief idea in war was still the cavalry charge."⁷⁰ While the members of the Tukhachevsky group greatly impressed Martel, he found that the junior and middle-grade officers' tactical leadership abilities left a great deal to be desired.⁷¹

The praise which Martel had for the Soviet tanks and airplanes was substantiated by their performance during 1936 and early 1937 in the Spanish Civil War. Walter Krivitsky, a high official in military intelligence who was involved in the Soviet intervention in Spain, wrote that no more than

2,000 Red Army personnel were sent to Spain. "Only pilots and tank officers saw active duty"; the others were advisers and specialists.⁷² The degree of efficiency of the Soviet combat personnel and equipment was observed by Major-General A. C. Temperly. He wrote that the Soviet pilots, airplanes, and light and medium tanks sent to Spain were superior to those of the Germans and Italians and were of "very high quality."⁷³

As was noted earlier, the December 1936 Regulations stressed the adoption of remedial measures to correct the main weaknesses noted by Martel in the September maneuvers. Furthermore, Tukhachevsky was noted for continuously striving for perfection,⁷⁴ and there seems no reason to doubt that he would have worked relentlessly to insure that these deficiencies were corrected. Yet, by the beginning of 1937, Tukhachevsky's problems were more political than they were military. As Martel said, "Three main factors go to make up an army and, in order of importance, these are--the personnel, the equipment, and the organization. The first of these is easily the most important. Equipment comes along in due course, but without the right type of personnel an army can make no headway at all."⁷⁵ In 1936, the axe that was to eliminate thousands of the Red Army's "right type of personnel" was being sharpened.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Roman Kolkowicz, The Soviet Military and the Communist Party (Princeton, N. J., 1967), p. 37.
- ² Raymond L. Garthoff, Soviet Military Policy (New York, 1966), p. 11.
- ³ For an excellent discussion of the Trotsky-Frunze military debates, see Fedotoff-White, pp. 158-97; Erickson, pp. 113-43.
- ⁴ Wollenberg, pp. 171-73; Fedotoff-White, pp. 196-97.
- ⁵ Erickson, p. 118.
- ⁶ Wollenberg, pp. 172-73.
- ⁷ Barmine, pp. 95, 111; Erickson, p. 120.
- ⁸ Whiting, p. 19. It cost 535 rubles to train a cadre soldier, as compared with 291 rubles for a militiaman.
- ⁹ Fedotoff-White, pp. 196-97.
- ¹⁰ Erickson, p. 173.
- ¹¹ Fedotoff-White, pp. 199-276; Erickson, pp. 177-99. For an excellent study of Frunze's military theories, see Walter D. Jacobs, Frunze: The Soviet Clausewitz, 1885-1925 (The Hague, Netherlands, 1969).
- ¹² George W.F. Hallgarten, "General Hans von Seeckt and Russia, 1920-1922," Journal of Modern History, 21 (Mar 1949), 28-33; Edward H. Carr, German-Soviet Relations . . . , 1919-1939 (Baltimore, 1951), pp. 17-60; Edward H. Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923 (1951-53; rpt. New York, 1961), III, 305-82.
- ¹³ Louis Fischer, Russia's Road from Peace to War (New York, 1969), pp. 180-81.
- ¹⁴ Hallgarten, p. 32. The degree of secrecy seems to be evidenced by the fact that in his initial book on Soviet foreign policy Fischer apparently was not aware of any agreement for military cooperation being made until 1925. Fischer, Soviets in World Affairs, II, 601. An example of the measures taken to maintain the secrecy was the method by which the bodies of Germans who died in the U.S.S.R. were returned to Germany. The bodies were shipped in crates labelled "machine parts." Gerald Freund, Unholy Alliance (New York, 1957), p. 207.

15 Erickson, p. 143. No comment is made in Aleksandr M. Nekrich's book, June 22, 1941 (Moscow, 1965), which was an attempt by a Soviet historian to objectively portray the U.S.S.R.'s and Stalin's mistakes prior to Hitler's invasion of Soviet Russia, or in the subsequent discussions by Soviet historians. Petrov, *passim*.

16 Paul Leverkuehn, German Military Intelligence, trans. R. H. Stevens and Constantine FitzGibbon (London, 1954), p. 155. For what is probably the most complete discussion of the military cooperation, see Erickson, pp. 144-63, 247-82, 330-49.

17 Gustav Hilger and Alfred G. Meyer, The Incompatible Allies (New York, 1953), pp. 196-98; Wollenberg, pp. 236-37; Whiting, p. 21; Freund, pp. 124-25, 210; Erickson, pp. 258-59.

18 Hilger, pp. 196, 201; Erickson, pp. 157-59; 249-51; Carr, German-Soviet Relations, p. 95; Hans W. Gatzke, "Russo-German Military Collaboration During the Weimar Republic," American Historical Review, 63 (Apr 1958), 567-84.

19 Fischer, Russia's Road, p. 180.

20 Hilger, pp. 206-07.

21 Fischer, Russia's Road, p. 182; Whiting, p. 22; Garder, p. 65.

22 Max Beloff, The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia: 1929-1941 (New York, 1947-49), I, 57.

23 Hilger, p. 257.

24 Carr, German-Soviet Relations, pp. 110-11, 115.

25 Wollenberg, pp. 168-69; Erickson, p. 200, Whiting, p. 53; Garder, p. 78; Makers of Modern Strategy, ed. Edward M. Earle, Gordon A. Craig, and Felix Gilbert (Princeton, N. J., 1943), p. 349.

26 Grigori A. Tokaev, Comrade X, trans. Alec Brown (London, 1956), p. 80.

27 Wollenberg, pp. 190-91.

28 Ibid.

29 Erickson, p. 207.

30 Wollenberg, p. 192; Erickson, p. 241.

31 Fedotoff-White, pp. 280-81; Kolkowicz, pp. 50-51; Erickson, pp. 310-12.

32 Fischer, Soviets in World Affairs, II, 759.

33 Whiting, pp. 23-24.

34 Fedotoff-White, pp. 280-81, 299.

35 Garthoff, Soviet Military Policy, p. 242, n. 15.

36 Whiting, pp. 24-25.

37 Ibid., pp. 23, 25; Fedotoff-White, p. 357; Mikhail N. Tukhachevsky's speech to the Second Session of the Central Executive Committee of the U.S.S.R., January 15, 1936, contained in V. I. Lenin, et al., The Soviet Union and the Cause of Peace (New York, 1936), p. 94.

38 Erickson, p. 322.

39 Ibid., p. 327.

40 Ibid., pp. 326, 350, 355; Petrov, p. 124.

41 Erickson, pp. 390, 769; Tukhachevsky, The Soviet Union, pp. 83, 91. For estimates on the Red Army's strength and disposition at this time, see Erickson, pp. 765-69. The corps was the largest peace-time formation in the Red Army.

42 Fedotoff-White, pp. 285, 358; Tukhachevsky, The Soviet Union, pp. 83-93.

43 Max Werner [pseud. Alexander Schifftrin], The Military Strength of the Powers, trans. Edward Fitzgerald (New York, 1939), p. 28.

44 Giffard Martel, The Russian Outlook (London, 1947), p. 21.

45 Barmine, pp. 233-37; Louis B. Ely, The Red Army Today, 3rd ed. (Harrisburg, Pa., 1953), p. 113; Erickson, p. 327.

46 Erickson, p. 390.

47 Ibid., pp. 382-83; Garder, pp. 88-89; Werner, pp. 12-13.

48 Erickson, p. 207.

- 49 Ibid., pp. 302-03, 327; Whiting, pp. 55-59.
- 50 Erickson, p. 349.
- 51 Garthoff, Soviet Military Doctrine, pp. 85, 309; Erickson, pp. 458-59.
- 52 Garthoff, Soviet Military Doctrine, pp. 349-51.
- 53 Garder, p. 75.
- 54 Erickson, p. 352.
- 55 Garthoff, Soviet Military Doctrine, p. 107n.
- 56 Ibid., p. 150.
- 57 Makers of Modern Strategy, p. 350.
- 58 Garthoff, Soviet Military Doctrine, p. 118; Erickson, pp. 437-445, Appendix III. Erickson's Appendix III contains extracts from the 1936 Regulations.
- 59 Makers of Modern Strategy, p. 359; Erickson, pp. 384, 441-43, 567. Erickson emphasizes that pre-1938 Soviet military writers, such as Tukhachevsky, were well aware of the possibility of strategic surprise, with powerful enemy forces being committed in the "very early stages of a conflict." He notes that, to Tukhachevsky, "The 'battle of the frontiers' was therefore of supreme importance in denying this advantage to a potential enemy, and even assuming a considerable break-through, to meet him with a defensive strength deployed in great depth." (p. 384) It was not until after the purge of the Red Army that the concept of strategic surprise was "consigned to a kind of Stalinist perdition." (p. 567) I stress this point because Garthoff, in his otherwise excellent study Soviet Military Doctrine, contends that it was not until 1942 that defensive action was "explicitly admitted to be a normal form of combat" by Soviet military theorists. (p. 67) As should be evident in my presentation, a great deal of attention was devoted to defensive doctrine years before 1942.
- 60 Erickson, pp. 438-39. Continuous reconnaissance and effective intelligence "were singled out as the indispensable condition of success in war."
- 61 Ibid., p. 390.
- 62 Barmine, pp. 235-36.

63 Werner, p. 37; Beloff, I, 157.

64 Robert O. Paxton, Parades and Politics at Vichy (Princeton, N. J., 1966), p. 244.

65 U. S., Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers: The Soviet Union 1933-1939 (Washington, D. C., 1952), pp. 293-94. [Hereafter referred to as Foreign Relations: The Soviet Union]

66 Werner, pp. 82-83.

67 Martel, pp. 17-21.

68 Ibid., pp. 22-25.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid., pp. 24-25. The representatives from France and Czechoslovakia were also impressed with the work of Tukhachevsky, Khalepsky, and Alksnis. Werner, pp. 37, 43-44; Robert Conquest, The Great Terror (New York, 1968), p. 229.

71 Martel, pp. 20, 51.

72 Krivitsky, p. 95.

73 A. C. Temperley, "Military Lessons of the Spanish War," Foreign Affairs, 16 (Oct 1937), 37, 41.

74 Garder, p. 89.

75 Martel, p. 51.

CHAPTER III

THE AXE IS SHARPENED

While the Communists in the Red Army were very involved in politics in the early twenties, their political activity markedly declined later in the decade. In 1927, Yakir and Vitovt K. Putna signed a declaration to the Politburo in which they proclaimed their solidarity with the Stalinist opposition; however, Tukhachevsky was not involved in this, or any similar, action.¹ Robert Conquest, in his study of the "Great Purge," made a distinction between the military specialists who joined the Party, like Tukhachevsky, Kork, and Yegorov, and the Communists who became professional soldiers, such as Yakir, Vasily Blyukher, Alksnis, and Putna: "Even at this time [the twenties] the former played little part in politics--except when military matters were directly affected, as when Tukhachevsky and Uborevich opposed Trotsky's ideas of army organization."²

Between 1929 and 1935, Stalin seems to have catered to the military. By 1932, the bulk of the army's commanders had joined the Party.³ In the comparatively mild Party purges of 1929 and 1933, the military Communists suffered only about one-fourth the percentage of the purges that hit the Party as a whole.⁴ However, the years 1929-1935

apparently were not a complete idyll between the military and Stalin. There were reports that several army commanders were disturbed by the effect that Stalin's collectivization program was having on the Red Army. Yakir, the commander of the Ukranian troops, Blyukher, the Far Eastern commander, and Tukhachevsky reportedly complained to Stalin that the harsh measures used in the collectivization program and the resultant 1931-1932 famine were having an adverse effect on the army's morale.⁵

While there may have been individual worries on the part of several high ranking Soviet military personnel, there was no collective protest. Furthermore, as Erickson noted, ". . . the signal fact remains that the Red Army and its command--in the absence of evidence to the contrary--remained loyal [to Stalin] during this period, while Stalin remained firm to his purpose [of collectivization]."⁶ Probably to insure the army's continued loyalty, Stalin bestowed more and more benefits on the Red Army.

In addition to Voroshilov, who had already been a full member of the Central Committee, Ya. B. Gamarnik and Yakir became full members of the Committee in 1934. In the same year, Blyukher, Tukhachevsky, Uborevich, and Yegorov became candidate members; Budenny already was a candidate member.⁷ Also in 1934, the principle of unity of command was instituted in the Red Army. In March, the political commissar's duties became just that--political advice. The commander was in full control of his unit.⁸

In September 1935, an even more surprising prestige factor, as far as the Soviet people were concerned,⁹ was added. The old military officer ranks up to colonel were introduced, and the new rank (for Russia) of Marshal was instituted. The title of "General," however, was not yet brought back. The same decree provided immunity from arrest by civil authorities for all officers, except junior commanders, without the special permission of the People's Commissar of Defense.¹⁰ In November, the rank of Marshal of the Soviet Union was bestowed on Budenny, Blyukher, Tukhachevsky, Voroshilov, and Yegorov.¹¹ Of the five new Marshals, the appointments of Voroshilov and Budenny must have been political, since their military abilities hardly merited such a rank. Also in 1935, the prestige and well-being of the officer corps was greatly increased. The Red Army Staff formally became the "General Staff," officers' living accommodations were improved, higher pay was granted, and special theaters, stores, and clubs were established.¹² Even though the Red Army's prestige was high, the military was not independent. Through Voroshilov, Stalin maintained a relatively tight control of the Red Army.

Barmine, who had been assigned by the General Staff to a post dealing with the sale of military weapons to other countries, related how he went to Gamarnik and Tukhachevsky in an attempt to resolve an arms-export problem. Voroshilov was not in Moscow at the time, and no decision could be made until his return.¹³ The apparent degree to which

Tukhachevsky had become subordinated to the bureaucracy was also disclosed by Barmine, who was visiting Tukhachevsky when Voroshilov telephoned the Marshal. Tukhachevsky calmly picked up the phone and then "suddenly jumped to his feet" and in a "definitely respectful voice" agreed to do what Voroshilov said.¹⁴ As Erickson noted about the Red Army during the early thirties:

One of the striking features of the period 1930-5 is the absence of any proven organized discontent which strove to become politically effective. . . . Stalin had not had to deal with a military opposition, although that is not to suppose that he found the command pliant and in any way submissive.¹⁵

Politically, however, Stalin had been faced with opposition from Party members in the early thirties. Stalin's enforced collectivization had resulted in the famine of 1931-1932, in which 5 to 7 million people perished.¹⁶ During this time, M. N. Riutin, the secretary of one of the Party's district committees, prepared a program which attacked Stalin. The Riutin platform proposed the abolition of the collectives and called for a return to Party democracy. Stalin was incensed by this opposition and claimed that it was causing a growth of terrorist sentiment among the youth. Therefore, in 1932, Stalin demanded Riutin's execution. It was permissible to execute terrorists, but the Party had to give special permission for the imposition of capital punishment on Party members. Sergei M. Kirov, the first secretary of the Leningrad Party organization, was adamantly against breaking Lenin's "last testament," which warned the Party about

repeating the mistake of the French Jacobins and destroying each other. Stalin's demand, therefore, was not approved.¹⁷

Kirov was a very influential member of the Party, and he favored mediation and reconciliation with the opposition and the abolition of terror, both in and out of the Party. Stalin valued him highly, but was perturbed at his independence.¹⁸ This independence may have led to Kirov's death.

In July 1934, the OGPU was transformed into the NKVD, and some contemporary observers believed that the reorganization was made in order to limit the arbitrary power of the secret police.¹⁹ However, this soon proved to be an unfounded hope. On December 1, 1934, Kirov was assassinated at his Leningrad office by Leonid Nikolaev.²⁰ Since Kirov was against imposing the "supreme penalty," death, on members of the opposition, the Soviet people initially believed his assassination was the result of foreign influence, and it was not foreseen that the murder would have a profound impact on Soviet political conditions.²¹

Stalin has not been directly accused of planning Kirov's death, except by two authors.²² There have been, however, strong implications to that effect, with the main emphasis placed on the facts that the Leningrad office of the NKVD was aware of Nikolaev's intent to assassinate Kirov, that it did nothing to prevent it, and that Stalin's "investigation" of the murder was far from thorough.²³ Regardless of who perpetrated the murder, the result was summed up by Boris

Nicolaevsky, who is probably the best authority in the western world on Soviet domestic politics. He wrote that, "this unfortunate shot ushered in a new period in the history of the Soviet Union."²⁴

As Nikita Khrushchev revealed in his "secret speech" to the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, Stalin immediately directed the NKVD to intensify its investigation and arrests of "terrorists," who were to be shot "immediately after the passage of sentences." There were to be no judicial appeals.²⁵ No longer did the trials of Party members require the consent of the Politburo.²⁶ Shortly thereafter, Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, and thirteen other "members of the former Zinoviev groups" were secretly tried by an NKVD special board. During 1935, the framework for the structure of the Great Purge was built.

In January 1935, Zinoviev admitted the "political responsibility" of the "Zinoviev group" for Kirov's murder. He was sentenced to ten years imprisonment, and Kamenev and the others received five-year terms.²⁷ In May, Stalin abolished the Society of the Old Bolsheviks, followed in June with the dissolving of the Association of Former Political Prisoners of the Tsar.²⁸ Between May and December, 81.1 per cent of the Party members' records were screened, and 9.1 per cent of these members were expelled from the Party as "undesirables."²⁹ On May 4, 1935, Stalin addressed the graduates of the Red Army academies. He stated that "certain of our leaders [are

indifferent] to people, to cadres," and are unable to "value people." He then said that "we must first of all learn to value people, to value cadres, to value every worker capable of benefitting our common cause."³⁰ The need to "learn to value people" sounds hypocritical in the light of the approaching purges, unless the key to what Stalin meant lies in the definition of the "common cause."

By 1936, the foundation for the Great Purge had been laid, and the stage was set for the next step--the show trials. There was nothing new about the mechanisms of the show trials, since even the technique of the "confessions" had been employed against the Nepmen, the Kulaks, and the remnants of the old leftist parties, the Mensheviks and the Revolutionary Socialists. What was new was Stalin's use of the public trial against his own associates and the depth and savagery of the purge. Though the public trials were like the visible tip of an iceberg, showing only a small percentage of the total number of people purged, they performed the essential function of mobilizing public opinion.³¹

The first trial, serving almost as an inaugural to the Great Purge, was held in August 1936. It involved Zinoviev, Kamenev, and fourteen other leading Communists, all of whom were allegedly part of a Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Center. The two main defendants, Zinoviev and Kamenev, were brought to the dock in Moscow from prison. Within four days, sentences of death were imposed and carried out.³² A strong indication that this initial trial was to be only the

beginning of a wave of terror was given at the trial when denunciations of other well-known Party leaders were made. An ominous sign, especially for the military, was that two of the accused, S. V. Mrachkovsky and I. N. Smirnov, both well-known military leaders, had been questioned at length not only by the prosecutor, Vyshinsky, but also by Stalin himself, who sought confessions from them.³³ In the meantime, other events transpired which must have increased the fears of the Red Army's officer corps.

In July 1936, the NKVD arrested Divisional Commander Dmitri Schmidt without informing or consulting his Kiev Military District Commander, Yakir.³⁴ After the 1927 Congress, when the Trotskyites had been expelled, Schmidt had walked up to Stalin, cursed at him, and told Stalin that one day he would cut off Stalin's ears. Stalin, though visibly upset, said nothing to Schmidt. With Schmidt's arrest, however, it was evident that Stalin had not forgotten the incident.³⁵ Yakir went to Moscow to investigate the situation. He was shown "confessions" which implicated Schmidt with the Trotskyites. Yakir initially protested to Voroshilov but later dropped the matter. Shortly thereafter, Schmidt was shot by the NKVD. Schmidt's arrest was followed by the arrest of another of Yakir's Divisional Commanders, Yu. Sablin, in September. In the same month, Putna, a close friend of Tukhachevsky's, and recently the Soviet Military Attaché in London, was arrested. Sometime between September

and November, Corps Commander Primakov, the Deputy Commander of the Leningrad Military District, was arrested.³⁶ The arrests of these officers, especially one so senior as Putna, should have warned the military that any forthcoming purge would not be as limited as were the purges of 1929 and 1933. Yet even if the military was becoming worried, the Red Army members of the Central Committee apparently were not sufficiently awed.

In the autumn 1936 plenum of the Central Committee, Stalin wanted Bukharin arrested. In addition to the majority of the civilian members of the Committee, it was reported that all the military members, except Voroshilov and Budenny, voted against Bukharin's arrest.³⁷ It was doubtful that Stalin would forget this rebuke. Though the first show trial apparently compromised the whole Bolshevik Old Guard, Stalin did not seem pleased with the pace of the purge.

In his "secret speech," Khrushchev quoted a telegram dated September 25, 1936, sent by Stalin and Andrei Zhdanov from Sochi to the Politburo, which read: "We deem it absolutely necessary and urgent that Comrade [Nikolai I.] Yezhov be nominated to the post of People's Commissar for Internal Affairs [NKVD]. [Henry] Yagoda has definitely proved himself incapable of unmasking the Trotskyite-Zinovievite bloc. The OGPU is four years behind in this matter."³⁸ The reference to being "four years behind" indicated Stalin's feelings about the opposition to his 1932 demand for Riutin's execution, and

the day after the telegram was sent, Yezhov took command of the NKVD. Yagoda was reassigned as Commissar of Communications. The Yezhovshchina, as the bloodiest days of the purge were known, was about to begin.³⁹

Boris Souvarine described what was to come when he wrote that "the year 1937 will stand out as an indescribable nightmare in the memory of Russians, contemporary with the methodical massacre begun by Stalin under the empire of fear."⁴⁰ In January, the second show trial was staged. Seventeen men, led by Karl Radek and Gregory Pyatakov, made their appearance before the court. The accused were Communists who, despite their initial sympathy for those opposed to Stalin, finally sided with Stalin and attempted to readjust themselves to the political realities of the Soviet system. Thirteen were sentenced to death; Radek alone escaped execution.⁴¹ His reprieve was the result of the accusations and innuendoes that he gave during his "testimony." On the second day of the trial, Radek accused Putna of having had dealings with Radek's "Trotskyite underground organization." During his description of these dealings with Putna, Radek mentioned Tukhachevsky's name at least ten times, though he attested to Tukhachevsky's loyalty. Because of his "testimony," Radek only received a sentence of ten years imprisonment.⁴²

When Walter Krivitsky, who had worked closely with the NKVD, read Radek's testimony in the newspaper, he exclaimed

to his wife, "Tukhachevsky is doomed." When his wife read the report and replied that Radek had absolved Tukhachevsky, he replied: "Exactly. Does Tukhachevsky need absolution from Radek? Do you think for a moment that Radek would dare on his own accord drag Tukhachevsky's name into that trial? No, Vyshinsky put Tukhachevsky's name in Radek's mouth. And Stalin prompted Vyshinsky. . . . I tell you Tukhachevsky is doomed."⁴³

By the time of the second show trial, it was known to Party members that unless an individual's name was bracketed on a list of intended "victims" of the "terrorists," there was no mark of favor in having a man's name mentioned at a trial.⁴⁴ Radek's testimony, therefore, provided a substantial hint that there was some sort of a plan afoot against the Red Army's commanders.

Another clue that all was not well with the military, as far as the life expectancy of many of its commanders was concerned, was Stalin's March 3, 1937, report to the plenary meeting of the Central Committee. After referring to the Zinoviev and Radek trials, Stalin said, "Several Red Army corps may be necessary to win a battle during war time. But it only needs a few spies somewhere in the army headquarters or even in a divisional staff to steal the plan of operations and pass it on to the enemy for this gain to be lost."⁴⁵ The reference to "spies" in the army may have been prompted by what Conquest terms the "probable" opposition of Yakir and "presumably other military men" to the first purge trial at

the February-March 1937 plenum.⁴⁶ Stalin's comment was followed in April by newspaper attacks on military personnel such as Kork, the head of the Frunze Military Academy, and by an April 28th article in Pravda which called for the Red Army to increase its political training and to root out the internal enemies in the army.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the next few months witnessed a shifting of the assignments of many of the senior Red Army officers and the arrests of still more commanders.

On April 3, 1937, Army Commander Khalepsky, Tukhachevsky's tank expert, was assigned as Commissar of Communications, replacing the arrested Yagoda. This was a ridiculous use of Khalepsky's military talent. Also in April, Corps Commander A. I. Gekker, the Chief of the Red Army's Foreign Liaison, disappeared, and Corps Commander Garkavi, the Commander of the Urals Military District and a close friend of Yakir's, was arrested. Again Yakir attempted to assist a subordinate officer, and he eventually even talked to Stalin. But it was to no avail.⁴⁸ In the same month, Tukhachevsky had been nominated to be a member of the Soviet delegation to the coronation of King George VI in London, but on May 4, the British were told Admiral V. M. Orlov would replace Tukhachevsky. Reasons of health were cited for the replacement.⁴⁹

Tukhachevsky may have been sick with anxiety, but other than that he appeared healthy at the May Day Parade on May 1, 1937. Tukhachevsky was the first high-ranking officer to arrive, followed by Yegorov and then Gamarnik. All of them were

silent, and none saluted or acknowledged the presence of the others. Tukhachevsky kept his hands in his pockets, and during the intermission between the military and civilian parades he walked "out of the Red Square, out of sight."⁵⁰

During May, even more drastic changes were made in the command relationship of the army, and numerous transfers, or cross-postings, were made. These changes and transfers provided the clearest indications yet of Stalin's animosity toward the commanders of the Red Army. On May 10-11, the old system of "dual command" was restored, and the powers of the political commissars in military matters were once again at least equal to those of the military commander.⁵¹ An even greater shock was the concurrent announcement of the transfers of many of the high-ranking commanders. Tukhachevsky was reassigned, actually demoted, to the command of the Volga Military District,⁵² which only had three territorial divisions and a couple of tank battalions.⁵³ Yegorov was relieved of his position as Chief of the General Staff and reassigned as First Deputy Commissar of Defense, Tukhachevsky's previous position. Shaposhnikov became Chief of the General Staff. Yakir was transferred from the Kiev Military District to Leningrad. Shortly thereafter, Kork of the Frunze Military Academy was arrested, and Eideman was replaced as head of the Osoaviakhim, an important para-military organization. Uborevich, the Belorussian Military District Commander, had vanished by late May. On June 1, Gamarnik was reported to have committed suicide the previous day. In all the turmoil

of cross-postings, only in a few cases was there any proof that the new commander arrived at his new station.⁵⁴

In the assault on the Red Army's High Command, the technique used by Stalin had been to break up the cohesion of the higher command levels and to seize individuals at a distance from any support they might have mustered from their troops. Whereas the show trials had struck at men relatively isolated and ostracized both politically and socially, the move against the Red Army was against a group of men skilled and respected in their profession and supposedly in command of the military branch of the Soviet State. These military men commanded organizations with which they had close emotional bonds, and these organizations had the necessary power, given time, to defend their interests. Stalin, therefore, must have realized that the best way to deal with such a situation most probably was to present all concerned with a fait accompli. While it would be rather foolish to assume that Stalin would not have moved against the military without some documentation to substantiate his charges against them and to convince the remaining military leaders of the high commanders' guilt, Erickson noted that "the dossier may well have played a very important part in determining the timing of the military purge."⁵⁵ To obtain this documentation, the NKVD had set to work in 1936.

In order to provide more authenticity to the documentary "evidence" of the high commanders' complicity with foreign powers, it would seem to have been of the greatest importance

to Stalin that the "evidence" appear to have been furnished to the NKVD from external sources. Tukhachevsky's actions in January 1936 were to be of great assistance in preparing the case against him. On January 23, he was nominated to accompany Maxim Litvinov, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs, to London to attend King George V's funeral. On January 26, Tukhachevsky spent several hours in Berlin, and then proceeded to London, arriving on the 27th. Thirteen days later, he went to Paris, where some of his comments were not very wisely chosen. At a dinner at the Soviet Embassy in Paris, Tukhachevsky attacked attempts to align the Soviet Union with the mechanism of collective security, which the U.S.S.R. was actively pursuing at that time. He also advised the Rumanian Foreign Minister to look to Germany for assistance, and in the company of many noted French officials he extolled Germany's achievements and referred to her air force as invincible.⁵⁶ Though Tukhachevsky's comments probably represented an attempt to stimulate French military cooperation in accordance with the Franco-Soviet Mutual Assistance Pact, it was a poorly chosen method of so doing.

There were reports that Tukhachevsky stopped in Berlin on his return to Moscow in mid-February 1936 and that he met with Russian emigres there, but these reports are improbable,⁵⁷ if for no other reason than that Tukhachevsky certainly must have been aware of the close surveillance performed by the NKVD on all of its travelling dignitaries. However, Tukhachevsky's brief visit in Berlin provided Stalin,

working through the NKVD, with the foundation for spreading a credible, even if untruthful, piece of misinformation about him.⁵⁸ The NKVD's work was evident by October 1936. Bella Fromm related that at a party given by the French Ambassador in Berlin she was informed by a member of the French staff that "some of Tukhashevsky's [sic] highest staff officers . . . entered into an agreement [with Germany] to effect the removal of Stalin. Afterward, a pact with Germany against the world."⁵⁹ France was not the only target for the NKVD's misinformation campaign against Tukhachevsky.

In a conversation recorded by Winston Churchill, Eduard Beneš, the President of Czechoslovakia, said that in the autumn of 1936 he was informed by "a high military source in Germany" that he had better hurry up and agree to Adolf Hitler's 1935 offer to respect Czechoslovakia's integrity in return for her neutrality in the event of a Franco-German war. The reason cited was that events would soon occur in the U.S.S.R. which would make the agreement with Czechoslovakia of little use to Germany.⁶⁰ Towards the end of 1936, the NKVD planted its greatest piece of misinformation, using the Russian emigré General Skoblin.

It was Skoblin, an NKVD controlled double-agent,⁶¹ who furnished Reinhardt Heydrich, the chief of the German Sicherheitsdienst (SD), with the information that Tukhachevsky and some other Red Army high commanders planned to overthrow Stalin.⁶² The SD, which was the Security Service of the Schutzstaffel (SS), knew that Skoblin was a double-agent,

but Heydrich still wanted to use him.⁶³ As Paul Blackstock noted in his study of the forged documents, reports of Tukhachevsky's planned overthrow of Stalin had already been circulating in Europe, thanks to the NKVD, and these reports confirmed Skoblin's information.⁶⁴ Besides, Heydrich had a deep hatred of the German General Staff, and when he received Skoblin's information in late 1936 he realized that it provided a chance to strike at both the hated German officers and at the leadership of the Red Army. He persuaded Hitler and Heinrich Himmler, chief of the SS, to his way of thinking around Christmas 1936.⁶⁵ Planning ahead, Heydrich considered various methods by which the SD would furnish Stalin the dossier when it was ready.

Heydrich ruled out furnishing the dossier to the Czech General Staff for transmission to Stalin because he was afraid that the documents would be passed through military channels and a friend of Tukhachevsky's might get the dossier.⁶⁶ Therefore, the SD took no chance that Stalin might not receive the Tukhachevsky "conspiracy" information. In his memoirs, Beneš wrote that in the second half of January 1937 he received a report from Berlin that Tukhachevsky and others were planning to overthrow Stalin. This report was supposedly based on "a slip of the tongue by [Count Maximilian] Trauttmannsdorff," who had been in Prague earlier that month negotiating a non-aggression agreement.⁶⁷ Beneš told Churchill that this information, coupled with the December 1936 report, made him decide to immediately inform

Stalin of the "conspiracy."⁶⁸ In his study "The Tukhachevsky Affair," Blackstock wrote that the "slip of the tongue" had "all the marks of a calculated leak" by the Germans: "Apparently Hitler correctly assumed that the report would be promptly relayed by Beneš to Stalin, and the way would be paved for forwarding the dossier of forged evidence as soon as it was ready."⁶⁹ It should also be noted that another benefit to Stalin was that Beneš' report also would corroborate the contents of the dossier. The problem now was to prepare the forged documents as soon as possible.

In order to obtain specimens of the signatures of the German and Soviet officers, the SD burglarized the archives of the German High Command, and a fire was started in the archives in order to destroy any traces of the robbery. In April 1937, the forgeries were prepared. They consisted of an exchange of letters, covering a twelve month period, between Tukhachevsky and his associates on the one side and senior German generals on the other. The preparation of the forgeries was extremely meticulous. For the Soviet letters, a typewriter made in the U.S.S.R. was obtained; the paper used had a Soviet Russian watermark; Tukhachevsky's signature was obtained from a 1926 Soviet-German military cooperation protocol, and the signature was forged by Franz Putzig, a Berlin engraver; Tukhachevsky's distinctive literary style was used in typing the letters; and the margins were initialled to denote that they had been seen and read by the German officers. In addition to the Soviet letters, carbon

copies of letters written by German generals to the Red Army "conspirators" and receipts from the Soviet officers for large sums of money were placed in the dossier. Photocopies of the documents were then made in order to insure that they would defy detection as forgeries.⁷⁰ The dossier of photographs of the forged documents was now ready for transmission to Moscow.

Heydrich had a German agent inform the Soviets of the availability of the dossier. Within several days, NKVD agents contacted another SD agent in Berlin and purchased the dossier.⁷¹ By mid-May 1937, the dossier was in Stalin's hands,⁷² and sometime between May 15-27, Tukhachevsky was arrested by the NKVD.⁷³ A Soviet official who was reassigned from the U.S.S.R. on May 22 reported the situation that he observed that day: "Something like a panic seized the entire corps of officers of the Red Army. Hourly reports came in of fresh arrests."⁷⁴

The axe was now honed razor sharp; the victims were being brought to the block, and the executioner was ready. All that remained was for the axe to fall.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Roland Gaucher, Opposition in the U.S.S.R., 1917-1967, trans. Charles L. Markmann (New York, 1969), p. 113; Conquest, p. 204.

² Conquest, p. 205; Wollenberg (p. 198) noted that Tukhachevsky kept his political opinions to himself.

³ Erickson, p. 326.

⁴ Conquest, p. 205. In 1929, 3 to 5 per cent of the military were purged, and in 1933 the purged amounted to 4.3 per cent. This compared with 11.7 per cent and 17 per cent of the Party purged in 1929 and 1933, respectively.

⁵ Wollenberg, pp. 215, 249-50, 257-58; Nikolaus Basseches, The Unknown Army, trans. Marion Saerchinger (New York, 1943), pp. 176-77; Krivitsky, pp. 222-23.

⁶ Erickson, p. 357.

⁷ Conquest, pp. 540-41; Leonard Schapiro, The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (New York, 1960), p. 416.

⁸ Conquest, p. 205.

⁹ F. Beck [pseud.] and W. Godin [pseud. K. F. Shtoppa], Russian Purge and the Extraction of Confession, trans. Eric Mosbacher and David Porter (New York, 1951), pp. 14-15.

¹⁰ Ibid.; Erickson, pp. 391-92; Whiting, p. 25. The rank of General was not introduced until May 1940. Kolkowicz, p. 54, n. 66.

¹¹ Erickson, p. 392.

¹² Ibid., p. 391; Garthoff, Soviet Military Policy, p. 35; Whiting, p. 25.

¹³ Barmine, p. 220.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 219.

¹⁵ Erickson, p. 393.

¹⁶ Barmine, p. 246; Alexander Orlov [pseud.], The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes (New York, 1953), p. 28; Boris I. Nicolaevsky, "The Letter of an Old Bolshevik," contained in Nicolaevsky's Power and the Soviet Elite,

ed. Janet D. Zagoria (New York, 1965), p. 28. "The Letter" is actually notes taken by Nicolaevsky during his 1936 Paris conversations with Nikolai Bukharin.

17 Nicolaevsky, pp. 28-30, 36, 56; Gaucher, pp. 216-18; Fischer, Russia's Road, p. 229.

18 Nicolaevsky, pp. 32-33; Walter Duranty, The Kremlin and the People (New York, 1941), p. 25.

19 Merle Fainsod, How Russia is Ruled, rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), p. 433.

20 Nicolaevsky, p. 37; Orlov, p. 3; Grigori A. Tokaev, Betrayal of an Ideal, trans. Alec Brown (London, 1954), p. 240.

21 Nicolaevsky, pp. 37-38.

22 Robert Payne, The Rise and Fall of Stalin (New York, 1966); Orlov, p. 14.

23 Nikita S. Khrushchev's February 25, 1956, "Secret Speech," contained in The Anti-Stalin Campaign and International Communism, rev. ed., ed. Russian Institute, Columbia University (New York, 1956), pp. 25-26; Alexander N. Shelepin's October 26, 1961, speech to the Twenty-second Congress of the CPSU, contained in Current Soviet Policies IV, eds. Charlotte Saikowski and Leo Gruliov (New York, 1962), p. 180; Khrushchev's October 27, 1961, concluding speech to the Twenty-second Congress, contained in Khrushchev Speaks, ed. Thomas P. Whitney (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1963), pp. 438-39; Nicolaevsky, "The Letter," pp. 42-43; Boris I. Nicolaevsky, "More on Stalin and Kirov," contained in Power and the Soviet Elite, p. 101; Barmine, p. 252; Krivitsky, pp. 184-85; Deutscher, p. 355; Georg von Rauch, A History of Soviet Russia, 5th rev. ed., trans. Peter and Annette Jacobsohn (New York, 1967), p. 239.

24 Nicolaevsky, "The Letter," p. 37.

25 Anti-Stalin Campaign, p. 25. This was disclosed earlier by Beck and Godin, p. 22.

26 Nicolaevsky, "The Letter," pp. 62-63.

27 John A. Armstrong, The Politics of Totalitarianism (New York, 1961), pp. 23-24.

28 Souvarine, p. 607; Orlov, p. 32.

29 Fainsod, p. 435.

- 30 Joseph Stalin, Problems of Leninism, 11th ed. (Moscow, 1947), p. 524.
- 31 Gaucher, p. 227.
- 32 Brzezinski, p. 72.
- 33 Krivitsky, p. 201; Kolkowicz, p. 55; Erickson, p. 425.
- 34 Conquest, p. 209; Erickson, p. 426.
- 35 Barmine, p. 90.
- 36 Conquest, pp. 209-11, 213; Erickson, p. 426.
- 37 Erickson, p. 426; Conquest, p. 205.
- 38 Anti-Stalin Campaign, p. 26.
- 39 Fainsod, p. 439.
- 40 Souvarine, p. 629.
- 41 Brzezinski, p. 73.
- 42 Souvarine, p. 628; Krivitsky, pp. 216-17; Tokaev, Comrade X, p. 68; David J. Dallin [pseud. David Iu. Levin], From Purge to Coexistence (Chicago, 1964), pp. 97-98.
- 43 Krivitsky, p. 217.
- 44 Erickson, p. 450; Nathan C. Leites and Elsa Bernaut, Ritual of Liquidation (Glencoe, Ill., 1954), p. 210.
- 45 Joseph Stalin, Mastering Bolshevism (New York, 1946), p. 26.
- 46 Conquest, p. 213.
- 47 Ibid., p. 214; Erickson, pp. 458-59.
- 48 Conquest, p. 214.
- 49 Krivitsky, p. 229; Erickson, p. 459.
- 50 Krivitsky, pp. 228-29.
- 51 Erickson, p. 460.
- 52 Krivitsky, p. 229.

- 53 Erickson, p. 460.
- 54 Ibid., pp. 460-61.
- 55 Ibid., p. 457.
- 56 Ibid., pp. 412-13.
- 57 Ibid., p. 413.
- 58 Paul W. Blackstock, "The Tukhachevsky Affair," Russian Review, 28 (Apr 1969), 175-76.
- 59 Bella Fromm, Blood and Banquets (New York, 1942), p. 231.
- 60 Winston S. Churchill, The Gathering Storm (Boston, 1948), p. 288. Churchill added a footnote which stated that there was reason to believe that the NKVD planted this information so that Stalin would receive it "from a friendly foreign source."
- 61 Krivitsky, pp. 238-39; Petrov, p. 134n; Wilhelm Hoettl [pseud. of Wilhelm Hagan], The Secret Front, trans. R. H. Stevens (New York, 1954), p. 78.
- 62 Hoettl, p. 78; Gunter Peis, The Man Who Started the War (London, 1960), p. 76; Walter Schellenberg, The Schellenberg Memoirs, ed. and trans. Louis Hagen (London, 1956), p. 46; Petrov, p. 254.
- 63 Hoettl, p. 78; Schellenberg, p. 47.
- 64 Blackstock, p. 177.
- 65 Hoettl, pp. 79, 81; Schellenberg, p. 47; Peis, p. 78.
- 66 Peis, p. 90.
- 67 Eduard Beneš, Memoirs of Dr. Eduard Beneš, trans. Godfrey Lias (London, 1954), pp. 19-20, 47, n. 8.
- 68 Churchill, p. 288; Beneš, p. 47, n. 8.
- 69 Blackstock, p. 180.
- 70 Peis, pp. 81, 86-89, 90-93, 99; Hoettl, pp. 81-82; Conquest, pp. 219-20. Conquest noted that a recent Soviet book by Lev Nikulin, Marshal Tukhachevsky (Moscow, 1964), appears to accept the version of the forgeries presented by Peis. Actually, the accounts of Peis and Hoettl are very similar.

71 Peis, pp. 90, 99; Hoettl, p. 83.

72 Schellenberg, p. 49; Conquest, p. 220.

73 Erickson, p. 460; Conquest, pp. 220-21. No exact date is known as yet.

74 Krivitsky, p. 230.

CHAPTER IV

THE AXE FALLS

Now that Stalin had the dossier of "proof" of the treasonous activity of Tukhachevsky and his associates, the assault on the Red Army began. The purge of the army occurred in two phases: the first attack began in the summer of 1937 and lasted until early 1938, while the second phase started in the summer of 1938 and ended about the latter part of that year.

By June 1, 1937, the Red Army "conspirators" had been arrested, except Gamarnik, who supposedly feared arrest and committed suicide.¹ The crux of the charges against them was treason, though the Trotskyite and terrorist allegations were to persist as a second basis for indictment. During an extraordinary session of the Military Soviet attached to the Defense Commissariat, held during June 1-4, Yezhov presented the report of the NKVD's sudden uncovering of criminal activity within the Red Army. The report contended that there was a "counter-revolutionary and treasonable organization" which had existed for a long while within the ranks of the Red Army, and it was probably at this time that the dossier was produced.²

As of June 4, there had been no announcement of the arrest of the "conspirators." On June 5, however, the Nazi news agency, the DNB, reported that Tukhachevsky had been

arrested, but Moscow remained silent on the subject.⁵ In his June 8th report from the U. S. Embassy in Moscow, Loy W. Henderson wrote:

Although not yet announced there seems little doubt that Tukhachevsky has been arrested [Henderson mentions the possible arrests of Kork and Eideman] . . . It appears that many officers more junior in rank including protégés of some of the general commanders mentioned above have also been arrested. . . . Whether the Kremlin will go so far as to charge that there has been a gigantic Red Army plot remains to be seen. . . . It is the consensus of opinion of competent observers here that the morale and self-confidence of the armed forces from top to bottom has received a severe shock from which they cannot recover for some time.⁴

The degree of the shock was announced by Pravda on June 11, 1937, when Moscow reported that Tukhachevsky, Yakir, Uborevich, Kork, Eideman, Feldman, Primakov, and Putna had been arrested at various dates by the NKVD. They were charged with treason and attempting to restore capitalism in the U.S.S.R., and they reportedly had pleaded guilty to the charges. The article said that the case would be presented to a special judicial session of the Supreme Court of the U.S.S.R. that same day. The members of the court were listed as V. Ulrich (Chairman), Alksnis, Budenny, Blyukher, Shaposhnikov, Belov, P. E. Dybenko, I. D. Kashirin, and E. I. Goryachev. The announcement ended with the statement that the case would be heard in the manner prescribed by the law of December 1, 1934, which meant no defense counsel, no appeal, and immediate execution of the death sentence when found guilty.⁵ The announcement was accompanied by an editorial which attacked Germany and ended

with generous praise for Yezhov and the NKVD's vigilance.⁶ Two days later, the Moscow newspapers announced that Tukhachevsky and the others had been executed on the 12th, and Pravda published a proclamation from Voroshilov to the Red Army concerning the executions, which Henderson described as being "of a redundant nature and contained little of interest." Henderson also described the Pravda editorial comment on the executions as "evasive."⁷

In his report to the U.S. Secretary of State on June 13, 1937, Henderson noted Tukhachevsky's earlier statements about the efficiency of the Reichswehr and the Marshal's belief that the "politicians," probably a reference to the Nazis, were disturbing German-Soviet relations. Henderson also noted that Voroshilov had made similar remarks, and he wrote, "So in the present instance the Embassy believes that it [the Kremlin] distorted the known friendly feelings for Germany shared by the condemned officers into treason."⁸ Henderson also gave credence to the "rumors prevalent in Moscow" that Tukhachevsky and the others were not tried by "Blyukher, Budenny, et cetera," but "were merely shown the alleged confessions and commanded to sign the verdict."⁹

Henderson's comment on discounting the existence of a trial is shared by numerous authors.¹⁰ In fact, Krivitsky asserted that he was personally aware of the imprisonment of Alksnis at the time "when he was supposed to be sitting in judgment on his former Chief [Tukhachevsky]."¹¹ Alexander Orlov, a high-ranking NKVD official, wrote that he was

informed by Shpigelglas, the deputy chief of the NKVD's Foreign Department, that

immediately after the execution of Marshal Tukhachevsky and the other Red Army leaders, Yezhov summoned to a conference Marshal Budenny, Marshal Blyukher, and several other generals and, having informed them about the conspiracy of Marshal Tukhachevsky, gave them a prepared 'court verdict' to sign. Each of those involuntary 'judges' had to sign the fake document, knowing well that if he refused to comply he would be arrested and branded an accomplice of Marshal Tukhachevsky.¹²

While Conquest cited three 1963-1964 Soviet publications which suggest that there was the facade of a trial, he seemed inclined to agree with Orlov's account.¹³ In Erickson's biographical sketches of the accused, he ends each one with the statement "Shot without trial"¹⁴ From the evidence available, it would appear that there was no trial, and even if there was a "verdict" it was a rubber stamp approval of Stalin's decision that Tukhachevsky and the others were to be executed.

As to the guilt of Tukhachevsky and the others, the available evidence strongly indicates that they were innocent. The main charge against them was that they were working in collaboration with a hostile foreign power (Nazi Germany was not specifically named, but it was strongly implied) against the U.S.S.R.¹⁵ Considering that three of the accused were Jews,¹⁶ this charge was hardly short of incredible. Furthermore, Henderson reported on June 13th that the French Embassy "ridiculed" the idea of a conspiracy between the Red Army officers and Nazi Germany.¹⁷

In February 1938, Colonel Frantisek Dastich, the Czech Military Attaché in Moscow, told a member of the U. S. Embassy, "I may state in . . . [reference to the Red Army generals plotting with the Germans] that I have never been able to find any confirmation of the charges that Tukhachevsky and his colleagues were in the service of any foreign government, and I have never believed that they were."¹⁸ Considering the part played by Beneš in inadvertently framing Tukhachevsky, Dastich's comment was hardly politically motivated.

A solid refutation of the treason charge was that there was no German document discovered after World War II and the Nuremberg and Tokyo war crimes trials failed to produce any evidence which gave the slightest grounds for even a reasonable suspicion that a plot with Nazi Germany or Japan might have existed.¹⁹ In his memoirs of the activities of German military intelligence during the Nazi regime, Paul Leverkuehn wrote, "I am satisfied that the fantastic charges of treason . . . [alleged at the Tukhachevsky trial] were baseless."²⁰ Furthermore, it is an established fact that Heydrich boasted of his role in the downfall of Tukhachevsky.²¹

While there is virtual unanimity among most authors that Tukhachevsky and the others were innocent of the charge of collaboration with a foreign power, there is some disagreement as to whether Tukhachevsky and his fellow officers planned a coup d' état. Isaac Deutscher, for instance,

seems convinced that such a conspiracy in fact did exist. He wrote that "all non-Stalinist versions concur in the following: the Generals did indeed plan a coup d' état."²² In reality, however, the accounts written by the great majority of emigrés refute the contention that a coup was planned. With the exception of Erich Wollenberg,²³ the leading defector information and the present Soviet revelations all agree on the absence of any plot.

In their numerous discussions with NKVD and Red Army officers in prison during 1938-1939, F. Beck and W. Godin concluded: "We ourselves believe that there was no such [Bonapartist] plot, and our belief coincides with the interpretation put on events by the majority of Soviet intelligensia, and in particular by the arrested officers themselves."²⁴ Continuing, Beck wrote, "In the whole of my long prison career, . . . I did not come across anything whatever that pointed to the real existence of any kind of counter-revolutionary activity."²⁵ Furthermore, the judgment of the most careful historians, such as Leonard Schapiro, John Erickson, and Robert Conquest, concludes that there was no conspiracy.²⁶ The few accounts which deal with the existence of a conspiracy are conflicting, scrappy, and unconvincing. They are, moreover, often colored by the version of the "conspiracy" given at the March 1938 show trial.²⁷

One of the purposes of the March 1938 trial was to explain and justify the purge of Tukhachevsky and the other Red Army officers.²⁸ During the second examination of

Nilolai Krestinsky on March 4, Krestinsky testified that Tukhachevsky, Gamarnik, Yakir, Uborevich, Kork, and Eideman conspired with the Trotskyites to overthrow Stalin, restore capitalism in the U.S.S.R., and make territorial concessions to Germany. He claimed that the cross-postings and arrests in early May 1937 prevented the accomplishment of the coup.²⁹ However, since Krestinsky had denied his guilt when the charges against him were read two days earlier,³⁰ thus casting doubt on his subsequent "confession," it probably was necessary to have Nikolai Bukharin complete the vilification of Tukhachevsky and the others.

In the trial session on March 7, 1938,³¹ Bukharin claimed that he had been informed by M. P. Tomsky and A. Yenukidze that Tukhachevsky, Kork, Primakov, Putna, and others had united with the Trotskyites towards the end of 1932 or the beginning of 1933. He said that in 1934 they planned a coup in conjunction with "German fascists," in return for which the Germans were to receive territorial and trade concessions from the U.S.S.R. Plans were also being made for an agreement with Japan. In order to accomplish the coup, the military conspirators agreed to "open the front" to the Germans. Bukharin claimed that he was against the military group's plan, because of Tukhachevsky's "Bonapartist tendencies." In order to get Bukharin to make his damning statements against Tukhachevsky and the other military personnel, it was necessary for the prosecutor to ask

leading questions, or questions which clearly spelled out what answers were expected from Bukharin. The result was that the accusations made by Bukharin were far from convincing.

As previously discussed, not only did the vast majority of emigrés refute the idea of a coup, but also the recent Soviet rehabilitations of Tukhachevsky and the other officers substantially diminished the credibility of the coup charge. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines "rehabilitation" as the reinstatement of the good name of an individual. In his study on Soviet rehabilitation, Leopold Labedz noted that, unlike the publicized rehabilitation of Alfred Dreyfus in France, rehabilitation in the U.S.S.R. is conducted with stealth and in installments. Some rehabilitations are first brought about by name-dropping in texts, others by portraits put on display at exhibitions and museums.³²

In his 1956 "secret speech," Khrushchev disclosed that the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the U.S.S.R. had rehabilitated 7,679 persons since 1954, most of them posthumously. He also referred to the "excellent military cadres which were unquestionably loyal to the Party and to the fatherland" who were purged by Stalin.³³ With this disclosure, the backdoor was opened for the rehabilitation of Tukhachevsky and the others purged during the Great Purge. Khrushchev's speech was followed in 1956 by the mention of Tukhachevsky's name in two Soviet periodicals. Though he

was charged with "bad organization" of the 1920 Warsaw offensive in one of the articles,³⁴ the mention of his name was a step forward. He was first given praise as an influential and talented military leader in August 1957, in volume 50 of the Large Soviet Encyclopedia, and the complete rehabilitation resulted shortly thereafter, with the inclusion of a biographical note on his life in volume 51 of the same encyclopedia. About the same time, Soviet publications made favorable comments about Primakov, Putna, Yakir, Uborevich, and Eideman.³⁵

With the publication of the 3rd edition of the Small Soviet Encyclopedia (1958-60), the Tukhachevsky group had been rehabilitated with brief biographical sketches, though the circumstances of their deaths were not listed.³⁶ The final step in the complete restoration of the military's honor came with Khrushchev's concluding remarks to the Twenty-second Congress of the CPSU. Khrushchev openly declared the innocence and praised the talents of the Red Army leaders whose services were lost because of "the repressions" of Stalin.³⁷

The repressions of Stalin were not limited to the elimination of Tukhachevsky and the other June 1937 "defendants." While a crippling blow had been struck at the high command, as it had formerly existed, the autumn and winter of 1937 witnessed the first assault on the command group running through corps and divisional commanders down to brigade and

regimental level. This was the structure of the Red Army which was composed predominantly of Civil War veterans. While Stalin evidently issued arrest orders personally in some cases, the NKVD thinned the officer corps by the use of denunciations and the dossiers compiled by the Special Section (OO), the NKVD's counter-intelligence organization in the Red Army.³⁸

Almost immediately after Tukhachevsky's execution, military personnel were questioned to determine their opinion of the charges.³⁹ Each officer who received his post from the hands of one of the executed officers fell under suspicion.⁴⁰ Considering that Tukhachevsky was the Deputy Commissar for Defense and that several of the other executed officers were military district or corps commanders, the number of officers that they probably assigned must have been very large. In Moscow alone, twenty younger generals were executed, and in the Military District of Kiev 600-700 senior officers were arrested because of their association with Yakir.⁴¹

Not only were the commanders arrested, but also their immediate assistants and all those considered their friends were imprisoned. Almost the whole command of the Kremlin Military School was arrested,⁴² and the Frunze Military Academy was plagued with arrests of both the staff and faculty and the students.⁴³ Once an officer was arrested, he was expected to accuse other officers.⁴⁴ One division commander told the NKVD that he had recruited every officer in his

division, down to and including company officers, into his "Trotskyite organization."⁴⁵ With the NKVD's demand for accusations against other officers and the resultant arrests of these officers, it was understandable why one observer wrote that weeks and even months passed before the military posts vacated by the arrested officers were filled by new commanders, and it often happened that the new commanders were arrested in their turn.⁴⁶

By August 1937, the arrests of Red Army commanders had spread to Spain. Ian Berzin, the chief military adviser to the Spanish Government and an old "bosom friend and drinking companion of Voroshilov," and three brigade commanders were arrested.⁴⁷ Late that year Khalepsky and Alksnis were arrested. Khalepsky, the tank expert who had made such a favorable impression on foreign military observers, was shot in 1938. Alksnis' death date was given variously as 1938 and 1940. In February 1938, Yegorov was removed from his position and arrested; he died in 1941.⁴⁸ Only in the Far Eastern portion of the Soviet Union was the initial impact of the military purge of lesser ferocity and intensity,⁴⁹ probably because the Japanese forces in Manchuria posed a real threat to the U.S.S.R. That is not to say, however, that Blyukher's Far Eastern Front did not suffer any purges. To name but a few, Blyukher lost his Chief of Staff, V. M. Sangursky, three other key staff members, and Corps Commander Konstantin Rokossovsky. However, the first phase of the purge of the Far Eastern Front lasted only five weeks,

losing its momentum with Blyukher's return from Moscow.⁵⁰ For the remainder of the Red Army, the initial phase of the purge did not end until early 1938, but the summer of that year witnessed the second assault on the Red Army.⁵¹ This time the Far Eastern Front was not as fortunate as before.

Beginning in June 1938, the NKVD arrests escalated once again. Blyukher's forces suffered the decimation which the Red Army in the European U.S.S.R. had experienced in the initial phase of the purge, and both eastern and western Red Army units lost entire staffs to the purge. The higher the command level, the greater the proportional loss. Up to regimental level, a reported 40 per cent loss of the officer corps was incurred. In divisional and corps staffs, the figure rose to 70 per cent, while the Front staff lost over 80 per cent of its officers. For the moment, however, Blyukher himself remained untouched.⁵² Once again, the threat of Japan presented itself.

In July 1938, Soviet and Japanese forces began a large-scale conflict at Lake Khasan (near the junction of the borders of Manchuria, Korea, and the Soviet Maritime Provinces). This was no mere border incident, as had been the case earlier, and the Far Eastern Front employed several divisions, supported by heavy artillery, tanks, and airplanes. Though the Red Army suffered heavy losses, it emerged victorious, and a cease-fire was arranged for August 11, 1938.⁵³ However, one of the greatest losses suffered by the Far Eastern Front was not inflicted by the

Japanese. Sometime around August 6, the NKVD arrested Blyukher, and on November 9, 1938, he was dead.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, the elimination of other military leaders was taking place.

In July 1938, two of Tukhachevsky's "judges," Belov and Dybenko, were executed,⁵⁵ and another, Kashirin, simply vanished during the year.⁵⁶ Of the eight military officers who were Tukhachevsky's "judges," only two men survived 1938--Budenny and Shaposhnikov. Of the six who perished, only Goryachev died of natural causes.⁵⁷ In the summer of 1938, Voroshilov toured the Ukrainian Military District. Upon his return, he told Stalin, "The foundations of [the Red Army's] discipline and comradeship are crumbling. No one dares to trust his fellow, either superior or subordinate. I hear it's the same in the Navy. Both forces are demoralized."⁵⁸

Possibly as a result of Voroshilov's report, the purge of the Red Army slacked off in the late autumn of 1938, though vestiges of the purge continued until 1941.⁵⁹ During the period from late spring 1937 to late autumn 1938, various well-informed sources have estimated the total arrests among Red Army officers, line and political, at 15,000 to 35,000, which was from one-fifth to one-half of the total officer corps.⁶⁰ The most careful available analysis of the evidence indicates that the 35,000 figure is most nearly correct.⁶¹ However, when the 1939-1941 reinstatements of many of the purged officers are considered,⁶² the real loss

probably was about 25,000.⁶³

In percentage of ranks, the Red Army's purge losses were significantly higher in the grades of colonel and above: 90 per cent of the officers with ranks equivalent to general officers, 80 per cent of the colonels, and 60 to 70 per cent of the remaining field grade ranks.⁶⁴ The Red Army lost three out of five Marshals, all eleven Deputy Commissars for Defense, 75 out of 80 of the 1934 membership of the Military Soviet, all of the military district commanders who held that position in June 1937 or who had replaced those commanders first executed. Of the army commanders holding that rank in May 1937 only two survived; thirteen were shot. Fifty-seven of the 85 corps commanders were executed, as were 110 of the 195 divisional commanders. At the brigade commander level, 186 of the 406 officers in that position in June 1937 were shot, and only 195 out of 460 regimental commanders survived.⁶⁵ It seems very improbable that a military conspiracy involving so many officers could have occurred within a totalitarian system. Furthermore, had such a conspiracy in fact taken place it is difficult to believe that Stalin could have moved against it as gradually as he did and could have suppressed it so easily.

During the time that Stalin was purging the military, he also took steps designed to insure the Red Army's continued loyalty to his regime. By 1939, the officers' pay had been considerably increased. Corps commanders received 364 per cent more pay, division commanders 337 per cent, and

so forth, down to an increase of 240 per cent for platoon commanders.⁶⁶ It is significant to note that the higher officers received a greater percentage of increase in their pay, indicating that Stalin especially wanted to insure their continued loyalty. Another improvement for the well-being of the commanding personnel was the creation of the co-operative consumer's system, the Voentorg, which made the commander's life more comfortable. This system created retail shops, barber shops, laundries, and tailoring and boot-making establishments. It supplied camp furniture and equipment and organized and insured a continuous food supply.⁶⁷ Since housing space was scarce in the urban centers of the U.S.S.R., special construction was begun in 1937 to provide the commanding personnel with up-to-date apartments.⁶⁸ Also in 1937, "as if in exchange for the execution of Marshal Tukhachevsky," the Red Army officers were presented with an ultramodern rest sanatorium at Sochi.⁶⁹ Rapid promotions were yet another method by which the Red Army's loyalty to Stalin was courted.

As Erickson noted, "The emptying ranks of the officer corps were filled by means of extremely rapid promotions--one of the reasons why a certain degree of safety existed for Stalin in undertaking the purge."⁷⁰ Erickson related the case of an officer who was made a lieutenant on October 22, 1937, and one week later was promoted to command one of the three cavalry regiments in the Stalin Division in Moscow.⁷¹ Another example of the astonishing promotion rate

was the case of P. Rychagov. In 1937, he was a senior lieutenant, three years later he was a Lieutenant General, and by 1941, when he was 35 years old, he was Commander-in-Chief of the Air Force.⁷² Aleksandr Gorbатов had been a deputy corps commander until his arrest in 1938. While imprisoned, he wondered how the officers who were newly appointed to high rank would react in a real war:

Honest, brave men devoted to their country they might be, but yesterday's battalion commander would be head of a division, yesterday's regimental commander of a corps; in charge of an army, or a whole front, there would be at best a former divisional commander or his deputy. How many futile losses and failures would there be? What would our country suffer just because of this?⁷³

At the same time that Stalin enticed the officers with rapid promotions and improved living standards, he took steps designed to increase the Party's (by now synonymous with his) control over the Red Army. On August 15, 1937, Stalin enacted a statute which increased the power of the political commissar.⁷⁴ No order, not even a simple supply requisition, was valid without the commissar's counter-signature, and the commissar's attestation of an individual's loyalty was required on the service record of all personnel in his unit, including the record of the unit commander.⁷⁵ There was a rapid escalation of the number of commissars after 1937, and by 1939 the number of Red Army political personnel had more than doubled, even though the purge had wreaked havoc within their ranks too.⁷⁶ This increase in the number and power of the commissars, however, had an

inverse effect on the Red Army's military efficiency in 1937-1938. This lowered efficiency was revealed by the numerous instances in which companies left for the firing ranges without being issued cartridges for the target practice.⁷⁷ Another example was the instance in which a commander approved the requisition of a pair of socks for one of his soldiers. The quartermaster, however, would not issue the socks. The commissar had not co-signed the requisition, and he was off on "private business" that day.⁷⁸

As though the effect of the commissar was not bad enough on the army's efficiency, there were also frequent reports of unit commanders being taken from their training duties and sent to party schools for political studies. These studies often last for a month at a time.⁷⁹ In his report to the Eighteenth Congress of the Party, in March 1939, Lev Mekhlis, the head of the army's Political Administration (PUR), claimed that the practice of taking the commanders for a "whole month on end" had stopped.⁸⁰ However, he did not specify whether the commanders were no longer taken from their units or if the duration of their absence had just been reduced. Another measure instituted to increase Party control was the policy of criticism and self-criticism. This resulted in reduced morale and discipline in the army, since any commander whose orders angered his men was criticized by them and was subject to punishment, if not arrest.⁸¹

Discipline was going to pieces, and the awkward conditions of dual command, which had never contributed to any sort of military efficiency, were further compounding the problem. As U. S. Ambassador Joseph E. Davies reported in April 1938, "It is generally considered that the Army is loyal to Stalin, but the morale and confidence may have been shaken by the purge."⁸² In the same report, Davies noted that the Red Army's officer corps was "lacking possibly in experienced leadership at the top."⁸³ This lack of experienced leadership "at the top" led to two bad decisions in the fields which the Tukhachevsky group had worked so hard to develop.

By 1939, air force pilots were being penalized if they damaged their aircraft, regardless of whose fault it was. As a result, pilot initiative was severely curtailed, and the air force flew training missions only during exercises.⁸⁴ Also in early 1939, as a result of an incorrect conclusion drawn from the experience of the use of tanks in Spain, where the terrain was not as open as in the western portion of the U.S.S.R. and in Eastern Europe, the maintenance of the large tank formation was considered inexpedient.⁸⁵ Though events in mid-1939 were to demonstrate the tank's value, the armored branch as a separate entity was about to end.

During May-September 1939, Soviet and Japanese forces became heavily engaged in the Khalkhin-Gol battles. After the Lake Khasan conflict, the Red Army forces in the Far East were greatly increased. In May 1939, intense fighting

broke out on the Manchurian-Outer Mongolian border (about ten miles east of the Khalkhin-Gol River) between Soviet-Mongolian and Japanese forces, and the size of both forces quickly grew. By July, the Soviet-Mongolian forces consisted of 11,000 infantry and cavalry, 186 tanks, and a superiority in artillery and aircraft. The Japanese had 24,000 infantry and cavalry, 170 guns, 130 tanks, and 250 aircraft.⁸⁶ The Soviets, however, had a marked advantage that was to enable them to heavily reinforce their troops and yet not have to worry about starting a full-scale war with Japan.

Dr. Richard Sorge, a well-placed Soviet agent in Tokyo, informed Moscow that the Japanese planned to keep the Khalkhin-Gol engagement a local conflict, and he provided accurate information on Japanese troop movements to that area.⁸⁷ Therefore, in August the Soviets decided to go all-out. Georgi Zhukov was assigned as commander of the 1st Army Group on the Khalkhin-Gol front, and he received massive reinforcements. When he attacked on August 20, he had a $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 superiority in infantry and cavalry, 2 to 1 in artillery and aircraft, and 4 to 1 in tanks. Zhukov used his tanks brilliantly, and he synchronized their activities with his artillery and motorized infantry.⁸⁸ It was the execution of Tukhachevsky's doctrine of combined arms and massed armor, and the result was a Japanese retreat. By August 31, the Japanese had been pushed beyond the Soviet-Mongol version of the frontier, and an armistice was

arranged September 16, 1939.⁸⁹

Zhukov's demonstration of the use of massed armor, combined with infantry, artillery, and aircraft should have impressed D. G. Pavlov, the most influential voice on the employment of armor who survived the purge. Pavlov stuck with his lessons learned in Spain, however, and he persuaded Stalin and Voroshilov to disband the seven mechanized corps in the Red Army. The tanks were then distributed in separate battalions to infantry units. Zhukov and Shaposhnikov were against this break-up of the mechanized corps, but their arguments were in vain.⁹⁰

In the meantime, events had transpired in the west which were to have serious consequences for world peace. The British and French had lost faith in the strength of the Red Army after the purge,⁹¹ and whatever favorable opinion the French Army had of the Red Army in 1935-1936 was seriously undermined by the military purge.⁹² In September 1938, a conference was held in Munich which determined whether the non-Axis powers would attempt to stop or would capitulate to Hitler's demands on Czechoslovakia. In 1935, the U.S.S.R. and France had signed Mutual Assistance Pacts with Czechoslovakia, but the Soviet Union was only required to assist the Czechs if France did so.⁹³ However, the U.S.S.R. was not even invited to the Munich Conference.⁹⁴

Though the British and French opinions of the Red Army were not the only factors involved in the U.S.S.R.'s exclusion from the Munich Conference, the purge of the Red Army

certainly seems to have had a bearing in the matter. Actually, apart from numerous proclamations by Soviet diplomats, there is little evidence to suggest that the Red Army would have been committed in defense of Czechoslovakia. There was little or no preparation of the Soviet people for the possibility that the U.S.S.R. might have become involved in war with Germany,⁹⁵ and Wollenberg wrote that the Soviet press was quiet about the Czech crisis in August-September 1938.⁹⁶ George F. Kennan, who was in Prague at the time, said that he did not believe in the good faith of the U.S.S.R.'s offers of assistance, since just transporting elements of the Red Army to Czechoslovakia presented a large problem in itself.⁹⁷ At the Munich Conference, Britain and France capitulated to Hitler's demands, and Czechoslovakia was taken over by Nazi Germany. Less than a year after the Soviet Union's exclusion from the Munich Conference, one of the surprises of the century occurred, though it should not have been so startling.

On August 23, 1939, the Hitler-Stalin Nonaggression Pact was signed.⁹⁸ Apologists for Stalin's signing the Nonaggression Pact claim that the exclusion of the Soviet Union from Munich was proof to Stalin that the Western democracies were attempting to turn German aggression against the Soviet Union.⁹⁹ There is little doubt that the Munich Conference did spur Stalin's efforts to arrange an agreement with Hitler in order to keep the Soviet Union out of war with Germany as long as possible. At this time, Stalin certainly

appears to have been practicing Realpolitik,¹⁰⁰ since he was placing the U.S.S.R.'s national interests, as he saw them, ahead of all else. After the British and French failed to take action in 1936 during Germany's reoccupation of the Rhineland, after the failure of the Western democracies to give little other than lip service against the German-Italian intervention in the Spanish Civil War, and then after the failure of Britain and France to stand by the Czechs, Stalin could hardly have had much faith in bolstering the defenses of the U.S.S.R. through collective security or entente with the Western democracies. On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that Stalin had been working on an agreement with Hitler several years before 1939.

Immediately after Hitler's bloodpurge of the Brown Shirts in June 1934, according to Krivitsky, whose reliability on Soviet foreign policy is doubtful, Stalin decided to "secure at whatever cost an understanding with the Nazi regime."¹⁰¹ Krivitsky contended that after the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact in October 1936 Stalin sent David Kandelaki to Berlin as a special envoy to obtain a pact with Germany, and in December of that year Krivitsky received an order to "throttle down" Soviet intelligence operations in Germany.¹⁰² He also wrote that Stalin's intervention in the Spanish Civil War was in order to strengthen "his bargaining position with Berlin" and to "arrive at his underlying steady aim and purpose, a compact with Germany."¹⁰³

Barmine wrote that Stalin was attempting to obtain a

pact with Nazi Germany as early as January 1937, and that this was the reason for the NKVD's misinformation programs against Tukhachevsky.¹⁰⁴ Barmine quoted the text of an article which reportedly appeared in the Nazi newspaper Frankfurter Zeitung on August 29, 1939. The text said, "The removal from the social life of the Soviet Union of that upper layer who go by the name of Trotskyists, and were on that ground removed, was indubitably a very essential factor in the rapprochement between the Soviet Union and Germany."¹⁰⁵ Boris Nicolaevsky wrote that the Great Purge was conducted by Stalin largely for the purpose of eliminating opposition to a Soviet-Nazi Germany alliance,¹⁰⁶ and even Gustav Hilger, a German diplomat in Moscow, has expressed this view. Hilger wrote, "Viewed in the light of [the Hitler-Stalin Pact] (and only in this light), the great purges can be regarded as a necessary preparation for the German-Soviet alliance. . . . to claim that the purges meant the elimination of a 'pro-German' faction with the [Communist] party appears utterly ridiculous."¹⁰⁷

Notwithstanding the arguments on when Stalin conceived the notion of the Nonaggression Pact, with its conclusion Hitler did not have to worry about war with the Soviet Union when Germany attacked Poland; Articles II and IV of the Pact insured this.¹⁰⁸ The immediate significance of the Pact, from the Soviet viewpoint, must have been the provision of the "Secret Additional Protocol," which provided the U.S.S.R. with the sphere of influence in Poland "bounded approximately

by the line of the rivers Narew, Vistula, and San" in the event of a "territorial and political rearrangement" of Poland. The initial Soviet sphere of influence was also to include Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Bessarabia.¹⁰⁹ Stalin was too much the realist not to recognize that the conclusion of the Pact probably would mean war between Germany and Poland, a war in which the Soviet Union would also gain territory, and on September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland.

The Red Army was startled by the rapid advance of the Germans and the defeats suffered by the Polish Army. Therefore, the Byelorussian and Ukrainian fronts were activated and attacked the Poles from the rear. By September 21, the Red Army reached the line of demarcation; it had advanced easily in the absence of Polish opposition. The Soviet occupation of the Polish territories was accomplished, though there had been a few minor skirmishes with German troops.¹¹⁰ On September 25, Stalin offered Germany the Province of Lublin and part of the Province of Warsaw in return for a free hand in Lithuania, and three days later Hitler agreed.¹¹¹

Stalin's next military move was against Finland. The Red Army had easily occupied Poland. The Finns, however, were to be another matter. The impact of the purge on the Red Army's combat efficiency was soon to be demonstrated, and Gorbatov's worry about the "futile losses and failures" would be answered with bloody and agonizing clarity.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Erickson, pp. 460-61; Conquest, pp. 220-21.

² Erickson, pp. 462, 736, n. 46; Leonard Schapiro, "The Great Purge," contained in Liddell Hart, The Red Army, p. 70; Blackstock, p. 186; Orlov, p. 234. The only evidence that I have found which claims the dossier was never used was that contained in a Russian emigre weekly, Possev, as presented in Petrov, p. 258, n. 13. Possev presented a version of the February 1966 meeting of the Department for the History of the Great Patriotic War (WW II) at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Moscow. The article claimed that Pyotr Yakir, a Soviet historian and son of the executed commander, asserted that there was no dossier and that the defendants were judged guilty based on Stalin's unsubstantiated declarations.

³ Albert Parry, Russian Cavalcade (New York, 1944), p. 175.

⁴ Foreign Relations: The Soviet Union, pp. 377-78.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 378-79.

⁶ Ibid., p. 379.

⁷ Ibid., p. 383.

⁸ Ibid., p. 384.

⁹ Ibid., p. 385.

¹⁰ Leites and Bernaut, p. 382; Barmine, p. 7; Wollenberg, p. 233; Krivitsky, p. 232; Orlov, p. 237; Erickson, p. 463; Robert Conquest, "The Great Purge," Encounter, 31 (Oct 1968), 80.

¹¹ Krivitsky, p. 232.

¹² Orlov, p. 237. Emphasis in original.

¹³ Conquest, Great Terror, pp. 223-24.

¹⁴ Erickson, pp. 838, 840, 842, 845-46.

¹⁵ Foreign Relations: The Soviet Union, p. 379.

¹⁶ Orlov, p. 234.

- 17 Foreign Relations: The Soviet Union, p. 385.
- 18 Ibid., p. 519, n. 14.
- 19 Cerroni, p. 168; Erickson, p. 464; Leites and Bernaut, p. 18.
- 20 Leverkuehn, p. 156.
- 21 Erickson, p. 471; Joachim C. Fest, The Face of the Third Reich, trans. Michael Bullock (1963; rpt. New York, 1970), p. 388, n. 27.
- 22 Deutscher, p. 379. However, in his Preface to the Second Edition (p. viii, n.) he admits that his version is based on "anti-Stalinist sources," that it "may be mistaken," and that it "may need some revision" as it pertains to Tukhachevsky.
- 23 Wollenberg, pp. 240-53. Wollenberg believes that Tukhachevsky and Gamarnik conspired to overthrow Stalin in order to "help preserve the socialist movement." In reading his presentation, however, one is left with the opinion that Wollenberg was presenting his own hopes for a coup. Furthermore, his version of the planned coup sounds too much like that presented at the 1938 show trial. It was interesting to note that in Comrade X Grigori Tokaev, who was a self-professed oppositionist and belonged to "conspiratorial groups," wrote that Tukhachevsky was innocent of the charges against him (pp. 68, 80).
- 24 Beck and Godin, p. 105.
- 25 Ibid., p. 205.
- 26 Schapiro, "The Great Purge," p. 70; Erickson, pp. 464-65; Conquest, Great Terror, p. 207.
- 27 Schapiro, Communist Party of the Soviet Union, p. 424.
- 28 Keith D. Eagles, "Ambassador Joseph E. Davies and American-Soviet Relations, 1937-1941," Diss. Univ. of Washington 1966, p. 249.
- 29 The Great Purge Trial, eds. Robert C. Tucker and Stephen F. Cohen (1938; rpt. New York, 1965), pp. 235, 237-43. The verbatim transcript of Krestinsky's March 4th examination is contained in pp. 220-45.
- 30 Ibid., p. 36.

31 Ibid., pp. 351-396 contains the verbatim transcript of March 7th. The information provided hereafter on the testimony from Bukharin is based on the testimony contained in these pages.

32 Leopold Labedz, "Resurrection--and Perdition," Problems of Communism, 12 (Mar-Apr 1963), 48.

33 Khrushchev Speaks, ed. Thomas P. Whitney (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1963), pp. 231, 238-39.

34 Labedz, p. 55.

35 Ibid., pp. 55-56; Jane P. Shapiro, "Soviet Historiography and the Moscow Trials," Russian Review, 27 (Jan 1968), 70-71.

36 Samuel A. Oppenheim, "Rehabilitation in the Post-Stalinist Soviet Union," Western Political Quarterly, 20 (Mar 1967), 100. In the appendix to his article (pp. 112-113), Oppenheim provides a useful list of the rehabilitated military leaders and how and when they were restored to favor.

37 Current Soviet Policies IV, eds. Charlotte Saikowski and Leo Gruliov (New York, 1962), pp. 197-98.

38 Erickson, p. 471.

39 Tokaev, Comrade X, pp. 78-80.

40 Orlov, p. 234.

41 Barmine, pp. 6, 8.

42 Tokaev, Betrayal of an Ideal, p. 244.

43 Conquest, Great Terror, p. 226.

44 Aleksandr V. Gorbатов, Years Off My Life, trans. Gordon Clough and Anthony Cash (New York, 1965), pp. 109-13; Beck and Godin, pp. 45-46.

45 Beck and Godin, p. 47.

46 Orlov, pp. 234-35.

47 Ibid., p. 235; Krivitsky, p. 114.

48 Orlov, p. 241; Conquest, Great Terror, pp. 229, 233-34.

49 Erickson, pp. 466-68. In June and July 1937, there were several company-sized engagements between Japanese and Soviet troops in the Amur River area. Harriet L. Moore, Soviet Far Eastern Policy (Princeton, 1945), pp. 81-83.

50 Erickson, p. 467; Conquest, Great Terror, pp. 459-60.

51 Erickson, p. 470.

52 Ibid., pp. 493-94.

53 Ibid., pp. 494-99; Moore, pp. 98-101; Garthoff, Soviet Military Policy, p. 17.

54 Erickson, pp. 497, 499.

55 Conquest, Great Terror, p. 234; Tokaev, p. 84.

56 Erickson, p. 501.

57 Ibid., pp. 501-02.

58 Duranty, p. 127.

59 Khrushchev Speaks, p. 238; Erickson, p. 505.

60 Barmine, p. 323; Wollenberg, p. 253; Krivitsky, p. 177; Brzezinski, p. 106; Souvarine, p. 635.

61 Garthoff, Soviet Military Doctrine, pp. 220-21.

62 Lev Mekhlis' speech to the Eighteenth Congress of the CPSU in March 1939, contained in Klimenti Voroshilov, et al., The Red Army Today (Moscow, 1939), pp. 47-48. Mekhlis, the Chief of the PUR, said that the PUR had found it necessary "to reinstate about 50 per cent of the expelled men"; however, this reinstatement probably referred to those who had not been shot or died in prison. Further reinstatements occurred after the Soviet-Finnish war of 1939-1940. Gorbatoff, pp. 150-51; Nicolaevsky, p. 237.

63 Thirteen Who Fled, ed. Louis Fischer, trans. Gloria and Victor Fischer (New York, 1949), p. 35; Erickson, p. 506.

64 Beck and Godin, p. 106; Barmine, p. 323.

65 Erickson, p. 505; Beck and Godin, p. 106; Barmine, pp. 322-23; Nekrich, June 22, 1941, contained in Petrov, p. 135.

66 Voroshilov's speech to the Eighteenth Congress of the CPSU, contained in The Red Army Today, p. 27; Fedotoff-White, p. 379.

67 Fedotoff-White, pp. 379-80.

68 Ibid., p. 380.

69 Garthoff, Soviet Military Policy, p. 35.

70 Erickson, p. 471.

71 Ibid.

72 Garthoff, Soviet Military Policy, p. 36.

73 Gorbatov, p. 134.

74 Fedotoff-White, pp. 395-96, 398; Harold J. Berman and Miroslav Kerner, Soviet Military Law and Administration (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), p. 15; Documents on Soviet Military Law and Administration, pp. 12-15.

75 Fedotoff-White, p. 396; Documents on Soviet Military Law and Administration, p. 14.

76 Fedotoff-White, p. 399. There were 15,000 commissars prior to the purge, and the figure rose to 34,000 in 1939.

77 Ibid., p. 399, n. 225.

78 Thirteen Who Fled, p. 31.

79 Fedotoff-White, p. 409.

80 The Red Army Today, p. 47.

81 Thirteen Who Fled, p. 34.

82 Foreign Relations: The Soviet Union, p. 547.

83 Ibid.

84 Wollenberg, p. 321.

85 Nekrich, June 22, 1941, contained in Petrov, p. 124.

86 Erickson, p. 520; Whiting, p. 35.

87 Charles A. Willoughby, Shanghai Conspiracy: The Sorce Spy Ring (New York, 1952), p. 104.

88 Erickson, pp. 522, 533-37.

89 Ibid., p. 536. The outbreak of World War II in Europe was one of the factors in arranging the armistice.

90 Ibid., p. 537; Nekrich, June 22, 1941, contained in Petrov, p. 124; Whiting, p. 36.

91 Churchill, p. 289; Joseph E. Davies, Mission to Moscow (New York, 1941), p. 168; George F. Kennan, Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin (Boston, 1961), p. 295.

92 Paxton, p. 245.

93 Beloff, I, 155-56.

94 Beloff, II, 161.

95 Beloff, II, 166; Wollenberg, p. 284.

96 Wollenberg, pp. 283-84.

97 George F. Kennan, Memoirs (Boston, 1967), p. 94; Kennan, Russia and the West, pp. 323-24. Kennan noted in Russia and the West that the U.S.S.R. did not have a common border with Germany in 1938 and would have had to obtain permission to cross Poland or Rumania. These two countries would not agree to the transit of the Red Army through their territory. Besides, the Rumanian railway system from the U.S.S.R. to Czechoslovakia was such that, "even had the Rumanians permitted the passage, it would have taken the Soviet command approximately three months to move a division into Slovakia over this primitive and indirect route."

98 U. S., Department of State, Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941, eds. Raymond J. Sontag and James S. Beddie (Washington, D. C., 1958), pp. 76-78. [Hereafter referred to as Nazi-Soviet Relations.] The cited pages contain the provisions of the Pact, to include the "Secret Additional Protocol."

99 The best examples of this are Falsifiers of History (New York, n.d.), pp. 24, 33-49; Victor A. Yakhontoff, U.S.S.R. Foreign Policy (New York, 1945), pp. 206-07.

100 Simply stated, Realpolitik is the practice of statesmen attempting to preserve their country's national interests through a pragmatic analysis of the situation, remaining flexible and maintaining alternate courses of action, and not letting one's grasp exceed his reach. Otto von Bismarck's conduct of German (Prussian) foreign policy in the second half of the nineteenth century is one of the best historical examples of the practice of Realpolitik. It is doubtful that Stalin believed that the Nonaggression Pact with Germany would preclude Hitler's attacking the

Soviet Union at a later date, but he probably hoped to delay an attack until possibly at the end of the Fourth Five-Year Plan.

101 Krivitsky, p. 13. While Krivitsky's book is probably one of the best memoirs by a defector from the Stalin regime, especially on the NKVD, his interpretation of Stalin's Foreign Policy is dubious and should be used with caution.

102 Ibid., p. 21.

103 Ibid., pp. 76, 81.

104 Barmine, pp. 222-24, 309.

105 Ibid., p. 224.

106 Boris Nicolaevsky, "The Murder of Kirov," contained in Power and the Soviet Elite, p. 89.

107 Hilger and Meyer, pp. 292-93.

108 Nazi-Soviet Relations, p. 77.

109 Ibid., p. 78.

110 Erickson, pp. 537-39; Whiting, p. 37.

111 Nazi-Soviet Relations, pp. 103, 107.

CHAPTER V

THE IMPACT ON THE ARMY'S COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS

While the Red Army was securing its Polish territory, Stalin obtained additional gains from the Nonaggression Pact. He demanded and received mutual aid treaties and military bases in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania on September 28, October 5, and October 10, 1939, respectively.¹ Stalin's next move was against Finland. Though negotiations for military bases on Finnish territory had begun in April 1938,² the Soviet demands increased in October 1939.

In the October 1939 meetings with the Finnish representatives in Moscow, Stalin personally demanded that the border be moved back to provide protection for Leningrad, islands in the Gulf of Finland be ceded to the U.S.S.R., and Hango Cape be leased to the Soviet Union for thirty years. The demand on Hango included the provision that up to 5,000 Soviet military personnel would be stationed there. In return for the use of the islands, Moscow offered to cede 183 square kilometers in eastern Karelia, north of Lake Ladoga.³ Stalin and V. M. Molotov, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs, referred to the possible threat of England and France, recalling British naval actions against St. Petersburg (Leningrad) during the 1918-1920 Civil War. However, one of the

negotiators sensed that "it was Germany they feared."⁴

On November 3, the Finnish representatives rejected the Soviet proposals on Hango and Lappohja Bay, and the meeting closed with Molotov's ominous words: "We civilians can see no further in the matter; now it is the turn of the military to have their say."⁵ The negotiations ended. On November 26, seven artillery rounds reportedly were fired at the Soviet border village of Mainila. That same day, Molotov sent a note to the Finnish Ambassador in Moscow protesting the "Mainila incident" and demanding that Finnish forces on the Karelian Isthmus withdraw twelve to fifteen miles from the border to eliminate "the possibility of fresh provocations."⁶ On November 29, the Finnish government offered to withdraw "its defense forces stationed on the Karelian Isthmus . . . to such a distance from Leningrad that they cannot be alleged to represent a threat to its security."⁷ But this did not suffice. On the morning of November 30, the Red Army invaded Finland and Helsinki was bombed--without a declaration of war.⁸

The war with Finland was the initial responsibility of the Leningrad Military District,⁹ whose commander and his subordinates had vociferously told Stalin that its forces could easily overcome the Finnish defenses. In addition to the new military commanders' claims of an easy victory, Stalin received reports from Helsinki of popular resentment against the Finnish government. These reports seem to have led Stalin to believe that the Finnish "masses" would welcome "liberation"

by the Red Army.¹⁰ Therefore, on December 3, 1939, radio Moscow announced the establishment and the U.S.S.R.'s recognition of a Finnish popular government under Otto Kuusinen, a Finnish Communist exile and former general secretary of the Comintern, at the small border town of Terijoki.¹¹ The mistake of establishing the Kuusinen government, coupled with the Leningrad Military District's command of the Finnish campaign, suggested serious Soviet miscalculation of the military and political aspects of their operations in Finland. As events were soon to prove, the Winter War was not to be an easy victory.

The military front extended from Leningrad in the south to the Arctic Ocean in the north, a distance of some 800 miles, and the Soviets deployed four armies, which required a redeployment of forces from other military districts and indicated that preparation for the invasion began weeks before the "Mainila incident." The Soviet plan called for the 7th Army to attack the "Mannerheim Line" on the Karelian Isthmus and drive on to Vyborg (Viipuri). North of Lake Ladoga, the 8th Army was to attack the flank and rear of the Finnish forces defending the Isthmus and attempt to outflank the defensive belt there. The 9th Army was to attempt to push through central Finland to the Gulf of Bothnia, which would have severed the land communication between Finland and Sweden and virtually cut Finland in half. In the far north, the 14th Army's objective was the seizure of Petsamo district.¹² If the Finnish people had had no desire to resist, the initial

Soviet plan might have succeeded. The problem was that the Finns did not realize they were supposed to welcome the "liberation," and the Finnish terrain favored the defenders.

Water covers almost a third of Finland, and an additional 60 per cent of the land consists of thick forests. The average winter temperature is 14 degrees below zero, and the winter of 1939-1940 was even colder than usual. In December, daylight in the south is limited to four hours, and in the north, around Petsamo, there is hardly any daylight. The road system, at best, was composed of narrow winding tracks.¹³ The roads were miles apart, with thick forests on both sides. There were only a few small clearings for agricultural purposes. The sides of the roads could only be negotiated with skis, and the roads themselves were beaten snow and ice, which was in a condition that John Langdon-Davies said "would cause the A. A. [Automobile Association] in England to pronounce them dangerous for use."¹⁴

For this extremely cold climate and snow and ice covered land, the Red Army failed to provide sufficiently warm clothing, footwear, and skis. While the Finnish defenders wore white clothing that enabled them to blend into the terrain, the Soviet forces wore khaki colored uniforms. The Finns even painted their equipment white, but the Red Army's equipment retained its normal dark color.¹⁵

During the first two weeks of the war, each side was feeling out its opponent. On December 14, the 14th Army easily captured Petsamo,¹⁶ but the 9th Army's push into

central Finland met utter disaster. The 163rd Division of the 9th Army moved from the north toward the important road junction of Suomussalmi, while the 305th Regiment of the 9th Army's 44th Division approached the junction from the south. The Red forces arrived at Suomussalmi on December 9 and prepared to move toward Oulu and the Gulf of Bothnia. The Finnish troops numbered about 2,500, which was about one-tenth the size of the Soviet force. The Finns, however, compensated for fewer numbers with the use of ski mobility, whereas the Red Army forces stuck to the roads. The Finns sent out combat patrols, which whittled away at the Soviet troops and forced them to withdraw from the village on March 13. At the same time, the Finns cut the road on which the 305th had advanced. The 163rd retired its left wing by crossing the ice on Lake Kianta, and the Finns now had two separate forces to fight, rather than one massed force.¹⁷

By December 15, the Finnish force was reinforced to about 7,000 men. Leaving only 200 men to hold the 305th, the Finns attacked the 163rd. The Finns defeated the division by cutting its lines of communication and attacking its flanks from the woods. During this time, the 305th did not send out any reconnaissance patrols and apparently was not aware that only a small Finnish force kept them from assisting the 163rd. The 163rd was forced to retreat, which it accomplished in an orderly manner, but it was no longer an effective fighting force. On December 27, the remainder of the 44th Division crossed the frontier to reinforce its 305th Regiment, but

the division only had a two-day supply of food. The Finns immediately cut off the division's resupply from the frontier and placed a small blocking force of about 300 men in front of the division. The 44th was spread out over five miles of road, and the Finns again attacked from the flanks. Cold and hunger added considerably to the casualties inflicted by Finnish machine-gunners and snipers. By January 9, 1940, the 44th Division was virtually wiped out. Again, the lack of reconnaissance had grave consequences for the Soviet forces. As an observer said, "Had the Russians tried to advance they could have pushed these men [the blocking force] aside at any time."¹⁸ Another reason for the 44th's defeat was the commander's lack of initiative. Rather than take responsibility for pushing the attack or falling back, regrouping, and making sure his supply line was secure as he readvanced, the division commander turned again and again to the commanders above him, in a manner which suggested that the fears of the purge still existed in his mind.¹⁹

Another division of the 9th Army, the 54th, fared a little better than the 163rd and 44th. In January 1940, the 54th launched its attack toward Kuhmo, but within a few days 2,000 Finns stopped the division's advance. After the earlier experience of the 163rd and 44th Divisions, the 54th should have realized that retreat was the best course of action, since the Finns would surely attempt to cut off their supply lines. Yet the 54th, spread out over sixteen miles of road, prepared a series of defense positions. The Finns cut

off the 54th's land supply route. The Soviets began air-dropping supplies, which was a good idea, but the Finns profited too, since they frequently captured the drops.²⁰ In February, the Soviet command sent a brigade of Siberian ski troops, about 2,000 men, to relieve the 54th. Again, a lack of reconnaissance caused disaster. A few hundred Finns ambushed the brigade about 24 miles from the border, and the Soviet ski troops were virtually annihilated. The situation remained a stalemate until the end of the war; the Finns could not destroy the 54th, and the division could not break out.²¹

The remaining division of the 9th Army, the 122nd, suffered a serious defeat at Kemijärvi. A lieutenant from the 122nd, Gregory Ugryumov, wrote that one Finnish battalion stopped the Soviet division. Ugryumov said that the basic tactic of the Red Army was to crush the enemy with masses of infantry, assuming that the Finns could not kill all of the Soviet attackers. The costliness of this tactic was revealed when his company attacked a village without any artillery preparation; 60 per cent of the Soviet troops were killed and most of the survivors were wounded. To make matters even worse, the attack failed.²²

The Finns employed the same tactics against the 8th Army. They cut the Soviet supply routes and attacked and harried the Soviet divisions from the forests, using skis for rapid mobility, until the Soviet forces froze, starved, or broke. Here too, the Soviet forces invariably kept to the

roads and failed to perform reconnaissance. The 18th Division was destroyed; the 168th Division ceased to exist as an organized unit; and after a fifty-four day siege of the 34th Tank Brigade, which was sent to relieve the 18th Division, the Finns stormed the brigade position and annihilated the Soviet troops.²³ The 34th Brigade's defeat was almost inexcusable, since the commander, a Colonel Kongratjev, had been warned by an 18th Division officer who had evaded the Finns that the narrow roads, the almost impassable terrain, and the Finnish encirclement tactics posed a grave risk to mechanized forces. Kongratjev, however, merely expressed contempt for the Finns' combat abilities and disregarded the warning.²⁴ Though the 8th Army's operations north of Lake Ladoga cost the Red Army very heavy losses in men and equipment, they did cause the Finns to divert troops from the Isthmus, where the Soviet 7th Army also fared poorly in the first two months of the war.

The main blow of the Red Army was directed at the Karelian Isthmus, where the "Mannerheim Line" was the main component of the Finnish defense. Marshal Carl Mannerheim, the Finnish Commander-in-Chief, wrote that Soviet propaganda launched the myth of the invincibility of the Finns' defensive barrier. He claimed that the defense line was not comparable to the Maginot and Siegfried Lines.²⁵ Actually, the Mannerheim Line was a series of field fortifications--trenches, dugouts, machine-gun nests, and tank barriers and traps--stretching in a sixty-mile curve from the Gulf of

Finland to Lake Ladoga. Only in the southwestern portion of the Line, around Summa, were there any real concrete fortifications. Here a series of small forts, built with reinforced concrete and armed with one 75 mm. field-gun and two heavy machine-guns, were placed at intervals of 200 yards. The chief defense of the Line was water; two-thirds of the Line ran along rivers or lakes.²⁶

On November 30, 1939, the 7th Army launched twelve rifle divisions and the equivalent of a tank corps against the Finnish defenses on the Isthmus, but only four of the nine divisions in the first echelon were properly committed. The concentration of Soviet forces was poorly handled. The troops were not trained for operating against the Finnish obstacles, and few gaps were made against the obstacles to assist the tanks. The artillery merely fired barrages without any real regard for targets or accuracy. It was obvious that the combined arms co-operation that was so pronounced at Khalkhin-Gol was sorely lacking on the Isthmus.²⁷

One Soviet battalion commander, Captain Nikolai S. Ugrumov, advanced without knowing anything about the terrain and pursued the Finns without regard for his open flanks. The lead company came under fire and fell to the ground. The company commander called Ugrumov and asked what to do, an obvious display of lack of initiative and training. As could be expected, the battalion suffered heavy casualties.²⁸

One of the main defects in Soviet unit leadership on the Isthmus, especially in the December actions, was the desire

to advance at all costs. The Soviet forces, therefore, overextended their lines, and the Finns encircled them and attacked their flanks. Another deficiency during the early phases of the war was the lack of coordination between infantry and armor, which enabled the Finns to destroy a great number of the Soviet tanks that forged ahead of the infantry.²⁹ The failure to use artillery to prepare for infantry assaults was another conspicuous error by the Soviet commanders in the initial two months of the war. Finnish soldiers told foreign observers that they admired the courage of the Red Army troops but were astonished and had nothing but scorn for the "blundering tactics" of the Soviet commanders who massed their infantry and drove them forward to almost certain death.³⁰

By the end of December it was obvious that the Finnish campaign was a Soviet fiasco, and on December 26 the Soviet armies were reorganized. On the Isthmus, the 13th Army was added to the 7th, and on the other side of Lake Ladoga the 15th Army reinforced the reorganized remnants of the 8th Army. On December 28, a new directive was issued which forbade the front commander's rushing ahead; he was directed to proceed only after adequate preparations had been made. Mass attacks were to be discontinued, reconnaissance was ordered, and well-planned artillery preparation was to precede infantry assaults. Equipment changes were also introduced. The light tank ceased to be used as a battle tank, and the

medium and heavy tanks were grouped into brigades. Heavier artillery was brought to the front. On January 7, 1940, Timoshenko took command of the front.³¹ With a new organization, new tactics, new weapons, and a new commander, the Red Army began what amounted to a second war with Finland.

On February 1, 1940, the renewed Soviet offensive began, and it lasted without a break until March 13, 1940. The main effort was directed at the Isthmus, where not less than fourteen rifle divisions were committed. By February 3, massive artillery and air force barrages were preceding the infantry assaults. By February 13, the Soviet troops opened a hole in the defenses east of Summa, and they broke the right flank of the Mannerheim Line by capturing the fortress of Koivisto on the 26th. On March 3, a Red Army corps began to cross the frozen ice on the Gulf of Finland. The Finns fought hard, but by March 9, the Soviet forces had a foothold on the northwest shore of the Gulf and threatened the city of Vyborg.³² The situation looked hopeless for the Finns,³³ but two days earlier the Finns had sent a peace delegation to Moscow to resume the negotiations initiated by the Kremlin in January.³⁴

On March 12, 1940, Finland signed a dictated peace treaty in Moscow; she lost the entire Karelian Isthmus and was forced to lease Hango Cape to the U.S.S.R. In accordance with the protocol appended to the treaty, hostilities ended the next day.³⁵ However, the Winter War demonstrated that the purge and Stalin's attempts to insure Party control of the Red Army

had a grievous impact on the army's combat effectiveness.

An estimate of the Red Army's losses lists 165,000 killed and 1,700 tanks and 700 airplanes destroyed.³⁶ The Soviets lost three divisions and one tank brigade in their entirety, three divisions ceased to exist as organized units, and at least four other divisions lost between one-third and one-half of their total force.³⁷ Finnish and Western sources blamed the Red Army's poor performance mostly on poor leadership and training.³⁸ Poor leadership was especially evident in units above battalion level--the very area in which the purge caused rapid promotion of relatively inexperienced officers. Even a recent Soviet publication stated that the quality of officer training was low.³⁹ There was general agreement, however, that the performance of the Red Army improved in February and March 1940, but there were still serious deficiencies. While there is little evidence of the degree to which the power of the commissars impaired the army's efficiency, the abolition of this position in August 1940⁴⁰ suggests that even the Soviet political leadership realized that the dual command system had been a costly one.

After the Winter War, the Kremlin took several steps to correct the Red Army's problem areas. In May 1940, Voroshilov was "promoted" to deputy chairman of the Defense Committee, and Timoshenko became Defense Commissar. The Main Military Soviet debated the problems of the Finnish campaign, and on May 16 it listed the shortcomings to be corrected in the army. Troop training needed improvement, more effort on

combined arms operations was especially required, and staff work needed great improvement.⁴¹ The list was a tacit admission that the NKVD scythe had lopped off more heads than had been consistent with good leadership in the Red Army.

To restore some of the lost leadership, many of the surviving, but imprisoned, purged officers were released. Officers such as Colonel (later Marshal) Rokossovsky and ex-deputy corps commander (later General of the Army) Gorbатов were released from prison and returned to the army.⁴² On October 12, a new Disciplinary Code replaced the old code of 1925. The new Code demanded unquestioning obedience to commanders' orders, prescribed harsh discipline, and instituted saluting.⁴³

In the meantime, Germany had overrun France in June 1940, and the Kremlin was astonished by Hitler's overwhelming victory. Moscow dropped all pretense of respect for the sovereignty of the Baltic States, and the Red Army occupied Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Bessarabia, and Northern Bukovina in late June 1940.⁴⁴ The Soviet action in Bessarabia alarmed Germany, which was worried about its oil supply from Rumania.⁴⁵ Therefore, within a few months, Hitler subjugated Rumania, and the Wehrmacht virtually occupied Bulgaria. In the late summer of 1940, Moscow reinforced the Red Army forces on the Soviet-German frontier to a strength of about 90 Rifle and 23 Cavalry Divisions plus 28 Mechanized Brigades, but these units were understrength and improperly deployed.⁴⁶ By December 1940, after Molotov's visit to Berlin, Hitler

issued Directive Number 21, which gave the Wehrmacht the task of preparing for a "swift campaign" to crush Soviet Russia.⁴⁷

The initial date for the invasion of the U.S.S.R., code name "Barbarossa," was set for the middle of May 1941.⁴⁸ The purge of the Red Army caused Hitler and the Chief of the German Army's General Staff, Franz Halder, to believe that the campaign would be victorious in eight to ten weeks.⁴⁹ In his memoirs, Wilhelm Keitel wrote that Hitler stressed that "Stalin had purged the elite among his military commanders in 1937, so there was a shortage of able brains to back him up."⁵⁰ Hitler's belief in the weakness of the Red Army was reinforced in the months prior to the invasion by Stalin's appeasement policy, such as the Soviet Union's recognition of Germany's occupation of Norway and its continued shipment of raw materials to Germany, even though Germany fell behind on their shipments to the Soviet Union.⁵¹ Events in the Balkans in April 1941, however, forced the deployment of elements of the "Barbarossa" invasion force to the Balkin Campaign, and the invasion of the Soviet Union was delayed by almost six weeks.⁵²

Though Stalin later claimed that the German invasion was a surprise attack,⁵³ the Kremlin received numerous reports in 1941 that Germany planned to attack the Soviet Union. In March, the U. S. State Department informed the Soviet Ambassador of Germany's intention to attack.⁵⁴ Between February and June, the Soviet Embassy in Berlin obtained and

forwarded numerous reports of Germany's intentions.⁵⁵ The British also furnished several reports, and in May Dr. Sorge, one of the NKVD's best agents, reported that 170-190 German divisions would attack along the whole frontier on June 22, with the main direction of advance against Moscow.⁵⁶ Even with these advance warnings, however, Stalin still refused to believe that Hitler would attack. He apparently thought that the reports from Berlin were Hitler's ruses to obtain further Soviet concessions. In Stalin's view, the British and U. S. reports were attempts to cause a Soviet-German war, and in late May and June he considered every new report a British provocation and ordered that no credence be given the information.⁵⁷ Not only were the reports disregarded, but strict instructions were issued not to shoot down any of the numerous German reconnaissance planes flying over Soviet territory.⁵⁸ It was not until 0030 hours on June 22 that Timoshenko placed the armed forces on alert; however, he ordered the commanders not to fire on the Germans, since this would give Germany an excuse to claim provocation.⁵⁹

As early as 1936, Tukhachevsky had publicly warned that Germany was preparing for a surprise attack,⁶⁰ but after the purge the concept of strategic surprise and defensive strength deployed in great depth was "consigned to a kind of Stalinist perdition."⁶¹ Therefore, the German attack, which commenced at 0330 hours on June 22, 1941,⁶² quickly overran the Soviet defenses.

The Germans formed three army groups for "Barbarossa":

Army Group North, under Field Marshal Ritter von Leeb, with about 29 divisions, attacked from East Prussia and drove toward Leningrad; Army Group Center, commanded by Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, with approximately 46 divisions, attacked from north of the Pripet Marshes and proceeded toward Moscow; Army Group South, under Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, with about 38 German divisions and several Rumanian and other "allied" divisions, attacked from south of the Pripet Marshes and drove toward Kiev.⁶³ The Germans employed about 4,000 tanks⁶⁴ and 1,200 airplanes.⁶⁵

Against the German invaders, the Soviets had a superiority of about 25-30 divisions; however, it should be noted that only about one-third of these 170 divisions were deployed in the first echelon of defense on June 22. The Red Army did, however, have at least a 7:1 advantage in tanks and a 4 to 5:1 superiority in airplanes,⁶⁶ but this too was misleading. The Red Army's tanks and airplanes deployed in the West were mostly obsolete, and the training of the tank crews and airmen had been seriously neglected. Many tank men had only 1½ to two hours experience in actual tank driving, and the pilots for the few new aircraft that were deployed had very few hours flying experience. Furthermore, most of the airfields were under reconstruction, which prevented effective camouflage, maneuverability, and dispersal of the aircraft.⁶⁷

The Soviet defense plan was so poor that the bridges across the Bug River were not even mined, enabling the German armored units to rapidly cross this potential obstacle.⁶⁸

The German generals who led their corps to the attack declared that they had struck right into the middle of a Soviet defensive deployment and that it was still in progress when the German troops crossed the border.⁶⁹ Immediately after the invasion began, the Germans intercepted a Soviet radio message: "We are being fired on. What shall we do?"⁷⁰ There seems to be little doubt that the Red Army troops had been caught by surprise, which Gorbatov blamed on inadequate preparation of the army.⁷¹

The lack of defensive preparation was further revealed by the fact that very few fortifications had been built on the post-1939 border, and, to make matters even worse, the extensive fortifications built prior to the purge, the "Stalin Line," had been completely dismantled.⁷² Therefore, there was not a prepared secondary line of defense. Besides these problems, the Soviet troops were not properly equipped. One Soviet general said, "Often our troops could not dig in, simply because they did not even have the simplest implements."⁷³ Another Red Army general recorded in his diary that the South-Western Front had a shortage of ammunition, vehicles, and fuel, and there were no spare parts for the equipment.⁷⁴ The lack of qualified leadership, however, was one of the main causes for the Red Army's initial defeats.

Gorbatov was deputy commander of the 25th Rifle Corps, which was deployed in the Ukraine in June 1941. He attributed the main reason for the Soviet retreats to "the weakness of the officers."⁷⁵ While inspecting the disposition of his

units, Gorbатов discovered that his corps artillery regiment had not established observation posts and when the artillery started to fire it was not aware of the location of the troops for whom it was providing support. One of his division commanders was not even aware of the location and situation of the division's regiments. Since the corps commander would not take remedial action, Gorbатов initiated the necessary corrections himself. In seeking the reason for the mistakes of his commander and his subordinate officers, Gorbатов concluded that it was that inexperienced officers, "who have never before been under fire, are coping timidly and inadequately with vital jobs."⁷⁶

Coping timidly and inadequately with the situation was not limited to the regimental and corps commanders. General I. V. Boldin reported that immediately after the invasion, Timoshenko called him and said that Stalin forbade the Red Army firing on the German troops and that aerial reconnaissance was limited to thirty-five miles beyond the frontier. Boldin told Timoshenko that since his air force was destroyed, reconnaissance was impossible, but he pleaded for permission to employ his artillery and armor. Timoshenko refused, again stressing Stalin's orders.⁷⁷ That evening, even though Boldin's 10th Army was practically wiped out, General D. G. Pavlov, the Western Front commander, demanded that the 10th Army counter-attack. The counter-attack was attempted, though Boldin protested, and the Germans encircled Boldin's forces in the famous "Bialystok Pocket."⁷⁸ General

Gunther Blumentritt claimed that the Germans captured 150,000 prisoners and captured or destroyed some 1,200 tanks and 600 guns in the battle. He also noted that the Red Army's officers were "rather awkward and unskilled."⁷⁹ Boldin was forced to split his unit into small groups, and after forty-five days of evading von Bock's forces, only 2,000 of Boldin's army managed to rejoin the main Soviet forces near Smolensk. Boldin believed that the unrealistic counter-attack orders were issued "merely for the record, to show Moscow that something was being done to stop the Germans."⁸⁰

A recent Soviet account of the early days of the invasion noted that at 0715 hours on June 22 Timoshenko ordered "All forces . . . to attack the enemy."⁸¹ Not only did this show an ignorance of the situation at the front, but it was an example of being too offense-minded. What was necessary at that time was a regrouping of the Red Army, the establishment of a defense, and then--once, and if, the German advance was checked--a counter-attack. Not only had the Red Army sustained heavy casualties, too heavy to successfully launch a counter-attack, but the Germans had almost completely destroyed the Soviet Air Force in the first few days of battle. By noon of the first day, the Red Air Force had lost 1,200 planes, 800-900 of which were lost on the ground.⁸² By the 24th of June, the losses reached about 2,000 planes.⁸³ These losses gave the Luftwaffe almost immediate air superiority and enabled close air support of the advancing German forces. General Blumentritt wrote that

even as late as December 1941 the Germans saw very little of the Red Air Force.⁸⁴

As the Germans advanced, the Red Army committed its tanks piecemeal and had no armor reserves. The result was heavy losses. On several occasions, smaller German units actually surrounded larger Red Army units and virtually annihilated them. One of the reasons for the repeated encirclement of large Red Army units was that the division commander had no authority to withdraw. He had to receive permission from the next higher commander, and even if it was granted, the authority frequently was so slow in arriving that the division was already caught.⁸⁵

In an attempt to stem the German advance, the Red Army's command structure was reorganized into three main sectors: Voroshilov was appointed to command the North-Western Front, opposed by German Army Group North; Timoshenko took command of the Western Front, facing Army Group Center; and Budenny went to the South-Western Front, battling Army Group South.⁸⁶ On July 16, the military commissars were re-introduced. The commissars were equally responsible with the commanders for the military performance of the units, and they were charged with waging "a relentless struggle against cowards, panic-mongers, and deserters. . . ."⁸⁷ In this moment of crisis, Stalin apparently wanted to insure the Red Army's loyalty. While Voroshilov and Budenny were undoubtedly loyal to Stalin, their appointment to command positions was hardly well-calculated for slowing the German advance.

By the middle of July, von Leeb's Army Group North had slashed through the Baltic States and was moving toward Novgorod and the Luga defense line. Of the original thirty divisions of the Soviet North-Western Front, only five were still up to strength. The rest were left with only a 10 to 30 per cent complement of men and equipment. In early August, the Germans broke through the Luga defense line, and by the end of the month Leningrad was sealed off. The famous siege was under way.⁸⁸ As Alexander Werth wrote, "Voroshilov had lost his head completely, and it was not until General Zhukov was rushed to Leningrad at the beginning of September and reorganised the troops on the spot that the defence of Leningrad began in real earnest."⁸⁹

At the opposite end of the Soviet Union, the Red Army had performed well against von Rundstedt's Army Group South. Tukhachevsky's "great military qualities" were demonstrated by the defense system which he had established around Kiev.⁹⁰ Furthermore, the commander in the Kiev area, Lieutenant-General M. P. Kirponos, was an excellent officer, and when his forces were forced to withdraw to Kiev, they did it gradually, keeping their front fairly well intact and holding von Rundstedt west of Kiev. Following Budenny's assumption of command of the South-Western Front, however, the Germans encircled a large Soviet force in the Uman area (125 miles south of Kiev), which opened the way for a gigantic encirclement east of Kiev and cut Budenny's forces in two between Uman and Odessa.⁹¹

In late August, the German Army Group South was reinforced with General Heinz Guderian's Second Armored Group, which was taken from Army Group Center against the advice of von Bock and Guderian.⁹² Between August 25 and September 16, the Germans encircled Kiev and either captured or destroyed five Soviet armies. The way to the lower Volga was opened for the Germans, and in the next two months they occupied the Eastern Ukraine and nearly the whole Crimea.⁹³ A Soviet general attributed the failures on the South-Western Front to the lack of properly qualified officers. He wrote that, "so many of our most experienced divisional commanders were still cooped up in [prison], while at the front the command of units and larger formations had to be entrusted to people who . . . did not know how to fight."⁹⁴ Meanwhile, on September 13, Budenny was removed from his command and sent to a job where, hopefully, he would cause no damage, training reserves. He was replaced by Timoshenko, who had been successful in at least slowing von Bock's advance.⁹⁵

Von Bock's Army Group Center had encircled several Soviet armies in the first few weeks of the invasion and then rapidly drove toward Smolensk.⁹⁶ Timoshenko, however, established a defense-in-depth, which Albert Parry said was based on "plans first worked out for this region by Tukhachevsky."⁹⁷ On July 16, von Bock's advance guards reached the outskirts of Smolensk, but the Soviets put up a heavy resistance. Army Group Center was stopped for almost a month before it finally captured Smolensk. Though the Soviets suffered very heavy

casualties, the battle had given the Red Army time to regroup and bring up reserves for the defense of Moscow.⁹⁸

During this time, the Soviet Government also ordered the evacuation of the industry in the Ukraine and around Moscow to the east.⁹⁹ Furthermore, Hitler's decision to divert elements of von Bock's forces to the south prevented Army Group Center's immediate advance on Moscow after Smolensk had fallen, which cost von Bock several precious weeks of good weather and possibly was the turning point of the war.¹⁰⁰

Army Group Center finally renewed its offensive on September 30, and during the next week the battle of Vyasma raged. Vyasma was the outer ring of the defense covering Moscow. The Germans encircled the five defending Soviet armies and inflicted enormous losses on the Red Army;¹⁰¹ however, the delay enabled more Soviet forces to reinforce Moscow. On October 10, Zhukov assumed command of the Western Front, thus taking charge of the defense of Moscow.¹⁰² By October 14, the Germans took Kalinin (93 miles northwest of Moscow), and by October 19, Army Group Center captured Mozhaysk (60 miles from Moscow). Despite stiff Soviet resistance and heavy German losses, Army Group Center was closing in on Moscow.¹⁰³ Then a different form of enemy helped stop the German advance.

Heavy rains turned the roads and countryside into a large quagmire, through which mobility was almost impossible. It was not until mid-November, when cold weather froze the

mud, that the Germans renewed their advance.¹⁰⁴ The battle raged from November 15 to December 3, during which time General Blumentritt wrote that the weather broke and "the full fury of the Russian winter was upon us."¹⁰⁵ General Guderian wrote that on November 17 his forces encountered strong resistance from newly arrived Siberian troops, and the new Soviet T-34 tank was employed in mass against his forces, which had a difficult time trying to destroy the T-34s.¹⁰⁶ Despite these difficulties, the Germans arduously forged ahead; some elements of the German force even penetrated the outer suburbs of Moscow, but were repulsed.¹⁰⁷

On December 5-6, the long-awaited moment finally came for the Red Army. Zhukov had stopped the German advance on Moscow and had built up sufficient forces to launch a counter-attack. As Zhukov wrote of December 6, 1941, "On that day the troops of the Western Front, after concentrated bombing and artillery bombardment, went over to the offensive north and south of Moscow. . . . The initiative had passed to our side."¹⁰⁸ However, the initiative had not passed to the Soviets without a frightful cost.

A former Red Army field grade officer said that the initial period of the Soviet-German war "resulted in the shattering and almost complete destruction of the greater part of the Soviet Army."¹⁰⁹ There are no precise and final figures on the Red Army's losses in the first five months of the war, but the available evidence indicates that the losses were extremely high.

According to German data, the Red Army lost 3,806,865 men captured, and 21,390 tanks, 32,541 guns, and 17,322 planes captured or destroyed.¹¹⁰ Field Marshal Erick von Manstein claimed the Red Army lost 6.9 million men by December.¹¹¹ The German claims suggest that about 3.1 million Soviet soldiers were killed, but this is probably too high a figure. Soviet announcements on losses were not broken down into the same five month time frame. However, Stalin admitted that in the first four months "we lost 350,000 killed, 378,000 missing, and have 1,020,000 wounded men."¹¹² While the German claim probably was inflated, it seems likely that Stalin's "admission" of losses was conservative in the extreme. A reasonable estimate of Red Army losses, both dead and captured, probably would amount to well over one million, and possibly two or three million, men by December 1941. Kenneth Whiting's study of the Red Army concluded that Soviet losses in airplanes probably were about 10,000,¹¹³ or about 60 per cent of the German claim. This percentage indicates that the Red Army may well have lost about 12,750 tanks and 20,000 guns in the first five months of the war.

The loss of Soviet territory was equally as great as the losses sustained by the Red Army. By December, the Soviet Army conceded 1,600,000 square kilometers of territory and was thrown back to the line Leningrad-Moscow-Northern Caucasus. According to Soviet sources, the U.S.S.R. lost about 40 per cent of its pig iron, 58 per cent of its steel, 60 per cent of its aluminum, and about 40 per cent of

its grain production.¹¹⁴ But why did these losses in human and material resources and land occur?

As discussed earlier, Tukhachevsky stressed the need for the Red Army's officers to learn the "new technique" of mechanization in modern war as early as 1935, but the History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941-1945 admits the officer corps lacked both education and experience. The History says, "At the beginning of the war, only 7 percent [sic] of the officers had higher military education, and 37 percent [sic] had not completed their intermediate military education. By the summer of 1941, about 75 percent [sic] of the commanders . . . had not been in their jobs more than a year."¹¹⁵

As the first five months of the war proved, Tukhachevsky's emphasis on the need for commanders to encourage initiative by their subordinates and on the necessity for continuous reconnaissance was well taken. While the German generals praised the tenacity of the Soviet soldiers, there was little commendation for their officers. General Blumentritt wrote that "the majority of officers lacked . . . independence and initiative. . . . Despite new tactics, the idea of 'mass' was still predominant. . . . Attacks were massive but not well-planned and the co-operation of attacking formations, artillery, and heavy weapons remained faulty. . . . The shortcomings were inadequate co-operation, no concentration on key points, and poor reconnaissance."¹¹⁶ Field

Marshall Manstein said that one of the main reasons for the Red Army's initial defeats was "a lack of ability and of initiative, as well as the lack of readiness to accept responsibility on the part of the higher, intermediate, and subordinate officers."¹¹⁷

Even Soviet personnel decried the Soviet lack of training and initiative. General Gorbatov reflected that the first five months of the war were "a stage in the war when many of our officers learned how not to fight and consequently how they should fight. The slowness with which this knowledge was absorbed--no matter how obvious were the bloody examples--was the result of the pre-war conditions in which the mental habits of the officers had been formed."¹¹⁸ He continued by noting that "one of the basic reasons for our failures at the front was the lack of properly qualified officers . . . [the purge eliminated the best officers] while at the front the command of units and larger formations had to be entrusted to people who . . . did not know how to fight."¹¹⁹ Admiral Nicolai Kuznetsov wrote that "people fell out of the habit of self-reliance and became used to waiting for orders from above, which they carried out without thinking. . . . military organizations did not work systematically but spasmodically, in bursts. They would fulfill one order, then wait for the next."¹²⁰

The Kremlin had to learn the hard and bloody way that, while Party appointments to command positions in the Red Army were politically safe, they were militarily disastrous.

Because of the losses during the summer and autumn battles, Stalin initiated a military purge as opposed to a political purge of the military. A great number of the incompetent commanders were removed, and the new commanders proved capable of saving the Red Army from total defeat.¹²¹ Whereas the 1937-1938 political purge of the military had a detrimental impact on the Red Army's combat effectiveness, the 1941 military purge probably was one of the causes for the army's slowly, but surely, improving its ability to first slow, then stop, and eventually to destroy the Wehrmacht.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Vera M. Dean, "Russia's Role in the European Conflict," Foreign Policy Reports, 15 (1 Mar. 1940), 315.

² Väinö Tanner, The Winter War (Stanford, 1957), pp. 3-5.

³ Ibid., pp. 25-30.

⁴ Ibid., p. 41.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 66-67.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 85-86. There is some evidence that the Soviets fired the artillery rounds. Erickson, p. 748, n. 96.

⁷ Ibid., p. 88.

⁸ Ibid., p. 89. A Soviet force had crossed the border at Petsamo and captured a few Finnish border guards the day before, but the main attack began on the 30th. An immediate political result of the U.S.S.R.'s invasion was her expulsion from the League of Nations in mid-November 1939. Finland and World War II, 1939-1944, ed. John H. Wuorinen (New York, 1948), pp. 63, 67.

⁹ Erickson, p. 542.

¹⁰ Fischer, Russia's Road, p. 383. The Helsinki representative of the Soviet news agency TASS and the Soviet Legation submitted the reports.

¹¹ Tanner, p. 102. Finland and WW II (p. 65) states that Kuusinen's government was established on December 1, 1939.

¹² Erickson, p. 543.

¹³ William P. and Zelda K. Coates, The Soviet-Finnish Campaign (London, 1941), pp. 1-5; Geoffrey Cox, The Red Army Moves (London, 1941), pp. 96, 119.

¹⁴ John Langdon-Davies, Finland: The First Total War (London, 1940), p. 10.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 15-16; Cox, pp. 53, 57, 89, 119.

¹⁶ Erickson, p. 544.

- 17 Cox, pp. 115-17.
- 18 Ibid., pp. 118-28; Langdon-Davies, p. 48.
- 19 Cox, p. 240.
- 20 Langdon-Davies, pp. 50-56; Carl G. E. Mannerheim, The Memoirs of Marshal Mannerheim, trans. Eric Lewenhaupt (New York, 1954), p. 349.
- 21 Cox, pp. 134-35; Langdon-Davies, pp. 57-60.
- 22 Thirteen Who Fled, pp. 216, 218.
- 23 Cox, pp. 192-94; Langdon-Davies, p. 48; Mannerheim, pp. 348-49.
- 24 Cox, p. 194.
- 25 Mannerheim, p. 371. Another observer made a similar comment, noting that the defenses were not modern field fortresses like those in France and Germany. Cox, p. 150.
- 26 Cox, pp. 150-51.
- 27 Erickson, p. 544.
- 28 James V. Anzulovic, Jr., "The Russian Record of the Winter War, 1939-1940," Diss. Univ. of Maryland 1968, pp. 192-94.
- 29 Ibid., pp. 200, 204-05; Erickson, p. 544.
- 30 Cox, p. 156; Langdon-Davies, pp. 103, 105.
- 31 Cox, pp. 189-90; Erickson, p. 547.
- 32 Cox, pp. 200-209; Erickson, pp. 549-51.
- 33 Tanner, p. 211.
- 34 Ibid., pp. 126, 219.
- 35 Ibid., pp. 263-67. The cited pages contain the text of the Treaty, to include the appended protocol.
- 36 Langdon-Davies, pp. 44-49, 100, 160.
- 37 Langdon-Davies, p. 48; Cox, p. 194.

³⁸ Mannerheim, p. 367; Cox, p. 240; Langdon-Davies, pp. 9, 19, 104; Anzulovic, p. 172; Erickson, p. 552; Lieutenant-General Kurt Dittmar, "The Red Army in the Finnish War: From the German Side," in Liddell Hart, p. 85; Garder, pp. 102-03; Wollenberg, pp. 356-59. Wollenberg cited numerous instances where Soviet artillerymen forgot to fuse their shells, which caused dud rounds, and he wrote that the infantrymen forgot to pull the safeties on their grenades 30 to 90 per cent of the time.

³⁹ Nekrich, June 22, 1941, contained in Petrov, p. 131.

⁴⁰ Documents on Soviet Military Law and Administration, p. 15. The commissar was replaced by the Assistant Commander for Political Affairs (Zampolit), who was subordinate to the unit commander. Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, "Party Controls in the Soviet Army," Journal of Politics, 14 (Nov. 1952), 567.

⁴¹ Erickson, p. 553.

⁴² Boris Nicolaevsky, "A. N. Bulganin," in Power and the Soviet Elite, p. 237; Gorbatov, pp. 147-53.

⁴³ Fedotoff-White, pp. 419-20.

⁴⁴ Alexander Werth, Russia at War, 1941-1945 (1964; rpt. New York, 1970), p. 106.

⁴⁵ The Fatal Decisions, eds. Seymour Freidin and William Richardson, trans. Constantine Fitzgibbon (New York, 1956), p. 30; William L. Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (New York, 1960), p. 795.

⁴⁶ Erickson, pp. 557, 571.

⁴⁷ Fatal Decisions, p. 30; Wilhelm Keitel, The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Keitel, ed. Walter Gorlitz, trans. David Irving (1961; rpt. New York, 1966), p. 124. Keitel contended that, apart from general staff type studies, there was no preparation for war with the Soviet Union prior to December 1940. He also wrote that the directive was the result of Hitler's belief that the U.S.S.R., with its build-up on the frontier, planned to invade Germany. It is clear, however, that German forces secretly began to concentrate in Poland in August 1940. Shirer, p. 799; Erickson, p. 560.

⁴⁸ Vice Admiral Kurt Assmann, "The Battle for Moscow, Turning Point of the War," Foreign Affairs, 28 (Jan. 1950), 309; Keitel, p. 137.

49 General Heinz Guderian, Panzer Leader, trans. Constantine Fitzgibbon (New York, 1952), p. 142; Fatal Decisions, p. 33.

50 Keitel, p. 124.

51 Hilger and Meyer, p. 327.

52 Assmann, p. 309; Fatal Decisions, pp. 32, 44. However, Keitel (p. 145) noted that the weather also would have precluded, or at least delayed, the invasion in mid-May. The Bug River and its tributaries "were at flood level well into May and the nearby ground was swampy and almost impassable." General Günther Blumentritt also wrote that the late thaw in 1941 probably would have postponed the scheduled May invasion. Fatal Decisions, p. 44.

53 Joseph Stalin, The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union (New York, 1945), pp. 10-11, 40; Werth, p. 141; U. S., Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers: 1941 (Washington, D. C., 1958), I, 808. [Hereafter referred to as Foreign Relations: 1941.]

54 Foreign Relations: 1941, I, 712, 714, 723.

55 Valentine Berezhev, "On the Eve of Hitler's Invasion," Atlas, 11 (Jan. 1966), 10-11.

56 Willoughby, p. 105; Nekrich, June 22, 1941, contained in Petrov, pp. 173-74. Parts Three and Four of Nekrich's book (Petrov, pp. 164-214) are devoted to the numerous warnings received by the Kremlin.

57 Nekrich, June 22, 1941, contained in Petrov, pp. 184, 191; Khrushchev Speaks, p. 235; Admiral Nicolai Kuznetsov, "Stalin in Command," Atlas, 11 (May 1966), 271.

58 Werth, p. 137; Nekrich, June 22, 1941, contained in Petrov, pp. 166-67.

59 Nekrich, June 22, 1941, contained in Petrov, pp. 217-18.

60 M. Tukhachevsky's speech to the Second Session of the Central Executive Committee of the U.S.S.R. on January 15, 1936, contained in V. I. Lenin, et al., The Soviet Union and the Cause of Peace (New York, 1936), pp. 83-87.

61 Erickson, p. 567; Nekrich, June 22, 1941, contained in Petrov, p. 127; Werth, pp. 143-44.

62 Fatal Decisions, p. 32.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 53-54; Guderian, pp. 145-46; Erickson, p. 588.

⁶⁴ Erickson, p. 588.

⁶⁵ Fatal Decisions, p. 54.

⁶⁶ Erickson, p. 584, n.; Harrison E. Salisbury, The 900 Days (New York, 1969), p. 99.

⁶⁷ Werth, pp. 147-51; Alexei Markoff, "How Russia Almost Lost the War," Saturday Evening Post, 222 (13 May 1950), 175. As early as October 1939, German officials told Hitler about their observations of the poor condition of the Soviet equipment in Poland. This information, coupled with the Red Army's performance in Finland, convinced Hitler that the Red Army was weak and poorly organized, according to Albert Speer. Albert Speer, Inside the Third Reich, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York, 1971), pp. 232-33.

⁶⁸ Nekrich, June 22, 1941, contained in Petrov, p. 219.

⁶⁹ Assmann, p. 312. Werth gives several accounts of Soviet generals whose forces were caught deploying to the front, p. 164.

⁷⁰ Fatal Decisions, p. 56.

⁷¹ Gorbатов, p. 154.

⁷² Werth, p. 151; Markoff, p. 175; Erickson, pp. 569, 576.

⁷³ General Ivan I. Fedyuninsky, quoted in Werth, p. 157.

⁷⁴ George Fischer, "General Vlasov's Official Biography," Russian Review, 8 (1949), 298-99.

⁷⁵ Gorbатов, p. 160.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 161-65.

⁷⁷ General I. V. Boldin, quoted in Werth, pp. 159-60.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 162-63.

⁷⁹ Fatal Decisions, pp. 47, 57.

⁸⁰ General I. V. Boldin, quoted in Werth, pp. 162-63.

⁸¹ Nekrich, June 22, 1941, contained in Petrov, p. 221.

- 82 Ibid., p. 222; Salisbury, p. 106.
- 83 Erickson, p. 593, n.
- 84 Fatal Decisions, pp. 67, 74.
- 85 Louis B. Ely, The Red Army Today, 3rd ed. (Harrisburg, Pa., 1953), pp. 18, 21, 40.
- 86 Werth, p. 175.
- 87 Documents on Soviet Military Law and Administration, pp. 16-18. The military commissars were again abolished in October 1942. Ibid., pp. 18-20.
- 88 Werth, pp. 201-03.
- 89 Ibid., p. 204.
- 90 "X" [pseud. George F. Kennan], "Russia and Germany: Political and Military Reflections," Foreign Affairs, 20 (Jan. 1942), 318.
- 91 Whiting, p. 45.
- 92 Fatal Decisions, pp. 60-61; Guderian, pp. 198-200.
- 93 Werth, pp. 204-10; Whiting, p. 45. General Kirponos was killed during the Kiev encirclement.
- 94 Gorbатов, p. 187.
- 95 Werth, p. 207; Whiting, p. 45.
- 96 Whiting, p. 44.
- 97 Parry, p. 225.
- 98 Werth, pp. 177-80; Tokaev, Comrade X, pp. 204, 228.
- 99 Werth, pp. 214-16; Tokaev, Comrade X, pp. 204, 228.
- 100 Fatal Decisions, pp. 33, 62.
- 101 Georgi K. Zhukov, Marshal Zhukov's Greatest Battles, trans. Theodore Shabad (New York, 1969), p. 44; Werth, p. 229, n.
- 102 Zhukov, p. 45.
- 103 Werth, pp. 229-30.

- 104 Fatal Decisions, pp. 66, 69.
- 105 Ibid., pp. 69-70.
- 106 Guderian, p. 248.
- 107 Fatal Decisions, p. 70; Tokaev, Comrade X, p. 211; Alfred W. Turney, "Field Marshal Fedor von Bock and the German Campaigns in Russia: 1941-1942," Diss. Univ. of New Mexico 1968, p. 160.
- 108 Zhukov, p. 84.
- 109 Vyacheslav P. Artemyev, et al., Political Controls in the Soviet Army, ed. Zbigniew Brzezinski (New York, 1954), p. 35.
- 110 Nikolai Galay, "The Soviet Armed Forces' First Half-Century: Legends and Reality," Bulletin. Institute for the Study of the USSR, 15 (Mar. 1968), 14.
- 111 Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, "The Development of the Red Army, 1942-1945," in Liddell Hart, p. 141. The total German losses as of early December 1941, not counting the sick, were 775,078. Werth, p. 255.
- 112 Stalin, Great Patriotic War, p. 20.
- 113 Whiting, p. 61.
- 114 Kommunist, 1958, No. 2, p. 39, cited in Galay, p. 8.
- 115 Quoted in Nekrich, June 22, 1941, contained in Petrov, p. 136.
- 116 Günther Blumentritt, "The State and Performance of the Red Army, 1941," in Liddell Hart, pp. 135-38.
- 117 Manstein, in Liddell Hart, p. 141.
- 118 Gorbatov, p. 177.
- 119 Ibid., p. 187.
- 120 Kuznetsov, p. 270.
- 121 Werth, p. 224-25; Erickson, p. 624.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

By 1937, the Red Army was rated a formidable military force. Foreign observers were very impressed with the military skills of the Tukhachevsky group, but the evaluations of the middle and junior grade officers were not good. The weaknesses observed by foreign officers were recognized by Tukhachevsky, and he stressed the need to learn and practice measures designed to correct the army's failings. Then, in June 1937, Tukhachevsky and seven other outstanding Red Army commanders were executed; by the latter part of 1938 almost one-half of the officer corps had been shot or imprisoned. Available evidence indicates that Stalin had several reasons for the 1937-1938 purge of the Red Army.

Probably the most important reason for the purge was that it was symptomatic of the time, a segment of the Great Purge. As Leonard Shapiro said:

. . . the military purge must be viewed as part of the process that was taking place in the country as a whole. Seen in this light, the temptation to look for rational explanations ought perhaps to be resisted. For, when once terror had been let loose on so vast a scale among the Party, intellectual and professional elite generally, the logic of common caution may well have made it seem imperative to Stalin that the Army should not be allowed to remain the only part of society immune from his assault.¹

There seems little doubt that one of the main purposes of the Great Purge was the elimination of all opposition, past or present, real or imagined, to Stalin's dictatorship. In

his March 10, 1939, speech to the Eighteenth Congress of the CPSU, Stalin expressed the degree of subservience expected from Party members. He said, "A correct political line is, of course, the primary and most important thing. But that in itself is not enough. . . . we must have cadres, people who understand the political line of the Party, who accept it as their own line" ² It was not enough to espouse the Party, or Stalin's line; each member had to accept it as his own line. This implied blind obedience and a complete absence of the expression of independent thoughts, which leads to a second probable reason for the purge of the military.

The Tukhachevsky group had been too vocal in their opposition to Stalin's programs and to the Tsaritsyn group. In June 1918, Stalin and Voroshilov opposed Tukhachevsky's proclamation on former Tsarist officers joining the Red Army. Eighteen months later, Tukhachevsky severely criticized Voroshilov and Budenny for their activities at the battle of Bataisk Heights. In 1920, while director of the Military Academy, Tukhachevsky blamed Stalin and Voroshilov for prolonging the Civil War because of the Simbirsk defeat. In March 1921, in secret Party debates, and again in February 1923, in lectures delivered at the Military Academy, Tukhachevsky blamed Stalin and Budenny for the failure of the 1920 Polish campaign. Furthermore, Trotsky's 1930 publication of Stalin's role in the failure of the Polish campaign, at a time when Stalin was having problems with collectivization

and the First Five-Year Plan, must have increased Stalin's dislike of, if not hate for, Tukhachevsky, whose criticisms of Stalin were supported by Trotsky's book. It also seems clear that Tukhachevsky was not a favorite of Voroshilov, since in 1925 Tukhachevsky referred to Voroshilov's theory--that the Red Army could not learn modern strategy and must win victories by its enthusiasm--as "foolish chatter."

By the mid-twenties, the military specialists, such as Tukhachevsky, Kork, and Uborevich, seldom participated in politics, except when military matters were directly involved. However, in 1927, Yakir and Putna, Communists who became professional soldiers, signed a declaration proclaiming their solidarity with the Stalinist opposition, and in the early thirties Yakir, Blyukher, and Tukhachevsky reportedly complained to Stalin about the adverse effects of the collectivization program on the army's morale. Finally, it was reported that in 1936 all the military members of the Central Committee, except Voroshilov and Budenny, voted against Stalin's demand for Bukharin's arrest. All of these actions were hardly blind obedience to Stalin.

In 1936, Stalin controlled the Red Army. It was not, however, a Stalin-created organization, which suggests another reason for the purge. In 1934, the Tukhachevsky group obtained the principle of unity of command by abolishing the military commissars, who were relegated to providing political advice only. Though Stalin must have agreed to this action, it was probably a concession to the army's loyalty

to him during the trying years 1931-1933; however, Stalin must have realized that the abolishment of the commissars, while improving the military's efficiency, was a step toward taking the army out from under strict Party control. To be the absolute dictator that Stalin aspired to be, it was necessary to reconstruct the army so that it would completely owe its position, prestige, and loyalty to him alone. As Erickson wrote, "In liquidating the most independent section of the high command [the Tukhachevsky group], Stalin rid himself of the last potential source of a leadership which could rival his own The action was not so much to prevent a conspiracy but to block an eventuality."³

There is another possible reason for the purge, the claim that Stalin planned the Nonaggression Pact with Hitler as early as June 1934 and then eliminated the Tukhachevsky group to secure the Pact. This version is very unlikely. That Stalin could or would plan that far ahead is not probable, and the strength of Hitler in 1934 does not seem to have been such that Stalin would have taken such a drastic action as to plan the purge of his army just for an agreement with Hitler. Besides, the Soviet Union's extensive attempts to make collective security, or entente with the West, the means of bolstering the defense of the U.S.S.R. from 1934 until 1938 indicates that Stalin did not seriously consider a pact with Hitler until late-1937 or 1938.

The June 1937 charges against Tukhachevsky and the others of working with foreign powers against the U.S.S.R. appear

patently false. Even with the voluminous information obtained from Japan and Germany after World War II, there was no evidence to suggest collaboration with either of these countries. While there is some evidence to suggest the existence of a planned coup d'état, the material was far from convincing, and this charge also appeared to be "trumped up." The charges of plotting against the regime were fashionable "labels" during the Great Purge, but the obsession with "treason" and "conspiracy" was not peculiar to Stalin. As Roland Gaucher noted, "It [the obsession] had impregnated Bolshevik circles since the first days of the Revolution. The Soviet Union grew up in a half-simulated, half-genuine fear of capitalist encirclement and the secret machinations of imperialist agents."⁴

The escalation of the purge, after the June 1937 execution of Tukhachevsky and the others, caused the greatest numerical loss in the echelons from regiment to corps. This was the command group which consisted predominantly of Civil War veterans, suggesting that a major reason for the first phase of the purge was political. These veterans were the officers who could recall Stalin's role in the Civil War and in Poland. A large number of the losses in the first phase of the purge also was likely a preventive measure, since Stalin probably believed that the immediate associates of the purged commanders were "contaminated" with their ideas and were too loyal to them. The reestablishment of the military

commissars and the rapid growth in the number of military political personnel, despite a purge in their ranks, further substantiates Stalin's political motivation. It was not until the second phase of the purge, when entire unit staffs disappeared, that the eliminations seem to have been based on both political reasons and conflicts over military policy and doctrine. A possible example of the latter motivation for purging was the arrest of Blyukher. Stalin did not want a war with Japan, but Blyukher's action at Lake Khasan could have provoked a war. He was arrested in the midst of the battle.

The timing of the purge on the Far Eastern Front indicates that in 1937 Stalin was worried about the Japanese threat. Therefore, he delayed the purge in the Far East, but he conducted an extensive purge in the West. The Western front's purge suggests that Stalin was not very worried about Hitler's strength in 1937, which probably was a correct estimate since Hitler seems to have been mostly bluff at that time. Besides, the Soviet personnel and equipment in Spain made a better showing than did the German-Italian personnel and equipment. By the time Stalin initiated a full-scale purge of the Far Eastern Front, Dr. Sorge had furnished information that Japan had no desire for a war with the U.S.S.R.

There does not seem to be a common denominator to account for the decimation of the Red Army's officer corps. Both ex-Imperial and "proletarian" officers were purged. Many Civil War veterans were retained and even promoted, such as

General Pavlov. The only protected group appears to be former officers of the 1st Cavalry Army, but that immunity was not granted to Yegorov. Even officers connected with the Reichswehr were not all eliminated, notable exceptions being Voroshilov and Zhukov. Furthermore, both line and political officers felt the effects of the purge.

The detrimental impact of the purge on the Red Army's combat effectiveness was demonstrated during the Winter War with Finland and the first five months of the Soviet-German war. The condition of an army's equipment and supplies is one indication of leadership. Not only was Soviet equipment in a bad state of repair and frequently obsolete, but the small amount of new equipment on hand in 1941 was not properly used because the operators had not been trained. As early as 1939, the Red Air Force flew training missions only during exercises. Furthermore, the troops were not issued necessary, and rather basic, equipment, such as warm, white-colored clothing in Finland and entrenching tools and spare parts prior to the German invasion.

The power of the military commissars also hampered the efficiency of the army. When units report to rifle ranges for target practice without ammunition and when a simple pair of socks cannot be issued because the commissar did not sign the requisition, both of which occurred in the relative calm of peace, the efficiency of the army in the trying circumstances of combat seems certain to be severely curtailed.

The abolishment of the military commissars in 1940 supports the contention that the commissar system had a detrimental effect on the Red Army's performance in Finland.

Another impact on the Red Army, which was brought to bear by the purge, was the lack of initiative. By 1939, Tukhachevsky's doctrine that modern war required flexibility and initiative was discarded by the majority of the officer corps. Most commanders must have been haunted by the ghost of Tukhachevsky; that is to say that initiative in modernizing the Red Army and increasing its prestige had brought about his execution. Commanders probably thought, "If I do take initiative and am wrong, I'll be imprisoned or shot. Therefore, I'll pass the buck to my senior commander and let him make the decision." What must the next higher commander have thought? The evidence suggests that he frequently had the same fears as his subordinate, and while a decision was being made the subordinate unit was encircled, and often destroyed.

Another point stressed by Tukhachevsky was the absolute necessity for continuous reconnaissance and effective intelligence. Especially in 1939-1940 and also in the second half of 1941, this point was almost totally ignored, and the results were catastrophic. In numerous instances, Red Army units forged ahead without regard for their flanks or rear, only to be encircled or ambushed by the enemy. In Finland, significantly smaller forces stopped the Red Army's divisions, enabling the Finns to cut them off from their supplies and

eventually annihilate them.

Tukhachevsky also emphasized that combined operations and artillery preparation were necessary for the offensive. Zhukov's victory at Khalkhin-Gol proved the value of the combined arms doctrine. In 1939, however, the Red Army not only fragmented tank units into small groups attached to the infantry, but seems to have forgotten the combined arms concept in the initial months of the Winter War. In the few instances when artillery was used prior to the infantry's assault, it was fired as indiscriminate barrages, with little regard for accuracy or massing. As a result, the enemy inflicted grievous casualties on the Red infantry. The infantry was not trained to assist the tanks, and the tanks frequently pushed ahead of their infantry support. In the first five months after the German invasion, the Red Army often committed its tanks piecemeal and had no armor reserves. In both wars, the Red Army lost an inordinate number of tanks.

Finally, Tukhachevsky's concept of modern defense against strategic surprise was discarded after the purge. Whereas the Kremlin had numerous warnings of Germany's plan to invade the Soviet Union, very little was done to prepare the troops. Instead of defense in depth, the Soviet forces in the west were concentrated near the border, with few reserves available. Instead of conducting the defense by falling back on new defensive lines and reorganizing their forces, the Soviet High Command ordered a fight to the bitter end and counter-attacks. To make matters even worse, the

"Stalin line" had been dismantled before new defenses had been built on the post-1939 border. It is doubtful that Tukhachevsky would have just stood by and allowed this possible secondary defense line to be taken apart, especially before the new defense line was completed. It was interesting to note that the 1967 Party attack on Aleksandr Nekrich's book June 22, 1941 did not even discuss Nekrich's statements that the purge of the Red Army seriously hurt the Soviet preparedness for war, including the failure to alert the troops and the bad decision to dismantle the "Stalin line."⁵

Because of the 1937-1938 political purge of the military, the best and most experienced military leaders were replaced by relatively inexperienced commanders, but, for the most part, they were loyal to Stalin. However, when the true test of leadership arose, in the war with Finland and then with Germany, the new military leadership was inadequate. Of the Tsaritsyn group of officers, only Timoshenko proved adequate, and his success seemed to have been because he reverted to the pre-purge military doctrine. Although Tukhachevsky's theories were not faultless, his philosophy was essentially correct, as Zhukov demonstrated.

Though the Red Army was virtually decapitated in 1937-1938, David Dallin noted that "Unlike most animal organisms, the social organism is capable, when necessary, of growing a new organ to replace the one that has been cut off."⁶ Some efforts to improve the Red Army were initiated after the near

fiasco in Finland, but they were too little and too late. After the disastrous initial months of the German-Soviet war, Stalin finally purged the Red Army's commanders for military, instead of political, reasons. The 1941 purge was one of the factors which led to the improvement of the Red Army's ability to combat the Werhmacht. There were, however, other reasons for the Red Army's recovery.

On April 13, 1941, the Soviet Union signed a neutrality treaty with Japan.⁷ Yet after Hitler broke his Nonaggression Treaty with the U.S.S.R., it is unlikely that Stalin placed much faith in treaties. Besides, Japan was a member of the Anti-Comintern Pact. In July and August 1941, Dr. Sorge informed the Kremlin that it was doubtful that the Japanese would attack in Siberia, and on October 15, 1941, he reported that the Japanese had decided to move south and not to attack the Soviet Union.⁸ Therefore, Stalin probably was fairly certain that there was no longer the danger of a two-front war, and, as Guderian reported, by mid-November battle-proven Siberian troops arrived at the Western Front.

To boost the morale and retain the loyalty of the Soviet soldiers and population, Stalin reopened the churches and stopped religious persecution.⁹ However, it was Hitler's harsh treatment of Soviet civilians that really united the people against the Germans. Louis Fischer wrote:

All objective evidence, and a correct reading of Soviet sources, indicates that the combat spirit of the Red Army was not aroused until the middle of 1942 when the soldiers had seen with their own eyes the

atrocities committed by the Nazis in occupied Russian territory. The Kremlin fed the sentiment of the army. One impressive Soviet poster, widely distributed at the front, showed a Nazi killing a Russian boy, and the child screaming, "Pappa, strike the German." Ilya Ehrenburg, a skillful Soviet journalist, shook the army and the country with bloodcurdling descriptions of Nazi horrors and bloodthirsty summonses to hate the Germans. Enraged, the Red Army commenced to fight to earnest [sic] and did so until the triumphant end.¹⁰

The treatment of the Soviet population in German occupied areas showed Hitler's belief that the Soviet people were inferior beings. The ironic fact was that during the first five months of the war, there "was little active opposition [to the Germans, in occupied areas], while outright collaboration was widespread."¹¹ By 1943, however, the occupied population's resentment of the Germans was crystallized by the Nazi view of the Soviet people as Untermenschen, German agricultural measures interpreted as an effort to maintain the collective farms, mistreatment of prisoners of war, extermination of the Jews, atrocities against innocent civilians as part of the anti-partisan campaign, and the recruitment of forced labor on a mass scale.¹² As Alexander Dallin wrote, "While attachment to the Soviet regime was not strong, it could be weaned away only by a satisfactory alternative."¹³ This the Germans did not provide.

Other factors which contributed to the rejuvenation of the Red Army were the award of numerous decorations for bravery, officially inspired rumors that collective farms would be abolished, the increase in Soviet armaments production, and the allied lend-lease program.¹⁴

In conclusion, the available evidence indicates that the 1937-1938 purge of the Red Army was a component of the Great Purge, and Stalin purged the military for political reasons, to settle earlier grudges, and to insure the Red Army's loyalty to him. The purge demonstrated that when Stalin had to choose between the army's complete loyalty to him and military efficiency, he decided to accept what he must have known would lead to a reduced army combat effectiveness. The interests of the Party came first and foremost, and by 1939 Stalin was the total dictator of the Party, the Red Army, and the entire Soviet State and society. The impact of the purge of the Red Army was almost a total disaster for its combat effectiveness. Though the Biblical story was finally reversed, the Finnish David almost slew the Soviet Goliath. Not until much Soviet blood was shed and many futile flailings were made did the Red Army finally overpower the Finns. Between June and December 1941, it appeared as though Germany would conquer the Soviet State. The Red Army forces in the west were almost wiped out. By December, however, Stalin had conducted a purge that rid the Red Army of most of its incompetent leaders and replaced them with aggressive and imaginative personnel, such as Zhukov. Though the war was far from over, the German tide had ebbed.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Leonard Schapiro, "The Great Purge," in Liddell Hart, p. 72.
- ² Stalin, Problems of Leninism, p. 626.
- ³ Erickson, p. 465.
- ⁴ Gaucher, p. 224.
- ⁵ Petrov, p. 274.
- ⁶ David J. Dallin [pseud. David Iu. Levin], The Changing World of Soviet Russia (New Haven, Conn., 1956), p. 381.
- ⁷ David J. Dallin [pseud. David Iu. Levin], Soviet Russia's Foreign Policy, 1939-1942, trans. Leon Dennen (New Haven, Conn., 1942), p. 359.
- ⁸ Willoughby, pp. 105-07.
- ⁹ Werth, p. 182; Markoff, p. 178.
- ¹⁰ Thirteen Who Fled, p. 6. In interviews with ex-Red Army officers, Louis Ely obtained a similar opinion of the Red Army's hatred of the Germans, p. 28.
- ¹¹ Alexander Dallin, German Rule in Russia, 1941-1954: A Study of Occupation Policies (New York, 1957), p. 59.
- ¹² Alexander Dallin, Reactions to the German Occupation of Soviet Russia (Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala., 1952), pp. 41-42.
- ¹³ Ibid., p. 3.
- ¹⁴ Markoff, p. 178.

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