

Militarism From the Steppes



“The Red Army,” edited by **B. H. Liddell Hart** (Harcourt, Brace. 480 pp. \$6), is a collection of thirty-nine essays by British, American, German, French, and Russian experts on every facet of the Soviet military machine. Our reviewer, Gordon Harrison, is a former Army historian and is now military writer for The Detroit News.

By Gordon Harrison

ON A February night in 1942, with the temperature at 40 below, low-flying Soviet aircraft dropped a brigade of paratroopers on a snow-covered plain behind the German lines. It would have been just another routine and unsuccessful operation but for one eccentricity: Many of the Russians jumped without parachutes.

German General Student, who relates this incident in “The Red Army,” comments drily that the Soviet tumble wingless into the deep snow was “the simplest and most original kind of parachute drop.” The simplicity and originality were both peculiarly Russian. While individual G. I.’s might be capable of similar toughness and improbable courage, it would be inconceivable for an American command to plan a parachuteless drop, order planeloads of men to jump under such circumstances, or expect the orders to be carried out as a matter of course. What made the exploit feasible for Russians?

In the thirty-nine essays by British, American, German, French, and Russian expert observers here assembled by the distinguished military writer Captain B. H. Liddell Hart every facet of the history, techniques, tactics, arms, and organization of the Soviet Army is explored, but the central preoccupation is—as it should be—to define what manner of man is the Russian behind the gun. “The two great traditions basic to Russia,” writes former Soviet Captain Mikhail Koriakov, “are the military tradition and the Russians’ love of the soil. Despite Soviet industrialization, the mass of the Russian people . . . remain a people of farmers and soldiers. The mentality of the peasant is stamped on the Army—its conditions, its character, and the general spirit that pervades it.” Here is the indispensable

key to understanding the Red Army.

The deep sociological consequence of the Bolshevik revolution was not the conversion of a nation to Communism but the delivery of Russian society, culture, government, and policy into the hands of the peasantry. Where American commentators in this book tend to see Soviet strengths and weaknesses as reflections of ideological drives and limitations, Russian and German observers find more convincing explanations in village-bred habits of mind. The toughness and dumb obedience, for instance, exemplified by the jump without parachutes may look like products of totalitarian training or fanatic devotion to an idea but actually derive more basically from the hardships, fatalism, and paternalism of the Russian village. Used to an existence of grinding poverty, the Russian peasant lives too close to death to fear it and too absorbed with animal necessities to value himself as a person. Accustomed to absolute obedience to the father, who exercises literally the right of life and death over his family, the soldier sees nothing unreasonable or unjust in the demand of his officers for the same kind of discipline. Nor do officers of peasant stock hesitate to make such demands.

Village life in semi-serfdom has

enforced communal responsibility, stifled impulses toward individualism. The Russian peasant soldier is therefore an unexcelled mass fighter, almost impervious to suffering and danger so long as he feels himself part of a disciplined group. (On this point the German generals are unanimous.) Peasant psychology rather than the mere availability of manpower has encouraged Russian armies in mass tactics. Conversely, not a scarcity of men but the traditions of individualism restrict the NATO countries to a European army of only twenty divisions heavily dependent on machines and super-weapons.

BOTH technically and tactically mass armies would seem to be particularly vulnerable in the atomic age. Some of Captain Hart’s contributors derive considerable cheer from what they feel is an inherent Russian disadvantage on the atomic battlefield. But in so doing they come perilously close to identifying “peasant” with “stupid,” and to assume that free enterprise is necessarily the only progressive system for peace or war. Unfortunately, their colleagues have page after page of facts that do not support that view. Far from being technologically backward, the Russians have struck a pace of scientific



—International News Photo.

Russian Honor Guard, Vienna—“. . . simplicity and originality.”

and industrial development that in certain directions already threatens to outstrip Western efforts. What is happening cannot be argued as impossible.

A Soviet scientist, asked how he could get on with his work under the constant supervision of secret police replied: "The Russian police is like the Russian climate. It is hard, but we are used to it and we take precautions." Sir Eric Ashby, who quotes that remark in his final brilliant essay on Soviet science, thinks we could commit no more serious blunder than to assume that conditions of work intolerable to us are equally burdensome to the Russians. For along with the burdens of unfreedom Soviet society has discovered new sources of vitality, particularly in the humility and hunger of the newly risen peasant mind for knowledge and excellence. A country which awards the same kind of prestige and privilege to engineers which in democracies goes to baseball players is likely to devote a correspondingly larger proportion of its energy, talent, and intelligence to engineering. In a contest between two nations roughly comparable in human and natural resources that one will prevail that makes the more sustained effort.

One way we might do better would be to take to heart such impassive analyses as are here presented without any attempt to push a thesis. The strikingly undigested and unliterary quality of "The Red Army" curiously seems to give it greater weight as a document capable of dispelling some very dangerous illusions. It demands rather more than it should of the patience of the reader, yet in compensation it offers an impressive body of research and experience to any who will make the effort. In Washington, at least, it ought to be required reading.



—U.S. Army.

S. L. A. Marshall—"... searching inquiries."

Americans in Battle

"Pork Chop Hill," by S. L. A. Marshall (Morrow. 315 pp. \$5), is the story of a forty-eight-hour defensive fight by elements of the U. S. 7th Infantry Division in Korea that throws light on the way American soldiers behave in conflict. H. A. DeWeerd, who reviews it here, is the author of "Great Soldiers of World War II" and other books.

By H. A. DeWeerd

S. L. A. MARSHALL is a gifted, energetic newsman with a long-time interest in military affairs. His searching inquiries into the behavior of men in battle and his realistic combat narratives have won him a leading rank among the military writers of our time. He has concerned himself with deceptively simple but militarily vital questions. How many soldiers actually fire their weapons in battle? Why do others fail to fire? How much ammunition, equipment, and clothing can a soldier carry and still fight? What makes one man capable of in-

fluencing others in battle? How do Americans from various walks of life meet the strains and uncertainties of combat?

There is an old saying: "Truth can be seen wandering about the battlefield naked on the night of an encounter, but by morning it has put on a uniform." In order to get a second chance at truth, Marshall developed a technique of post-combat group interviews. He employed it as an army historian in the Pacific and European theatres during World War II and as an operations analyst for ORO in Korea. His last book, "The River and the Gauntlet," was based upon this method. It was a brilliantly written shocker showing how the road-bound Eighth Army, lavishly equipped with vehicles and radios, was ambushed and defeated late in November 1950 by a host of Chinese "peasants" armed with rifles and machine-guns and led into battle with shepherd's pipes.

His newest book, "Pork Chop Hill," tells the story of a forty-eight-hour defensive fight made by elements of the U.S. 7th Infantry Division against a surprise Chinese assault on their hill position. It also tells the story of six different combat patrols carried out on the static front at various times during the armistice negotiations. Marshall is not concerned with the command decisions governing this confused and apparently senseless fighting but with the actions of the men who carried it out. His words make it clear that Marshall regarded it as "a privilege to be associated with such courageous, high-minded men. . . ."

When the Chinese Communist forces tried to push the American troops off Pork Chop Hill on April 16, 1953, Operation Little Switch was underway and the Korean War seemed to be approaching its indecisive end. There was not much sense in the Chinese attack, any more than in their attack on Old Baldy a few weeks earlier. Perhaps they wanted the satisfaction of throwing the Americans out of another entrenched position before the armistice closed down upon the war. If this was their objective they failed. But a few weeks later we gave them Pork Chop Hill as a gift, not regarding it worth the loss of another squad or man.

By the time of these engagements the character of the war in Korea and of the Chinese armies presented a great change over the conditions of November 1950. Two years of positional warfare had turned the Chinese infantryman into a skilled and deadly trench fighter, "furtive, light of foot, and highly elusive." He operated out



Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

FAST COLOR



The authors listed below used the name of a certain color—the same color throughout—as part of the titles of their books. Ruth B. Stebbins of Elizabeth, N.J., asks you to supply these titles. Answers on page 31.

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Richard Llewellyn | 11. Michael Arlen |
| 2. Ernest Hemingway | 12. Lloyd Douglas |
| 3. William Archer | 13. Arthur Schnitzler |
| 4. Hugh Walpole | 14. German Arciniegas |
| 5. Marc Connelly | 15. Eudora Welty |
| 6. Louis Bromfield | 16. Julian Duguid |
| 7. W. H. Hudson | 17. Emyln Williams |
| 8. Daniel Pierce Thompson | 18. William Faulkner |
| 9. Elizabeth Goudge | 19. Evan Brandon |
| 10. A. P. O'Donnell | 20. Robert S. Hichens |