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**EXPERIENCE GAINED IN COMBAT
AGAINST SOVIET INFANTRY**

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**EXPERIENCE GAINED IN COMBAT
AGAINST SOVIET INFANTRY**

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**HEADQUARTERS
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This pamphlet is published for the information of all concerned.

BY COMMAND OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL HUEBNER:



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Preface.

This study is a first-hand account by a former German field commander of the distinguishing characteristics of Soviet infantry as observed in two years of combat during World War II. It describes Soviet infantry tactics in defense and offense, and includes remarks on the Soviet use of tanks. The author closes with some practical suggestions regarding training and organization based upon his experience. In using the study it should be borne in mind that it represents the limited experience of a single individual. This study has been prepared by the Historical Division, Headquarters EUCOM, and authorized for publication by the Office of the Chief of Military History, Special Staff, U.S. Army.

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EXPERIENCE GAINED IN COMBAT AGAINST SOVIET INFANTRY

The "Unknown" Soviet Soldier.

1. In 1941 I was in command of a motorized infantry regiment (a panzer grenadier regiment) during the German advance on Leningrad from the Koenigsberg area in East Prussia through Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. My regiment was a part of the panzer corps led by General Field Marshal (then General) von Mannstein. Under the same corps and as commander of the same regiment, I took part in the autumn operations which drove beyond the Lovat and the Pola the Soviet forces attacking the flank and rear of the northern German army group south of Lake Ilmen, which advanced our lines to the Valdai Mountains. In 1942 I and my regiment were under the command of the Sixteenth Army, which was enveloped in the Demyansk fortress. Prior to this we had been under the command of the 6th Division. During the first half of 1943, I commanded a panzer division in the Kharkov area in the Ukraine.

2. My experience was accordingly gained in two years of continuous combat, during which my unit was always employed at focal points. I became acquainted with the characteristics of the Soviet soldier of World War II in offensive and defensive action, in the heat of summer and in the bitter cold of winter, in the rugged country of northern Russia with its impenetrable forests and swamps and in the vast fertile plains of the Ukraine.

3. When the campaign against the Soviet Union opened in June 1941 we German soldiers knew in general very little about our Soviet opponent. The veterans of World War I described the Soviet infantryman as a tenacious fighter in defensive action, but thought little of his performance in attack.

4. We had learned little from the Soviet campaign against Finland, as it seemed to us that the Soviet Army had not shown its full strength in this struggle against a greatly inferior opponent. It must also be remembered that at least the lower echelons of the German military had given hardly any thought to the possibility of an imminent war against Russia. It was not until our arrival in East Prussia on 8 June 1941, less than a week after leaving southern France, that we realized why we had been shipped to the East so suddenly and so urgently. During the few days before the opening

of the campaign on 22 June 1941 it was impossible to devote much time and effort to a thorough study of the characteristics and the fighting qualities of our new opponent or to the peculiarities of his country, although such a study would have been extremely helpful; too many tasks resulting from the sudden commitment had to be given priority. Excellent descriptions of the country were available, but the qualities of the modern Soviet soldier were absolutely unknown.

5. There was a widespread belief in the German Army and among the German people that the Soviet soldier was dissatisfied with the Soviet form of government and was only waiting for us to free him from Bolshevik oppression. We were even strengthened in this belief at first, when the Russian troops withdrew rapidly and we became acquainted with the "Soviet Paradise" through personal experience.

6. However, we were soon disillusioned. I remember the battle for Duenaburg (Dvinsk), which was the first engagement with the Soviet Army that required any considerable effort on our part and which proved costly to us; it reminded us of the fierce fighting against the British Guards regiments for the La Basse Canal in Flanders in 1940.

7. The so-called Stalin Line was held even more tenaciously, and the deeper we penetrated into Russia and the closer we came to Leningrad, the more we were amazed at the Soviet infantry's power of resistance, at its snipers, and its efficient defense tactics. The great battles of encirclement and the enormous numbers of PW's taken in the center of the Eastern Front later on do not alter my opinion; in those cases the Soviet commanders surrendered after they had been completely cut off from their lines of communication or because the situation in their respective front sectors had left them no other choice.

8. We were soon forced to realize that we had underestimated our opponent; we had to adjust our tactics to those of the Soviet Army and had to learn a great deal. But by then the flower of our shock troops had been irretrievably lost, and today I feel justified in saying that this mistake, this ignorance of and underrating of the Soviet power of resistance, was one of the reasons for the failure of the German campaign against the U.S.S.R.

9. What was the reason for this failure? Was it due to the peculiarities of the Russian terrain, which proved so difficult for us, with its wide spaces, its deep, impenetrable forests, its lack of roads, and its many watercourses? On close inspection, it must be admitted that although the German advance was slow when compared with the 1940 blitzkrieg in France, it was nevertheless comparatively rapid through Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, so that the failure was due solely to the resistance offered by the Soviet Army; and this stubborn resistance was not put up by the Soviet air force or by the Soviet artillery, which two arms at the time were no match for their German counterparts, but only by the Soviet infantry which, supported by the Soviet armored formations, fought fanatically for every inch of Russian soil.

10. The stiff resistance cannot be accounted for by the mere fact that the Soviet infantry was **numerically** superior to the German. Numbers alone

were not decisive; this was proved many times, when small groups of German infantrymen not only held their own against far superior enemy units, but even defeated them.

11. At this time (the summer and fall of 1941), the concept of **nationalism** had not yet penetrated the thick skulls of the Soviet combat troops: it was not until late fall that Stalin proclaimed the doctrine of nationalism.

12. Was the Soviet infantry **better trained** than the German? Was it **better equipped**? It was neither better trained nor better equipped: it is true that, from the very beginning, the Soviet Army had a large number of mortars of different calibers, while the German infantry had only a few mortars of light caliber, but on the other hand the Soviet troops were still equipped with the old-type machine guns of World War I.

13. These questions occupied my mind as early as August 1941 when I lay wounded in a hospital and for the first time since the start of the campaign had time to assess the events of the first months of the war against the Soviet Union. After my return to the front in late August 1941, I took every possible opportunity to try to find the answer.

14. I talked to a large number of PW's and especially interrogated officers and the more intelligent NCO's and enlisted men. The results of these conversations and interrogations, together with my personal experience in combat, my impressions gained in daily contact with the Russian civilian population, instructions issued by the appropriate offices, and personal impressions gained by superiors, comrades, and subordinates will be discussed in the following pages.

The Education of the Soviet Infantryman.

15. It is generally known among Western Europeans that the masses of the Russian people live under primitive conditions, that they are extremely frugal, and that they are not affected by weather conditions. It is also known that their standard of living is low and their schooling inadequate. Nevertheless it is almost impossible for Western Europeans to imagine what the living conditions of the Russian people really are.

16. We saw only a few towns in the area west and south of Lake Ilmen. The country is sparsely populated and its inhabitants live in small isolated villages. For centuries the people of these areas have hardly changed their way of living. They still live in primitive wooden houses, all members of the household, including grandparents, parents, and children, crowded into one room with pigs, chickens, and other large and small domestic animals and vermin. Most of the family sleep on top of the huge stove. Roads as they are known in Western Europe exist neither in nor outside the villages. The roads indicated on maps are neither hard-surface roads nor definitely established routes; they are tracks which are used as the season permits and as occasion demands. In spring and autumn, these "roads" are completely

covered with mud and thus rendered impassable for vehicles, which therefore travel alongside the road, thus making it broader and broader. In summer the road consists solely of dust, and it is only in winter that traveling across the broad white countryside in a horse-drawn sleigh affords at least some pleasure.

17. The Soviet peasant does not need roads. The necessities of life, such as shelter and most of his clothing, have been passed on to him by his ancestors, while his farm plot provides him with food. Nowadays, whatever he produces above his own necessities must be turned over to the commissar, and it is usually more than he had to turn over to the landowner prior to 1917.

18. The peasant has hardly any other necessities. Electric light, motion picture theaters, radios, etc. are still unknown to him. On his "streets" he has no use for modern shoes or modern clothing, so that he does not miss such items. His world is his family, and it is bounded by the edge of his village. If the crop is not a failure and the commissar leaves him the few commodities which he and his family need in order to live in the manner in which they have always lived, he is satisfied with his lot.

19. Even twenty-five years of Bolshevik rule have changed nothing in these villages.

20. I saw the collective farm system in operation only in the Ukraine, an area which has a different appearance in every respect; in my opinion its culture and civilization are far superior to the culture and civilization found in northern Russia. In the Ukraine, for instance, nearly all churches had been preserved, while almost all of those which I saw in the Lake Ilmen area had been destroyed, although ikons were still to be found in every farmhouse.

21. We should try to view things through the eyes of a 20-year-old Russian who, after growing up in such a village, enters a city for the first time in his life, to become a soldier. For the first time, he sees paved streets, and even cobblestone pavements appear modern. He sees large numbers of two or three story stone buildings, electric lights, railroads, and perhaps street cars, busses, and a large number of automobiles. In the barracks, which must appear enormous to him, he receives a handsome uniform, underwear, a bed, and even a razor, with which he has to shave daily. With this his education in the Soviet system has already begun. During the first few days of his army life, the company political commissar or "politruk" begins to process the young recruit. The political commissar explains to him that all the fine things which he is now seeing for the first time were created by the Bolshevik government for the worker and the peasant, formerly oppressed by the czarist regime. He shows him how generously the Soviet State under Lenin and Stalin has looked after the welfare of the people, and by this means he guides the interest and the admiration of the simple-minded recruit in the prescribed direction.

22. The well-trained political commissar will quickly select from his flock the recruits whose intelligence is above average. This select group is now given training in special courses in which visual aids play an important

part. It is sufficient merely to show the primitive man how comfortable he, the political commissar himself, is housed, how well he is clothed, and how well he is fed. (Officers and commissars draw special food, tobacco, and liquor rations even at the front.) The recruits listen to radio broadcasts, they are taken to motion pictures and stage shows, etc. These young peasants thus become filled with enthusiasm for the system which has brought about all these fine things, and it is easy for the political commissar to convert them into faithful adherents of communism. Since, as has been mentioned before, only recruits of above-average intelligence are selected for special instruction, further instruction is given in reading, writing, and arithmetic. In accordance with their natural gifts, inclinations, and qualifications, the recruits are trained either as NCO, officer, or commissar replacements, or they receive training at a later stage for some civilian occupation. **In any case, the system achieves one objective: The young peasant, who knew little or nothing about politics prior to his induction into the army, becomes a convinced communist, an ardent adherent of Stalin, and is ready to die for the preservation of the Soviet Paradise.**

23. Such is the **nucleus** of the Red Army, built up in decades of systematic effort devoted to selection, education, and methodical co-ordination. The most efficient of these experts have become today's victorious generals, and many of the younger generation look forward to replacing them some day. Those who cannot qualify for the highest posts are still numerous enough to inspire the masses and to lead them to death if this is required in the interests of the State or the Party. Their intelligence is sufficient and they have learned enough to be able to think and act for the masses, to train them, and to instruct them in the use of weapons. These former peasants can compete in every respect with those of their comrades who grew up in cities or came from the ranks of the industrial workers.

24. In view of the fact that conditions in the cities and industrial districts are different, my experience might be called one-sided. However, it is not the purpose of this study to give a description of the Soviet people or soldiers in general, but to discuss the characteristics of the Soviet **infantryman**, and the majority of the infantrymen come from rural areas. Naturally personnel for the more or less technical arms such as armored forces, signal troops, air force, navy, etc., are taken from the industrial districts.

25. It is my opinion that the peasant origin is the secret underlying the combat efficiency of the Soviet infantry and the cause for its unexpected tenacity. The fact that the bulk of the replacements were recruited among the primitive population of the rural areas, who lack technical skill, simply forced the recruiting officers of the Soviet Army to assign replacements from rural areas to the infantry and those coming from the cities and industrial areas to the other arms. Thus a virtue was made of necessity: nobody can deny that the peasant* is more suitable than the townsman for service in the infantry. In contrast to townspeople, the man bred under country conditions

*Ed: The word "peasant" is generally used in Europe to mean a countryman and does not necessarily have a derogatory meaning.

is familiar with nature and with the soil. More so than in the past, the modern infantryman has to fight not only **on** the ground but also **in** the ground; modern weapons force him, more than in the past, to adjust himself to the terrain and to take advantage of every possibility of cover which it offers. A good infantryman has to be thoroughly familiar with the terrain.

26. The Russian peasant, who is close to nature, has many of the requirements of a modern infantryman. The fact that he cannot think independently, a deficiency not found among Western European peasants, is partly made up for by the above-described selection and training of officers and NCO's. Finally, the inexhaustible reservoir of manpower at the disposal of the Soviet leadership is an important factor. However, in the East, our side always benefited from the lack of initiative on the part of the Russians, particularly because the German soldier usually displays a great deal of initiative.

27. Military training was conducted in the same systematic and purposeful manner as that by which Soviet infantry experts were selected and trained in decades of painstaking work. The native abilities of the Soviet soldiers were skillfully utilized and even their shortcomings were cleverly put to use. The frugality of the Soviet soldier, his ability to endure hardship and the harshest weather conditions, his familiarity with nature, and his craftiness constituted a good basis on which to develop infantry combat drill. The primitive way of thinking and the mental sluggishness of the Soviet peasants did not permit the employment of complicated weapons, so they had to be satisfied with simple weapons, with the infantry weapons of World War I, such as the rifle, the machine gun, and the mine thrower. Thanks to the excellent eyesight of the peasants, it was possible to train a great number of the riflemen as **snipers**, who handled their guns in a masterly manner and shot down the enemy skillfully from any position just as a hunter shoots game. The old-type machine gun of World War I was well-known to its crews, who were proud of their weapon, which they handled just as efficiently as the snipers did their rifles. A large supply of ammunition was nearly always available. The mine thrower of World War I was developed to become the **mortar** of World War II, easy to produce, easy to service, and yet extremely effective. Its effectiveness, which was realized by the Soviet authorities very soon after the start of the Eastern campaign, finally led to the production and employment of the "Stalin organ," (Ed: a multiple mortar battery firing forty-eight rounds in rapid succession). The first pieces captured by our troops, in August 1940, were so primitive that at first we were unable to tell what kind of weapons they were; it was not until later that we learned what a dangerous weapon the Stalin organ was.

28. Snipers and mortars inflicted heavy losses on our troops during attack, while in the beginning of the campaign the Soviet **artillery** caused less damage. The Soviet artillery was numerically superior to our own, but there was no co-operation with the infantry. Only isolated Soviet **planes** were encountered in the beginning.

29. From the outset, however, the Soviet **tanks** were the backbone of the infantry, mechanized political commissars, so to speak. During an advance, the infantrymen clung to them, and in defensive action they sought cover behind them just as chicks run to the mother hen.

Soviet Infantry in Defensive Action.

30. The Soviet infantrymen displayed outstanding skill in adapting themselves to the nature of the terrain and in utilizing it to the full, and they knew how to dig in within a surprisingly short time. Their system of positions was as simple as it was practical. They used trenches comparatively seldom; generally two or three riflemen would occupy a deep and narrow foxhole. The machine-gun crews also occupied such foxholes, which were always well distributed and employed in such a manner as to leave no dead spaces. The best places were occupied by the snipers, of which each company had forty to fifty; frequently they were encountered perched on trees and in houses, always well camouflaged and hard to spot. If possible the mortars were emplaced in natural hollows, or suitable holes were dug and reinforced; all calibers were available from the start of the campaign.

31. In addition to the mortars, the Soviet infantrymen employed flame throwers, which were often set off by remote control so that the attacking troops suddenly ran into a sea of flames. Tanks were assembled in well-covered positions, ready for counterthrusts, or were dug in, distributed throughout the position. The main targets of these tanks, which were supported by a large number of antitank guns, were the attacking panzers.

32. Thus a system of defense positions in depth was established which was protected by wire entanglements and a large-scale use of mines. This method of defense was employed in any terrain - - in villages, in level country, on hills, and in forests.

33. Particularly impressive was the excellent combat discipline displayed by the Soviet companies. Usually they allowed our patrols to penetrate their lines without harassing them, and even permitted them to withdraw without interference if they felt sure that the patrols had not learned anything. Generally, however, none of our men returned. As a rule, our reconnaissance planes saw little or nothing of the enemy, who remained motionless in well-camouflaged positions. I remember that German officers once drove in a motor vehicle through a seemingly deserted village. The officers were neither halted nor fired upon, and they saw no one. **They swore later that neither soldier nor civilian had been in it.** However, when we tried to occupy the village only a few hours later we found out that it was fortified, and when we finally captured it after fierce fighting, we found that it had been defended by an infantry regiment reinforced with weapons of every type. But even Soviet infantrymen could not have set up within a few hours a system of positions such as that described above, although the Soviet soldier is extremely efficient in digging trenches; actually, all

positions had been well camouflaged and everyone had kept so quiet that the officers had failed to notice anything when passing through.

34. Since we frequently had no knowledge as to the location and strength of the enemy position, our artillery preparation seldom had the desired effect. The Soviet soldiers allowed our advancing infantrymen to come as close to their lines as possible in order then to force them to the ground by sniper, machine gun, and mortar fire, and our attacking panzers sustained heavy losses due to the fire of the enemy antitank guns and tanks, while their advance was considerably slowed down by mines and tank traps. At this stage the enemy artillery fire, which during the initial stages hardly worried us, began to become annoying.

35. We very soon learned how to spot the enemy's positions and to draw his fire through feint attacks. An attack against the enemy's flank or rear nearly always led to success within a surprisingly short time. Clever utilization of the terrain and an adequate number of advanced artillery observers to ensure proper support by our own artillery were prerequisites for such success. Whenever an attack was launched from an unexpected direction the Soviet system failed, which demonstrated the weakness of their one-sided training.

36. However, the Soviet infantryman always fights to the last, each man in his foxhole. Tank crews whose tanks were burning continued firing with every available gun as long as there was life in them. A victory was never secure until we could be sure that no living enemy was left in the position. Even wounded men who had lost consciousness picked up their weapons again as soon as they recovered their senses.

37. After a penetration had been achieved, it was necessary to prepare for defense at once, because the enemy always had reserves available for an immediate counterthrust. However, such counterthrusts were only dangerous when we were caught by surprise. The Soviet command is not flexible enough to conduct immediate and swift counterthrusts. On the whole, however, the Soviet soldiers are masters at defense, and we learned a great deal from them.

Soviet Infantry in Offensive Action.

38. In the beginning of the Eastern campaign the Soviet attacks were not too impressive, and showed little initiative on the part of the Soviet command. They were carried out methodically, but co-operation with the heavy arms was inadequate and the lack of a flexible command was noticeable. As long as our good infantry regiments were still intact and stubbornly contested every inch of ground in well prepared positions, and as long as our artillery was served by efficient forward observers, the Red Army gained practically no victories by such attacks.

39. It was only after our infantry had been bled white in months of bitter fighting that the Soviet Army, employing numerically vastly superior

forces in massed onslaughts, was able to gain a victory over our forces, which, lacking even the most essential winter clothing in the icy Russian winter and unable to dig themselves into the frozen ground, had to face ceaseless attacks by day and by night without support by our panzers, which had been rendered immobile and incapable of combat action owing to the masses of snow and to damage caused by freezing.

40. A major Soviet attack was usually preceded by artillery preparation lasting several hours and comparable to the concentrated artillery fire of World War I in France. Only well-entrenched troops could endure such a concentration of fire. The Soviet troops generally used shells with percussion fuses, and on frozen ground the spray effect of these shells was particularly dangerous. The artillery fire became especially effective when it was directed by enemy agents behind our front.

41. As soon as the artillery fire was lifted, the infantry attack began; it was supported by tanks and snipers and, to an ever-increasing extent, by close support combat planes. If our own infantry was still in fighting condition, i. e. if it had survived the concentration of artillery fire, it was still possible to repel the first attack wave, particularly if heavy infantry weapons were employed against the enemy flanks. In any case, it was important to separate the Soviet infantry from the accompanying tanks, to which the Red infantrymen clung like bunches of grapes. Veteran German infantrymen paid little attention to the enemy tanks; they left it to the antitank weapons and tank destroyer units to combat them and used their efficient fire, if possible flanking fire, to force the Soviet infantry to dig in. Usually, the Soviet tanks halted at this juncture and directed their fire to cover their own infantry, which dug in with lightning speed; occasionally, however, the Soviet tanks advanced on the German positions in order to flatten them out.

42. In the first case, the Soviet tanks constituted excellent targets for German tank destroyer units; in the second case, they were doomed if German panzers or antitank artillery were at hand. In many instances, the attack was stopped in this way.

43. The less our artillery had suffered as a result of the enemy artillery preparations, the greater was our chance to repel the enemy attack, particularly if our infantry still had forward observers.

44. If the Soviet troops succeeded in penetrating our position, it was of the utmost importance to launch an immediate counterthrust. A small force of determined infantrymen, accompanied by panzers and supported by heavy arms, was usually sufficient to annihilate the forces which had effected the penetration before they had time to enlarge it, a task which the Soviet troops were usually slow to undertake.

45. If the Soviet troops failed in their first attack, a second, a third, a fourth, a fifth and sometimes even more attacks were certain to follow at short notice, but during all my years of experience the repeat-attacks did not depart a single time from the pattern of the first attack. The Soviet

officers' lack of flexibility, which has been mentioned previously, was aggravated by the fact that they were always held personally responsible for failures, so that they were anxious to report the accomplishment of the assigned mission under any circumstances.

46. In this connection, I must point out that the Soviet command was not able to assign enough trained radio operators to the combat units and probably will remain unable to do so for some time to come. As a result, the radio operators at the front line used only simple codes and we were nearly always able to intercept and decode their radio messages without any difficulty. Thus we obtained quick information on the front situation, and frequently on Soviet intentions as well; sometimes I received such reports from our monitoring stations earlier than the situation reports of our own combat troops and was able to make my decisions accordingly. This is one of the weak spots in the Soviet Army, the importance of which must not be underestimated!

47. If the Soviet command finds that the intended offensive operations cannot be carried out in the above-described manner, it employs the method of infiltration, i.e. it tries to get troops behind the enemy line unnoticed, a method which is in line with the general Bolshevik policy, which favors the use of underground channels. Political agents are usually at the same time military spies; like guerilla fighters and parachutists, they are equipped with radio sets. Once the Soviet sector commander has discovered the weak and thinly-manned parts of the enemy front, his "infiltration parties," which are led by trained agents, find their way behind that front. No water and no swamp is too deep for these infiltration parties and no forest too dense; for them the word "impossible" does not exist. It is widely known that during the last years of the war Russians appeared in German officer uniforms at the command posts in the East and passed on fictitious orders, thus creating considerable confusion.

48. The only defense against "infiltration" is continuous and strict vigilance by all officers, NCO's, and enlisted men, at and behind the front. The front troops must be on guard against any enemy reconnaissance and shock troops, as it is often the sole mission of such troops to prepare or to camouflage an infiltration.

49. The Soviet command used to organize reconnaissance parties of considerable strength, varying from thirty to fifty men, a method made necessary by the characteristics of the Soviet soldier. Although each reconnaissance party is led by efficient officers and accompanied by a sufficient number of political commissars, it is nevertheless easily spotted and repulsed if the men at the front are watchful. In combating the reconnaissance party, care must be taken to prevent individuals from separating from it in order to penetrate the lines gradually. These men hide in front of, within, or behind the lines for several days and are reinforced gradually by men coming in in a similar manner. Then they suddenly emerge at a given time in accordance with their orders and do considerable damage.

50. How dangerous infiltration can become is demonstrated by my own experience:

51. In February 1942, the German Sixteenth Army was completely surrounded in the so-called Demyansk pocket, so that for several months its six divisions had to receive all supplies by air while two Soviet attack armies with a total of thirty to forty divisions, including the "Guards Corps," which were employed here for the first time, tried to smash the pocket; however, the German divisions held their ground. A vast swampy forest extends along the eastern bank of the Pola between the town of Demyansk and Lake Ilmen; this area is impassable except during the severest part of the winter, when the swamps are frozen. This swampy jungle was behind our front line. Toward the end of February 1942, we observed planes cruising above the forest and giving flash signals. We first thought of Russian guerillas, although we had not yet encountered any in this area. (Even subsequently we did not encounter any.)

52. The unit adjacent to mine sent out a reconnaissance party that failed to return. On the following night I sent out a stronger party. This party returned intact but it had seen no one, although a great number of recently extinguished camp fires had been found. During one of the following nights the leader of this reconnaissance party finally succeeded in spotting the hitherto invisible enemy and in drawing him from hiding. For three days a village at the edge of the forest, which was occupied only by elements of a supply train unit, was attacked by enemy forces coming from the direction of the forest, and it was only after the employment of heavy weapons that the enemy was driven back into the woods. Fortunately, several PW's were taken and through the interrogation of these PW's the situation was clarified.

53. We discovered that for three weeks Soviet parachutists on snowshoes had been infiltrating slowly at various points of the German front and had assembled in the vast forest. Our men had frequently seen snowshoe tracks in the morning, but had paid no attention to them, assuming that they had been left by our own troops. The Red parachutists belonged to the Russian I and II Parachute Brigades; their strength was 5,000 men, and in addition to hand arms and machine guns they were equipped with mortars. Their commander was a lieutenant colonel. As the former adjutant of Marshal Tukhachevsky, who had been sentenced to death, he had been held in prison for several years, but now, as a parachute specialist, he had been given the following assignment; first to take Demyansk airdrome, the heart of the German pocket, and next to smash the pocket in collaboration with forces attacking from the outside. The parachutists remained quiet in the woods by daytime and at night received orders, food supplies, and additional arms from the planes which we had observed. The airdrome actually was attacked a few days later. It had not been possible to attack the Soviet brigade in the forest itself because we lacked the necessary strength for such an action, but the defense of the vital airdrome had been well prepared and the Soviet attack was repulsed. Later on, the Soviet

troops inside the pocket, supported by forces attacking from the outside, tried to break through toward the South, but we succeeded in annihilating them and captured the above-mentioned commander.

54. Although this incident ended favorably for our side, it demonstrates how dangerous a situation can become if seemingly insignificant indications of Soviet infiltration are not given due attention. In this case, it was the snowshoe tracks. In other cases it might be refugees, deserters, or something else. Vigilance is of vital importance!

Soviet Tanks.

55. The Soviet troops employed many types of tanks at the beginning of the Eastern campaign, but they later gave preference to the T 34, which definitely proved to be the best. In the Ukraine they also employed American tanks, but these were of an obsolete type and too complicated for the Soviet soldiers, so that they were soon discarded. As far as I know, no major changes occurred during the last years of the war. I shall refrain from giving a description of the tanks because they are well known; furthermore new types of tanks will be employed in a future war.

56. However, the crews will not be different from those we fought. The Soviet townsman, who is highly interested in technical matters, is just as well suited for the modern tank arm as the Soviet peasant is for the infantry. An added factor is that the Soviet worker is usually a convinced communist who, having enjoyed the blessings of "his" revolution for decades, will fight fanatically as a class-conscious proletarian. Just as the Red infantryman is ready to die in his foxhole, the Soviet tank soldier will die in his tank, firing at the enemy to the last, even if he is alone in or behind the enemy lines. It was amazing to see the primitive technical means by which the Soviet crews kept their tanks ready for action and how they overcame all difficulties.

57. For instance, in January 1943 Soviet tanks drove from the eastern bank of Lake Ilmen up to the mouth of the Pola, and from there up the frozen river to a point beyond our own lines. In order to make it possible for the infantry to follow, the tanks handled wooden sleighs on which the infantrymen crouched. During the muddy seasons in spring and fall, the Soviet troops, within an extremely short time, built a large number of corduroy roads leading to the front, in order to support their infantry with tanks even in swamps. For the purpose of crossing rivers, they constructed submerged bridges.

58. Co-operation between tanks and infantry was always very good; this was a result of stiff combat drill. The tanks efficiently aided the political commissars in their task of keeping the troops together or driving them forward.

What Lessons Can Be Learned for Modern Infantry from this Experience?**59. Officers, NCO's, and Enlisted Men.****a. The Building Up of Suitable Infantry Replacements Must Not Be Neglected.**

Even in modern ground combat the infantry will remain the principal arm. Any armed forces whose command fails to realize this fact and neglects the infantry will be at a disadvantage from the outset. With her vast reservoir of manpower, the Soviet Union is numerically superior to the Western Powers. The Western Powers will therefore have to substitute quality for quantity, and the process of selection must begin at the recruiting stage. Young farmers belong in the infantry because they are "close to nature."

b. Officers and NCO's Must Be Carefully Selected and Trained.

In order to train good individual fighters, an efficient corps of officers and NCO's is necessary. The policy of assigning the best officers and NCO's to other arms or even allowing them to seek a transfer must not be tolerated.

It is not the tank officer or the artillery officer, but the **infantry** officer, who leads at the front. He must be able to utilize all arms for the support of his troops and to direct their commitment properly in offensive and in defensive action. Inasmuch as the infantry officer is more exposed to enemy fire than any other officer, the infantry officers are bound to have the highest casualties; ample reserves must therefore be available. An infantry company must never be left with only one officer, while other arms might have an officer to each platoon.

No officer should be promoted to field grade unless he has received a thorough infantry training and has actually led an infantry company for a long period of time. This is an ideal which can hardly be realized, but I am deliberately sinking the probe into what might be termed a festering sore, by way of warning.

The infantry **NCO** is left to his own devices in combat; he must be tough, he must be a model leader of men, and he must be able to take the place of an officer.

c. The Greatest Possible Number of Riflemen Must Be Trained as Snipers!

As many riflemen as possible must be trained as snipers, and every rifleman must be able to handle a machine gun as well as his rifle. He must learn the fundamentals at the target range; his combat practice firing should only begin when he has shown at the target range that he is familiar with his weapon. In the field, the rifleman must be a good marksman who can fire from all positions; he must also know how to adapt himself to the peculiarities of the ground, to dig in with lightning speed, and to make use of terrain features.

The principle must be to obtain a good line of vision and cover!

Riflemen whose marksmanship performances during training are below average should be trained as mortar gunners.

60. Suggestions for Infantry Organization.

a. The **rifle squad** constitutes the smallest unit. It consists of the squad leader, six riflemen, and one machine gunner. Teams of two or three men should occupy foxholes narrow and deep enough to protect the riflemen against tanks although enabling them to fire effectively. Larger teams are not only more difficult to command, but also offer better targets for the enemy.

b. Three rifle squads form a **rifle platoon**. The platoon leader must have at his disposal a platoon headquarters detail consisting of two or three messengers and a trench radio.

c. The **rifle company** comprises three rifle platoons, one mortar platoon with three to six mortars, one antitank squad armed with antitank grenade launchers, one sniper squad, and the company headquarters detail. The mortar platoon and the sniper squad will be employed by the company commander for the formation of focal points; it is always a mistake to distribute these units among the platoons. The antitank squad will contain the most courageous and skilled men of the company, and the company commander should not send it into action before recognizing at what point his company is threatened by enemy tanks.

d. The **Infantry Battalion** consists of three rifle companies, one mortar company with from six to twelve medium or heavy mortars, one or two antitank platoons, and one or two antiaircraft platoons.

e. The **Infantry Regiment** consists of three infantry battalions in addition to one heavy infantry howitzer company with four howitzers, one tank or assault gun company, one antiaircraft company, one engineer company, and one headquarters company (consisting of reconnaissance platoon, signal platoon, and headquarters staff personnel).

f. Each division's wartime T/O must provide for the organization of one **replacement training battalion** for each of its infantry regiments in order to make possible the immediate replacement of casualties suffered by the companies in action.

This type of organization has been successfully tested in the Italian theater of war and in the West, as well as in the East.

61. The Most Important Rules for Combat Tactics.

a. In offensive action:

(1) Sufficient time must be devoted to thorough **reconnaissance** of the enemy position, by aerial photographs, patrols, feint attacks, etc.

(2) The **rule** must be to direct attacks against the enemy's **flank or rear**.

(3) Clever **choice and exploitation** of terrain must be made; any time so lost will be repaid by the preservation of lives.

(4) Co-operation between infantry, tanks, and heavy arms, especially artillery, must be carefully taught, and secured by the employment of a large number of forward observers.

(5) Once a penetration has been effected preparations for defense must commence immediately.

b. In Defensive Action:

(1) Defense must be established in depth, and a defense fire plan prepared.

(2) Infantry must be instructed to watch the enemy constantly in order to avoid surprises.

(3) During an enemy attack, the enemy infantry must be separated from its supporting tanks.

(4) Preparations must be made to employ heavy weapons against the enemy flanks.

(5) Reserve combat troops must be held in readiness for counterthrusts; it is wiser to weaken the front line than to disregard this rule; reserves are trump cards!

Conclusion.

62. Little is known about postwar developments in the Soviet Army. However, it is safe to assume that with its characteristic tenacity of purpose, the Soviet command has eliminated the weaknesses and shortcomings revealed during the last war, and is doing everything possible to make the Soviet infantry the best in the world.

63. Whether or not the Soviet command will be hampered in these efforts by the effect on the primitive Soviet soldier of contact with western civilization is just as uncertain as the value of the influence German PW's have had on Soviet thinking and feeling.

64. The following factors will always influence the development of the Soviet Army:

a. The physical strength of the Soviet people, which is a result of their living close to nature.

b. The absolute subordination of the individual to an outside directing will, cruelly enforced.

c. The vast reservoir of manpower at the disposal of the Soviet Union.

d. The steady advance of technology in the Soviet Union.

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