



## *The Red Army and the Second World War* by Alexander Hill.

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In *The Red Army and the Second World War*, historian Alexander Hill (Univ. of Calgary)<sup>1</sup> has produced an exceedingly lucid treatment of the development and employment of the Red Army before and during the Great Patriotic War. Transformation is the book's unifying narrative thread.

The Red Army became a more capable army..., [but] just how far did qualitative improvement in the Red Army go and to what extent were those improvements down to human and organisational factors, and to what extent were improved capabilities down to equipment and material factors? (3)

The book comprises twenty-three chapters with notes, two appendices, a glossary, bibliography, and index. Chapters 1-6 trace the development of the Red Army in the 1920s and 30s, an era of small wars and Great Purges. The rest of the volume concerns the war experience itself, with attention to Stalingrad (chap. 17), major late-war Soviet operations, and the fall of Berlin (chaps. 22-23). The book is equipped with forty-four figures, but a paucity of maps (just seven) makes it hard to visualize the geography of many of the war's campaigns and operations. Readers will need to seek relevant maps elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

Hill opens with the evolution of the Red Army from the Russian Revolution through the 1930s. A careful discussion of its training, educational and doctrinal development, and material growth establishes Hill's model for analyzing transformation, both positive and negative. He provides a baseline analysis of the Red Army's military effectiveness following the Russian Civil War. The most damning indicator of the incompetence of the Red Army's leaders was the state of its field training in the mid-to-late 1930s. Even as war loomed in Europe, "manoeuvres took place only during the summer and autumn, in good weather, typically in daylight and for only part of the day" (21). For an Arctic nation like the Soviet Union to allow such deficient training was grossly negligent and had dire consequences in the coming war.

The Red Army was also in the midst of a creative spasm at the time. Chapter 2 explores its efforts to evolve through "the application of theoretical work to practice and, in particular, its influence over Soviet field regulations and organisation" (31). Most notably, the "Deep Battle" theory fostered "the development of the military-industrial capacity that was so important in Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War" (32). Hill succinctly reviews its concepts and impact, particularly its influence on the Red Army Field Regulations of 1936. While other works have detailed the development of Deep Battle<sup>3</sup>, the author breaks new ground by contrasting the theories of the military elite with the realities of the Soviet industrial and educational base. His extensive statistical

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1. Hill's earlier work includes *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941-45: A Documentary Reader* (NY: Routledge, 2008) and *Soviet Partisan vs. German Security Soldier: Eastern Front 1941-44* (Oxford: Osprey, 2019). He was editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* in 2018-19.

2. I recommend the invaluable *West Point Atlas for World War II, European Theater* - available online.

3. See, e.g., David M. Glantz *Soviet Military Operational Art: In Pursuit of Deep Battle* (NY: Routledge, 1991).

data and personal reflections on the dismal state of most units show that implementing the Deep Battle concept was beyond the Soviets' capabilities. Despite their experiments with tank formations and airborne operations, their use during the Great Patriotic War fell far short of envisioned goals.<sup>4</sup>

The small wars of the 1930s exposed the weaknesses of the Red Army, caused in part by the Great Purges and persistent industrial shortcomings. In chapters 3–9, Hill lays out the Army's operational, logistical, and tactical weaknesses in stark terms. During the Lake Khasan incident, for example, the 32nd Rifle Division reached the front without gas masks or rifles (90)! Only Gen. Georgy Zhukov's success at Khalkhin Gol presaged the Red Army's ability to conduct, even on a small scale, the modern combined arms warfare envisaged by Deep Battle.

Chapters 10–17 take the story from the Germans' launch of Operation Barbarossa through their defeat at Stalingrad. While the battles and campaigns are discussed with clarity, Hill concentrates on the Red Army's structures, mechanics, logistics, personnel policies, and leadership. In peeking behind the curtain of the frontlines to expose the sinews of the army, the author again astutely uses statistics to clarify the effects of various orders, initiatives, and decisions; he does the same for the Axis invaders.

Hill devotes chapters 17–23 to the Red Army's shift to a general offensive with Operation Uranus in fall 1942 through to the end of the war. As he does for the period 1941–42, Hill examines the advances and changes in the Red Army by adducing examples of campaigns, orders, and leadership that fueled the Red Army's growth into a war-winning instrument. As always, he uses pertinent statistical analysis to elucidate matters such as the logistical realities at the front, numbers of tanks needing overhaul after Uranus (422–23), and the quantities of fuel available to 4th Tank Army during the third phase of the Vistula-Oder operation in 1945 (522).

Hill ends the book with a summary conclusion, contending that

By the end of the Great Patriotic War the Red Army was certainly in many ways a very different creature than it had been in June 1941 or by the summer of 1936. By late 1945 the Red Army had developed organisational structures that capitalized on what had become Soviet strengths.... [It played] what can be argued to have been the dominant role in the defeat of Nazi Germany. (562, 581)

The book has a few minor flaws. First, Hill relies on G.F. Krivosheev's calculation of casualty statistics.<sup>5</sup> These have been persuasively called into question, most recently by Boris Kavalerchik and Lev Lopukhovskiy,<sup>6</sup> whose analysis shows significantly higher Soviet losses, but very likely too late for Hill to take their findings into account in his book. Furthermore, Hill's central interest is not so much casualty parity analysis as the Red Army's organizational structure and growth.

A second shortcoming is Hill's omission of the Red Army's war with Japan in August 1945. While the Manchurian campaign has been well covered elsewhere,<sup>7</sup> some discussion of the immense logistical hurdles of the Red Army's redeployment across the Soviet Union to face a new

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4. See, further, Glantz, *The Soviet Airborne Experience* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Inst, 1985) – available online, and Vladimir Kotelnikov, *Red Assault: Soviet Airborne Forces, 1930–1941*, trans. Kevin Bridge (Warwick, UK: Helion, 2019).

5. *Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses in the Twentieth Century* [1993], trans. Christine Barnard (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1997).

6. *The Price of Victory: The Red Army's Casualties in the Great Patriotic War* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2017).

7. E.g., Glantz, *August Storm: The Soviet 1945 Strategic Offensive in Manchuria* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Inst, 1983) – available online.

enemy would have strengthened the book's thesis regarding its transformation during the Great Patriotic War.

These quibbles aside, *The Red Army and the Second World War* is a lucid, painstaking organizational history of the dominant combat force of World War II. It should be compulsory reading for all students and experts interested in the Red Army and the history of the Soviet Union's war.<sup>8</sup>

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8. Hill has authored a blog post for Cambridge Univ. Press on the creation of the book, with a discussion of sources – available online.