

THE ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORK OF
UNIT COHESION IN THE SOVIET ARMY

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Unit Cohesion

Of the Federal troops who, at First Bull Run, had stampeded from the battlefield, trampling in their panic the crowds of sightseers who had come out with them from Washington to watch the spectacle, General William T. Sherman wrote: "We had good organization, good men, but no cohesion (no common bond in a situation of rush and distress), no real discipline, no respect for authority, no real knowledge of war."¹ The technical advances in warfare have but increased the human problem which he defined. Under the withering fire of contemporary weapons, men in combat have the utmost difficulty in coordinating their efforts. This is so not only because the efficacy of modern firepower forces the small unit to disperse its members to the point that individuals easily lose touch with their comrades and with their leaders, but also because the horrifying superiority of machine over man has created mental stresses with which the individual, remote from companionship and supervision, finds it difficult to cope and still function as a member of a tactical team. All Western nations deal with the problem of small unit cohesion by attempting to minimize weapon efficiency through personnel dispersion, while compensating for consequent loss of control by demanding of low level leaders great initiative, by improving electronic and other means of communication between commanders and their units, by vigorous training programs designed to acclimate the soldier to battlefield isolation and combat fears, to develop his initiative and personal

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1. L. A. Pennington, R. B. Hough, Jr., H. W. Case, The Psychology of Military Leadership, Prentice-Hall, New York, 1943, p. 132. Source not given.

resourcefulness, and to foster in him pride in his unit and an understanding of its contribution to the national war effort.

The Soviet Union, by contrast, holds that tactics dictated by any concern other than execution of assigned mission are inconsistent. Loss of human life is regrettable because casualties adversely affect unit capabilities, but for no other important reason. Thus, as far as the Soviet Army is concerned, it makes thoroughly good sense to march a unit through a minefield, trading a life for each mine; what lives are thereby lost are more than compensated for by the overall saving in time and casualties which might have resulted from more orthodox methods of mine clearance.² Similarly, if in the application of the usual method of artillery support for infantry assaults employed by the Soviet Army,³ Red soldiers are lost to Red artillery fire, nichevo, the continuous neutralization of the enemy is worth it. A callous attitude toward casualties pervades Soviet tactical doctrine. Infantry wastes time and energy by maneuver; therefore small units simply advance in a straight line in the attack. Dispersion complicates communication and control, therefore infantry units advance in tight masses.

No Western soldier who has ever fought against troops trained under the Soviet system can be but amazed at the incredible valor displayed by Red

2. Raymond L. Garthoff, Soviet Military Doctrine, Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois, 1953, p. 301.

3. The artillery fires throughout the assault on all parts of the objective save a narrow corridor up which the infantry advances. The gross inaccuracy and inflexibility of Red artillery frequently renders this supposed safe zone a lethal trap, or just as often, the infantry wanders from its course into its own supporting fires. L. B. Ely, The Red Army Today, Military Service Publishing, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, pp. 33, 225.

units in translating these precepts into tactical action. But the Red infantry is no elite. The Soviet Army allots to it only the poorest of Russia's badly educated, multi-racial, polyglot manpower.⁴ Especially in World War II, its training was spotty, and its commanders definitely second-rate. Assignment to a Red assault unit was tantamount to a death sentence, and yet not only did such units hold together in the attack, but they preserved integrity when confronted with utterly hopeless situations of encirclement, starvation, exposure, exhaustion, or decimation. In fact, in all but the first few months of the Nazi invasion of Russia, Red Army units exhibited, as a matter of routine, cohesion worthy of the best in the Anglo or American military tradition. 1000s

The following accounts are written by German soldiers who came to grips with the Red Army deep inside Russia:⁵

In the attack the Russian fought unto death. Despite most thorough German defensive measures he would continue to go forward, completely disregarding losses. He was generally not subject to panic. For example, in the breakthrough of the fortifications before Bryansk in October, 1941, Russian bunkers, which had long since been bypassed and which for days lay far behind the front, continued to be held when every hope of relief had vanished. Following the German crossing of the Bug in July 1941, the fortifications which had originally been cleared of the enemy by the 167th Infantry Division were reoccupied a few days later by groups of Russian stragglers, and subsequently had to be painstakingly retaken by a division which followed in the rear.

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4. For instance, only 8% of the infantry is of "proletarian origin." These draftees from urban areas who have been subjected to intensive Communist education comprise 50% of the armored forces and 40% of the airforce. See Merle Fainsod, How Russia Is Ruled, Harvard Press, Cambridge, 1953, p. 402.
 5. Department of the Army, Pamphlet No. 20-230, Russian Combat Methods in World War II, Washington, 1950, pp. 4, 6, 25, 26. Was classified "Restricted." Present classification unknown.

An underground room in the heart of the citadel of Brest Litovsk held out for many days against a German division in spite of the employment of the heaviest firepower.....

During the winter campaign of 1941, a Russian regiment was surrounded in the woods along the Volkhov and, because of German weakness, had to be starved out. After one week, reconnaissance patrols met the same resistance as on the first day; after another week only a few prisoners were taken, the majority having fought their way through to their own troops in spite of close encirclement. According to the prisoners, the Russians subsisted during those weeks on a few pieces of frozen bread, leaves and pine needles which they chewed, and some cigarettes. It never occurred to anyone to throw in the sponge because of hunger, and the cold (-30° F.) had not affected them.....

In the winter of 1941, the Russians cleared a German mine field south of Leningrad by chasing over it tightly closed columns of unarmed Russian soldiers shoulder to shoulder. Within a few minutes, they became victims of the mines and defensive fire.... In a twinkling of an eye the terrain in front of the German line teemed with Russian soldiers. They seemed to grow out of the earth, and nothing could stop their advance for a while. Gaps closed automatically, and the mass surged on until the supply of men was used up and the wave, substantially thinned, receded again.....It is impressive and astounding, on the other hand, how frequently the mass failed to recede, but rolled on and on, nothing able to stop it.....

How did the Soviets achieve such a remarkable standard of unit performance?

The answer usually advanced, that Red soldiers are driven into battle by a pistol brandishing commissar, is only true in a remote sense, and sadly misrepresents the strength of the Soviet system of discipline and indoctrination which in fact produces troops far more likely to follow their Political officer into battle than precede him. Certainly a disregard for the value of human life, a natural inclination to uncompromising compliance, and the blind obedience characteristic of Communist youth all figure prominently in the process by which Russia's raw masses are made into a formidable fighting machine; but these human factors are difficult to assess from outside the environment which creates and conditions them. However, this paper can explore the question more fully by examining in turn Soviet

law, the Communist Party, and the Soviet Army administration in order to determine what each contributes to or detracts from unit cohesion.

The author is aware of the Soviet proclivity to interpret law as ideal rather than reality, and to look on the administrative policy embodied in regulations and laws as a formal goal rather than a modus vivendi; he recognizes therefore that a considerable gap may, and probably does, exist between the bureaucratic framework described below and conditions in the Soviet Army at the present time or in the near future. Moreover, he admits to the very Russian error of using his own Army as the criterion for his estimate of the strength and weakness of the Soviets'. Nonetheless, on the basis of all available evidence, the Soviet system does achieve the solidarity which the policy and procedures described below were intended to produce; whether or not it is brought about in the manner intended, or whether the evaluation with which this paper concludes is fallacious, this survey of its administrative foundations should serve at least as a point of departure for a more incisive appraisal of the prowess of the military formations upon which Soviet world power rests today.

Soviet Law and the Unit

Consistent with the Marx-Lenin-Stalin concept of the beleaguered proletarian state and its militant citizenry, military crimes in the Soviet Union are treated not in a separate body of legislation as is the practice in the West, but in the civil criminal code; its provisions deal with all cases tried before courts-martial. Non-judiciary punishment; that is, penalties for infractions deemed not serious enough for formal trial, are

administered in accordance with a separate body of regulations, the Disciplinary Code. Both the Criminal Law and the Disciplinary Codes serve to establish a firm legal foundation for the solidarity of the military unit.

Criminal Law

Prior to the edition of the latest revisions of the Criminal Code in 1952, Soviet laws were still couched in the revolutionary terminology. Guilt was the degree to which the criminal act threatened the stroj, or social order, and therefore crime was referred to as "social danger" and punishment as "social defense."⁶ The connotations for the code's military provisions are obvious: the stroj is directly represented by the unit, and criminal acts are those which prejudice its internal order, efficiency, or cohesion. The 1952 laws drop the revolutionary terminology, but the concepts remain clearly embodied. Legally, the military stroj is closely identified with what the Soviets call "discipline," and the West calls "subordination", and the extensive shoring erected under commander-commanded relations is the principal legal foundation for unit cohesion. The basic military crime is an act which disrupts the proper relationship between commander and subordinate, either through abuse of authority by the former, or by deviation from duty in the latter.

In Soviet usage a commander is anyone in the chain of command above a

6. H. J. Berman and M. Kerner, Outline of Soviet Military Law, manuscript, Cambridge, February, 1954. This book is to be published by the Harvard Press in the summer of 1954. The manuscript is in two volumes: the Text, and the Documents. The latter consists of original translations of Soviet laws and regulations. Mr. Kerner is a former Colonel of the Czech Army unit which fought with the Red Army against the Germans. Quotation here is Berman and Kerner, Text, p. 80.

subject individual. Thus, if the defendant in a criminal case be a private soldier, he might have run afoul of his squad commander, his platoon commander, his company commander, or any of the other commanders above them to whom he ultimately owed obedience. All sections of the code emphasize the point that obedience must be prompt, exact, and unconditional. The only ground upon which a subordinate can legally refuse to execute an order is that the directive is "obviously criminal;"⁷ Soviet reports of court proceedings, and Soviet textbooks on military law significantly omit any discussion which might serve to clarify the word "obviously." Failure to execute an order in a non-operational unit may be punished by a sentence of a maximum five years "deprivation of freedom." During time of war, the same offense brings a minimum five years imprisonment, and it could be punished "by the highest measure of criminal punishment—death by shooting with confiscation of all property."⁸ Interference with a soldier executing a commander's order receives a maximum three years in peace, a minimum three years in war. If a soldier obstructs his commander directly, the latter may use force, including arms, to obtain compliance, although regulations admonish him to report such an extraordinary case immediately through channels." So legally sacrosanct is the process of execution of orders that the provisions of the criminal code even cover cases where soldiers indulge in an "insulting body movement toward another.....engaged in the execution

7. Ibid., p. 96.

8. Berman and Kerner, Documents, R. S. F. S. R. Criminal Code, 1950 ed., Chapter Ten, 193 (2) (d).

of a service duty....Commanders are always in the execution of service duties in relation to their subordinates."⁹

However, there can be little doubt that the privileged legal position of the commander serves the definite functional end of welding his unit to him, and to him only. The Soviet soldier owes no allegiance to anyone of higher rank or position unless he be one of his immediate or direct commanders:¹⁰

The serviceman is obliged under Article 193 (2) // see discussion of failure to execute orders, above / as interpreted, to execute orders given by his actual commanders only, and not those given by any other higher-ranking serviceman or officer. In some instances the actual commander may be of lower rank than the person to whom the order is issued, who must nevertheless execute it.

The commander, on the other hand, is legally prevented from alienating his unit through abuse of his position. Severe penalties await him if he employs a subordinate for personal services, either for himself or for his family, or if he is negligent in providing his men with the equipment, privileges, or pay due them, or the allowances due their families. Should he, in the exercise of the considerable powers of discretionary justice granted him under the Disciplinary Code, deprive a soldier of his statutory rights, infringe on the due process of the law, adjudge guilty an innocent man, or exceed his powers of punishment, criminal prosecution must take place. In fact, any military crime is regarded as grievously aggravated if it involves a commander, and as such merits an extraordinarily severe sentence. For instance, while mere disclosure of intent to commit a crime is not punishable as a civil criminal offense, such disclosures in a military

9. Op. cit., pp. 98-99.

10. Ibid., p. 97.

unit are regarded as prejudicial to order, and as such are a crime. The punishment for the crime is more severe if the intent includes a threat against the unit commander, but the most serious penalty under the law is reserved for the commander who commits the crime in the presence of his subordinates. Similarly, if a commander participates in any crime, even though his participation may be only passive, he can be subjected to a heavier penalty than the principals because his responsibility makes his crime the more pernicious.¹¹ The legal burdens of the commander extend beyond his criminal vulnerability, however. He is bound by law to obey the orders he receives from his commander, and he must answer personally for the performance of his entire unit. In particular, if his orders direct his unit to advance to such and such a place and hold it, he is liable to prosecution under the Criminal Code should it fail. A Soviet military jurist comments as follows:¹²

Only under those entirely exceptional circumstances when a suddenly and rapidly changing situation dictates a decision contradicting the received disposition, and there is no possibility of receiving a new order, must the commander show initiative and take upon himself the responsibility of retreat from dispositions....In such exceptional circumstances the acts of the commander....will be evaluated on the basis of a thorough study of a given situation, the results of the decision made.....If as a result of such thorough evaluation, it is considered that the commander acted incorrectly.....then it will be concluded that there was a breach of military rules imposing responsibility for unauthorized retreat from assigned combat dispositions underthe Statute. If it is considered that the commander acted correctly and the retreat from assigned battle dispositions was actually called for by the suddenly changing situation, that will mean that the military rules were not violated and criminal responsibility falls away.

11. Ibid., pp. 87, 88, 88a.

12. Ibid., pp. 101-103.

In view of the fact that the criminal responsibility referred to in the last sentence entails death by shooting, it is no wonder that Soviet combat actions betray rigid adherence by small unit commanders to prefixed plans. There is no legal penalty for the commander who persists in the execution of his orders in disregard for the realities of his situation; he can order his unit forward according to plan until it is wiped out, but he will run no legal risk unless he uses initiative. If he uses initiative and fails, he can be shot. Small incentive there for flexible thought or opportunistic action! Still, the significance of this law for unit cohesion is plain: a commander laboring under apprehensions of punishment for deviation from plans will exact of his subordinates strict adherence to his own orders, and the hierarchy of command, from the lowest level to the highest, will evince singleness of purpose, and unity of effort.

A former Soviet company grade officer, in an interview with US intelligence officers, provided a very complete description of the way in which Soviet criminal law influences the thoughts and actions of the front line soldier;¹³

Of course, sometimes some of our soldiers do not like to advance in battle, and want to skulk in the bushes or the ditches. If a man doesn't advance, he must be shot. It is legal to shoot a soldier on the spot only in extreme circumstances, but when an advance is necessary it can nearly always be considered an extreme circumstance if someone skulks. At least it was figured that way. And it is right to shoot those who stay back, because if too many stay back, only the bravest will be up front. They will be too few, and so will be killed. It is better for the bad ones to be killed than the good ones. And, if too few advance, the objective will not be taken, so the platoon or company commander will not have done his duty, and he too often may then be shot....I was a sergeant in my old infantry regiment, the 478th, when the

13. Ely, op. cit., p. 29.

Red Army prepared to meet the last big German attack of the war. We were near Kursk. We dug from March to July of 1943. In May a rumor went around that someone was shot in the 467th regiment next to us for not digging hard enough. How we all worked after that!....Very few Soviet Army soldiers surrender. A soldier knows that if he surrenders the authorities may think he is an enemy of the Soviet state.....

His last statement points up another important contribution which criminal law makes to unit cohesion. Under the Criminal Code, all sorts of defections-- from simple cases of being absent without leave for a few hours to outright desertion--are punished most severely. Desertion in battle is, of course, punishable by death. If the desertion is to the enemy in combat, or if a peacetime deserter flees the country, the crime is defined and penalized as treason. Treason in the Soviet Union warrants punishment not only against the transgressor, but also against his family, whether they even knew of his crime or not, the principle being that only thereby can the social consequences of the act be brought home to the potential offender.¹⁴ The most unwilling Soviet infantryman is thus fettered to his unit by strong legal chains. He literally has no place to which to run, unless he be so fortunate as to have no family, or so callous as to disregard them. Obviously, any nation fighting the Soviet Army would frustrate its own ends were it to follow a policy harsh on prisoners of war--such as using them as slave labor as did the Germans--or a policy in accord with international convention of furnishing the Soviets with accurate lists of Red soldiers who had surrendered. In either case, their action would materially aid the enforcement of Soviet criminal law.

14. Berman and Kerner, Text, op. cit., pp. 82-84.

The foregoing discussion of the Criminal Code was not meant to convey the impression that in the routine operations of Soviet units criminal prosecutions were or are a frequent occurrence. To the contrary, what few there be are probably important only in the same way as the rumored shooting for failure to dig mentioned by the lieutenant above: as an object lesson, a reminder of the power of the Soviet State, which, even though not in evidence, nor always exercised, is ever present. Moreover, there never was an army which functioned well in battle held together by fear of a judicial power which exists and functions outside of the physical realities of the soldier's life. The legal power binding on men in military units is that which creates constant surveillance and instant punishment for slight infractions of order. It is this legal machinery rather than the other which serves to develop the habitual obedience to which any soldier must turn in the stress of combat, and in the Soviet Army, it is this sort of law which is ordained by the Disciplinary Code.

The Disciplinary Code

Military discipline, states Article 1 of the Disciplinary Code of the Armed Forces of the U.S.S.R. dated June 1, 1946,¹⁵ is "the strict and exact observance by all servicemen of the order and rules established by laws and military regulations." It is founded on "recognition by each serviceman of military duty and personal responsibility for the protection of his motherland, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics." The Code then lists some specific duties and responsibilities of the soldier, beginning with

15. Berman and Kerner, Documents, pp. 93-94.

"to carry out exactly the requirements of military codes, orders, and instructions of commanders." The next five articles of the Code bear reproduction in their entirety:

4. The interest of defending the Motherland requires of a commander that he not leave without action a single offense of his subordinates, that he punish strictly the remiss, and encourage the deserving for demonstrated zeal, exploits, and distinctions of service.

5. Each commander is obliged resolutely and firmly to require observance of military discipline, constantly to educate his subordinates in the spirit of unflinching fulfillment of all its requirements, to develop and support in them a recognition of military honor and military duty.

6. The order of the commander shall be law for the subordinate. An order must be executed without reservation, exactly, and promptly.

7. In case of open disobedience or resistance of a subordinate, the commander is obliged to take all measures of compulsion, and in the extreme case, which does not permit delay, to use arms; the commander shall report such an extraordinary case immediately through channels.

The superior who does not take measures for actions for the restoration of order and discipline, shall bear the responsibility for that.

Each serviceman is obliged to cooperate with his commander in upholding military discipline and order.

8. Only direct commanders and commanders indicated in Chapter 7 can impose disciplinary penalties.

The remainder of the Code is a complicated exposition of the powers of punishment and reward which each specific kind of commander may exercise, but in these first eight articles the three fundamentals of Soviet unit discipline are precisely stated. First of all, subordination, instant and unqualified, is the first and last duty of each member of the group. Second, the commander, in the exercise of his absolute control over his subordinate, is the source of reward as well as punishment. Third, the power of the commander rests not on the obscure objectives of international Communism but in the fact that he directly represents the Motherland, beloved of all

Russians, and speaks always in her defense. The consistency of these principles with those embodied in the criminal law is evident, but in the application of the Disciplinary Code, the Soviet State reaches down into the minute details of military life.

All Red commanders exercise justice. The commander of a weapon, of a squad, the assistant commander of a platoon (platoon sergeant), the platoon commander, the company commander—each is granted by the Code certain carefully limited powers of punishment. The higher he stands in the chain of command, the greater the punishment which he may adjudge. The Soviet squad leader can deprive one of his squad members of a pass or privilege, or assign him to an extra work detail; the platoon sergeant can withdraw from the soldier whom he punishes two passes, or put him on two extra details; his platoon leader can take three passes, or cause up to four periods of extra work; and so on, each successive commander possessing the right to adjudge increasingly severer penalties.¹⁶ The strength of the system lies in the fact that the powers thus granted commanders are virtually arbitrary. No trial takes place. Only the briefest record of the offense and sentence is required by regulation. It is true that both the Code and the criminal law provide punishment for command injustice, and guarantee the soldier the right of appeal, but side by side with these guarantees there are these stipulations:¹⁷

"it shall be forbidden to complain of the severity of a disciplinary penalty if the commander has not exceeded the disciplinary authority assigned to him.....
servicemen who discover an abuse.....shall be eligible for a reward.....

16. Ibid., pp. 102-104.

17. Ibid., pp. 127-131.

a serviceman who knowingly turns in a false complaint or report shall be made responsible for that.....

In as much as the Code makes available to even very junior commanders some very harsh penalties, and considering the fact that these same commanders handle in most cases the formal appeals of their subordinates, it seems improbable that even a grievously wronged soldier would chance a complaint without some very explicit and highly unlikely proof of injustice. The cumulative effect of all these laws is to grant the commander of each Soviet soldier formal authority to penalize immediately his slightest transgression without recourse to elaborate procedure, or to a judicial apparatus outside the unit. The resultant strong position of the unit commander is further enhanced by the fact that he can decide, again quite arbitrarily, whether or not any given offense is severe enough to warrant trial under the Criminal Code. In short, a Soviet commander who so chooses, can make himself the fountainhead of justice in his unit. His impersonation of justice can not but help to advance the solidarity of the unit by insuring complete subordination, and by erecting for the common soldier an active, physical image of authority.

However, no military unit commander could exercise complete sway over his soldiers unless he convinced them often that he was, if severe, at least just. For this reason, the Code contains a section devoted exclusively to the rewards with which a commander may recognize a soldier's outstanding performance of duty, or diligence in reporting negligence in others. As in authorizing punishments, it ascribes to each rank of command progressively greater powers of reward. The squad leader of the honored soldier may deliver an official commendation before his assembled unit, or remit any unperformed punishment which he himself had prescribed, while the company commander can award passes, and the regimental commander "valuable gifts

or money," or even a "personal photograph of the serviceman, taken before the unfurled banner of the unit." The Code expressly bids the commander to exercise his powers of reward in conjunction with his powers of punishment, and thereby establishes at least a formal basis for justice within the unit: incentive for compliance as well as discouragement for transgression.¹⁸

The Russians' sense of justice, no doubt attenuated by generations of dictatorial rule, is as much of an enigma as most other aspects of their national characteristics. One facet of it, however, seems clearly established: the higher one progresses in the stratified Soviet society, the greater the privileges which are due one.¹⁹ The Disciplinary Code conforms closely to this principle. Punishments which may be adjudged against privates are considerably more severe than those which can be given sergeants, and these are in turn harsher than those of officers. The same careful gradations exist for authorized awards, those which may be applied to privates and sergeants being less attractive than those which an officer may earn. These provisions make advancement in the military society the more attractive, for the higher the rank attained by the soldier, the less amenable he is to harsh and arbitrary punishment for petty acts, and the greater his reward for extraordinary exertions in the performance of his duty.²⁰

The utilization of Russian nationalism by the Soviet state came about through the military good sense of Stalin during the early months of the

18. Ibid., pp. 119-125.

19. Op. cit., pp. 237-238.

20. Berman and Kerner, Documents, pp. 119-125

German invasion, but it was not until 1946 that the Disciplinary Code was rewritten predicated upon love of the Motherland. Among Red soldiers, the notion that their stringent discipline is necessary for the protection of Mother Russia must be vastly more acceptable than the post-revolutionary idea of devotion to the principles of the Workers and Peasants Soviets, of the international proletarian revolution, or other esoteric Communist concepts. For this reason the current Disciplinary Code, as a workable administrative instrument, must be the more viable and efficacious. Soviet discipline--unit cohesiveness--is now anchored in the common affections of all Russian people, and through this root draws much of its strength. But if the Soviets found it expedient to premise nationalist sentiment as the fundament for their military discipline, how does the Communist Party machinery, which in all other areas of Soviet public administration provides both discipline and cohesion, affect the integrity of the military unit?

The Communist Party

The legal structure of discipline in the Soviet Army is built around undeviating allegiance of subordinates to commander. Loyalty to the Communist Party must then necessarily compete with loyalty for the commander should the two be less than completely identified. The Communist Party, with its institution of the unit Political Officer, has, in the abstract administrative sense, blocked this complete identity, and therefore the operations of the Party detract from the type of discipline ordained by the Criminal and Disciplinary Codes. This statement is true in general, but it needs important qualifications. Firstly, Political Officers-- the modern version of the old Commissars--are assigned only to units of company

size and above,²¹ which theoretically leaves intact the relationship of platoon-level commanders with their subordinates. Secondly, most Soviet officers are today Communist Party members,²² and therefore in most cases it may be assumed that commanders themselves associate the ends of the Party with their own, and do all they can to cooperate with the Political Officer, the Party's official representative. Thirdly, even in cases where the commander is not a Communist, there may be, and probably most often is, unanimity of viewpoint and objective between himself and his Party aide. Fourthly, current Party doctrine makes the Political Officer of the unit explicitly subordinate to the commander under all circumstances: "Party and Komsomol organizations are obliged to strive for the strengthening of the authority of the commander, to help him in educating soldiers, in mobilizing them toward new successes in military and political preparedness."²³

The Political Officer

The Communist Party has every reason for fostering military unit solidarity, and beyond a doubt it recognizes the inherent weakness of a system which places within each unit an officer who derives his authority and influence other than from the commander. Yet, the Communist concept of the monolithic state precludes the existence of potential sources of political power, of which the Army is certainly one, which are not under its surveillance and influence. Therefore, after years of experiment, it

21. Garthoff, op. cit., p. 240.

22. Berman and Kerner, Text, p. 31. "In October 1952, Marshall Vasilevsky reported to the 19th Party Congress that 86.4 % of all officers were Party members or members of the Young Communist League."

23. Ibid., p. 31.

has settled on a role for its direct representatives theoretically divorced from the exercise of command, confined to the political education of members of the unit. However, the line between political and military activity is nowhere clearly drawn. Commanders are bidden by Army regulation to take an active interest in the political attitudes of their troops,²⁴ and the Political Officer is directed by the Party to furnish assistance to the commander in the discharge of all his duties. "There is not a single part of the unit's life upon which the political organs do not exert their influence,"²⁵ writes a Soviet authority. "The Party organization secures through its party influence and by its work an exemplary execution of tasks by the entire unit, and above all by Communists and the Komsomols...."²⁶

The formal operations of the Political Officer are simple enough. In training he must conduct weekly for the officers and men of the unit at least four hours of systematic instruction on "political" subjects ranging from duties of the service, history of the Red Army, traditions of the unit, dangers of foreign espionage, the international situation, and so on. In addition, he initiates each training day with a short talk on current events, usually readings from Pravda. He supervises the activities of Party members, and of Komsomol (the Communist Youth Organization) leaders in his unit, and sees to it that all in the unit have ample opportunity to obtain and read political literature. He observes the political sentiments of the officers and men, as it is revealed to him by their reading, their

24. Fainsod, op. cit., p. 415.

25. Berman and Kerner, Text, op. cit., p. 30, quoting Ortenburg.

26. Ibid., p. 28, quoting Ortenburg.

conversations, or their actions, for symptoms of deviation from the stringent Soviet standards of State loyalty, reporting all irregularities to higher Party officials for action.²⁷ Informally, he fills for the soldiers of the unit, the position of trust normally discharged in Western armies by a chaplain, an inspector general, or a beloved commander. To him the troops look for clemency should they get in trouble with the commander. It is he whom they can rely on to detect, and cause to be corrected, inequities, administrative tangles, improper living conditions, and the other causes of soldier grievance. To him they go when they have family trouble, or when their spirits are low. He performs all those functions of understanding father and confidant which the Soviet commander, laced firmly into his shell of absolute authority and rigid justice, cannot.²⁸

The importance of the Political Officer and his activities to unit cohesion can readily be seen. The systematic program of indoctrination, emphasizing as it does the responsibilities of the soldier, his contribution to his country's welfare, and the traditions of his unit, cannot help but develop in him an awareness of mission which will bind him consciously to his unit in a way in which no system of subordination, however rigid, could. The Party emphasis on exemplary performance of military duty frequently causes the Party or Komsomol members of the unit to be its best soldiers. In this way the Political Officer comes to control directly with rigid Party discipline the hard core of devoted leaders around which any military unit must be built. By recruiting for the

27. Fainsod, op. cit., pp. 410-411.

28. Berman and Kerner, op. cit., p. 232.

Komsomol all young soldiers who evince superior military aptitudes, and by urging them and all Party affiliates on to ever greater endeavor, he can fill the unit with Party zeal, placing at the disposal of the commander an active instrument of leadership apart from his own hierarchy of command. His position as the mentor and guardian of this nucleus of young leadership, as well as his more informal role of unit counselor, in many cases must bind the unit to him with warm human bonds the like of which only a very unusual Soviet commander could bring into being.²⁹

The Political Officer is one of the Communist Party elite. Devoted to the Soviet with a fanatic, unquestioning zeal, generally from an urban background, well educated, intelligent, he has distinct advantages in personal attainments as well as in motivation over the average officer. In battle he was brave, resolute, ever in the van of the troops, ever encouraging, threatening, driving them onward toward their objective. The Germans entertained profound respect for him personally and appreciated and feared his hold on the unit. According to them, there were four factors which determined the nature of Russian warfare--the Russian terrain, the high command, the troops, and the Political Officer;³⁰

The weakest elements were the intermediate and lower leaders. Their shortcomings, however, were made up for in part by the appropriate action of the higher command and by the good will, the discipline, the undemanding nature, and the self-sacrificing devotion to duty of the enlisted men under the influence of energetic commissars who were filled with a belief in the essential necessity of victory. The Russian soldier thereby became an instrument which provided his leaders with the sort of fighter needed for the operations.

29. Garthoff, op. cit., p. 242. Fainsod, op. cit., pp. 412-413.

30. D. A. Pam. 20-230, p. 16.

Today, the role the Political Officer plays in welding together small units, is recognized in official Soviet Army doctrine, which defines morale in purely political terms. Voroshilov stated:³¹

The morale of the army, as Stalin teaches, depends in the first place and above all on the nature of the political aims of the war, that is, what the state is fighting for, on the degree of consciousness of the men and commanders of the army, on the depth of their understanding of the justness of the war...and the necessity of waging it to save their own country from the attacker...., on the depth of love for their Motherland and of their faith in the righteousness of their cause, of their faith in victory, of their faith in the leaders of the country and of the active armed forces.....

It is to be noted that all of these factors are the specific province of the Political Officer, and morale, the vital atmosphere in which the spirit of combat cooperation breathes, is then directly his responsibility. But does not his role of political spy prevent his ever effecting a close relationship with the men and the officers of his unit, and so make it impossible for him to be a real factor for good morale? And does not he, in the exercise of his responsibility for morale and education, frequently encounter a clash of interests with the commander, and does not the position of the latter suffer greatly by virtue of his presence?

Undoubtedly the Political Officer possesses very real power over the officers and men in the unit, power which in the unscrupulous tradition of the Party he probably is not loathe to use whenever he deems it advisable. An unfavorable report from a Political Officer could ruin the career of a young officer, for promotion procedures in the Soviet Army require a political review prior to each advancement. Among the non-commissioned officers, those who are members of the Party coterie undoubtedly are in a favored

31. Garthoff, op. cit., p. 231.

position by virtue of their special advocate at the commander's elbow. But on the other hand, these powers probably tend to create less fear now than might be expected. For one thing, more and more professional military men are becoming Communist Party members, thereby acquiring a political circumspection which no Political Officer would question without very sound reasons. For another, there is in existence within the Army a network of informers and agents of the MVD, the State police, unseen and unpublicized, charged with surveillance of loyalty and detection of espionage. In comparison with these clandestine operatives, the Political Officer certainly loses stature as an object of fear among the troops. In very human terms, it seems likely that fear cannot be the sole emotion felt by the Soviet soldier for his Political Officer, and that respect for his personal attainments as a soldier and fighter as well as affection for his concern for the welfare of the troops, must draw them to him with compulsions which override whatever fear they may entertain for the powers of his position.³²

In the commander's relationship with his Political Officer, he finds himself in a difficult position indeed. The Soviet commander is not characteristically careless of the welfare of his men, or yet impotent in establishing bonds with them other than those of rigid, wholly mechanical subordination. Still, the Soviet officer is in general from a social background less advantageous than that of his Political Officer, which means that his ability and general attainments are usually less than those of the latter. From the standpoint of personal leadership and attractiveness,

32. D. A. Pam. 20-230, p. 14.

he is in a social strata-conscious Army, bound to suffer by comparison. More importantly, however, he is at all times fettered by the chain of command. His policy and actions must reflect the policy of his own commander, preventing him in many instances from acting to the best interests of his troops, or even expressing disapproval for unfortunate conditions. The Political Officer, by contrast, has no such responsibilities. His superior governs his actions with respect to Party matters only; his extra-political function in the unit is his own concern. He has no tortuous military channels to follow when he wants to convey an opinion to the commander; he merely tells him. He has no military orders, no military policy to implement; he can at all times at least talk as though he disapproves of measures which exert undue hardships on the troops. In combat, this freedom together with his bravery and intelligence frequently led him to seize control of the unit in emergencies, and act with the very initiative, flexibility, and decisiveness which is systematically discouraged in the commander. German commentators credit the Political Officer with much of the fantastic cohesion displayed by Soviet units in dire combat adversity. The preciously mentioned occupation of bunkers on the Bug, and the continued resistance in the citadel of Brest Litovsk they attribute to the influence of Political Officers, and they cite numerous other examples where dogged perseverance by Soviet units under hopeless conditions was credited to the soldierly conduct of the Political Officers. They make this acute observation:³³

It might appear that much of the fighting spirit and concern for the welfare of the troops which the commissars displayed

33. Ibid., p. 15.

should have been the responsibility of the commanding officer and not of the commissars. However, it was always a question of situations in which something had to be done. The commanding officers generally did little, while the commissars acted. The passive character of the Russian officers was responsible for the fact that it was not the commander but the commissar who discovered the road to action. Therefore, the commissar was really a necessary part in the structure of the Red Army.

Since the end of the German war, the Soviet Army has made a determined effort to improve the quality of its officer corps, particularly its junior officers who serve now or will serve as small unit commanders. These officers can be expected to display considerably less passivity than the hastily recruited, poorly trained officers described above. Nonetheless, Soviet law, and as shall be seen subsequently, Soviet Army practice still penalizes initiative and flexibility in junior commanders. Moreover, the Soviet has made every effort to expunge the human bonds between officers and men which grew up during the war, and replace it with a stiff, formal relationship defined less by respect and devotion than by the Disciplinary Code and Army Regulations. So long as the Soviet Army persists in these policies, the Political Officer will continue to exert a positive influence for unit cohesion. His role, in this regard should, however, be looked upon as supplementary to that of the unit commander, rather than competitive. Despite the fact that many former Soviet commanders who have recently fled to the West report an apathy in their unit for the daily preachings and gyrations of Political Officers, and mention that the political programs of the Party are coming more and more to compete with the Army for training time, throwing commanders and Political Officers at loggerheads over this one issue at least, there is no basis for a belief that in combat there would be any fundamental change in the operation of the small unit. The Political Officer would provide, as he did before

in World War II, an emergency reservoir of resolution and leadership which would spring into operation whenever a command failure occurred. Batter the Soviet Army with unexpected nuclear weapons. Force it into impossible situations, Inflict on it disasterous tactical defeats. Then its junior commanders may lack the flexibility requisite to meet exigency, may lose their morale and will to victory. But the unit Political Officer may be expected to function as he did before, "as a sort of front-line conscience,"³⁴ rallying the unit to its ordained tasks, and inspiring it to remarkable performance. While the Soviet commander may experience difficulty and frustration in working out the details of his personal relationship with his Political Officer, the end of unit cohesion is served no matter which emerges dominant.

The Secret Police

Typical of all Soviet public administration is the multiplicity of lines of authority within the Army. The Communist Party, ever vigilant lest the Army develop political power independent of its own, has erected two separate lines of authority within the Army other than, and independent of, the Army command. The first of these is the Political Officer which it maintains at each level of command, answerable ultimately to the Main Political Administration, which is at once the Party section of the USSR Ministry of Defense and the Military Department of the Central Committee of the Party. The other line of authority is that of the secret police, mentioned briefly above, which operates on directives from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD).³⁵ These police are formally represented at

34. Ibid.

35. Fainsod, op.cit., p. 409.

regimental (possibly battalion) level by a uniformed officer. He is charged with:³⁶

Detection of anti-Soviet attitudes;
Surveillance of officers, political officers, and men;
Discovery and liquidation of enemy intelligence penetrations;
Security from enemy intelligence and of documents.

He conducts his work through a network of informers within the units committed to his care. The informers are obtained by various means, from bribery to blackmail, but they are invariably unknown and unsuspected by their fellow soldiers. Like all Soviet secret police, the Army MVD can arrest anyone whom it suspects and sentence them to prison or to a labor camp by an administrative sentence, that is, without benefit of the trial or due process of law guaranteed a defendant by the criminal code. Certain units of the Army are composed of troops selected for their loyalty to the State, and officered by police; these "blocking" units are positioned behind normal line troops in combat to apprehend any enemy line crossers, or any Soviet deserters.

The exact effect of this elaborate police apparatus upon the coherence of Soviet units is difficult to ascertain. Certainly it makes no positive contribution, although it must discourage political unfaithfulness, desertion, or other forms of defections. However, the potential existence of informers within the unit causes men and officers alike to conduct themselves at all times as though one were present, a condition which "generates an atmosphere of insecurity from which even the most thoroughly indoctrinated Soviet military unit is not wholly free."³⁷ This atmosphere of suspicion

36. Garthoff, op. cit., pp. 244-245.

37. Berman and Kerner, Text, op. cit., p. 34.

and fear is hardly conducive to the development of mutual trust and confidence among the members of the unit. In essence, the institution of the secret police makes fear an important element in unit solidarity;³⁸

Fear is fundamentally the same in all human beings and basically it is tied to the instinct of self-preservation. Difference in intensity and expression, however, characterizes different cultures and societies. The fear experienced by the typical Soviet soldier is apparently more diffuse and less linked with direct anxiety over possible loss of life owing to enemy action than is the case in Western armies. Supplementing the soldier's own normal fear, the Soviet system also introduces a general fear of his own officers [because of their legal powers] and especially of the secret police officers.....The feeling of perpetual submission to the omnipresent eyes of the regime is very strong and largely justified. In addition there is fear of public disgrace and shame which even a faint sign of cowardice or treachery would bring.

Institutional terror forms a less definite support for unit cohesion than either legally enforced subordination or political leadership and motivation, but it may be, for the very reason that it is clandestine in operation and ostensibly unlimited in power, as important as either of the other systems. It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that the secret police serve ends different from those of the military law or of the Main Political Administration. To the contrary, the Party effects close cooperation and coordination of policy, objectives, and procedures, so that any given State policy is at once transmitted to the unit via the dictate of the commander, explained and popularized by the Political Officer, and enforced by fear of the police. The police can act even for purely military transgressions merely by construing them as anti-State actions, and indeed it was the efficiency of the police "blocking units" during the war which gave rise to the Red Army saying: "Retreat and be executed, surrender and be executed."³⁹

38. Garthoff, op. cit., p. 239.

39. Ely, op. cit., p. 12.

The three systems of discipline have a confluence in the unique Soviet institution of the penal battalion. These battalions are supervised by the police, and are manned by offenders against either the criminal law, Army regulations, or, in some cases, political fealty. Assignment to such a battalion deprives the soldier of his family allowance for the period of his service therein, but he is maintained on Army roles, and upon completion of his sentence, his offense is expunged from his record, and he is returned without loss of status to his unit. Sentences to penal battalions were regarded as an act of clemency, in as much as convicts were thereby given the opportunity of redeeming themselves by their actions.⁴⁰ The battalions were not labor forces; they were used rather as shock troops, or at least as troops which were considered highly expendable for tactical purposes. Sentence to a penal battalion during the war was regarded by Red soldiers as the equivalent of a death sentence. During peace it means a period of extraordinarily severe discipline, with even the shortest of absences bringing the penalty for desertion.⁴¹

The sum effect of the existence and operations of the secret police is to place a premium upon at least outward submission to the other two forms of discipline. The prudent Soviet officer will at all times conduct himself so as to obviate any suspicion of his political loyalty, and will be most punctilious in the performance of his military duties, particularly in maintaining rigid subordination within his unit. Those under him will in turn be circumspect with their announced political sentiments, and

40. Berman and Kerner, Text, op. cit., p. 124.

41. Ibid., p. 244.

Careful to render precise and undeviating obedience to their commander. For the soldier whom subordination rankles, and for whom political motivation has no appeal, institutional terror provides, if not an incentive to binding himself to his comrades within the unit, at least some excellent reasons why it behooves him to do so, and thus even the most reluctant find their fate identified with that of the unit in which they serve.

The Army Administration

"To live by the Regulations, constantly to strengthen discipline and order, is the most important duty of Soviet warriors." So a Soviet officer evaluated the importance of Army regulations in a recent article for his service publication. General Kovalesky, commenting on the same subject, explained that in Soviet military regulations "is compressed the underlying foundations of Soviet military science and the many years experience of the construction of the Armed Forces of the Soviet State, and above all the experience of the Great Fatherland War."⁴² These regulations, and the administration they ordain, furnish evidence of the degree to which military professionals have adopted the thinking of their Communist overlords. A study of Soviet Army administration reveals that the doctrine taught in the service schools and propounded in service papers and military books jibes in every way with the methods and principles utilized by the legal, Party, and police apparatuses to create and guarantee unit cohesion.

42. Garthoff, op. cit., p. 208.

Personnel policies are designed to reinforce the existing system of discipline, and the Army makes every effort to develop pride of unit by encouraging more than perfunctory execution of duty through unit awards and distinctions which bring numerous privileges and material advantages as well as honor.

Soviet Military Doctrine

The cardinal rule emphasized in the military regulations is that from the smallest unit upward, there must be no retreat. If a unit is cut off it must fight to prevent enemy infantry from exploiting the success of enemy tanks; it must stop supplies going to enemy front line troops, and it must fight its way out of encirclement.....

The way in which this adamant attitude ⁴³ finds expression in tactics is through precise and detailed control of subordinate units by commanders at each echelon. One high ranking former Soviet officer said of it: "I believe this is a trait of Communist mentality, partly founded on the suspicion that the subordinate will not act vigorously without close direction, and partly because there is a streak of the theorist in every Marxist."⁴⁴ It is a moot point whether the military doctrine brought into being a system of punishment, motivation, and surveillance most admirably suited to insure its operation, or whether the military thought was not a doctrinaire rationalization of the controls foisted upon it by the Party. Probably, as is the case in most other sectors of the Soviet public administration, neither dogma nor apparat grew independently, but rather in a series of interactive changes. Obviously such a doctrine demands

43. Ely, op. cit., p. 15, quoting interrogated Soviet officers.

44. Ibid., p. 17.

for its application units of obdurate solidarity and absolute felicity to orders; the courts, police, and Party produce them.

One finds running throughout the Regulations and other official and semi-official military writing the same regard for the position of the commander as is so strikingly evident in the Criminal Law and the Disciplinary Code. "The commander bears complete responsibility for the condition and combat capability of the troop formation (unit), for the operating leadership of troops and for the success of their actions in combat."⁴⁵ But Regulations make it equally explicit that the way to success for the junior commander is through precise implementation of his senior's plans. Initiative itself is not regarded as wrong; it is in fact encouraged. But side by side with each exhortation to independence are such admonitions as "any change of decision when there are not adequately serious grounds for doing so is impermissible, and bears witness to the absence of a firm will in the commander."⁴⁶ In sum all these regulations provide punishment only for failures due to initiated action, and the risks for same being so great, most Soviet commanders no doubt elect to demonstrate "a firm will" and drive their subordinates through their preplanned maneuvers regardless of consequences. Strangely enough, there is no requirement that Soviet officers lead their troops into the tactical debacles which are the inevitable result of inflexibility. To the contrary, the Infantry Combat Regulations read:⁴⁷

Only in exceptional cases in combat conditions do the regulations permit the commander of a platoon, company or battalion to advance

45. Garthoff, op. cit., p. 216.

46. Ibid., p. 204.

47. Ibid., p. 217.

in front of their formations and personally lead their detachments into battle.

Hence, unit performance from the command point of view is a relatively impersonal matter, a simple matter of demanding precise execution of orders. Beyond a doubt these regulations serve to strengthen the unit along the monolithic, rigid lines envisaged by the legal codes.

It is apparent, however, that Soviet military leaders do not make the mistake of confusing morale with discipline; they came to appreciate in the Finnish War that even highly motivated Communists are not necessarily good soldiers, and they had learned in 1918 that a soldier must want to fight before he will do so effectively. Stalin and other early Bolsheviks made much of such terms as "revolutionary impulse" and "just" wars in explaining to their troops why it was necessary for them to die if need be for the State. To this day official military thought, as expressed in Regulations and other sources, stresses political justification as the key to morale. Voroshilov stated:⁴⁸

....Stalin makes the morale factor, the spirit of the army, dependent primarily on the nature of the political aims of the war and consequently on the nature of the social system, the nature of domestic and foreign policy of the given state, on the level of consciousness and culture of the broad masses of the people, on the predominant ideology, etc.

Of course, it is the Communist Party, through the medium of its Political Officer in each unit, which explains to the unit the aims of the war, is responsible for the "consciousness" of the men and the commanders, and

48. Ibid., p. 231.

provides the necessary rationale defining any combat in terms of defense of Motherland, any enemy as aggressive, any leaders as trustworthy. Thus the Political Officer has a position and function well defined by military as well as political dogma, and his contribution to unit solidarity is, then, understood and explained in terms of military necessity, obviating at least doctrinaire sources of friction between him and his military commander.

Personnel Policies

It is interesting to note that the Soviet Army administration makes use of none of the adjuncts of morale considered indispensable in most other armies. General Eisenhower commented on this after conversations with Marshall Zhukov:⁴⁹

As far as I could see, Zhukov had given little concern to methods that we considered vitally important to the maintenance of morale among American troops: systematic rotation of units, facilities for recreation, short leaves and furloughs, and, above all, the development of techniques to avoid exposure of men to unnecessary battlefield risks, all of which, although common practices in our army, seemed to be largely unknown in his.

To a certain extent the Soviet Army can afford to overlook such amenities simply because quite literally the Soviet soldier "never had it so good." The rugged peasant life from which comes the majority of Russians might make even very arduous conditions of service easy by comparison. Again, the Russian people have exhibited for centuries a characteristic phlegm in the face of disaster, are noted for their stamina, ability to endure great physical suffering and privation, and are personally resourceful when it comes to staying alive by sheer determination and refusal to yield to circumstance. Soviet leaders are not so foolish, however, to

49. Ibid., p. 237.

submit Ivan to hardships without a carefully conducted program relating his sufferings to discipline and to his political duty. Soviet training stresses feats of self control performed simply as an exercise in execution of orders, and former Soviet officers attribute the skill in camouflage and ambush of which the Germans were understandably respectful directly to patience and perseverance taught and maintained by firm discipline.⁵⁰

....some of the most important phases of our training for ambush rest very largely on discipline. We can rely on our men to hold their fire...Discipline makes him stand still or stay in concealment in many cases where his instinct might not. Several times when a whole division has hidden successfully for several days it was because absolutely no one stirred from the barn or haystack or grove of trees in which he was told to stay.....

Always, however, the Soviet soldier is told that his actions are directed for the defense of the Motherland, and that if the price is high, it is the least he can pay toward her survival.

Leave is considered a rare and unusual privilege in the Soviet Army, not an undeniable right of the soldier. In fact, as has been shown, leaves of a few days duration rank high on the list of rewards which a soldier may earn for outstanding performance of duty. Good food is looked upon as a luxury, a field kitchen being more of a treat than a necessity to a Soviet unit in combat.⁵¹ But the Soviet soldier is constantly told that he receives the best equipment available to any army in the world. During the German war, Soviet soldiers commonly believed that jeeps were manufactured in Russia,⁵² and allied soldiers working in the Soviet were

50. Ely, op. cit., p. 30.

51. Ibid., p. 24.

52. Capt. W.F. Jordan, "I Know the Russian Soldier," The Infantry School Quarterly, Vol. 43, No. 2 (October, 1953), p. 53.

cautioned against mentioning any piece of foreign equipment in unfavorable comparison with Soviet materiel.⁵³ As a result of these policies, the Soviet soldier lives a life almost completely divorced from civilian existence. The standard of living within his unit becomes the only standard he knows. Moreover, he has supreme confidence in the tools of his trade, and is taught that these and not creature comfort are the proper concern of a soldier.

This attitude is further developed by the Soviet practice of assigning men to one unit for the entire term of their service. This policy has several important effects on unit solidarity. First of all it tends to narrow the soldier's acquired military tastes; regardless of the conditions within the unit, they are all the soldier has ever known and therefore are less likely to displease him. Secondly, it makes every moment of a soldier's performance expressly important to his military future; there can be no slacking off in anticipation of a transfer, nor any yearning for another assignment which detracts from present efficiency. Thirdly, it provides sturdy reinforcements for the legal system, in that a soldier's disciplinary record is a matter of common knowledge for all within the unit, heightening the disgrace of punishment, and making it harder to regain good standing. Too, the Party and police are aided in their work because there is no steady flow of men in and out of the unit to make difficult the process of close surveillance and acquisition of extensive background records. But most important of all, a stable complement of personnel is an invaluable aid to the creation of feelings of interdependence, group loyalties, and unit pride. In a very real sense the unit becomes the society to which the Soviet soldier looks for recognition, reward, and other social satisfactions.

53. Berman and Kerner, Text, op. cit., pp. 238-239.

There is one substantial departure from personnel policies designed to strengthen the unit: the Soviet concept of the officer corps. Like most of the experiments initiated by the Bolsheviks, the revolutionary objective of a casteless army gave way to military practicalities during the Finnish war. From 1940 onward the Soviet officer was progressively exalted until today he is surrounded with official sanctions and privileges hardly equalled in the old Czarist Imperial Army. During the long years of combat with the Germans, there developed in most veteran combat units of the Soviet Army that spirit of camaraderie between company officers and their men which is a very natural outgrowth of shared danger and difficulty; but in the usual Russian black-white thinking, this spirit has since become anathema, and the Army administration has broken up old units by transfer of officers. In fact, today very few veteran junior officers see service in the politically sensitive units stationed outside the Soviet Union.⁵⁴ Every effort is made to develop in the professional officer corps a society based on privileged position, prestige, and opportunity. Membership in the Communist Party is practically mandatory for the ambitious officer, and the Army makes it plain that the politically discreet, militarily efficient officer will eventually enjoy a standard of living far above that of even fairly well off Soviet civilians. This policy tends to pry the officer loose from his men, to force him from any feelings of identity with his unit other than purely official attachments. As a result, the Soviet officer stands to gain much for demanding strict obedience from subordinates, and otherwise translating into reality the mechanical arrangements for unit cohesion established by the legal system and Army regulations.

54. Garthoff, op. cit., p. 229.

On the other hand he stands to lose much by indulging in any compassion which might cause him to relax his formal relationship with his men, or demand of them any amount of effort less than that expected in his orders. Here is yet another policy through which unit cohesion becomes a matter of strict subordination, and by which inflexible tactical performances by all echelons of command are rendered unavoidable.

The Army and the Unit

In Soviet Army regulations there is a striking differentiation between combat units and support units. The Russians even employ a different word for the commander of a line unit from that for a commander of rear area troops. Little official attention is given to the organization of the field army rear, the discipline and command of support troops apparently being considered as much a matter of indifference as the organization of the rest of the Soviet Army logistical system. Severe penalties are simply prescribed for the rear area commander who fails to deliver his goods or services on time, but no mention is made of methods.⁵⁵ On the premise that it is combat troops who win battles, official concern centers on the training, discipline, equipment, and operations of line units. This policy hardly benefits the cohesion of Soviet support troops, but it does add considerably to the prestige and pride of fighting units.

Development of pride of unit as a means to unit solidarity is the evident intention of some orientation programs outlined for Political Officers, in which the exploits of unit heroes, and the battle history of the unit itself become subjects for weekly political talks. Units

55. Ely, op. cit., p. 96.

which do perform extraordinary combat feats receive special recognition, which may take the form of a unit award called the Order of the Red Banner, or designation as a Guard unit. The former was intended to be the greater honor, for the regulations provide that should the banner be lost in combat for lack of fighting spirit, the commander and his officers are subject to court martial, and the unit itself is broken up.⁵⁶ However, designation as a Guard unit carried with it extra pay for all members of the unit, extra rations, and other privileges which made it actually more desirable to the Soviet combat soldier. Guards units, for instance, got most of the vodka issued for troop use.⁵⁷ A unit undistinguished otherwise is permitted to adopt the name of the area in which it was formed, or to take the name of a place which it liberated during the war.⁵⁸ Such unit distinctions are an important adjunct to the fostering of unit cohesion in the West, but generally speaking, Soviet doctrine and regulations attribute group loyalty wholly to political fealty and love of country; there is no doctrinal foundation for the development of the sort of unit pride encouraged by establishing differentiation between various outfits.

In fact, a Western observer examining the Soviet Army administration would look in vain for similarities in either principle or method between the Soviet provisions for unit cohesion and those familiar to him. In theory and administrative procedure at least, the Soviets adhere to the Communist concept of the monolithic State. For the Russian soldier, as far as those over him are concerned, there can be but one loyalty: the

56. Ibid., p. 10.

57. Ibid., p. 28.

58. Ibid., p. 10n.

State; loyalty centered in the group to which he belongs is misplaced and even politically dangerous, and is in general treated as such. If anything, the informal relationships which are bound to develop among men working together in danger, the sort of relationships which are encouraged and capitalized upon by the democracies in their armies, are intentionally not emphasized by the Soviet military because they and the atmosphere of Communism are not compatible.⁵⁹ It might well be argued that the Soviets have thus far evinced a commendable willingness to compromise political ideals with military reality. But one has but to examine their tactical doctrine to find startling confirmation for an exactly opposite thesis. The combat situations most feared by the Soviets, the ones which regulations and doctrine name as those most dangerous, are exactly those which demand of the individual soldier, or of the small unit, solidarity, initiative, resourcefulness, and determination: flanking, encirclement, attack from the rear, guerrilla harassment, sniping, separation of men from their commanders, or loss of contact between adjacent units.⁶⁰ The very fact that Soviet Army units not only survive in such situations, but do so ably, indicates that they derive strength as much within themselves as from without.

Refugee Soviet soldiers claim that the Soviet soldier is not at all the man his leaders would have him be. He is not politically enthusiastic, and he is dissatisfied with service conditions and complains about them.⁶¹ Without questioning the reliability of this deserter information, one might ask if there ever was an army of politically enthusiastic combat soldiers,

59. Garthoff, op. cit., p. 229.

60. Ibid., pp. 239-240.

61. Ibid., p. 230.

or whether there can be a soldier who is not dissatisfied with service conditions and complaining of them. Nonetheless, this testimony serves to support a contention which any military critic of the Soviet system would advance even in complete ignorance of actual conditions in the Soviet Army: there must be a considerable difference between the soldier which Army and State strive to create, and the stolid, plodding fellow who actually fills the turtle-shaped steel helmet.

Soviet Unit Cohesion: An Evaluation

One of the popular theories advanced by military commentators of recent years is that the Soviet soldier fights primarily for his native soil, and that therefore he would never function well in a war of aggression which carried the Red tide over the borders of the Soviet Union. It is true, as has been shown, that a genuine love of country does motivate him to a certain extent, but this motivation is by no means the only, nor the most important bond which exists between him and the mission of the unit to which he is assigned. To the contrary, the Soviets have devised a durable unit discipline predicated on three independent compulsions: legally enforced subordination, Communist leadership, and omnipotent, clandestine surveillance. This system is strong enough to assure the Soviet Union of dependable tactical formations with which to wage any war it chooses. The theory of no-Soviet-foreign-wars is further weakened by the well-known ability of the Soviet Union to interpret fact for its soldiers as it pleases, thus assuring even reluctant soldiers of sound reasons for fighting "in defense of their Motherland." Given a situation in which the Soviet Army was advancing victorious into foreign territory

rich in forage and plunder, any supposition that there would be wholesale defections, or even weakness in unit cohesion, is unfounded. The Soviet Army could control its formations with all the deftness and precision anticipated by its regulations.

This statement is not to be construed as an endorsement of Soviet military administrative method, nor yet as meaning that the Soviet system has no weakness. The Soviet Army has purchased its intrinsically admirable unit cohesion at a sacrifice of flexibility, and flexibility is the tactical characteristic of the potential victor in atomic warfare. Briefly, the warfare of the future will entail the use of firepower greatly advanced in efficiency beyond that which the Soviet now chooses to ignore. The killing potential of modern tactical weapons is already high enough to preclude the employment of massed artillery and herded infantry on the scale favored by the Red Army against the Nazis. Tactical nuclear weapons can force the Soviets to adopt dispersion. But however well dispersed Soviet units can die, they cannot fight together. The very type of combat most feared by the Russians would ensue, combat of distances, rapid movement, surprise, and fluid fronts. In such an event commanders would lose contact with commanded, and in the milling confusion the system of police control would be bound to break down. Only the political leadership could remain effective in maintaining unit cohesion—just as the same leadership was all that remained when the Germans achieved their successes against the Red Army—and in a foreign land, confronted by chronic defeat and tactical uncertainty, deprived of even the meager logistic support to which the Soviet soldier is accustomed, the Political Officer would be hard pressed to hold his unpredictable charges to their tasks, especially if the army opposing them made skillful use of propaganda warfare. No, the very

solidarity which enabled the Red Army to cloy the guns of the German armies, the solidarity preserved and enhanced in the current Soviet military administration, can but provide apt targets for the insatiable weapons available today to the defenders of freedom. In short, while the present Soviet administration might well be able to provide for its military units discipline, respect for authority, and real knowledge of war, it cannot assure itself of unit cohesion, of a common bond among the men of its small units which will enable them to meet what General Sherman termed "a situation of rush and distress."