

Perspectives in Military History

49th Annual Lecture Series

The Problem with Preemptive War

Soviet Mobilization Planning, 1938-1941

Dr. Richard W. Harrison

Scholar and Author

In the spring of 1941, the Red Army high command sat poised to strike the German occupied Polish hinterland in a daring push to alter the course of the Second World War. Meanwhile, the German General Staff was likewise preparing for a blitzkrieg against the Russian western territories with the final prize of Moscow itself. The Russian commanders never carried out their plan to strike the Germans, however, and the German's treacherous onslaught sprang forth first, resulting in the devastation of much of western Russia and contributing to the final defeat of the Nazi regime. The plan to invade Poland, though never carried out, offers fascinating insight into Soviet military thinking at the highest levels in response to a rapidly changing political-military situation.

On Wednesday, January 18, 2017, Dr. Richard W. Harrison will give a lecture at the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center in Carlisle, Pennsylvania based on his years of research on the Russian plan to invade Nazi-occupied Poland. He will break down the Russian plan and tie his conclusions to today's preemptive warfare theory. The lecture will open with a brief review of previous Soviet mobilization plans as they developed in 1938 and throughout World War II. The early plans were defensive in nature and tasked the Red Army, due to its slower pace of mobilization, to absorb the initial enemy attack, followed by a counterstroke to pulverize the Nazi menace. The idea of a massive counteroffensive gradually evolved into the preemptive attack plan of 1941, carrying the high command's desire to push through southeastern Poland, followed by an advance into Germany. The lecture will examine the forces allotted for the preemptive attack, the route of their projected advance, and the interplay of personalities among the plan's authors and Stalin. Dr. Harrison will conclude with a discussion of the strategy's utility and the lingering consequences of some of its component parts during the first weeks of the war.

Dr. Richard W. Harrison received his Ph.D. in War Studies from King's College London in 1994. He spent several years studying and working in the Soviet Union and Russia, specializing in the development of the Red Army's military theory between the world wars. Dr. Harrison has written two books on this subject: *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904-1940* (University Press of Kansas, 2001) and *Architect of Soviet Victory in World War II: The Life and Theories of G.S. Isserson* (McFarland & Co., 2010). He is also the translator and editor of several major studies of the Red Army's major operations during World War II.

DATE: Wednesday, January 18, 2017

TIME: Doors open at 6:30 PM and the talk begins at 7:15 PM

PLACE: USAHEC, Visitor and Education Center, Multi-Purpose Room

For updates and any last-minute changes in "Perspectives" meeting times and places, please check the USAHEC website: www.USAHEC.org or call the Information Desk: (717) 245-3972.