THE FALL AND RISE OF MARSHAL TUKHACHEVSKY

by

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Although Soviet military theory and tactics are now the subject of exhaustive study in the West, comparatively little attention is paid to the men who were most important to their development during the 1920's and 1930's. Our attention too often is so frozen on the traumatic events of Hitler's conflagration that we tend to look on the Russian Army strictly in terms of its deployment and capabilities after the German *Panzers* crossed the Bug and Dniester in the small hours of 22 June 1941. Yet one man whose ideas on warfare contributed significantly to the ultimate defeat of the Germans had been dead for four years before that massive incursion: Marshal Mikhail Nikolaevich Tukhachevsky. This article provides an introduction to the man: his career, his ideas, his downfall, and his subsequent rehabilitation.

THE MAN

Tukhachevsky was born on 15 February 1893 in Alexandrovskoe, in Smolensk Province.[1] In 1904, the family moved to the town of Vrazhenskoe and from there, in 1909, to Moscow. His early family life seems to have been similar to that of the Rostovs in *War and Peace*. The Tukhachevskys were members of Russia's impoverished nobility, but this did not prevent them from providing a cultured and happy home for their large, well-adjusted brood of children. Mikhail Nikolaevich graduated from the Alexandrovski Military Academy in 1914 and became a junior lieutenant in the Semenovski Regiment, leaving for the front in September of the same year. Five months later, he had been decorated six times for bravery. In February 1915, he was captured; after five attempts to escape, he was sent to a special detention camp at Ingolstadt (one of his fellow inmates there was a tall, aloof French captain named Charles DeGaulle). But even Fort No. 9 could not hold Lieutenant Tukhachevsky; he escaped in August 1917 and worked his way back to the Russian lines two months later.

In spite of his aristocratic background,

Tukhachevsky became an enthusiastic convert to the Bolshevik cause soon after his return, entering the party on 5 April 1918. Why would a bright, daring, and highly decorated officer of the Imperial Army turn so violently against all that had been so sacred to him, and to which he had just returned at the cost of such sufferings and personal risk? It could have been sparked by a profound disenchantment at what he found upon his return. Maybe he simply decided that the greatest opportunities for advancement and professional growth were to be found in the newly forming Red Army. Soviet political hagiographers say that the heart of the young officer was won over to the side of the toiling masses by a personal encounter he had with Lenin in 1918. While all of these motives—and probably others—played their roles in Tukhachevsky's dramatic conversion, one thing becomes obvious from the events that followed: Once he had chosen his side in the conflict, he did not waver. His loyalty to the party and to Lenin, however motivated, was absolute. And it was rewarded.

Tukhachevsky's advancement and his responsibilities snowballed with mindboggling speed. Less than three months later, on 26 June 1918, he was commanding an army which was to play an important role in the defeat of counterrevolutionist Admiral Kolchak. In April 1920—at the age of 27—he assumed command of all the armies operating on the western front against the Poles, almost capturing Warsaw. His last combat operations were the suppression of the Kronstadt and Tambov uprisings in 1921. A succession of high-level assignments followed, including his appointment as Head of the Military Academy in 1921, as Deputy Chief of Staff of the Red Army in 1925, and as Commander of the Leningrad Military District in 1928. In 1931, he became both the Deputy Minister of Defense under Voroshilov and the Chief of Ordnance. In 1935, together with Voroshilov, Budenny, Blyukher, and Yegorov, he was promoted to the newly created rank of marshal. He attended the funeral of George V in London as a representative of the Soviet Government, and he was a member of the commission that drew up the constitution of 1936.

Then, suddenly, on 11 May 1937, Tukhachevsky was demoted and made commander of the Volga Military District, an upper-level garbage detail inflicted on generals who were in Stalin's disfavor. Fifteen days later, he was arrested by the NKVD, the secret police. He was shot at dawn on the 11th or 12th of June for treason.

Understanding the reasons behind Tukhachevsky's fall requires more than a glance at his career; it requires a grasp of his character. Tukhachevsky was a many-sided genius, not afflicted with the tunnel vision that can attack *Wunderkinder* who achieve spectacular success in a given field. He spoke several languages, appreciated music, and played the violin. A keen student of literature and world affairs, he was capable of knowledgeable give-and-take with professionals in fields far removed from his own. For example, the great composer Dimitri Shostakovich was a young musician in Leningrad when Tukhachevsky became Commander of the Leningrad Military District. The two became close friends and spent many happy hours talking about things musical.[2]

Tukhachevsky was handsome, brave, young, and, in marked contrast to a number of equals and superiors, he had class. But these very qualities raised some serious problems. His superior, K. E. Voroshilov, had personal courage and could "chew out" subordinates with the gusto of a tough sergeant, but strategy and tactics left him a bit bewildered. He was able to recite how many tons of metal his modern Russian Army could drop on an enemy in one minute, but his grasp of how he was to deploy and organize and control his units and how they were to find the putative foe upon whom this metal was to be dropped, thrown, or shot was extremely tenuous.[3] It was most uncomfortable for a man like Voroshilov to have a subordinate so conspicuously brilliant as Tukhachevsky.

If Tukhachevsky had merely been a quiet

genius, he might have worked out a *modus vivendi* with his dullard of a superior. But he also had charisma and attracted to himself the bright innovative spirits of a whole generation of officers like a magnet. This made him a source of acute concern to Voroshilov's superior. When two or more were gathered together in Stalin's Russia you did not have love, you had a possible conspiracy. Furthermore, Tukhachevsky's mind was not only brilliant, it was also independent. As such, it could not be easily controlled. If it could not be controlled, it could be dangerous. And if it could be dangerous, sooner or later it would be. There was no paranoia in that line of thought, but rather an incredible level of prudence in care and retention of power.

Stalin wanted a military establishment with which he could be comfortable, a docile instrument of his will that would do his bidding and with which he would not have to negotiate in order to attain his objectives. If he lost some talent in the pruning, it was a small price to pay: Talent was expendable; peace of mind, precious. Nor, as the years passed, did Tukhachevsky help his cause by his public statements. His thoughts were those of a concerned professional worried about the awesome capabilities of Germany's emerging military, but they were not perceived as such by the Arch Conspirator. Stalin well knew how to organize a conspiracy and could only think how he would be using such rhetoric. Thus, Tukhachevsky's very talents as a military thinker and observer conspired to damn him in Stalin's eyes.[4] And, as we shall see, Stalin hatched one of his most elaborate plots to ruin the marshal and his associates.

HIS IDEAS AND INTERESTS

The developing Red Army is a factor which must be reckoned with. To have it as a friend can only be counted an advantage. Already now it is for Poland an opponent to be reckoned with.

—General Werner von Blomberg, 1928

Much of what we see in the Soviet Army of today is the embodiment of ideas and dreams that were envisioned and field tested by Tukhachevsky almost 50 years ago. The vehicles have more horsepower, the gunnery is more accurate, and the ordnance is more lethal, but the basic ideas and tactics have not changed much. To say that all Russian military thought before and after Tukhachevsky was a blank page would, of course, be a gross overstatement. Colonel Savkin, in his classic work on tactics, gives a long list of historical precedents, both European and Russian, of two basic field tactics: concentration of forces and concentration of fire.[5] The ideas of moving swiftly, of striking with overwhelming numbers at a selected point in the enemy's line, and of wreaking havoc in the rear are not new. Suvorov used such ploys to brilliant effect two centuries ago. Nor is the massed concentration of artillery on particular enemy locations at critical junctures in a battle a new development. The Russians have had a long and proud tradition in the art of the cannonade, both for counterbattery and for support or interdiction purposes.

The traditions of swift decisive engagement, of overwhelming assault, and of all-obliterating firepower were part of Russian military lore long before Lieutenant Tukhachevsky marched off to the glory of the Czar. Yet in one of his first articles he spoke out against the use of Czarist officers in the command of Red Army units. It was not the matter of their questionable loyalty that concerned him so much as a feeling that the old school officer was so hopelessly out of

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step with the new type of warfare that was being waged that he and his profession had nothing to offer the revolution.

Much of this repudiation of past ties and training can be explained by the arrogance of Tukhachevsky's youth and by his equally youthful enthusiasm for his cause. But there were other reasons for such an attitude. To begin with, there had to be a feeling of profound disenchantment over the conflict between the tactics he had studied and those he saw actually employed. The differences between glorious past and ignominious present came to a disgraceful climax by 1918, when the war degenerated into a muddy, congealed *Sitzkrieg*, with tactics becoming irrelevant. It is hardly surprising to find that the veterans of both World War I and the revolution felt that they had discovered an entirely new species of warfare. The weapons had not changed during the revolution; in many areas, they were more primitive. But the revolution involved no trenches or forts or national boundaries. It was a war of movement, of isolated clashes, with the troops of both sides dispersing rapidly and reforming equally swiftly to strike somewhere else. Territory was something you passed over in order to close with or disengage from the enemy; it no longer was something you dug into like a worm and defended from holes.

Another change of attitude that was to remain with Tukhachevsky for years to come was the matter of the common soldier's motivation. Previous wars had been fought for the glory of one nation or ruler over another. But this was not so with those waged by the Red Army. For the rest of his days, Tukhachevsky saw the army as the cutting edge of the revolution, a legitimate and effective means of spreading the new gospel and its shield against all its enemies. The use of the army as a servant in the service of the revolution was to remain an axiom of Tukhachevsky's philosophy of the role of the army in Soviet Russia and the basis for his justification of that role. This was to remain a leitmotif in all his writings, down to and including his "Pamphlet for the Red Army Soldier on Maneuvers."[6]

Before waving this holy crusader appeal aside as a timeworn gimmick for inspiring the naive, it would be well to take a look at some very basic principles of Soviet military science—especially as they pertain to offense vis-à-vis defense. Soviet Army doctrine emphasizes the former and continually hammers home the dictum, "Decisive victory is achieved by offensive action only."[7] The defense, on the other hand:

> . . . is only a temporary expedient . . . employed locally while on the offensive in other sectors, or during consolidation after taking an important objective, to gain time, cover a withdrawal, or repel an attack by superior enemy force.[8]

Such emphasis on aggressive action, on bringing the war to the enemy, takes on added cogency when we realize that this is not intended to be a purely operational matter, but a manner of conducting a holy war. One does not win converts or overthrow systems by sitting in a bunker, and as Tukhachevsky continually observed, the army is part of the Soviet system and should reflect its goals and its spirit.

As a matter of fact, the young men who saw in their civil war experiences a foretaste of the future were correct, and the importance of this basic orientation should not be underestimated. While the Americans retreated behind their oceans to *Festung Amerika* and immersed themselves in the frivolities of the 20's, and while the French were digging bigger and better holes for their Maginot Line, the Russians were thinking in terms of mobile warfare, of defense in depth, and of command and control of units moving at great speed over vast areas.

Two aspects of Tukhachevsky's military development were completed by 1922. His formal training was long since over, and the practical experiences of foreign and civil conflict had come to an end. What remained was to digest this experience and to

apply it to oncoming technological and political developments. He achieved this brilliantly because his own insights were abetted by two ideal situations that interacted and reinforced each other during the decade that followed: the secret military collaboration of the Germans with the Soviets and the imaginative brainstorming of a group of bright young Red Army generals.

The first matter was a remarkable military symbiosis that lasted for almost 10 years. The Germans had a reservoir of technical know-how, but needed places to test and evaluate their ideas and equipment away from the prying eyes of the League of Nations' Disarmament Committee. The Russians, on their part, were eager to see how their own ideas of mobile warfare would appear when hitched to the wheels and wings that German technology was capable of providing. The diplomatic groundwork was laid by the Treaty of Rapallo, signed by Germany and the USSR in April 1922. Four months later, the nature and the extent of the collaboration between the two countries was specified in a second formal agreement:

> The *Reichswehr* asked for facilities to gain continuous experience in tactics, training and technical matters, to develop the theory and practice of forbidden weapons, to train higher personnel in the use of such weapons, to carry on weapon testing in battle conditions as an extension of the experiments in Germany, and finally to develop theoretical conclusions from such tests which would assist the planning of training and recruitment policies. Specifically there were three requests to be made of the Red Army. The first was for the use of military bases to exercise aviation, motorized troops and chemical warfare techniques. The second concerned freedom of action to conduct weapon tests and carry on tactical training. Thirdly the *Reichswehr* asked for a full exchange of the results of work in the military field. Soviet agreement to this was forthcoming, receiving in exchange an annual financial payment for the lease of these bases, as well as full participation in the technical, tactical and theoretical results gained in the tests and training on the Soviet sites.[9]

The eventual result of these negotiations was the establishment of three cooperative ventures: an aviation school at Lipetsk, a gas school at Volsk, and a tank school near Kazan on the River Kama. By 1928 or 1929, all were organized and operational. Officer-observer exchanges had been going on for some time, and by autumn of 1928, General Werner von Blomberg was visiting all three installations and observing the Red Army's exercises. The report he submitted was 54 pages long and is interesting both for its personal and for its technical insights.[10] In retrospect, the armored and the aviation schools were the most significant. It was at Kazan that the *Reich's* "light tractors" were tested and run against comparable French and English models on the proving grounds. It was also here that both Russian and German officers were introduced to handling tanks, both as pieces of equipment and on a unit basis.

There is a temptation to think that the Russian contribution was restricted to providing grounds and hospitality, but the Germans themselves felt otherwise. Erickson paraphrases Blomberg's opinion of the benefits accruing to the Germans:

> The German Army could learn from the Red Army in matters concerning troop equipment, engineers (especially pontoons), military aviation, chemical weapons, propaganda techniques, the organization of defense against aerial attack for the civilian population, and the mobilisation [*sic*] of the population for defense purposes.[11]

Some of these benefits are obvious, but others appear to smack of wishful thinking. What, for example, did the sons of the Red Baron have to learn from the Russians concerning aviation? Yet, while the Russians had little to offer in the way of equipment, they did have some interesting ideas on its use. The artillery had retained its special

place in the hearts of the Russians, and their immediate response to the idea of tactical aviation was that the airplane was essentially a very maneuverable aerial platform capable of dropping or firing explosives with deadly effect. When coordinated with conventional fires and with the shock effect of armor, the results should be devastating.

The Germans were not slow to absorb this idea and to develop a few tricks of their own. The most innovative of the nine types of aircraft they tested exhaustively at Lipetsk was the Junkers K-47, a ground assault plane designed to work closely with advancing infantry and armored units. After additional testing and redesigning in Germany, the K-47 emerged from its chrysalis as the Ju87 Stuka; it would subsequently rain death and havoc on the bewildered foe in Spain, in Poland, and in France.

Tukhachevsky, on his part, learned quickly from Russia's Teutonic guests and used their insights and expertise to seed his own fertile imagination. The advantages he saw about him were obvious: Speed, firepower, and maneuver capability were taking quantum leaps before his eyes. But the problems were growing apace: supply, training, communications, and organization, to name a few. How was one to avoid overdependence on one weapon, like the tank or the airplane, and still allow for the maximum exploitation of its unique advantages? How were the armored and mechanized units to retain their integrity and avoid being used as an escort service for the plodding infantry? How could the Soviet Union train its soldiers well enough to use this sophisticated weaponry intelligently and still avoid creating an elite of military technicians, which would be abhorrent in a classless society?

Although the tactical and theoretical problems were serious, the possiblities were exciting and stimulated the imaginations of the Soviet Union's best and brightest. Some of the young men immersed themselves in the possibilities of one particular branch or weapons system: Ya. I. Alksnis was a top pilot who took over the Red Air Force in 1931; A. Sedyakin was the artillery specialist; and I. Khalepsky, the Chief of the Mechanization and Motorization Administration, was the recognized expert in armor. Chief among the commanders who spread these new ideas among their staffs and subordinates were A. I. Kork of the Leningrad and Moscow Military Districts, I. P. Uborevich of the Byelorussian Military District, and I. E. Yakir, who headed the Kiev Military District. The dissemination of the doctrine outside of the military was handled by R. P. Eideman, who was in charge of *Osoviakhim* (a Russian acronym standing for Society of Associates for Aviation and Chemical Defense), the Soviet civil defense organization.[12]

The creation of the Soviet airborne forces is a good example of how these men interacted and cooperated. Tukhachevsky is usually given credit as the driving force behind the units' creation, and rightly so, but his success was the result of a team effort. The first inspiration came from an air force officer who had seen a daredevil parachutist performing at Roosevelt Field, Long Island. The possible military uses for such a skill percolated in his brain, and when he returned, he suggested to Alksnis that using parachutes to drop soldiers from airplanes just might add another dimension to both the army and the air force. The idea of wedding the infantry to the airplane was the sort of thinking that appealed to Tukhachevsky, and he set wheels turning within the military and without. Eideman's *Osoviakhim* organization soon included parachute training for boys and girls among its activities, and by 1929, the first airborne units had been formed. These troops participated in the large-scale maneuvers that started in 1931, and, true to the spirit of collaboration, they were observed with great interest by their German visitors. One of these guests was Major Kurt Student, who would be the founder of Germany's *Fallschirmjägers* five years later. By 1935, the Soviet airborne units were no longer small-scale curiosities. More than 5000 men, along with equipment and supplies, were dropped during the exercises held in Yakir's Kiev

Military District. The foreign observers, which this time included French, Czech, and Italian officers, were impressed.[13]

Besides developing new types of units, such as the armored and the airborne, that could perform unique missions, Tukhachevsky also had to rethink and reevaluate the roles of the traditional branches in this new style of warfare. One such branch to which he devoted particular attention was the cavalry. Once the most glamorous of the services, the flashing sabers of the bushy-faced dragoons did not strike much terror in the hearts of a tank crew. The earthshaking spectacle of the massed cavalry charge became a spectacle of another sort when conducted before a few well-positioned machine guns.

Some of the cavalry's traditional missions were indeed passé or were being assumed by the newer entities. Yet Tukhachevsky still saw a vitally important use for the cavalryman's tradition of élan, of speed, and of resourcefulness. This romantic anachronism was put on wheels and assigned the critical missions of reconnaissance and flank protection in support of the tactics of deep penetration and rapid encirclement. One of the talented middle-grade officers who immersed himself in the organization and control of these highly mobile operations was Georgi Zhukov, who completed his study at the Frunze Academy in 1931. By 1934, he was commanding the Fourth Cavalry Division, a show unit in the Red Army, and was conducting his own experiments in combined operations with armored units.[14]

Nor did Tukhachevsky neglect the other side of the coin, defense. He was only too aware of the men and materiel becoming available to his genial collaborators. What would happen if the Nazis decided to propagate some of their philosophy against the Russians? By 1932, Tukhachevsky had a pretty good idea of the sort of defense that would be needed. In many ways it would mirror the offense, emphasizing speed, firepower, aggressive spirit, and defense in depth—thus frustrating the very tactics of envelopment that he and the Germans had been rehearsing. Although there was to be no return to the old fixed defenses of the past (his exercises had shown the sort of shooting galleries these positions could turn into when they confronted a mobile striking force), fortifications and defense belts did have an important place in his scheme. They were to channel the enemy's armor into "kill zones" or areas where its mobility and firepower would be degraded. With the defense, as with the offense, the key to success was the timely use of mobile firepower, coupled with an offensive spirit and the proper use of armored reserves to butcher the forces that had blundered into the kill zones.[15]

All of this brought Tukhachevsky back to a fundamental problem that was rapidly assuming the aspect of a dilemma. Ideologically, the army of the Soviet Union was to be one with the working class, not a group set apart. As early as 1920, Trotsky, then the Minister of War, was suggesting that the army as such be done away with and that a militia type of defense be introduced in its place. Yet it was painfully obvious to Tukhachevsky that it would be criminally negligent to bury the capabilities of the mechanized units under the plodding bulk of old-style foot soldiers and to entrust the defense of the socialist motherland to the naive battle skills of a horde of *muzhiks* with scythes and workers with sledgehammers. However, as we have noted, there remained a strong aversion to the creation of a separate class of warriors who were too skilled in these new military arts. *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes*?

The problem was resolved, at least provisionally, by the creation of two Red Armies: a regular component, which provided the mass and the live contact with Soviet society, and the shock army, which was manned by thorough professionals. These soldiers, selected and trained in the new equipment and tactics, would thus be free to employ their awesome capabilities to the limit their wits and imagination allowed.[16] This also allowed planners to focus on specific

problems in the transportation, supply, and communication requirements proper to such entities. Eventually, as the vehicles and equipment became more numerous and the general population grew more sophisticated in things mechanical, it was hoped that the gaps between these two components would lessen and eventually disappear.

HIS FALL

The Tukhachevsky affair created a sensation on the Continent in 1937 and was a web of plots and counterplots involving the secret services of at least four countries: Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and France. Several sources point out that in December of 1936 Reinhard Heydrich, the head of Himmler's *Sicherheitsdienst*, was visited by General Nicholas Skoblin. This gentlemen, a White Russian general in exile, told Heydrich that he had information on Tukhachevsky which, if used properly, could destroy the man. Heydrich was enthralled at the prospect of such a coup and conferred with Erich Jahnke, who was an old hand at intelligence. Jahnke was suspicious; he warned Heydrich that Stalin could be using others to do his dirty work for him: If Stalin wanted to discredit Tukhachevsky and his associates, he could fabricate a much more plausible case if the evidence came from abroad. In other words, Skoblin could be a double agent working for the NKVD; if so, did Heydrich really want to be dabbling in the Byzantine intrigues of Stalin's court?

Captain Jahnke's perceptiveness was almost clairvoyant in its accuracy, but admonitions for caution only whetted Heydrich's appetite. If Stalin was about to decapitate his armed forces, Germany would be only too happy to render him all possible assistance. And, what was possibly even more important, Heydrich had his own fish to fry with his brethren in the *Wehrmacht*. His *SS* intelligence service had experienced astounding growth since its inception in 1931, but in many ways it was still the new kid on the block: small, inexperienced, and vulnerable. Heydrich's dream was to create an organization that could compare favorably with the world's other great secret services, like the Russian NKVD, or the German Army's *Abwehr*. And one sure way of putting the German Army and its various departments on the defensive would be to implicate them, even by association, in a foreign military *putsch*. So this was not just the matter of engineering the destruction of a Russian military genius; it was a golden opportunity to discredit the German officers who had been associated with him during those years of German-Russian collaboration. Jahnke was rewarded with 30 days of house arrest for his expertise, and Heydrich moved on.

Signatures were forged; documents were altered; and Schellenberg, one of Heydrich's right-hand men, even wrote an incriminating letter in Tukhachevsky's style and hand to lend a personal touch. Andre Brissaud describes the pipeline that delivered this lethal dossier to Stalin's eager hands:

> A German emigré who lived in Prague and worked under the orders of S.S. Colonel Böhme put the last [*sic*] in touch with a friend and confidant of Dr. Benes to whom he confided that a certain Alfred Naujocks in Berlin was ready to sell the Soviets a dossier which would destroy Marshal Tukhachevsky. President Benes, already alerted to the scent, fell into the new trap and told Stalin in a personal letter.
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> The response from the Kremlin was immediate. Two of Iezhov's agents came to Prague, made contact with Böhme and went to Berlin where Naujocks, forewarned, awaited them. Three million gold roubles in banknotes and the Tukhachevsky dossier changed hands.[17]

Benes was probably acting in good faith, for information from several other sources corroborated the material in the dossier. Prompted by Heydrich, Von Weizsacker, the Under-Secretary of State at the *Reich* Ministry for Foreign Affairs, had dropped the idea to the Czech Ambassador that relations between Prague and Moscow could change if the Tukhachevsky group took

over.[18] In his memoirs, Benes refers to a similar slip by Trautsmannsdorff, another German diplomat, with whom he personally had been in contact.[19] Another NKVD agent, Nikolas Alexeiev, arranged to have himself caught by the French and, during the course of his confession, intimated that Tukhachevsky was collaborating with the Nazis.[20] Meanwhile, Stalin and his prosecutor, Vyshinsky, were staging their own preparations by arranging for Tukhachevsky's name to be dropped—innocently but repeatedly—during the course of the first of their great show trials, in which the principal defendants were K. B. Radek, G. L. Pyatakov, N. I. Muralov, L. P. Serebryakov, and G. Ya. Sokol'nikov.[21]

When the fruits of this complicated scheme were presented with proper denunciations to Voroshilov in the Ministry of Defense, the very military organization that would otherwise have closed ranks in Tukhachevsky's defense was called upon to provide his prosecutors, his judges, and his executioners. A special military tribunal of the Supreme Court was convened. By 11 June 1937, it had completed its deliberations, and Voroshilov's order of the day for 12 June indicated that Tukhachevsky, I. P. Uborevich, I. E. Yakir, R. P. Eideman, A. I. Kork, V. M. Primakov, and V. K. Putna had been executed at dawn of that day.[22]

These executions opened the floodgates of a purge that would continue into 1941, sweeping away the upper ranks of the military and engulfing the middle and lower levels with fear and suspicion. Although the senior ranks experienced the most severe losses in terms of percentages (11 of 13 army commanders were shot, as were 57 of the 85 corps commanders and 110 of the 195 division commanders), the numerical bulk of the victims came from subordinates unfortunate enough to be on the wrong staff or performing the wrong mission. Estimates of the total losses created by this mass bloodletting range from 15,000 to 30,000 officers, depending upon the dates used and the figures available.[23]

The total suffering caused by this catastrophe extended far beyond the names permanently erased from the Soviet order of battle. One Russian source gives us the following description of how Tukhachevsky's arrest affected his family. The narrative begins after Tukhachevsky's wife, Nina, had accompanied him to Kuybyshev, where he was to assume command of the Volga Military District:

> Soon after his arrival, he attended a meeting of the political workers of the Volga Military District. One of the commanders who had known Tukhachevsky before remarked that the marshal had turned grey within a period of about two months. At the meeting he seemed very tired but, as usual, spoke clearly and to the point about their missions in military training and the work that lay ahead of them.
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> Nina Yevgen'evna waited up for him for a long time, but he did not return. Then Pavel Yefimovich Dybenko,[24] his face a deathly white, came and told her that Mikhail Nikolaevich had been arrested.
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> Nina Yevgen'evna returned to Moscow. Soon she and Mikhail Nikolaevich's mother and sisters and brothers—Alexander and Nikolai—were also arrested.
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> Marshal Tukhachevsky's wife . . . and his brothers . . . were subsequently killed ['physically annihilated' is the literal translation of the Russian] on Stalin's orders. The three sisters were sent off to labor camps and his daughter, who was under age, was also arrested when she attained her majority. His mother and a sister died in exile.[25]

Throughout the vast reaches of the Soviet Union, the suffering compounded itself in similar fashion. The families, the friends, and the colleagues of the condemned either joined them in oblivion or sat with faces frozen in mute resignation, waiting for the summons that could arrive at any moment.

HIS REHABILITATION

I had known Tukhachevsky slightly and used to meet with him when I worked as First Secretary of the Moscow City and Regional committees. We used to talk on the telephone and see each other at plenums. He

occasionally took me out into the field to show me some new weapon or new piece of engineering equipment. He had a deep understanding of military innovations and a high regard for them. I'm convinced that if he hadn't been executed, our army would have been much better trained and better equipped when Hitler attacked.

—Nikita Khrushchev[26]

Although Khrushchev denounced the purges of the 30's in his secret speech at the 20th Party Congress in February 1956, it takes time for the effects of being a nonperson to dissipate. Tukhachevsky and the other two marshals who disappeared later in the same purge, Blyukher and Yegorov, were not mentioned at all in the 1956 edition of the *Soviet Encyclopedia*. Voroshilov, by comparison, had an extremely flattering full-page portrait, with 3 pages of text followed by 10 more pages of text and pictures describing the two cities and the district named after him. The extended selections of the 1972 work by Colonel Savkin, *The Basic Principles of Operational Art and Tactics*, which are used by the Command and General Staff College in its lesson on the Soviet Army make no mention of Tukhachevsky but contain profuse examples of the contributions of A. Suvorov, Kutuzov, and Lenin to Soviet tactics.

But the process has indeed begun. As this article was being prepared, the new edition of the *Soviet Encyclopedia* had not yet moved far enough into the T's to consider Tukhachevsky, but since 1963 a substantial collection of literature on him has appeared, especially from the military and political publishing houses.[27] Writers and poets are even joining in: A novel based on his life appeared in 1967, and a poem to him is included in another treatment on his life. Koritsky's biography is perhaps the most solid indication of Tukhachevsky's new stature. Besides including the articles by his sisters and Dimitri Shostakovich, the book also contains testimonials signed by several general officers and by Marshal Kiril Meretskov.

But Soviet biographies tend to gloss over the critical role played by Stalin in this tragedy. They make Heydrich the evil genius who concocted the plot, who staged the charade in Germany and Czechoslovakia, and who foisted the entire package on a gullible Stalin, who overreacted. If Stalin is criticized, it is for having allowed his cult of personality to blind him to the machinations of these Nazi plotters.

While such a scenario may salve some consciences, it also belies the shrewdness of Stalin. He may have been many things to many people, but heretofore no one—not even Trotsky—has ever accused him of being an impressionable lamb in the forest of intrigue. It would seem that if anyone was "had" in this sordid mess, it was Voroshilov. After filtering out the personal bitterness towards Stalin that pervades Trotsky's writing, his analysis of the situation rings far truer:

> The military machine is very exacting and voracious and does not easily endure the limitations imposed upon it by politicians, by civilians. Foreseeing the possibility of conflicts with that powerful machine in the future, Stalin decided to put Voroshilov in his place before he began to get out of hand. Through the OGPU [a former Soviet secret service organization], i.e., through Yezhov, Stalin prepared the extermination of Voroshilov's closest collaborators behind his back and without his knowledge, and at the last moment confronted him with the necessity to choose. Thus trapped by Stalin's apprehensiveness and disloyalty, Voroshilov collaborated in the extermination of the flower of the commanding staff and ever after was doomed to cut a sorry and impotent figure incapable of ever opposing Stalin. Stalin is a past master of the art of tying a man to him not by winning his admiration but by forcing him into complicity in heinous and unforgivable crimes. Such are the bricks of the pyramid of which Stalin is the peak.[28]

One lament that continually appears in Soviet books and articles on Tukhachevsky is what might have been if he had not been struck down in his prime. Their western defensive system might have

been completed. They might have avoided the debacle in Finland. The German invasion might have been blunted much sooner—or it might never have occurred. And so on.

Yet all this is what an anonymous scholar has irreverently called the Jean Dixon school of history—an utterly useless pastime, which normally does no great harm. But in Tukhachevsky's case it is particularly unfortunate, because it clouds our appreciation of the very real contributions he made. As World War II dragged on, the battle-hardened leadership returned to and expanded on his ideas, even when they still did not dare mention his name. The great encirclements at Stalingrad, the defensive belts that were waiting for the Germans at Kursk, and the artillery barrages before Berlin were all pages torn from his textbooks. Tukhachevsky was a part of Russian military tradition long before he was officially rehabilitated. Now he is part of its history as well.

NOTES

1. The information in this section has been extracted from John Erickson, *The Soviet High Command* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962), pp. 844-45; and *Marshal Tukhachevskiy, vospominania druzei i soratnikov*, compiled by N. I. Koritsky (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1965), pp. 231-34.

2. Koritsky, pp. 158-61.

3. See Erickson, pp. 510-11, for the author's comments on Voroshilov's report to the 18th Party Congress in 1938. The entire report was basically quantitative, one of the statistics proudly emphasized being: "The firepower . . . a Soviet rifle corps could produce by its artillery volley [is] 65 tons of metal per minute."

4. It is interesting that the Germans themselves have had an "if-there's-smoke-there-must-be-fire" attitude about Tukhachevsky's possible complicity in a plot to overthrow Stalin. In 1939, Agricola concluded that he must have been guilty, and the general bias continues to be found in more contemporary authors; for example, see Walter Goerlitz, *History of the German General Staff* (New York: Praeger, 1961), p. 308.

5. V. Ye. Savkin, *The Basic Principles of Operational Art and Tactics* (Moscow: [n.p.], 1972). The materials used for this article have been taken from the selections from Savkin's work used in the Command and General Staff College Subcourse 7/7, lesson 6: "Soviet Army Organization, Philosophy and Principles."

6. This pamphlet is included in the collected works of Tukhachevsky that were published in two volumes in 1964 by the Military Publishing House, Moscow.

7. US Army Command and General Staff College, *The Enemy Force*, RB 30-1, 1 July 1975, p. 2-3.

8. US Department of the Army, *Handbook on Soviet Ground Forces*, Field Manual 30-40 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1975), pp. 5-15.

9. Erickson, p. 155. This source has two chapters on this episode that are extremely well researched and documented: chapter 6, pp. 144-63; and chapter 9, pp. 247-82. A well written, more anecdotal account of the Lipetsk venture can be found in Herbert Molloy Mason, Jr., *The Rise of the Luftwaffe* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975), pp. 140-57.

10. Erickson, pp. 263-66.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 268.

12. *Osoviakhim* was no small undertaking. By 1927 it had close to 3 million members. See Erickson, p. 307.

13. The reactions were strong but not uniformly positive. Maysky, the Soviet Ambassador to Great Britain in the 30's, writes that a film he showed of the 1935 parachute drops evoked a lively discussion and argument among the British military. General Knox, a former attaché to Admiral Kolchak, is supposed to have remarked that the film confirmed his belief that the Russians were a nation of dreamers. See Koritsky, p. 229.

14. Erickson, pp. 352-53.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 406-07.

16. This refusal to dilute the mechanized units was one of those very basic decisions that sealed the fate of some countries in a few short years. General Douglas MacArthur, who was Chief of Staff during those years, also said that "tanks, planes, submarines will be the decisive weapons in the next war." How his subsequent words and actions altered that thrust are described by Richard Rovere and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in their book, *The General and the President* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Young, 1951), pp. 33-34 [subsequently published as *The MacArthur Controversy and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1965)]. The basic attitude they cite is most significant. Besides moving toward mechanization with all deliberate speed, the whole process was looked upon as one of finding motorized substitutes for the horse—like having a cavalry charge on motorcycles. The fact that mechanized units have unique capabilities of their own to be exploited and developed apparently escaped both MacArthur and the American Army. We can only be thankful that we did not share a border with Germany.

17. Andre Brissaud, *The Nazi Secret Service* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1974), p. 164.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

19. Erickson, p. 732.

20. Brissaud, pp. 162-63.

21. For the text of the pertinent questions addressed to Radek, see Erickson, p. 449.

22. This version has been taken from Erickson, p. 463. A Soviet source (Koritsky, p. 234) gives 11 June as the date of the execution and includes Feldman among the victims. There are other serious problems about the type of trial they had—if, indeed, there was a trial at all. See Erickson, pp. 462-64, and pp. 736-38, nn. 47-49.

23. The figures here have been taken from Erickson, pp. 503-04.

24. Dybenko was a general who would himself be executed the following year.

25. Lev Nikulin, *Tukhachevskiy, biograficheskiy ocherk* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1964), pp. 190-91. The translation is my own. There are other conflicting accounts of the fate of Tukhachevsky's family. See, for example, Erickson, p. 463, n.

26. Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, trans. and ed. Strobe Talbott (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), p. 86.

27. Besides Koritsky's anthology and Nikulin's biography, already cited, and Rakovsky's novel *Mikhail Tukhachevsky*, which was published in Leningrad in 1967, two other interesting works are: A. S. Popov, *Trud, Talant, Doblest'* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1972); and A. I. Todorsky, *Marshal Tukhachevskiy* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1963).

28. Leon Trotsky, *Stalin* (New York: Stein and Day, 1967), p. 421.