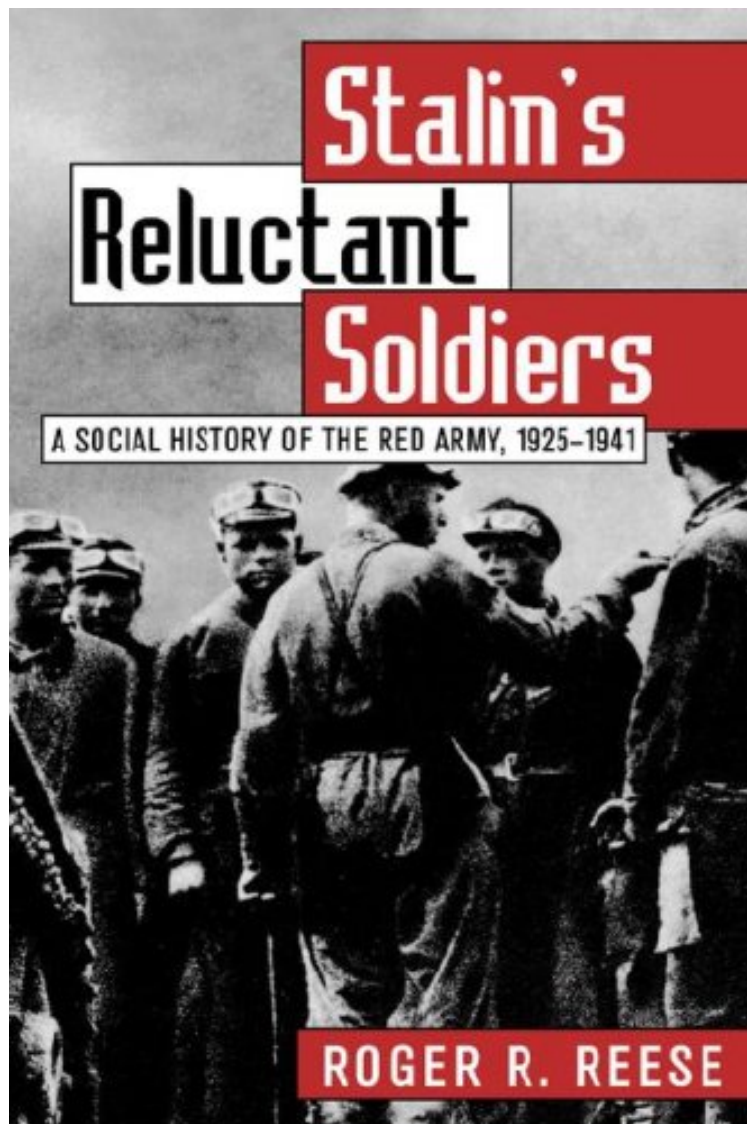


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Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers: A Social History of the Red Army, 1925-1941 (Modern War Studies (Hardcover))

Roger R. Reese

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Roger R. Reese : Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers: A Social History of the Red Army, 1925-1941 (Modern War Studies (Hardcover)) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers: A Social History of the Red Army, 1925-1941 (Modern War Studies (Hardcover)):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. TruthBy MagnitudeThis book was illuminating. Reese's research,

based on many Russian-language sources, seems robust. It was just dragged down a bit by the dry writing. The author says that this is based on his dissertation research, and the method may be in the foreground. In brief, the major revelation is simple. Many problems (if not all of them) in the Soviet army in the pre-WWII time period have one major cause: expansion. Reese gives us some insights on daily life for soldiers, the political aspects of the time, and focuses a major portion of this study (about two-thirds) on the officer corps. Soldiers spent little time in training, because they were forced to do things due to the army's expansion such as build barracks and help bring in the crops in nearby collectives. The most surprising aspect, and perhaps a great myth-busting bit of research, is that the impact of the purge was small: As little as 3.7% of the officers of the time may have been affected, and many of those that were were simply dismissed from the service. This is not to be kind to the Stalinist regime, but rather gives the officer purge some perspective. The real problem with the Soviet officer corps was that (again due to expansion) many officers were poorly trained and put in higher-level commands for which they had little or no training. Throughout, an ongoing theme is that the Soviet army of this time was a reflection of its society. This is often overlooked by military history buffs. In brief, the Soviet army was focused on rapid industrialization and collectivization. These drives may have helped the USSR modernize and prepare for the war, but the rapidity and brutality of these efforts caused resentment in the peasants, who formed the bulk of the soldiery. As a result, there were discipline problems, and it was difficult to keep young men interested in the military when they could earn more in a factory. So, the army was losing men at the same time it was expanding. Reese traces these trends well. If you're interested in the Soviet army and how it fared in the early years of Barbarossa, you'll get a lot out of this book, as I did. It tends to focus on training and recruitment, so it takes some dedication to get through. Those who do will be rewarded. The writing style reminds me of the typical American historians of the modern period, trained and untrained (especially from the University of Kansas Press, so like David Glantz and Dennis Showalter). The "just-the-facts" style certainly works, but it lacks the color, nuance, and page-turning interest of the much more literary and epic-minded British historians (Ian Kershaw, Richard Evans, Chris Clark, Norman Stone, and on and on). The American journalist-historians also write better, and so do those of the American Civil War, for example. In any event, be prepared for factual but sometimes dull prose here. Nevertheless, Reese's insightful research, from primary and secondary Russian-language sources, shines through, enlivening this rookie effort. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Glimpses of the Truth at Last By Stephen M. St Onge For a long time, there's been a myth about the Red Army. Supposedly, the Red Army was incredibly advanced until about 1937, when Stalin destroyed the High Command. This is mostly a myth. The weaknesses and strengths of the Red Army were organic to it, and stemmed partly from the old Imperial Russian Army, and partly from the Red Army's history as it developed during the Civil War, partly from the nature of Soviet society and the Czarist society that preceded it. Reese looks at the Red Army as it really was. How was it formed, who were its soldiers, how was it trained, who decided on promotions, what was the military doctrine and how did it originate? Reese digs into the facts, showing how the "peasant base" of the rank and file, and the Russian Civil War background of the officers shaped the structure, doctrine, and performance of the pre-German invasion Red Army. It's full of insights into the real conditions within the Red Army, how the Army and the society influenced each other, why the Red Army took the path it did, and how the nature of the army contributed to its defeat by the Germans. Reese especially highlights the problems caused by lack of training, rapid expansion, and the inherent difficulties of trying, in Stalin's words, to catch up in ten years when you were a century behind. Reese also takes a hard look at the Soviet soldiers' disaffection with the Stalinist regime over the horrors of collectivization, which left many soldiers indifferent to the fate of the USSR. My highest recommendation for those interested in this subject at all. 6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. an excellent overview of the pre-war Red Army By 1. Reese does a magnificent job at describing the poor state of the Red Army before the Second World War. According to Reese the main reason for the defeats that the Red Army suffered during the opening phases of the Second World War was due to the lack of training prior to the German attack. Soldiers spent more time working in factories or collective farms rather than training for war. To make matters worse the huge expansion of the army according to Reese left a huge shortage of junior officers and NCOs to train the new recruits. Stalin only exacerbated the situation by abolishing the national guard in order to spend money on the new recruits, this only led to a lack of any reserve units in case of an emergency. Due to the above mentioned factors, Reese concludes that the Red Army suffered massive defeats during the opening phases of the Second World War. I would highly recommend this book for anyone who wants to understand why the Russian army performed so poorly at the outset of World War II.

Under Joseph Stalin's iron-fisted rule, the Soviet state tried to forge an army that would be both a shining example of proletarian power and an indomitable deterrent against fascist aggression. In reality, Roger Reese reveals, Stalin's grand military experiment failed miserably on both counts before it was finally rescued within the crucible of war. Reese greatly expands our understanding of the Red Army's evolution during the 1930s and its near decimation at the beginning of World War II. Counter to conventional views, he argues that the Stalinist state largely failed in its attempt to use military service as a means to indoctrinate its citizens, especially the peasantry. After 1928, the regime's recruits became increasingly disenchanted with Stalin's socialist enterprise—primarily due to the disheartening

changes brought on by collectivization and dekulakization. In effect, these reluctant soldiers turned their backs on both the army and Communist Party leadership, neither of which regained credibility until after World War II. The soldiers' alienation and hostility, Reese demonstrates, was most clearly manifested in the highly volatile tensions between officers and peasant recruits following the military's chaotic expansion during the 1930s. Those tensions and numerous internal conflicts greatly undermined the regime's effort to create a well-trained, cohesive, and politically indoctrinated army. In place of this ideal, the regime stumbled along with a disunited and ineffective fighting force guided by outdated doctrines and led by an undeveloped officer corps. All of those elements made the Soviet Union particularly vulnerable to the devastating military disasters of 1941. Along the way, Reese persuasively dispels a number of myths. He shows, for example, that the Red Army's humiliating defeats at the start of the war were not, as many still believe, due to Stalin's bloody purges of the officer corps during the 1930s nor to overwhelming German military and economic superiority. Stalin, Reese argues, was only one of many key influences on the Soviet's disorganized effort to field an effective fighting force. And, while the Red Army was actually technologically superior to the Wehrmacht, the Germans made far better strategic and tactical use of their forces to overwhelm the poorly led Soviets. A fascinating portrait of an army at war with itself, Reese's study illuminates the daily lives of soldiers, officers, and civilians and forever changes the way we look at the relation between political motives and military needs in the early Soviet state.

From Publishers Weekly
In June 1941, the Soviet Army was the largest in the world and had a huge supply of advanced mechanical equipment. Yet within a few months, it would be all but destroyed by a numerically inferior Wehrmacht, suffering over 5,000,000 casualties and prisoners. What happened? Conventional wisdom and studies blame the infamous purges of high level military officers of 1937-38, as well as Stalin's intransigence in tactical and strategic matters. Reese's unique study, however, starts from the bottom up. He shows how this huge crowd of conscripts, mostly semiliterate peasants and largely disaffected, were closer to a rabble than an army. With recently released statistics, he shows how most of the army members who were technically trained to employ and maintain the new equipment had been drafted back into Stalin's industrial expansion efforts. Another interesting sidelight is Stalin's dissolution in 1935 of the territorial (part-time reserve) forces. These could have filled gaps in the undermanned regulars (often only 40%-60% of authorized strength) and possibly helped to stem the German tide. This thoughtful and well-written work is full of detail and statistics not found elsewhere. It is an intriguing study and a fast read for both the scholar and the layperson. Photos not seen by PW. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. "A fresh, appealing, and accurate portrait of the prewar Red Army and a fine contribution to Soviet social and military history."—David M. Glantz, coauthor of *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* "An original, persuasive, and important contribution to our understanding of Soviet society."—Mark Von Hagen, author of *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the Soviet-Socialist State, 1917–1930* "A very provocative and engaging book that will play a significant intellectual role among scholars of the USSR, civil-military relations, and military history."—William J. Chase, author of *Workers, Society, and the Soviet State: Labor and Life in Moscow, 1918–1929* From the Back Cover "A fresh, appealing, and accurate portrait of the prewar Red Army and a fine contribution to Soviet social and military history."--David M. Glantz, coauthor of *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* "An original, persuasive, and important contribution to our understanding of Soviet society."--Mark Von Hagen, author of *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the Soviet-Socialist State, 1917-1930* "A very provocative and engaging book that will play a significant intellectual role among scholars of the USSR, civil-military relations, and military history."--William J. Chase, author of *Workers, Society, and the Soviet State: Labor and Life in Moscow, 1918-1929*