

**MILITARY HISTORY IN THE EARLY SOVIET UNION  
AND THE LESSONS OF WORLD WAR I**

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## **Executive Summary**

Even though World War I was peripheral to the mythologies of the new Soviet state, there was a vibrant and multi-faceted discourse about World War I in the 1920s. The three case studies undertaken here (the rise and fall of the Moscow Military History Museum; the fate of the Red Army Staff's project for a 12- volume document collection on World War I; and vicissitudes in the representation of General Aleksei Brusilov reveal clear trends in the Soviet memory of World War I. In the 1920s, the Tsarist Army's achievements were acknowledged and its symbols were displayed in such venues as the Moscow Military History Museum and Brusilov's funeral.

The Red Army Staff also planned a grand documentary history project on World War I. But at the end of the 1920s, this emphasis on World War I fell victim to competing views of ideology and history that devalued both the Tsarist legacy and former Tsarist officers. Active study of the war disappeared for more than half a decade and the expertise of the professional military historians was not utilized. Study of the war only resumed at the end of the 1930s when the fear of military conflict with the Germans made coming to terms with the successes and failures of World War I an urgent necessity. Ultimately, World War I was not a "forgotten" war. It was remembered; then forgotten; then remembered once more; and finally forgotten again after the cataclysm of World War II became the defining moment of Soviet military history.

## **Introduction**

Between 1918 and 1939 Western Europeans built tens of thousands of World War I memorials. They engaged in intense cultural and political activity as they commemorated and reinterpreted the catastrophic events of the war, honored the dead, and connected the war to future political and social agendas. European opinion makers of all persuasions competed to define the war in ways that forwarded their particular social and political goals and they avidly studied the war's "lessons" in preparation both for avoiding and for fighting the next war. As the successor state to the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union was unique among the combatants in the virtual absence of public commemoration of World War I. The Revolutions of 1917 and the Russian Civil War served as the central founding myths of the new Soviet state and World War I receded into the background.

Scholars generally agree about this erasure of memory. Peter Gatrell argued that the Bolsheviks, "discouraged public reflection on the war as a compelling human struggle and did nothing to sustain its commemoration." Aaron Cohen showed that the marking of World War I anniversaries in the Soviet press contained "few depictions of the actions of individuals, the details of battles, the suffering of soldiers or civilians, or the experience of Russia and the Russians."<sup>1</sup> And, Richard Stites suggested that "the absence of a real historical memory [of World War I] in Russia" is "one of the many historical phenomena that have divided Russia from the West psychologically in our century."<sup>2</sup> There is no doubt that World War I, as an "illegitimate" and "imperialist" war, remained largely outside of official myths and on the margins of Soviet culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Aaron J. Cohen, "Oh That!: Myth, Memory, and the First World War in the Russian Emigration and the Soviet Union," *Slavic Review* 62 (Spring 2003), 80.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Gatrell, *Russia's First World War: A Social and Economic History* (Harlow, England: Pearson, 2005), 260; Richard Stites, "Days and Nights in Wartime Russia: Cultural Life, 1914-1917," in Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites, eds., *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 8.; Daniel Orlovsky, "Velikaia voina i rossiiskaia pamiat'," in *Rossii i Pervaia Mirovaia Voina: Materialy Mezhdunarodnogo Nauchnogo Kollokviuma* (St. Petersburg, 1999). 49.

Even though World War I was peripheral to the mythologies of the new Soviet state and it was never officially commemorated, there was nonetheless a vibrant and multi-faceted discourse about World War I in the 1920s, a discourse that explored the moral, psychological, and physical world of the soldier and the tactical and strategic successes and failures of the Tsarist army. Soviet political and ideological transformations at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s halted many of these early endeavors to study and analyze the war. As a result, the post-World War II generations have remained generally unaware of attempts to come to terms with the military legacy of World War I in the early Soviet period. This “forgetting” of World War I was not accomplished by some kind of overarching directive from top Soviet authorities. Changes in the nature of World War I memory occurred over decades and through thousands of individual bureaucratic, personal, or institutional contests.

The current perception of World War I as a “forgotten war” does not, therefore, adequately capture the ebb and flow of Soviet war memory. The robust early Soviet attempts to understand and describe the war and the various reasons for the subsequent loss of focus on World War I merit serious attention. In the early years of the Soviet Union, there were many civilian and military historians who took the experience of World War I seriously and conscientiously documented it. These proponents of studying the war and preserving its artifacts, however, often fought an uphill battle against those who believed that the Red Army’s victory in the Civil War made World War I irrelevant. This paper documents specific “battles” to preserve the history of World War I and to incorporate its lessons into Soviet strategic thinking. It also considers the extent to which the military culture and ethos of the Tsarist army endured into the 1920s and influenced Soviet military culture.<sup>3</sup>

This paper employs three case studies to examine the development of Soviet military history of World War I in the early Soviet period, and to demonstrate how, why, and when World War I disappeared from Soviet public consciousness. The three featured cases are: 1) The

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the military culture of the Red Army see Mark von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

rise and fall of the Moscow Military History Museum; 2) The fate of the Red Army Staff's project for a 12-volume document collection on World War I; and 3) vicissitudes in the representation of General Aleksei Brusilov in the interwar period. These cases show that the study of World War I got off to a solid start in the immediate aftermath of the war, but it met with both institutional and ideological resistance by the end of the 1920s, and was only resumed in the late 1930s as a new war with Germany loomed.

### *The Rise and Fall of the Moscow Military History Museum*

One of the earliest battles over World War I memory and the Tsarist military legacy in general took place over the creation of a Moscow museum to document pre-revolutionary Russian military history. During World War I, trophy museums and war archives opened in Russian cities such as Moscow, Petrograd, Minsk, Warsaw, and Kiev among many others. In the early Soviet period, the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (*Narkompros*) appropriated the inventories of many of these museums and dispersed them among military-history museums, shifting the main focus of the exhibits away from World War I.<sup>4</sup>

In Moscow, plans for the creation of a new Military History Museum, a branch of the State Historical Museum, got underway in 1921. This museum focused on Russian military history up to the October Revolution and its goal was "the study of all of the achievements and the mistakes of the old in order to better get to know and learn the new."<sup>5</sup> The Red Army simultaneously developed its own museum in Moscow, focusing on the creation of the army during the Civil War. The Military History Museum first opened its doors in September 1923, inaugurated its permanent exhibit dedicated to the "development of Russian military art from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries" on Red Army Day in 1925, and it added several rooms devoted to World War I in 1926.

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<sup>4</sup> Mariia Katagoshchina, "Muzei velikoi voiny," *Moskovskii zhurnal*, No. 5 (1992), 39, 43-44. Local military museums likely continued to exhibit artifacts from the Tsarist era. (*Krasnaia Zvezda* 183/479 (August 13, 1925).

<sup>5</sup> OPI GIM (Otdel Pismennykh Istochnikov, Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Muzei) f. 137 Voenno-istoricheskii muzei, ed. khr. 38, l. 116.

In that year, its staff reported that it was receiving a thousand visitors a month.<sup>6</sup> The museum was housed in a highly sought-after space, a Petrine-era palace once the residence of Prince G.D. Iusupov. This prominent location revealed that at least some early Soviet decision makers highly valued the enterprise of preserving the Russian military heritage, including the history of World War I. This desirable space caused the museum difficulties, however, as during its short existence it was always under threat of being evicted, and Narkompros forced the collection to move nine different times.<sup>7</sup>

The exhibits in the Military History Museum came primarily from the disbanded regimental museums of the former Tsarist army and its exhibits reflected this heritage. The museum dedicated an entire room to military banners, and in this part of the collection visitors could view a photograph of World War I soldiers proudly gathered around their regimental banner, as well as World War I era banners prominently displaying the icon of “Christ Not Made by Hands” and adorned with St. George ribbons. The museum also devoted an entire room to early twentieth century Tsarist jubilees in honor of the victory at Poltava, the defeat of Napoleon, and the three-hundredth anniversary of the Romanovs.<sup>8</sup> In short, the accoutrements and symbols of Tsarist military valor in World War I (and in earlier wars) were openly on display for visitors to observe.

As it was constituted in 1926, the exhibition cautiously embraced certain aspects of Tsarist military heritage. The curators put General A. V. Suvorov’s death mask on display and praised this general “educated in the best traditions of the previous [Catherinian] era” for his protest against the brutal military innovations of Paul I. While the exhibit called Paul I’s minister of war A. A. Arakcheev an “evil genius,” it noted that “strangely enough” the Tsarist government was indebted to Arakcheev for the fact that the Russian artillery of this era “yielded little to the superlative artillery of Napoleon.” The exhibit went on to evaluate the post-Crimea

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<sup>6</sup> OPI GIM f, 137, ed. khr. 38, l. 23, 38ob.

<sup>7</sup> *Komsomolskaia Pravda* 174/660 (August 3, 1927).

<sup>8</sup> OPI GIM f. 137, ed. khr. 38, ll. 26 ob, 31; ed. khr. 47, ll. 2, 7.

military reforms in a positive light and to recognize the talents of General M. D. Skobelev, hero of the Russo-Turkish war.<sup>9</sup>

Mixed in with these qualified but positive interpretations of Tsarist military history, the exhibit also introduced countervailing revolutionary narratives, noting, for example, that the siege of Sevastopol during the Crimean War was Russia's first encounter with English imperialism. The exhibits on the Russo-Japanese War emphasized the Russian military leadership's mistakes and overconfidence as well as the outbreak of the Revolution of 1905.<sup>10</sup>

The World War I exhibit was similarly multi-vocal –including heroic moments, revolutionary moments, and realistic depictions of the nature of war. The museum exhibited colorful World War I era popular prints and patriotic leaflets that were “unsuccessful attempts to raise the spirit of those sent to the slaughter without rifles or shells” in order to contrast them with revolutionary appeals to the soldiers. The exhibit emphasized the high number of Russian casualties, the many strategic mistakes, and the increase in illnesses among the troops.

A central theme of the exhibit was the new technology of warfare, underlining the potential dangers of a new imperialist war. Visitors could find out about battle communications, poison gas, armored defense, and the air war. They could see gas masks, artillery shells, mortars, bomb-throwers, rockets, cannons, helmets, shields, and diagrams of positions with barbed wire. This exhibit was unlike pre-revolutionary military exhibits in its emphasis on the ordinary soldier. Visitors learned about the misery and boredom of the soldier's life in the trenches and could see everyday items like mess tins and aluminum spoons as well as handmade objects that soldiers in the trenches had made from rifle cartridges.<sup>11</sup>

By reinforcing the messages conveyed by patriotic prints, visitors could also look at trophies and banners captured from the enemy, including unique, historically significant trophies of Tsarist World War I victories: the banner of the captured Austro-Hungarian fortress

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<sup>9</sup> OPI GIM f. 137, ed. khr. 38, ll. 28ob-30.

<sup>10</sup> V. Arendt, *Voенно-istoricheskii muzei v Moskve* (Moscow: “Voennyi vestnik,” 1926), available in OPI GIM f. 137, ed. khr. 47, ll. 61-64, see l. 63; ed khr. 38, l. 118 ob.

<sup>11</sup> *Krasnaia Zvezda* 171/765 (July 28, 1926); OPI GIM f. 137, ed. khr. 38, ll. 119-120.



Peremyshl' (1915), and the keys to the Turkish fortress at Erzerum (1916). The exhibit also gave voice to another familiar World War I trope: one display case in the exhibit was devoted to "German atrocities – in reports, denunciations, and photographs."<sup>12</sup> The exhibit thus articulated a notion of national glory and constructed Russian identity in opposition to German identity.

The heroic and nationalistic trope evident in this exhibit is one that historians more frequently associate with the "great retreat" of the mid-1930s; yet Soviet culture in the 1920s also positively framed Russian military heroes and Russian technical prowess and acknowledged them as the heritage of the Soviet state while defining the Germans as enemy. The museum exhibit also served as a transmission belt for the continued circulation of Tsarist symbols and the Tsarist language of valor in Soviet Russia. Of course, like the appropriation of Tsarist history in the 1930s, the museum's approach to the pre-revolutionary period was selective, qualified, and accompanied by contradictory narratives that challenged the notion of Tsarist military glory. However short-lived the exhibit, it nonetheless reveals that the impulses to nationalize, heroize, and militarize were present throughout the interwar period.

Alongside these heroizing elements, the museum also emphasized one of the most popular revolutionary tropes about the World War I experience: the vast distance between the common soldier and his officer, and the misery and injustice of barracks life. The Military History Museum illustrated this distance in a clever and tangible way, counterposing the "soldier's corner" with the "officer's corner." In the soldier's corner was displayed "a pitiful bunk, a crudely-made table and stool with materials all around for drilling the soldier: 'the obligatory knowledge for the rank and file soldier,' prayers, inventories of one's 'kit,' tables of shoulder-straps and decorations, and all that was usually hung on the walls in the old barracks." The officer's corner, on the other hand, displayed the "regimental museum" with lavish gifts from the Tsar to the regiment, a gala ceremonial table set with prize silver, and cards laid out on a gambling table.<sup>13</sup> The scene crisply contrasted the officers' decadence with the soldiers' lack

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<sup>12</sup> OPI GIM f. 137, ed. khr. 38, ll. 31-31 ob, 120 ob.

<sup>13</sup> OPI GIM f. 137, ed. khr. 47, l. 63 ob.

of freedom in the barracks. The museum thus exemplified all aspects of the multi-faceted discourse of World War I in the mid-1920s.

The Military History Museum faced tremendous pressures from all sides, however. The most obvious pressure was ideological, due to the museum's exclusive focus on Tsarist history and achievements. In the heady days of the early revolutionary period when many advocated the complete rejection of history and a total break with the Tsarist past, the museum's association with the old order made it vulnerable. In the public debate in the military newspaper *Red Star* about the fate of the museum in the summer of 1925 after Narkompros had ordered the museum to move without allocating it a new space, one defender of the museum sadly acknowledged that there were some who thought "to whom is this museum still necessary or interesting?" He pointed to the special "administration for the study of the experience of past wars" under the auspices of the Red Army Staff as evidence that some contemporaries were keenly aware of the importance of military history. Another letter writer reminded the readers of *Red Star* that Napoleon and Suvorov relied on military history and, "there is no basis to think that now the situation has changed and the significance of history has decreased....No other field of history has such pressing significance as precisely military affairs."<sup>14</sup> These pleas revealed the hostile ideological environment facing not only those who valued the history of World War I, but also those who saw utility in Tsarist military history generally.

The museum was also under pressure because of the grinding poverty and general disorder of NEP-era Moscow. The Military History museum staff struggled with issues of security. The museum was burglarized in mid-June 1926. In one ironic twist among many, the most appealing target to burglars was the very exhibit that the museum used to remind its viewers of the decadence of the old order: the officer's corner. *Worker's Moscow* reported that "the thieves penetrated the 'officer's corner' where they gathered around two poods [seventy-two pounds] of silver and crystal tableware from Tsarist tables."

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<sup>14</sup> *Krasnaia Zvezda* 153/449 (July 8, 1925); 195/491 (August 28, 1925).

In the difficult conditions of the mid-1920s, the museum could not even fulfill its basic function of protecting the historical inventory entrusted to it. In another incident after the museum was already formally closed, one of the cannons located in the courtyard mysteriously disappeared. The authorities were puzzled as to how this could have happened despite the twenty-four hour surveillance of the courtyard entrance.<sup>15</sup> NEP lawlessness contributed both to the demise of the museum and the destruction of the artifacts that the museum had been trying to preserve.

Finally, the museum was under pressure because of the fierce competition for resources among Soviet institutions during the era of the New Economic Policy. One letter writer in *Red Star* lamented publicly that the museum was the victim of “interdepartmental friction.” The director of the museum suggested that ideological attacks on the museum were motivated by the prospect of material gain. He cynically noted that among the many institutions that coveted the museum’s comfortable quarters, there frequently arose the “idea of the complete lack of necessity for a museum of the Tsarist army to exist.”<sup>16</sup> The ideological battles raging in the 1920s became all the fiercer because of the dearth of material resources.

Narkompros’ notion that the museum was unnecessary eventually held sway at the upper echelons of the Soviet government. After only four years of existence, on July 6, 1927, the Council of People’s Commissars liquidated the museum and transferred its inventory to the State Historical Museum. Mikhail Rosenfel’d, an investigative reporter for *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, wrote that despite protests from the voluntary organization Osoavakhim, and the Staff and Political Administration of the Red Army, Narkompros engineered the closing of the museum. The reporter blamed Narkompros for systematically destroying the museum in order to claim its space for a research institute and to provide private apartments for Narkompros staff.<sup>17</sup> Despite the fact the contemporary observers knew that military history museums were flourishing both in

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<sup>15</sup> *Rabochaia Moskva*, June 23, 1926; November 4, 1927.

<sup>16</sup> OPI GIM f. 137, ed. khr. 38, l. 116;

<sup>17</sup> OPI GIM f. 137, ed. khr. 47, l. 69; *Komsomolskaia Pravda* 174/660 (August 3, 1927).

Europe and in “the provinces” and felt that Moscow was lagging behind, the museum lost its battle for existence.

As many historians have already noted, World War I memory was rejected by Soviet ideologues who valued their new military history over the military history of the past. However, what has not been recognized was that in the 1920s there were historians, archivists, curators, and educators actively working to include the memory of World War I in Soviet discourse. Their failure and the subsequent absence of World War I memory had a great deal to do with Soviet rejection of the Tsarist past, but World War I memory was also shaped by the brutal bureaucratic competition and the grim economic circumstances of the 1920s. Conceptualizations of World War I memory were actively emerging in the first half of the 1920s before they were arrested both by ideology and by material circumstances. A return to the comprehensive exhibition of Tsarist military history did not occur until after World War II had thoroughly transformed the context of the Tsarist legacy.

### *Documents of the First World War*

In the first years after World War I in all of the combatant countries, military historians compiled documents, wrote narratives, and began to analyze the course of the war to educate the soldiers who would be responsible for fighting the next war. The Soviet Union was no different. In August 1918, six months after the founding of the Red Army in 1918, the Red Army Staff created the Commission on the Research and Use of the Experience of World War I. This commission was devoted to the serious study of the strategic, tactical, and technological aspects of the recent wars. Its goal was to facilitate the “rapid use of the experience of the world and civil wars by studying these events, the transformations in military-technical means used to conduct the wars, and examples of military art that occurred in the course of these wars.” The commission was also charged with collecting documents and materials connected with the wars and with popularizing its results. In early 1925, World War I was removed from the title of the commission, which was now charged to study “the experience of war” in general, but the

commission nonetheless continued to focus primarily on the study of World War I.<sup>18</sup>

The commission attracted the attention of prominent Red Army leaders and in its early years Leon Trotsky was an active member. In the mid-1920s, the commission relied heavily on the expertise of at least seven former generals of the old army who had received higher military education at the elite academy of the Tsarist General Staff. Led by these men known as “*Genshtabisty*,” the commission was particularly productive in the first half of the 1920s and published a seven-volume *Strategic Outline of War, 1914-1918*.<sup>19</sup> The eminent military historian A.M. Zaionchkovskii wrote the most authoritative single-volume summary of the war in 1924 accompanied by detailed maps drawn by A. N. De-Lazari. In 1926, Zaionchkovskii’s final scholarly work was published, detailing Tsarist Russia’s preparation for war. A variety of other strategic and tactical works appeared between 1920 and 1930 including the memoirs of former Tsarist officers such as K. Gilchevskii and A. A. Svechin.

In short, in the first decade after the war, the military history commission of the Red Army Staff was extremely active in documenting and analyzing the war. As in the case of the military history museum, World War I was emphatically not forgotten.<sup>20</sup> At the highest levels of the Red Army, both Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs Kliment Voroshilov and military reformer M. Tukhachevskii also emphasized the importance of World War I as the model to study in preparation for a future war.<sup>21</sup>

In late 1929, B. M. Shaposhnikov, a former Tsarist colonel and Genshtabist serving as the

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<sup>18</sup> RGVA (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voennyi arkhiv) f. 39352, Komissiiia po issledovaniuu i ispol’zovaniuu opyta mirovoi i grazhdanskoi voiny Vseroglavshstaba, op. 1, ll. 1, 6.

<sup>19</sup> OPI GIM f. 426 (Moskovskie ekspeditsii), op. 1, d. 77 (Memoirs of E. Z. Barsukov), 145; Roger R. Reese, *Red Commanders: A Social History of the Soviet Army Officer Corps, 1918-1991* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 20.

<sup>20</sup> *Strategicheskii ocherk voiny, 1914-1918*, Komissiiia po issledovaniuu i ispol’zovaniuu opyta mirovoi i grazhdanskoi voiny, Volumes I-VII (Moscow : Vysshii voen. redaktsionnyi sovet, 1920-1923); A. M. Zaionchkovskii and A. N. De-Lazari, *Mirovaia Voina 1914-1918 gg.: Obshchii Strategicheskii Ocherk* (Moscow, Gosvoenizdat, 1924); A. M. Zaionchkovskii, *Podgotovka Rossii k Imperialisticheskoi Voine* (Moscow: Gosvoenizdat, 1926); K. Gil’chevskii, *Boevye Deistviia Vtoroocherednykh Chastei v Mirovuiu Voynu* (Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1928); A. A. Svechin, *Iskusstvo Vozhdeniia Polka po Opytu Voiny 1914-1918 gg.* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1930; Moscow: Assotsiatsiia “Voennaia Kniga Kuchkovo Pole,” 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Sally W. Stoecker, *Forging Stalin’s Army: Marshal Tukhachevsky and the Politics of Military Innovation* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 18-19.

Red Army Chief of Staff, proposed that the military history department undertake an ambitious new project: a six-volume document collection, to be put out in two to three thousand copies, focusing primarily on the war of movement.<sup>22</sup> The first five volumes were to be organized chronologically, while the sixth volume would focus thematically on the economic preparation and prosecution of the war. This systematic documentary project was to take the place of the historians' ongoing work on "individual historical moments of the war." Each volume was to consist of eighty percent original documents and twenty percent explanatory text.

The chosen authors were both senior historians of the Red Army Staff trained before the revolution and young specialists from the Military Section of the Communist Academy. These younger Soviet-trained specialists were to "guarantee a politically consistent approach to the analysis of events." In March 1932, the World War I documentary project was expanded and reorganized to encompass twelve thematic volumes. At that point, the editorial team was made up of E. Z. Barsukov, M. D. Bonch-Bruevich, A. E. Gutor, Iakubovskii, Iakimichev, A. N. Lapchinksii, F. E. Ogorodnikov, A. A. Svechin, P. P. Sytin, and V.V. Zherve.<sup>23</sup>

On the one hand, this project can be seen as advancing military knowledge since the World War I archives were still in a poor state and the compiling of critical but unknown documents would enable future historians and army commanders to make their own conclusions about important events. On the other hand, the decision to focus on compiling documents instead of writing monographs limited the opportunities for the military historians themselves to interpret events. This project recast their professional duties toward archival research and source study and away from analysis. The inclusion of explicitly communist historians also hinted at the increasing distrust of pre-revolutionary military specialists and the careful monitoring of their work. Nonetheless, the project indicated that the Red Army Staff was still interested in vigorously pursuing the study of World War I.

Over the next several years, the World War I documentary project was reorganized

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<sup>22</sup> Reese, *Red Commanders*, 81.

<sup>23</sup> RGVA f. 39352, op. 1, d. 48, ll. 1-5. No first initials are indicated in the archival documents.

several times, and although four volumes of documents eventually appeared between 1936 and 1940, the project was never fully realized. The trials and tribulations of the World War I documentary project, though somewhat murky, provide some insight into the forces that curtailed the Red Army Staff's pursuit of the study of World War I, beginning in roughly 1930.

That year is also notable for the publication of the first volume of Svechin's memoir, *The Art of Leading a Regiment*, a work that was criticized after its publication for its lack of attention to class contradictions in the Tsarist army. No doubt as a result of this criticism and other attacks on Svechin as a "bourgeois" theorist, the second volume of Svechin's memoirs was never published. It was also in 1930 that Gosizdat declined to put out a second edition of General A. A. Brusilov's memoirs despite the success of the first edition.<sup>24</sup> While Moscow's Military History Museum began its struggle with Narkompros for survival in the mid-1920s, the turning point for World War I memory within the institutional structure of the Red Army occurred at the beginning of the 1930s.

There are some clues about the nature of this struggle available in the unpublished memoirs of E. Z. Barsukov, a former Tsarist officer and the editor-in-chief of several volumes of the World War I documentary history project that were never published. He wrote his memoirs in the mid-1950s, when he was one of the few participants in the World War I project who was still alive. While it is difficult to verify his rather partisan account, it is still worth considering in light of the dearth of other evidence. He blamed changes in personnel at the Red Army Staff for impeding the progress of work on the documentary collection, specifically the appointment of F. A. Anulov as the head of the Military History Department and A. I. Egorov as the Chief of Staff. Barsukov complained that Anulov was "psychologically ill" and began "to hamper the compilation of the sixth volume of the collection." In Barsukov's opinion, Egorov, who had become chief of staff in 1931 after Shaposhnikov fell into temporary disgrace for praising

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<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of the book's reception see I. S. Danilenko, "Borets protiv lzhi i bezmolviia," in Svechin, *Iskusstvo vozhdenniia polka*, 2005, 23-24; John Erickson, *The Soviet High Command: A Military-Political History*, Third Edition (Routledge, 2001), 308-309; Iu. V. Sokolov, *Krasnaia zvezda ili krest? Zhizn' i sud'ba generala Brusilova* (Moscow: Rossiia molodaia, 1994), 158.

Trotskii, “evidently did not recognize scholarship, especially history. (It seems that in the past he was an operetta singer) and he ordered that the compilation of the collection be stopped.”<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, Barsukov’s team of researchers was not paid for the work that they had already completed (8-10 rubles per printer’s sheet) and they took the Red Army Staff to People’s Court. After Barsukov served as a witness for the aggrieved historians, his relations with Egorov became “intolerable;” Egorov reprimanded him and threatened to dismiss him, but didn’t have the right to do so since Barsukov was an employee of the Central Directorate of the Red Army, and not the Red Army Staff. Barsukov eventually retired from the Red Army on a personal pension in 1934 but continued to publish his own scholarly work on the history of Russian artillery. In Barsukov’s account, it was personality rather than ideology that shaped events.

The records of the Red Army Staff’s “Commission for the Study of War Experience” confirm that the World War I documentary project faced severe problems regarding funding, logistics, and leadership, but do not specifically name Anulov and Egorov as the key decision makers in determining the fate of the project. One document from 1932 or 1933 included a list of reasons why work on the World War I collection was not moving forward: the editors were overworked and could not find time for archival research; they were not given money or ration cards, and they could not continue their work without typists and paper.<sup>26</sup> Somewhere between 1930 and 1932, the Red Army Staff’s support for the project had clearly evaporated, leaving the project completely bereft of finances and leadership. This lack of support suggests a turn away from both the Tsarist past and from the Soviet military specialists trained under the Old Regime.

In November 1933, a new directive from V. N. Levichev of the Chief Directorate of the Red Army changed the format of the collection by declaring that the documents should be published with a brief introductory sketch of the featured operation, but no other commentary at all. The new plans for the document collection also limited the scope of the volumes to documents that concerned only “the command and management of troops.” These decisions

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<sup>25</sup> OPI GIM f. 426, op. 1, d. 77, l. 48; Erickson, *The Soviet High Command*, 843.

<sup>26</sup> RGVA f. 39352, op. 1, d. 48, l. 50.



limited the interpretive powers of the historians even further. Now, they were simply supposed to unearth the documents and publish them with the barest amount of contextualization.

One of the volume editors Korol'kov protested that the new head of the Army's Fifth Department wouldn't allow him to publish "descriptions of the most interesting battles" in order to "illustrate the important staff documents being published." He warned that without narratives or commentaries, "a naked skeleton of only documents remained. In order to understand the events illuminated by the documents, a reader who was unfamiliar with the operation would have to study the entire publication; the reader would be charged to carry out work beyond his strength." But the pleas of Korol'kov and other historians that contextualization was integral to the success of the volumes fell on deaf ears. Furthermore, the new schema that narrowly focused on the command of troops entirely excluded volumes that had been in progress for years such as Barsukov's volume on the economic aspects of the war.<sup>27</sup>

In February of 1934, the Military History Department determined that only fifteen percent of the work on the document collection had been completed and that the compilers were doing a poor job. They completely reorganized the project for the third time in June 1934, scaling it down from twelve volumes to "two or three." Now, the works were to "reflect those positive and negative sides of the operational art of the Russian command...that should be studied by our Red Army commanders for the development of operational thought." They drew up new publishing agreements in June 1934, leaving those who had worked on the earlier edition in limbo. The old publication plan had been ceased, evidently without paying those who had worked on it, and there was no money yet allocated to start the new plan.

The new leadership of the Military History Department distrusted the historians and eliminated their interpretations of events. They were wary of narratives by a single author that

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<sup>27</sup> RGVA f. 39352, op. 1, d. 53, ll. 6, 8ob. A similar process of removing commentaries occurred during the compilation of Pushkin's collected works during the 1937 Pushkin centennial. See Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 140-141.

might not be “objective.”<sup>28</sup> The leadership feared the work of individual historians, no longer prioritized the general study of World War I, and sought to focus only on the narrow topic of operational art. Furthermore, they did not even make the funds available to carry out the work that they had mandated. As a result, serious historical study of the war was both circumscribed and stalled. Five years of work on the documentary project had not produced a single publication.

In early 1934, Bonch-Bruevich (a former Tsarist officer) and Lazarovich had already completed their volume on the Lodz Operation and submitted it to the publisher. It was rejected, however, because it did not comply with the new format. Colonel A. Kh. Bazarevskii was asked to reorganize the volume, and it finally appeared in print in 1936, without any indication that Bonch-Bruevich and Lazarovich had been the ones who had done all of the research on which the volume was based.

The foreword to the Lodz collection, the first volume of the series, announced that the publication of documents from the “World Imperialist War 1914-1917” would give readers “concrete military-historical material characterizing the work of the chief, front, and army commands in the formation of strategic plans and in putting them into effect.”<sup>29</sup> The volume itself consisted of a ten-page introduction discussing the Russian and German operational plans and the extent to which they were realized, followed by almost 500 pages of documents. Thus only two percent of the book was made up of explanatory material.<sup>30</sup> Three other volumes of similar format followed, without commentaries and with the identities of their original compilers and editors likewise erased.<sup>31</sup> The group of historians who advocated serious work about World War I and their conceptions of how this work should be carried out were pushed aside.

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<sup>28</sup> RGVA f. 39352, op. 1, d. 48, ll. 64, 118, 146, 152; d. 53, l. 10;

<sup>29</sup> RGVA f. 39352, op. 1, d. 53, l. 10; A. Kh. Bazarevskii, ed., *Lodzinskaia Operatsiia: Sbornik Dokumentov* (Moscow-Leningrad: Voenizdat, 1936), 11.

<sup>30</sup> Bazarevskii, *Lodzinskaia Operatsiia*, 13-22.

<sup>31</sup> The three other volumes were edited by V. E. Belolipetskii. *Varshavsko-Ivangorodskaia Operatsiia* appeared in 1938; *Vostochno-Pruskaia Operatsiia* in 1939; *Gorlitskaia Operatsiia* in 1940. The Russian military archives also put out a volume on the Brusilov offensive with a similar format in 1940, edited by F. M. Borodin. It was entitled *Nastuplenie Iugo-Zapadnogo Fronta v Mai-Iiune, 1916 gody*.

In 1937, as anxiety about the German threat increased, the historians of the General Staff of the Red Army regretted that Russian military historians had not completed a history of World War I because the French history was not yet finished and the German and Austrian histories had to be discounted because of their “bias.” These historians felt that the most urgent need, not surprisingly, was an analysis of operations on the Western Border of the Russian Empire. The department decided on a fourteen-volume chronology of the war, but this new project’s editorial board was destroyed in the purges before the project could get underway. Leaders of the Military History Department also recognized the urgency of completing the document collection that they had initiated in 1929. In March of 1938, I. F. Nefterev complained to Chief of Staff Shaposhnikov that “enemies of the people” had impeded work on the history of World War I and despite all their efforts, there were only four volumes of the World War I document collection either published or soon to be in press.<sup>32</sup>

In the end, the Military History Department of the General Staff produced no fourteen-volume chronology of the war and only four volumes of the projected twelve volumes of documentary history. Such ambitious long-term projects could not be fully sustained during the upheaval of the purges. In the mid-1930s, however, a number of single author monographs about particular World War I operations did make their appearance under the auspices of the Ministry of Defense and the Frunze Military Academy.<sup>33</sup> Systematic study of the war in general gave way to the analysis of the operations that were perceived as the most strategically important, but certain historians were again entrusted with narrating, interpreting, and analyzing events.

The convoluted fate of the World War I documentary history project, like the demise of the Moscow Military History Museum reveals the ways in which early Soviet attempts to take World War I seriously were curtailed in the face of the rejection of the Tsarist past and “bourgeois” military theory and the institutional struggles of competing Soviet agencies and

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<sup>32</sup> RGVA f. 39352, op. 1, d. 59, ll. 2, 4; d. 91, ll. 1-2.

<sup>33</sup> Some examples include N. G. Korsun, *Sarykamyskhaia Operatsiia: Na Kavkazskom Fronte Mirovoi Voyny v 1914-1915 godu* (Moscow: Gosvoenizdat, 1937); *Erzerumskaia Operatsiia na Kavkazskom Fronte Mirovoi Voyny v 1915-1916 gg.* (Moscow: Gosvoenizdat, 1938); M. Rozhdestvenskii, *Lutskii proryv* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1938).

competing departments within an institution such as the Red Army. For a time in the early to mid-1930s, the abilities and the expertise of the Tsarist-trained military historians of the Red Army Staff were devalued. And then the purges of the military swept up both those who seemed to be promoting the study of World War I such as Svechin and those who seemed to be discouraging it such as Egorov.

Yet in the years before World War II as the Nazi threat loomed, it became more and more important for the Red Army Staff both to plan for new battles against the Germans and celebrate past successes against them. As a result, selected episodes from World War I began to gain new prominence in the late 1930s. The four extant volumes of the World War I document project emerged in the late 1930s as a result of this heightened concern with the German threat as did other narrative operational histories. This ebb and flow of attention to World War I in the interwar period demonstrates the active efforts of many Soviet military historians to “remember” the war despite myriad institutional, logistical, and economic difficulties. And their efforts should not be forgotten.

### **Brusilov’s Zigzags**

The transformations in Soviet public recognition of General Aleksei Brusilov, like the twists and turns in the World War I documentary project, illuminate the contested nature of World War I memory and the various contingencies that influenced its creation. Brusilov occupied a unique position in Soviet culture as a military hero of the past that could still be celebrated in the Soviet present. He was the most internationally well-known Russian World War I general, the architect of the tactically brilliant “Brusilov breakthrough,” undoubtedly the most successful Russian campaign of the war.

But Brusilov was also one of only a few World War I generals who was “in favor” in the Soviet context because he joined the Red Army during the Soviet –Polish war. He threw in his lot with the Bolsheviks because he believed that they represented the best hope for preserving the Russian nation. In May of 1920, he publicly called for other former Tsarist officers “to forget all

grievances” and “to work for the benefit, the freedom, and the glory of our native mother Russia.”<sup>34</sup> Beginning in 1920, Brusilov worked on the Military-Legislative Council of the Revolutionary Military Council (Revvoensovet) and then as a cavalry inspector until his retirement due to ill health in 1924.<sup>35</sup>

Nonetheless, before his death in 1926, Brusilov’s status was tenuous. On the one hand, he was awarded a state pension, was allowed to go abroad for medical treatment, and he gained permission from the chair of the Revvoensovet M. V. Frunze to be buried at Novodevichii Monastery. On the other hand, his historical works were not accepted for publication, he was engaged in a bitter feud with some representatives of the Soviet military-history establishment such as his former protégée Zaionchkovskii, and he had been unable to intervene to prevent the arrests of some of his friends and associates among the former Tsarist military.<sup>36</sup>

Brusilov’s funeral in March 1926 revealed the attempts of the Soviet military establishment to co-opt certain aspects of his military glory. In the death announcement in *Pravda* on March 18, 1926, Kliment Voroshilov wrote the following:

The workers and peasants of the Soviet Union will not forget A. A. Brusilov. In their memory, his image will be surrounded by a bright halo, as a commander of the old army who was able to understand the significance of the social transformation that was occurring, and to elevate comprehension of the enthusiasm for the revolutionary defense of the Republic of Workers and Peasants.

Voroshilov argued that Brusilov would “live on” in the memory of workers and peasants, and in this way gain immortality in a Soviet civic context. The article also noted that the Revvoensovet would arrange for a personal pension for the Brusilov family and would pay funeral expenses. Brusilov was thus embraced as a member of the Soviet establishment who would be buried with official Soviet military honors.

Brusilov’s obituary recalled his connection to the Tsarist past. He was described as “one

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<sup>34</sup> *Pravda*, May 30, 1920.

<sup>35</sup> Sokolov, *Krasnaia zvezda ili krest?*, 149-150.

<sup>36</sup> GARF (Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii), f. 5972, Personal Archive of Aleksei Alekseevich Brusilov and Nadezhda Vladimirovna Brusilova, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 2-5; d. 21a, ll. 331, 336.

of the most outstanding commanders of the Russian army,” and it was noted that, “the name of Brusilov is connected to the summer offensive of 1916 that led to the breakthrough at Lutsk.” The official state funeral of Brusilov accommodated his status as a World War I hero and a Tsarist officer as well as his position as a Soviet military official. The funeral was to take place in an Orthodox cemetery, yet Voroshilov had suggested that participating in the “revolutionary defense” of the nation was the best way to commemorate Brusilov’s memory.

On the day of the funeral, a military honor guard, including a company of infantry, a squadron of cavalry, and a half-battery of artillery, arrived at Brusilov’s home to accompany the funeral procession to Novodevichii Cemetery. The delegation from Revvoensovet laid a wreath on the coffin that was inscribed: “To an honest representative of the old generation, who placed his battle experience at the service of the USSR and the Red Army. To A.A. Brusilov from the Revvoensovet.”<sup>37</sup>

Yet Revvoensovet’s wreath was not the only decoration on Brusilov’s coffin. The casket was also covered with “wreaths of white flowers with ribbons of the order of St. George.” An article in a Russian émigré newspaper noted with satisfaction: “This was very likely the first time after the October Revolution that St. George ribbons appeared openly on the streets of Moscow.”<sup>38</sup> Brusilov’s military successes in the Tsarist period were publicly acknowledged, and the procession was allowed to display both his Tsarist and Soviet honors. He was buried in 1926 explicitly as a military hero of both the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary eras.

The Soviet troops accompanied Brusilov’s coffin to the gates of the Novodevichii Cemetery. There, the procession halted and three Soviet military officials Aleksandr Egorov, (representing Revvoensovet), Semion Budennyi, (representing the People’s Commissariat of Military and Naval Affairs) and G. Gai (representing the Frunze Military Academy) gave formal speeches about Brusilov’s contribution to the Soviet military.<sup>39</sup> Although the Soviet

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<sup>37</sup> *Nasha zhizn'*, March 20, 1926.

<sup>38</sup> GARF, f. 5972, op. 1, d. 12, l. 48.

<sup>39</sup> Sokolov, *Krasnaia zvezda ili krest?*, 154.

government organized a state funeral, Voroshilov did not attend; Brusilov was valued by the Soviet state, but was not honored by the top Soviet military official. G. Gai said, “Sleep peacefully outstanding general. Your victorious saber, covered with laurels, is now in trustworthy hands.”<sup>40</sup> Gai thus publicly identified the Red Army as the legitimate heir to the Tsarist army. Brusilov’s success in World War I would be followed by the heroism and victory of the Red Army.

The coffin was then taken inside Novodevichii monastery, but Egorov, Budennyi and the Soviet troops remained standing at attention outside the gates. Gai, along with Brusilov’s relatives and friends accompanied the coffin to the grave. At the graveside, relatives and friends gave speeches that were not for Soviet public consumption; one speech expressed gratitude to Brusilov “in the name of the Slavonic peoples, for his battle against the Austro-Hungarian army.”<sup>41</sup> Another funeral oration celebrated Brusilov’s relationship with rank and file Russian soldiers. “The simple Russian soldier remembered his father-commander and forgetting himself, through a truly noble awakening, brought his labor to his father-commander.”<sup>42</sup>

Both of these speeches demonstrate the persistence of unofficial and non-Soviet remembrances of World War I. Soviet ideology explicitly rejected the notion that the significance of the war was national liberation for Slavs; likewise the official narratives of the war almost unanimously condemned the Tsarist officer corps for its brutality towards the “simple Russian soldier.” The memory of Brusilov as a paternalistic and benevolent father-commander who could awaken the soldiers to loyalty and noble labor was a subversive reading of Brusilov’s life in the Soviet context. While Soviet officials took great care to prevent these ideas from being expressed in print as part of the official report of Brusilov’s funeral, they nonetheless gave Brusilov’s friends and relatives the time and space to remember him and the war in this most unofficial way.

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<sup>40</sup> GARF, f. 5972, op. 1, d. 12, l. 48.

<sup>41</sup> GARF, f. 5972, op. 1, d. 12, l. 48.

<sup>42</sup> GARF, f. 5972, op. 3, d. 21a, l. 209.

After the speeches, the priest completed short prayers and the funeral service ended with the singing of the words “eternal memory” three times as Brusilov’s coffin was lowered into the grave. Outside the cemetery, Budennyi gave a signal and soldiers fired off a three shot salvo after each repetition of “eternal memory.” Brusilov’s widow noted that this ritual took place “exactly as in old times.”<sup>43</sup> The Soviet army thus actively participated in a religious-military tradition from pre-revolutionary times in honor of Brusilov.

The remarkably hybrid nature of this ceremony and the active cooperation between Soviet officials and the church reveals the complicated relationship of the Soviet government toward Brusilov’s military achievements as a Tsarist general. Because Brusilov supported the Soviet state, his glorious military career could be celebrated both as a Soviet career but also on its own terms as a reflection of an honorable Tsarist career. Because Brusilov passed his “laurel covered saber” to the Soviet state, in fact, he *had* to be recognized as an outstanding Tsarist general who had brought honor to the Tsarist military in an otherwise disastrous war. Brusilov’s legacy of Tsarist military success was so valued by the Soviet military establishment that it allowed Brusilov to be buried as a Tsarist general, with the ribbons of the order of St. George in full sight, and in an Orthodox cemetery in accordance with full Orthodox rites. They even participated in the Tsarist military tradition of a gun salvo at the moment of interment at the end of the Orthodox funeral service. Like the World War I exhibit in the Military History Museum, the Brusilov funeral demonstrates the persistence of notions of Tsarist military valor in Soviet discourse of the 1920s.

Soon after his death, Brusilov’s reminiscences were published under the auspices of the official Soviet publishing apparatus. Excerpts of Brusilov’s memoirs about World War I first appeared in the journal *War and Revolution* in 1927.<sup>44</sup> In 1928, the State Publishing House sought to publish Brusilov’s memoirs in a freestanding volume, and the Museum of the Revolution also pursued N. V. Brusilova to acquire documentary materials related to her

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<sup>43</sup> GARF, f. 5972, op. 3, d. 21a, l. 215.

<sup>44</sup> A. A. Brusilov, “Vospominaniia,” *Voina i revoliutsiia* 1927, No. 4, 67-83.



husband's career. The State Publishing House paid N. V. Brusilova at least 3,000 rubles for the memoirs alone.<sup>45</sup> All five thousand copies of the first edition of Brusilov's memoirs were sold out in 1929 and the book was an international success, appearing in English and French translation in 1930.

But Brusilov's narrative of the events of World War I was not fully endorsed by the editors at the State Publishing House who were responsible for the publication of the memoirs. Typical of Soviet publications in the 1920s, the introduction to Brusilov's memoirs warned readers that Brusilov was mistaken in his understanding of war and revolution and noted that the memoirs had to be read as an "historical document, reflecting the relationship between the progressive military bureaucracy and Nicholas II..."<sup>46</sup>

The State Publishing House planned to reprint the book in 1930 nonetheless. Sometime during that year, however, the publishing house changed its mind, and the book did not appear in print again until after the outbreak of World War II.<sup>47</sup> The decision not to reprint Brusilov's memoirs occurred at roughly the same time that Shaposhnikov charged the younger Communist historians working on the World War I documentary project with monitoring the historical analysis of the older military experts. Given this timing, one can speculate that the intensifying suspicion of "experts" and "former people" during "the great break," likely produced the authorities' reluctance to promulgate the views of even a "progressive" member of Nicholas II's military bureaucracy.

Between 1930-1939, Brusilov's class alien status came to matter more than his patriotism, and his military achievements were not necessarily viewed as successes. While 1934 is often seen as a key turning point in Soviet attitudes toward the Tsarist past, the twentieth anniversary of the start of World War I did not result in a positive evaluation of Brusilov or the

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<sup>45</sup> GARF f. 5972, op. 1, d, 63, ll. 6, 10, 12.

<sup>46</sup> A. A. Brusilov, *Moi Vospominaniia*, (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1929), 9.

<sup>47</sup> Sokolov, *Krasnaia zvezda ili krest?*, 158.

republication of his memoirs.<sup>48</sup> The image of Brusilov as a holdover from the Old Regime may have been reinforced by the emigration of his widow.

In the mid-1930s, analysts also tended not to value the effects of the Brusilov offensive. In 1934, historian Olga Chaadaeva emphasized the catastrophic losses incurred during the Brusilov offensive - half a million men dead, injured or captured. She assessed the results of the offensive by noting that it “led to new losses and new defeats,” and “definitively undermined the faith of the soldiers in the impending conclusion of the war by means of victory.”<sup>49</sup> Chadaeva depicted the Brusilov offensive as a steppingstone on the path to inevitable revolution rather than an object of national pride. At the moment of the “about face” toward Russian state-centered nationalism in the mid-1930s, when Tsarist military heroes of the more distant past gained prominence in Soviet culture,<sup>50</sup> Brusilov was not celebrated as an example of military prowess the way that he had been in the 1920s.

Positive references to Brusilov were largely absent from Soviet publications until the end of the 1930s. In the intervening years, officials at the Red Army staff had become worried that the Soviet population was so in awe of German military power that they needed concrete historical examples to show that the Germans could be beaten by the Russians.<sup>51</sup> In 1938, a pamphlet entitled *The Lutsk Breakthrough* by M. Rozhdestvenskii was published by the People’s Commissariat of Defense for wide distribution among the commanders and chiefs of the Red Army. Rozhdestvenskii’s assessment of the offensive at Lutsk criticized historians who denied the influence of the breakthrough on further developments in the Russian theater of war. The author called the operation “brilliant” and argued the following:

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<sup>48</sup> This transition in attitudes to the Tsarist past is the subject of David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Creation of Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>49</sup> O. Chaadaeva, ed., “Soldatskie pis’ma v gody mirovoi voiny (1915-1917 gg.),” *Krasnyi arkhiv* 65-66 (1934), 119.

<sup>50</sup> Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 2, 8.

<sup>51</sup> RGVA f. 39352, op. 1, d. 61, l. 31.

It proved to everyone that the Russian army had not collapsed after the difficult trials of 1915. In 1916 the Russian Army was still strong, for it had smashed the strongest opponent and gained successes not enjoyed by any other army in the period of the World War.<sup>52</sup>

Rozhdestvenskii credited the “Russian soldier” with this great victory but acknowledged Brusilov for his faith in the strength of the Russian army and his ability to convey this faith to his subordinates. By 1938, the memory of the “breakthrough” became an important aspect of military education even if the recognition of Brusilov’s role remained limited.

In 1939, Iu. Veber’s story “Breakthrough” was published in *Artillerists*, an agitational volume produced by the Komsomol for a wide readership. Like *The Lutsk Breakthrough*, this story emphasized the success of the offensive without mentioning Brusilov in the title. Veber, repeating Rozhdestvenskii’s assessment for a wider audience suggested that Brusilov’s significant achievement was that he was the one general who “believed in the success of the operation and in the battle-worthiness of the Russian soldier.”<sup>53</sup> While both of these works celebrated the performance of Tsarist-era soldiers during the Brusilov offensive, they stopped short of heroizing General Brusilov personally.

While it is difficult to discern the specific impetus for the change, it is possible to document a further rise in Brusilov’s status between 1939 and 1940. In a 1939 textbook published by the Academy of the General Staff of the Red Army, the military historian L. V. Vetoshnikov provided an “operational-strategic study” of *The Operation of the Breakthrough on the Southwestern Front in 1916*. One year later, after war had already broken out in Europe, the Commissariat of Defense published a second edition of this work under the title *The Brusilov Breakthrough*. The change in the title revealed a renewed willingness to acknowledge Brusilov personally for his successes against the Germans and to recognize him as a predecessor on the family tree of the Red Army.

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<sup>52</sup> Rozhdestvenskii, *Lutskii proryv*, 39. Rozhdestvenskii clearly exaggerated here since Germany and not Austria-Hungary was the Russian Empire’s “strongest opponent” in World War I.

<sup>53</sup> Iu. Veber, “Proryv,” in E. A. Boltin, L. V. Zhigarev, and M. M. Kaplun, eds. *Artilleristy: Sbornik statei i rasskazov*. (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1939), 119-136, quote on 120.

The invasion of the Soviet Union largely ended Soviet squeamishness about celebrating the achievements of a member of the Tsarist elite as propagandists eagerly sought to publicize any circumstances under which the Russians had militarily defeated the Germans. The outbreak of war propelled Brusilov into the spotlight as a hero once again. V. V. Mavrodin's short biography of Brusilov was first published in 1941 and then reprinted several times throughout the war in large print runs. He praised Brusilov as a "talented, educated, decisive, and energetic commander" who "brilliantly" carried out "the breakthrough of the Austro-German troops in 1916 that has received the appellation "the Brusilov Breakthrough."<sup>54</sup> The Ministry of Defense Publishing House put out new editions of Brusilov's own memoirs in 1941 and 1943. I. L. Sel'vinskii's play *General Brusilov* premiered in 1942, and, in 1943, Sergei Sergeev-Tsenskkii published a full-length novel about the Brusilov breakthrough.<sup>55</sup>

Brusilov's new popularity did not go completely uncontested, however. There were still a few Soviet writers who spoke against the rehabilitation of a World War I general as a popular hero. In a May 1944 letter to the Central Committee's Agitation and Propaganda Department, historian A. M. Pankratova decried Brusilov's new popularity, arguing that the heroization of Brusilov was confusing to schoolchildren because "this World War I general's claim to fame was based on his defense of a regime that Lenin would soon overthrow."<sup>56</sup> Thus, even during the patriotic fervor of World War II, there were voices raised against the figure of Brusilov and the rehabilitation of the heroic memory of World War I. During World War II, however, such voices were in the minority, unlike at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s when such opinions had circumscribed the study of World War I.

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>54</sup> V. Mavrodin, A. A. *Brusilov* (Moscow: Pravda, 1943), 3.

<sup>55</sup> Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 151, 156, 162; Il'ia Sel'vinskii, *General Brusilov in Lirika i drama* (Moscow: OGIZ, 1947), 305-376. Although Brusilov was the title character in Sergeev-Tsenskkii's novel, he was not its hero. S. Sergeev-Tsenskkii, *Brusilovskii proryv*, I (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1943). Sergeev-Tsenskkii relied heavily on Gilchevskii's 1928 memoir.

<sup>56</sup> Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 127.

These three case studies reveal clear trends in the Soviet memory of World War I. First of all, World War I memory was an integral part of Soviet culture in the 1920s even if the war was often viewed as mere prelude to the Revolution. The Tsarist Army's achievements were acknowledged and its symbols were displayed in such venues as the Moscow Military History Museum and at Brusilov's funeral. The grand plans of the Red Army Staff for a documentary project on World War I history revealed the army leadership's belief in the war's continued relevance.

But sometime around 1930 (and in the case of the museum run by Narkompros, earlier), this emphasis on World War I fell victim to competing views of ideology and history that devalued both the Tsarist legacy and former Tsarist officers. Active study of and publications about the war disappeared for half a decade and the military expertise of the professional military historians was not utilized. Study of the war only resumed at the end of the 1930s when the fear of another conflict with the Germans made coming to terms with the successes and failures of World War I an urgent necessity. Ultimately, World War I was not a "forgotten" war. It was remembered; then forgotten; then remembered once more; and finally forgotten again after the cataclysm of World War II became the defining moment of Soviet military history.