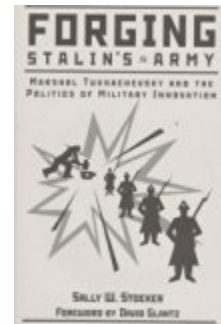


Sally W. Stoecker. *Forging Stalin's Army: Marshal Tukhachevsky and the Politics of Military Innovation*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998. xiv + 207 pp. \$59.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8133-3410-3.

Reviewed by Wayne H. Bowen (Ouachita Baptist University)
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The Power of One: Marshaling Reform in the Soviet Military

In her introductory chapter, “The Context for Innovation in Stalin’s Army,” Sally Stoecker presents a counter-intuitive, but compelling, argument that the Soviet Army during the period of the First Five-Year Plan was not a prisoner to Stalin’s totalitarian ideology, but instead a relatively “independent institution that was capable of successful innovation” (p. 8). Embracing and coaching their new strategies and tactics in Marxist-Leninist (and later Stalinist) language, “reform-minded military officers” such as Marshal Tukhachevsky promoted innovative military doctrines, doctrines which would survive Stalin’s purges of the Red Army and prove their merit in the bitter struggle against Nazi Germany (p. 12).

In the midst of the titanic efforts of the First Five-Year Plan, the Soviet view that war against capitalism was inevitable, and Stalin’s emphasis on breaking all links with the Tsarist past, military innovators had a significant amount of freedom to reshape the armed forces of the USSR, in the process modernizing and transforming the revolutionary army of the Bolsheviks into a conventional military power. Looking to the failure of Tsarist armies in World War I for powerful lessons on how not to prepare for war and conduct military operations, Marshals Tukhachevsky and Voroshilov also emphasized the need to give industrial priority to defense industries, and to link industrial production and priorities more explicitly to military preparations (p. 19).

In Chapter Two, “Politics and Military Priorities: Building a Case for More Resources,” Stoecker explains

the bureaucratic strategies employed by Soviet military leaders to focus more resources on rebuilding the military. Despite the image held today of an unbridled Communist military-industrial complex, which commanded more and more of the Soviet economy, the reality was that military leaders had to plead, cajole, and fight for every increase in their budgets.

The most significant challenge for military leaders was to persuade Stalin and other leading Communists that the Soviet Army could not wait for long-range industrial development to bleed over into defense preparedness: the armed forces needed a near-term infusion of resources to deal with potentially immediate threats to the existence of the Soviet Union (pp. 33-35). War Commissar Voroshilov, in particular, exhorted his fellow Communists at Party and Soviet Congresses to devote more budget consideration to the military, or face increased threats from Poland, Germany and other capitalist countries (pp. 37-39). By 1934, faced with rising instability in the Far East and Central Europe, and the initial successes of the First Five-Year Plan, Stalin finally began to devote to the military sufficient resources to accommodate the recommendations of Voroshilov and Tukhachevsky.

Chapter Three presents the confluence between foreign events, especially in the Far East, and the efforts of Soviet military leaders to improve and enlarge their institutions. With the coming to power of an explicitly anticommunist regime in Germany, and the swift Japanese conquest of Manchuria, Stalin was faced for the first time

with evidence of potential encirclement by hostile and expansionist powers. The dramatic seizure by Chinese Nationalists and Japanese of the Chinese Eastern Railroad in 1929, previously controlled by the Soviet Union, acted as a strong stimulant to divert more resources into military spending, particularly in the wake of the clearly inadequate military personnel and equipment available for Soviet counterattacks.

The Soviet military did learn valuable lessons in the use of combined arms, the importance of logistics, and tactics of encirclement from these operations, however (pp. 67-69). More important, however, was the Japanese conquest of Manchuria in 1931-32, which “rapidly spurred the substantial rearming of the border with China” (p. 69). Indeed, the Soviet military doubled its forces in the region from 1929 to 1932, indicating the rising necessity of military preparedness in a world hostile to the Soviet Union and its interests (p. 70).

Despite its great resources, the Soviet Union was not capable of modernizing its forces without some access to foreign technology and knowledge. Fortunately for Soviet military leaders, another pariah nation, Weimar Germany, was also in need of a covert military partner, as detailed in Chapter Four, “The Clandestine Collaboration between the Reichswehr and the Red Army.” Despite the mutual “secrecy and suspicion” which clouded the relationship between German officers and their Soviet counterparts, the Red Army gained significantly from the unlikely partnership (p. 79). The Soviet Union gained invaluable assistance in creating a chemical weapons industry, and also in improving tank and air doctrine.

Chapter Five, “The Acquisition and Adaptation of Foreign Models: The Case of Tank Development,” examines the development of an indigenous Soviet tank production infrastructure. Arguing that the Red Army did far more than copy foreign models, Stoecker does admit that Soviet researchers did copy from the West, particularly from tanks purchased from Great Britain and the United States. By the early 1930s, however, Soviet R&D centers had gleaned what they could from foreign sources, and were clearly focused on creating their own prototype tanks. Whatever imitation of components or designs they may have undertaken, Soviet scientists and engineers did far more than produce second-rate copies of foreign tanks; they designed tanks to fit Soviet terrain, tactics and industry. The best example of these developments was the famous T-34, the best example of a military-industrial complex which, by the years immediately preceding Soviet entry into World War II, “was well

on its way to designing and producing a formidable arsenal of high-quality indigenous weapons” (p. 128).

Chapter Six, “Marshal Tukhachevsky: Enigmatic Military Entrepreneur,” focuses on the man at the center of Soviet military innovation during the late 1920s and early 1930s, convincingly arguing that Mikhail Tukhachevsky was “the chief catalyst” for the culture of reformism in the Red Army, leading the movement for change within his institution as a “public entrepreneur” (pp. 135-36). Comparing Tukhachevsky to Admiral Hyman Rickover, the father of the modern U.S. nuclear navy, Stoecker makes the case that Tukhachevsky, more than Voroshilov, Stalin, or the general institution of the Soviet military, promoted and encouraged reformism, contributing his own command of detail, brilliant strategic thinking, and mastery of political infighting to gain resources and approval for his improvements. Despite an aristocratic background and service in the Tsarist army, his ideas of the decisive offensive and deep battle became essential elements of Soviet battle doctrine, even after Tukhachevsky himself was purged and executed in 1937.

Chapter Seven, “Postscript: Yezhovshchina and the End of Innovation,” details the fall of Tukhachevsky, a victim of the leading edge of Stalin’s great purge of the military. Despite the success of his reforms, and his great service to the Soviet state, in May 1937 Tukhachevsky was arrested, charged with treason and conspiracy with fascist powers. His execution soon after, and those of thousands of other officers, left the Soviet military weakened on the eve of World War II. More important, according to Stoecker, was the destruction of “the culture conducive to innovation,” which had been shepherded by Tukhachevsky, and the loss of this great strategist and doctrinal innovator (p. 182). Dismissing previous claims that Tukhachevsky was framed through an elaborate plot by Nazi leaders, Stoecker attributes Stalin’s destruction of the Marshal to an old grudge of Stalin’s from the Civil War, as well as, quoting Alec Nove, the General Secretary’s well-known “pathological excesses” (pp. 185-86).

In her final chapter, Stoecker again asserts the indispensability of both Tukhachevsky and Voroshilov to the increased resources available to the Soviet armed forces after 1928, as well as the relative autonomy these leaders and like-minded fellow officers had to promote innovative strategies and doctrines during the period of the first Five-Year Plan. Leading us one more step away from the totalitarian model, Stoecker has constructed a persuasive view of an important institution in Soviet society, presenting a coherent analysis of the rebuilding

of Soviet armed forces through the force of will of one man, and laying out a case that it was the reforms of Tukhachevsky which enabled the Soviet state to survive its greatest tests: the twin horrors of Stalin's rule and the Great Patriotic War against Nazi Germany.

Stoecker's study, which relies on recently declassified documents of the former USSR, as well as a thorough and judicious use of the most recent historiography, is a pathbreaking foray into Soviet military history and should be recommended reading for historians, military analysts and other readers interested in the history of military innovation in the twentieth century, Stalinism,

World War II, and the rise of the Soviet Union to world power. It would be a useful text for courses on modern military history or the Soviet Union, and is also recommended for upper-division undergraduates and graduate students. The only criticism which might be leveled at this text is its brevity, which does not allow the author an even more thorough examination of this important and interesting topic.

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