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In order to find a partial basis for the evaluation of the fighting qualities of the Russian soldier, we should endeavor to establish - at least in a general way - the most prominent characteristics of the Russian people. Let it be stated at the very outset: there is no such thing as a homogeneous Russian nation. What we usually refer to by the term Russian nation is, in reality, a variety of nations who inhabit Russia. Numerically, the two largest are the Great Russians and the Ukrainians. They are the ones who determined the peculiarities of the Russian people, and in whom its character is most decisively expressed. From a military viewpoint, however, we are also interested in the smaller nations.

The two large groups are closely related not only on the basis of their Slavic origin, but also by reason of the great similarity of their ethnical make-up. They absorbed the same racial elements, the product of which they represent today. In this racial mixture, there can also be traced a weak Germanic blood strain from the Gothic period and the Middle Ages. Of special importance, however, I consider the infusion of Mongol blood during the 300 years of Tartar domination, since it very definitely put its stamp on the Russian national character. This fact was brought out very pointedly by Maxim Gorki in his book on Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Andreyev. An excerpt from that book appeared in a magazine which recently came into my hands. Gorki has this to say about Tolstoy: "He carried in his great soul all the misery of his people, all the mutilations which we have suffered throughout history. His nebulous doctrine of 'do nothing,' 'do not resist evil,' and his 'theory of passive resistance' are the result of the unhealthy ferment of the old Russian

-1- blood which had been poisoned by Mongol fatalism. In its chemical composition, it appears strange and inimical to the West which stands in active and ineradicable opposition to the evil things in life." This Mongol inclination toward passive resistance was able to exert a definite influence as it met with a similar, although much weaker, inclination of the original Slavic blood strain of these two groups.

The absorption of foreign blood did not affect the various groups equally. I have, for example, seen many women, girls, and boys in the city of OREL and in the surrounding country, as well as in numerous villages east of ROSLAVL', who in Germany or England would not be noticed as strangers because of their features and body structure. On the other hand, I have seen entire regions, such as the area north of YUKHNOV (on the ROSLAVL'---MOSCOW highway) and the vicinity of KALUGA, where the stocky Mongolic type with slanted eyes was widely represented.

-2- It has often been mentioned correctly that certain characteristic traits of the Russians had their roots in historical experiences. Large portions of Russia, a country without the protection of natural frontiers, were frequently overrun in earlier centuries by conquerors who often ruled cruelly and tyrannically. Well-nigh a hundred times did KIEV, for instance, shelter foreign rulers within its walls. The Slavic traits, such as suspicion and caution, became more pronounced by these experiences, and similarly, Slavic endurance of suffering and submissiveness to pain were increased still more.

A considerable number of various smaller nationality groups who

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belong to Russia today, have neither racially nor historically passed through experiences similar to those of the larger groups. That holds true with the races in the Caucasus -- the Georgians for example, who were never subjugated to any real extent even when the country was dominated by the Turks.

For simplicity's sake, all the various ethnic groups in Russia will be referred to as the Russian people in the present study.

We are here most interested in the following characteristics which we can now discern among the Russian people as a whole: the greatest patience and endurance of suffering, a certain inertness and submissiveness to life and fate, little initiative, and in many of them - which is true of all other people to a greater or lesser degree - an easily aroused inclination toward cruelty and harshness which may be considered as part of the Mongol heritage in view of the basically good-natured disposition of the people.

Education and propaganda are additional factors which influence the psychological and spiritual attitude of the people as well as the action of the individual. For nearly a generation, education has been dominated exclusively by the principles and objectives of Bolshevism, thus eliminating any other influence. This education has brought amazing results. Besides raising the general educational level, it attempts to imbue youth with the ideals of Bolshevism. The doctrine of Russia's greatness and of Bolshevik world domination, in addition to the old Russian ideology of Russia's lofty mission as the savior of mankind, has taken complete

-2- hold of the new generation. The latter knows nothing else and understands no other world than that of Bolshevism; everything else has been represented as deserving repudiation and scorn. On the wall of every Russian schoolroom, I found a large map of Europe and Asia on which all of Russia

-3- was marked in bright red while the rest was shown without color. The insignificant size of the European peninsula was contrasted with unmistakable clarity with the vastness of Russia. The doctrine which youth absorbed by education, had to be instilled into the people at large by means of propaganda. I talked with many young soldiers, farmers, laborers, and also women. All of their thinking was patterned along the same line, and they were all convinced of the infallibility of that which they had been taught. Only among the older generation in the rural areas, i.e., people who are now around the age of 50 and older, did I find occasional skepticism, and even a blunt rejection of Bolshevism. However, I do not know whether this was always genuine. The old people who lived during the time of the czars retain nostalgic memories, but criticize Bolshevism - in most cases - only because of its attitude toward religion.

Bolshevist education also attempts to arouse enthusiasm, initiative, and vigor, the most essential prerequisites for great accomplishments not only in peace, but still more in war. These qualities, however, are incompatible with certain definite basic traits of the Russian national character that cannot be changed by education, and educational methods were, therefore, successful only to a very limited extent. Yet these retarding traits are the very factors that make the Russian people easily led, accepting every sacrifice that is demanded; they make it possible for

-3- the people -- led by a few leaders of initiative and vigor -- to achieve collectively great feats and accomplishments in certain fields. Where, however, initiative and energy of the leader alone do not suffice, and the same qualities are required of subordinate leaders -- and eventually, of each individual -- the system fails and breaks down.

There are only two major sources of discontent among the Russian people. One is the Kolkhoz principle, that is, the joint tilling of the soil by farmers for remuneration in money and kind, with only one small plot of ground for private exploitation; the other, the extremely low living standard. The latter was not realized by the Russian people to any great extent until toward the end of the war, because they had no basis for comparison. However, the situation has changed since the return of millions of soldiers and women who, during the war, were able to see and observe the culture and living standards of other countries. The discontent undoubtedly will increase. I believe, however, that because of the patience, inertness, and endurance of suffering of the Russian people, neither collectivism nor the low standard of living will ever become a threat to those in control of the government.

-4- The national traits which characterize a people as a whole always apply to the group. It stands to reason that these traits are not equally present in every individual; sometimes they may be lacking completely. This fact is partially due to the various racial influences which affect a people as a group, and also to different reactions of each individual to these very influences. A few belong to a definite category by them-

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selves. They are the ones in whom personal experiences and particular educational influences produced a decisive effect. For that reason we cannot always properly evaluate the manner in which an individual thinks, feels, and acts, on the basis of the national characteristics of his people.

The above observations will make it possible for us to obtain - in the light of war experiences - an estimate of the fighting qualities of the Russian soldiers as a group.

In every army, infantry, tank troops, and combat pilots are the elements in which the national traits of a people most clearly manifest themselves in combat. They are directly in the firing line. Every one of them is, so to speak, being fired upon. Infantry and armored forces fight in situations in which fire greatly limits the immediate commander's control over the individual, and entirely eliminates the influence of the higher commander. Consequently, combat demands initiative and nerve of each man in these arms, even if only on a very limited scale. This requirement is exacted to a particularly great extent also of the combat pilot who - in action - is virtually alone even when flying in formation.

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Because of his passive nature, the Russian soldier is not given to offensive and individual combat. In the many battles and engagements in which I participated in Russia in positions ranging from division commander to commander in chief of Army Groups, I do not know of one that was decided by the superior initiative and fighting spirit of the Russian infantry. In an attack - even in mobile warfare - the Russian soldier was able to succeed only when he had overwhelming infantry, artillery,

-5- and tank superiority on the entire front, or at certain weak points of an extended line, against which he would then direct his main effort. (It would be important to trace the reasons for the ultimate Russian successes in the offensive in order to check the evaluation of their offensive abilities; this, however, is outside the scope of the present study.) The reason why they failed in attacks is without doubt to be sought exclusively in the infantry, insofar as the command does not also bear the blame. The artillery and mortar units fought exceptionally well. If there was sufficient ammunition, we considered a [infantry] ratio of 1 : 3 and even 1 : 4 as bearable when we were in the defense.

The Russian high command very early recognized the inferior offensive quality of its infantry. It attempted to make up for this deficiency by a vast increase in artillery and heavy mortars. This action did not change the quality of the infantry, but in many instances facilitated its mission and provided a better chance for success.

-6- In addition, closely related with the lack of initiative and aggressiveness is the fact that the infantry -- whenever it did achieve a success -- did not take advantage of it, but rather was satisfied, and halted. As a matter of fact, the blame here may also be placed on the Russian command, primarily in the intermediate and higher echelons. They, to be sure, often set far-reaching objectives in their orders, but contented themselves with whatever results were obtained, since they could not overcome the inertia of the infantry. I never did see effective utilization of tactical reserves that had been assembled for a break-

-6- through. During the final stages of the war, strong armored forces were made available for that very purpose. The prerequisites that would have assured success will be outlined later. Thus the national character manifested itself even in the commanders* which, naturally, remains to be substantiated in greater detail.

The following is an example of Russian line of action after they had scored an initial success: From 27 January to 10 March 1945, I was in command of Army Group North in East Prussia. The attacking Russian Army Group had a fourfold superiority in infantry divisions, plus a tank army, several independent tank corps, five artillery divisions, some mortar brigades, and unlimited quantities of ammunition. Approximately half of the divisions in my Army Group had an infantry strength of only 400 to 700 men, and none had more than 1,400. The artillery had scarcely any ammunition -- 10 to 15 rounds per piece per day of action. The panzer divisions had altogether no more than 70 tanks to put into the field on any one day. Several assault-gun brigades were very good, although their strength had dwindled considerably. There were no trenches since it was impossible to dig into the frozen ground, and, naturally, no wire obstacles. The snowfall was light, and did not impede movement. The odds were therefore heavily against us. The battle continued without any interruption while the Russians repeatedly shifted their point of main effort. The lines were unprotected, thinly occupied, and scarcely covered by artillery, but the Russians attacked them with tank support after artillery preparations which were conducted with excessive expenditure of ammunition. Since they knew that there was no danger of counterbattery

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*Zhukhov was an exception. However, the forces that were at his disposal were effective only against disorganized troops, and when vastly superior in numbers.

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fire, the Russians moved up their batteries openly. Soon very little was left of our own infantry. A new thinly manned line was established one to three kilometers to the rear. After the Russian infantry had taken the advance line, neither it nor the tanks would, as a rule, move forward the same day, although by pressing on at that time they would have encountered only minor opposition. During days of rather heavy fighting we would lose from 3,000 to 5,000 men, mostly from artillery fire. Since there were no replacements, the line - which the Army Group had established in a semicircle in front of the Haff of Königsberg - had to be drawn in and shortened continually. The last stages and the end of the battle in East Prussia -- which I, however, was not able to witness -- were finally nothing more than a problem of mathematics. Considering the shortage of men and ammunition on the German side, the battle should have been brought to a conclusion in fewer days than it took weeks, had the Russian command been better and the infantry more aggressive. To be sure, initiative was not lacking on the part of the commander* of the Russian Army Group personally; he fell in this battle early in March.

By comparing the prisoners from the various arms and services, and by interrogating them, we came to the conclusion during the war that -- as far as personnel was concerned -- the Russian High Command had from the beginning neglected the infantry in favor of the other arms of the service. The cream of the crop, especially in officers, we found -- surprisingly enough -- not always in the tank units, but rather in the artillery, and then among the fliers. According to our viewpoint the infantry, which

*Chernyakovsky

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in the final analysis had the decisive mission among the ground troops, should not be inferior to the other arms of service, at least not in the quality of its leaders and subordinate commanders (noncommissioned officers). It is safe to assume that the Russians just did not have sufficient suitable personnel for all arms of the service, in particular not for the mass of the army, i.e., the infantry. Much can be done to remedy such a condition through training and education, but the difficulties cannot be entirely overcome that way since suitable human material is also necessary.

As far as offensive spirit and initiative were concerned, the same situation existed among the armored forces. They attacked and were commanded methodically. As for offensive spirit and initiative, the following episode from the battle of OREL (July 1943) may serve as an example. There I commanded XXXV Corps which was deployed in an arc east of the city. One night during the battle, I concentrated all heavy antitank weapons of the Corps in the one sector against which, I believed, the Russians would direct -- on the following day -- their main effort in a tank attack with at least 600 medium tanks. For this purpose the other sectors were stripped without mercy of these weapons; only in this manner could success be assured in the critical sector. I also took these weapons away from a certain division, even though the likelihood of a secondary enemy attack against it - supported by approximately 50 medium tanks - was clearly indicated. The main attack was repulsed with a loss to the enemy of 220 tanks. In the secondary effort, 50 tanks did break through our lines and put two of our batteries out of action, while the infantry that was advancing under the protection of the tanks could be stopped. The tanks rolled over

-8- the front line, but the division held, and either eliminated or sealed off a number of penetrations. The 50 tanks which had been separated from the infantry remained throughout the day about 50 kilometers back of the front, and to all appearances waited. In the evening, after the main attack had been repulsed, I pulled out two assault-gun brigades (approximately 50 assault guns) and moved them close to the area where

-9- the tanks were still being observed. In the morning, the assault gun units attacked and disabled 35 of the tanks, while the crews of the others got out and beat it. The heavy defensive battle which my Army Group fought in East Prussia from January to March 1945, has been mentioned before. There the Russian tanks, after rolling over the front line, usually suffered heavy losses from our heavy antitank weapons which were in position in the depth of our defenses. As a rule, they did not push on any further after that, nor did they attack the batteries which had been prepared for antitank defense by direct fire. In this manner the Russians lost many hundreds of medium tanks. The Fifth Tank Army of the Russian Army Group was never employed as such with the definite mission of effecting a break-through, but was soon expended in the manner described, and eventually dropped out of the picture entirely. To be sure, the blame for these deficiencies rests primarily with the command. However, there arises the following question: What is the command able to accomplish if the human material it has to work with, and the individual soldier are inferior?

The deep thrust of the Russian tank armies under Zhukhov which, after breaking through the German VISTULA front in January 1945, reached

-9- the ODER east of Berlin, does not reveal the true picture; in the entire sector between the VISTULA and the ODER, there were at best only scattered remnants of the shattered German troops who had been inferior from the beginning, and who were no longer under a co-ordinated command and were without fuel.

It must be mentioned, however, that instances of real fighting spirit, exceptional aggressiveness, and initiative were also noted in the above-described, as well as in some other engagements. Still, such occurrences were not the rule, and there might have been some causal relationship between them and the previously mentioned exceptional cases in which the personality of certain individuals differed from the characteristic traits of the nation as a whole.

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That the Russians were not good as individual fighters was proved also by their pilots, despite the fact that superior personnel was undoubtedly employed in that branch of the service. As a result, the Russian fighter pilots were no match for even greatly inferior numbers on the German side. This fact became evident in Russia, particularly in the Arctic. In the zone in which I commanded the Twentieth Mountain Army in Northern Finland (Lapland), there was a Fighter Wing, the so-called Arctic Fighters, which had at the most 31 planes at its disposal. The airfield was near KIRKENES, close to the Arctic coast. Invariably, whenever our convoys arrived in the fjord-like harbor of KIRKENES, a Russian air attack was made upon the vessels. As a rule, a hundred bombers, escorted by approximately a hundred fighters, appeared upon the

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scene. The Arctic Fighters went into action immediately, and in most instances shot down about 70 enemy planes. In the last attack they shot down 75 of them. It was seldom that a vessel was damaged or that one of our own fighter plane was shot down.

The strength of the Russians lies in the defense.

Here we may also see what an eminent role the infantry generally plays in combat. Psychologically, the activity of the artillery in the defense differs only slightly from that in the attack; tanks, in the defense, are actually only used in counterattacks; and fliers can always fulfill their missions only through attack. In the infantry, however, defensive action is basically different from offensive combat from a psychological point of view. This is of decisive importance for the effectiveness of the Russians in the defense.

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Whenever the Russian infantryman is in his own position, he can withstand the most severe fire - even if his cover affords only moral support - and is even ready to resume action as soon as the fire is lifted. He is more vulnerable to air attacks, in which his cover does not give him the moral support. In the defense, he develops an unheard-of tenacity, right to the bitter end. In counterattacks against penetrations, the infantry - unless numerically far superior - again reveals its inherent weakness.

The Russian High Command also knew how to use the means of propaganda in order to stiffen still more the native tenacity displayed by the infantry in the defensive. Characteristic of primitive man is his gullibility

-11- and the ease with which he may be influenced. Thus, the Russian command was able to propagate the story that the Germans killed all prisoners. The Russian infantryman firmly believed that in his struggle to hold his position he also was carrying on the struggle for his very life, and acted accordingly. In the early part of the war, on 16 July 1941, the 52d Infantry Division, which was at that time under my command, thrust into the flanks of three attacking divisions near ROGACHEV. In one phase of the engagement, a small woods was the key to the defenses which the Russians had quickly established on their flanks. The courageously attacking infantry of our division was able to take the small woods only after a third assault, and after the fire of the entire artillery had been concentrated on that area three times. As we entered the woods, we were confronted by the following scene: One position ran along the edge of the small woods, a second line one hundred meters back of it. In the trenches and in the terrain between them lay hundreds of dead Russians. A closer investigation revealed that a large number of them had slit their throats; numerous razors were lying around. Thoroughly intimidated prisoners who had been captured at other points stated that their comrades had acted in this manner since they were neither allowed to retreat, nor did they want to be captured as they had been told that the Germans killed all prisoners. Even if this belief was somewhat shaken during the course of

-12- the war, it still continued to exist until the very end. Although this belief was effective in stiffening the tenacity in the defense, it was definitely harmful to the aggressive spirit.

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Favorable for defensive warfare was also the Russian soldier's extraordinary skill in the digging of trenches and speedy construction of fortified positions. In nothing flat, he was dug in like a mole, and spared no pain in the construction of positions -- even when it was not absolutely necessary. He then continued to work ceaselessly on further improvements. Here, too, we see the tendency of clinging to the earth and the idea of holding fast. In this field, the Russian also developed a particular cunning resembling a natural instinct for defense. This was especially conspicuous because of the contrast to our men, who in the preparation of defenses did only the most necessary work of their own accord, and had to be ordered to effect any additional improvements.

In the beginning, the commissar system was able to make itself felt especially in the defense. The commissars were personalities driven by fanatical, political zeal. In addition, they were brave and ready to make any sacrifice. They were attached to commanders of companies and higher units. Their mission was to enhance the morale of the soldiers, keep tab on their reliability, and to see to it that they carried out their orders. They had absolute power over life and death. It could not be avoided that they soon began to interfere in the tactical command, particularly since tactical orders had to be countersigned by the commissars. Gradually, a strong opposition formed against them in the officer corps, apparently championed particularly by Marshal Timoshenko. In 1942, the commissar system was discontinued, and since the commissars had had considerable practical combat experience, many were commissioned

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as officers. The soldier stood in mortal dread of his commissar. I feel convinced that it was the commissar who held together and rescued the Russian Army after its numerous defeats and reverses in 1941, or that he at least played a decisive role.

The commissars exerted an extremely powerful influence on the behavior of the soldiers in combat. This influence, naturally, was weaker in the attack than in defensive operations. In the latter case, the commissar was right back of the lines and shot everyone who turned back. Even commanders who gave orders to retreat were shot down. He also saw to it that the soldiers in the trenches were always ready for action. Whenever we were able to take Russian positions with less than the usual effort and made an unusual number of prisoners, we could generally take for granted that the commissar had been either killed or evacuated after being wounded.

As the war progressed, the officers grew into their jobs. In the beginning, their authority was rather limited, and considerably overshadowed by the commissars. The barrier between the soldier and his officer, which is absolutely necessary for discipline, did not seem to exist at first to any considerable degree, perhaps due to the leveling Bolshevist ideology. The Russian High Command very early tried to erect such a barrier through outward signs, and to enhance the prestige of the officer; in many respects, however, they went too far and thus brought about criticism from the soldiers. The shoulder straps were introduced again. Bad feeling, however, arose when the officer received special supplements of imported rations, such as canned meats, butter, chocolate, cakes, and was quartered apart from his unit.*

*Strangely enough, many prisoners knew that the German officer received the same rations as the enlisted man.

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In February 1942 toward the end of the fighting against encircled elements of three Russian divisions in a wooded zone west of YUKHNOV, I saw the snow huts that had housed an infantry regiment. All officers had been quartered in a separate camp next to that of the regiment. During the first year of the war, there was scarcely a prisoner who spoke disparagingly of his officers. Later it became a different story.

In this study I have given a few factors which have to be considered in evaluating the fighting qualities of the Russian soldier. A special study should be devoted to a critique of the Russian command. In order to complete the description of the fighting qualities, mention should be made that the Russian soldier ordinarily possesses a robust constitution, can endure unusual fatigue and privations, and is very frugal. It is particularly striking that despite the fact that an overwhelming proportion of the population is engaged in agricultural pursuits, the Russian soldier has a considerable, almost instinctive talent for technical things (weapons and motor vehicles).

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(signed:)

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