



Red Commanders: A Social History of the Soviet Army Officer Corps, 1918-1991 (Modern War Studies) (Modern War Studies (Hardcover))

Roger R. Reese

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One of the largest and most feared military forces in the world, the Red Army was a key player in advancing the cause of Soviet socialism. Rising out of revolutionary-era citizen militias, it aspired to the greatness needed to confront its Cold War adversaries but was woefully unprepared to change with the times.

In this first comprehensive study of the Soviet officer corps, Roger Reese traces the history of the Red Army from Civil War triumph through near-decimation in World War II and demoralizing quagmire in Afghanistan to the close scrutiny it came under during Gorbachev's reform era. Reese takes readers inside the Red Army to reconstruct the social and institutional dynamics that shaped its leadership and effectiveness over seventy-three years. He depicts the lives of these officers by revealing their class origins, life experiences, party loyalty, and attitudes toward professionalism. He tells how these men were shaped by Russian culture and Soviet politics and how the Communist Party dominated every aspect of their careers but never allowed them the autonomy they needed to cultivate a high level of military effectiveness.

Despite its struggle to develop and maintain professionalism, the officer corps was often hampered by factors inextricably intertwined with the Soviet state: Marxist theory, revolutionary ideology, friction between party and non-party members, and the influence of the army's political administration organs. Reese shows that by rejecting the Western bourgeois model of military professionalism the state greatly limited its officer corps' ability to develop a more effective military. While a sense of group identity emerged among officers after World War II, it quickly lost relevance in the face of postwar challenges, especially the war in Afghanistan, which underscored fatal flaws in command leadership.

Red Commanders offers new insight into the workings of a military giant and also restores Leon Trotsky to his rightful place in Soviet military history by featuring his ideas on building a new army from the ground up. It is an important look behind the scenes at a military establishment that continues to face leadership challenges in Russia today.

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