



Stalin's Folly: The Tragic First Ten Days of WWII on the Eastern Front

Constantine Pleshakov

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On June 22, 1941, radios all over the Soviet Union crackled with the announcement that the country had been attacked by Nazi Germany. But the voice on the airwaves was not the familiar one of Joseph Stalin; it was the voice of his deputy, Molotov. Paralyzed by Hitler's unexpected move, Stalin disappeared completely from public view for the crucial ten days of war on the Eastern Front. In this taut, hour-by-hour account, Constantine Pleshakov draws on a wealth of information from newly opened archives to elucidate the complex causes of the Soviet leader's reaction, revealing the feared despot's unrealized military stratagems as well as his personal vulnerabilities, while also offering a new and deeper understanding of Russian history.

Stalin's Folly: The Tragic First Ten Days of WWII on the Eastern Front Details

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From Reader Review Stalin's Folly: The Tragic First Ten Days of WWII on the Eastern Front for online ebook

Sarah says

Did I like this book? Yes. Was I confused half the time I was reading it? Yes. Would I recommend it? Only if you are a history dork like me. Really, not a bad reading of a very specific subject. I remembered a few details from some classes at IU, but it was interesting to see some of the reasoning (and I use that term loosely) behind the decisions and policies that determined what happened in the first 10 days. The author also has an interesting note at the end of the book regarding his sources which I think anyone who is interested in writing or reading non fiction would find fascinating.

James says

A very interesting book,
if the author is correct,
the history of WW2's eastern front needs to be rewritten,
some other authors who published before this book <2005>,
considered the idea Stalin was going to attack first,
and dismissed the idea.

The notes section is a bit hard to decipher,
so it's hard to tell how solid the foundation of this theory is,
but the fact that Stalin built airfields and everything else
right up by the border indicates either he was planning to attack first,
or he was an even bigger idiot than we already knew.

Because Stalin was so paranoid, he wouldn't have shared his thinking with others until they had a need to know.

And he wasn't ready to attack before 22 June 1942.

David says

When I first read this book, I had my doubts about the author's assertion that the USSR did, indeed, have a plan in 1941 for a pre-emptive strike directed against a German mobilisation on the USSR's borders. Further research (e.g., Bellamy, "Absolute War") inclines me to accept Pleshakov's viewpoint.

Pleshakov does not argue that the USSR had a plan to attack Germany in 1941. He suggests that Stalin agreed to a plan that would enable the USSR to forestall a German invasion. However, the plan became moot because the Germans struck before the USSR had time to implement it.

Sarah says

I know almost nothing about Operation Barbarossa--besides the fact that it was called Operation Barbarossa and was, obviously, unsuccessful--so I can't speak to the historical viability of the argument or whatever. All I can say is that I really enjoyed reading this book and I found it fairly persuasive. I particularly enjoyed the attention given to the personalities of the various Soviet leaders--it made history seem so much more human and fascinating and tangible. I also appreciated the straightforward, simple, and often very lovely writing style--there's no convoluted academic jargon here, and for that I am very thankful.

I will say quickly that I'm slightly biased because I go to Mount Holyoke and am in a class with Professor Pleshakov. In case you're wondering, he's hilarious and a very good teacher. Not that it really matters, but I always like hearing a little about the backgrounds of authors...there's nothing more awkward than enjoying a book and then realizing the author is a douche (which isn't at all the case with this book, thankfully).

Anyways, I enjoyed the read, I learned a lot, and if you're interested in the early days of the German invasion of the USSR, I would certainly recommend this book.

Jeff says

An interesting study of a very specific, short period of World War 2 history -- the first 10 days of Operation Barbarossa, the Germany invasion of the Soviet Union. More specifically, he tries to answer a few questions: (1) Why did the Soviet Army and Air Force perform so poorly? (2) Why wasn't Stalin overthrown as a result of the poor performance? (3) Why did Stalin ignore the numerous warnings that a German attack was imminent, and (in passing, in the Epilogue (4) How did the Soviet Union recover from this disastrous performance to capture Berlin less than 4 years later? The author is a Russian historian who was a visiting professor at Mount Holyoke College when this book came out. He has lots of insight into the personalities of the different commanders, for example Zhukov and Rokossovsky, and looks at the impact of the purges on both of them (Zhukov advanced because of the purges, while Rokossovsky was tortured). I certainly would not recommend it as a first book on the history of the Russian-German conflict -- it's too specific, and much of the book would not make sense to someone who did not already have at least some basis in the subject.

Gary says

Very interesting, filled in the behind the scenes of what went on between Stalin and his Generals, and in the Kremlin during the first 10 days after the Nazi invasion.

I found it amazing how inept most of the Soviet military leaders, including the field commanders were. I also learned that the reason Stalin was slow to prepare for what looked like an inevitable invasion by the Nazi's was that he was planning his own offensive against them, and he couldn't prepare for both an offensive and defensive war at the same time.

Edwing says

magnifico libro, los 10 primeros días de la campaña oriental, el enfrentamiento mas colosal de la guerra, fue, sencillamente aterrador....

Bruce says

The author is Russian, currently a professor at Mount Holyoke College, so he has insights and access to the Soviet war archives that might not be so accessible to a foreign author. Consequently, it provides interesting views of the terror of the vozhd (leader - Stalin) that overwhelmed all levels of command in the Red Army at the time of the Nazi invasion in June 1941. So many events are covered that the book jumps from person to person and incident to incident that it is difficult at times to get the "big picture" of what was occurring. It's worth reading, if you have an interest in the subject.

Pleshakov indicates that Stalin planned a preemptory invasion German-held Europe at about the time that Hitler invaded. This is somewhat controversial, because another author, Niall Ferguson in "The War of the World" (which I'm currently reading) states that the evidence supporting this thesis is to scant to be credible.

Christopher Carbone says

This author also wrote the utterly unreadable "Tsar's Last Armada." Stalin's Folly is as good as Tsar was bad. A painstaking look at how near the USSR was to absolute defeat at the hands of the rising German Juggernaut. Most notably, how both sides were looking to launch an offensive and the Soviets were caught flat footed and on the ropes. Whole armies disintegrated under the rush of German tanks, better generals and an overall better army. A fascinating look at the first ten days of the Russian war and how bad they had it at the beginning.

Chi Pham says

I really want to give this book five stars, for its extraordinary story-telling styles and its descriptive tragedy. However, I honestly feel that the author blames Stalin too much. I understand that the book is ultimately about Stalin's mistakes, but it suggests that Stalin's mistakes ruined the Russian cause during the first ten days of the war. I guess that I am still in doubt about one of the biggest question in history: Can a mere human change the fate of the society, or Did everything happen according to a rule?

Nevertheless, this book is a must read for people who love to embrace tragedy. Tragedy is Pleshakov's strong forte, so why don't you enjoy the story for now?

Sean Smart says

A really well written history of the first 10 days of the German invasion of the USSR in 1941 focusing on all the mistakes by Stalin and his henchmen, and the sacrifices of the Red Army who paid the price for Stalin's errors, paranoia and arrogance.

Mike says

Stalin's folly gets a solid **3 Red Stars** for a decent account of the 10 days from the first German crossing the border to Stalin finally coming back to reality to lead the Soviet Union. Pleshakov brings some clarity to a confusing story. A couple of points stand out. First, the move of the Soviets to the new border after splitting Poland with the Germans causes a major problem as the Soviets moved their weapons out of the old defensive positions but have not completed new positions on the new border. Second, the author bases much of the problem on Stalin's putative plan to preemptively attack Germany. I was not aware of this plan. Third, as anyone familiar with Soviet history knows, Stalin's Great Terror erased much experience from the Soviet armed forces. Pleshakov gives you a good idea of the real impact of this. Fourth, Pleshakov recounts the confusion at all levels.

Stars are taken away for maps, little information on opposing German forces, other than gross generalizations about their moves.

The Great Terror:

(view spoiler)

Poor Stalin had no one to talk to at key points:

(view spoiler)

Even though the Germans were kicking the snot out of the Soviets, there was as occasional victory for the Reds:

(view spoiler)

“Off with their heads” or let’s have a purge to find the traitor:

(view spoiler)

Emmanuel Gustin says

The subject matter is interesting (as well as surprisingly controversial), and Pleshakov made a worthwhile contribution. Nevertheless I didn't like it very much. Perhaps the author wanted just to write for the widest audience possible, but the end product in many places does not read as the work of a professional historian. It is full of sweeping claims and bold statements, often poorly substantiated, and not seldom of the kind that should raise eyebrows in people with detailed knowledge of Soviet history. Pleshakov is of course entirely entitled to defend his specific interpretation of events, but he should have done so with more caution and due diligence.

Overall, this work reminds me too much of popular war history as it was written in the 50s and 60s. It is worth reading, but I think the events of the period have been better (if perhaps less entertainingly) described by others.

Stefan says

Stalin's Folly is a readable and well researched analysis of why Stalin and the Soviet Union reacted so poorly and slowly following the German invasion in 1941. Pleshakov did an excellent job at articulating why Stalin ignored reports from his intelligence services and the Red Army which predicted the German invasion. The author persuasively supports the theory that Stalin was preparing for an offensive war against Germany (which was planned to begin about a year later) and ignored the reports about the German's plan to attack Russia, because Stalin believed that Hitler would not attack Russia without defeating Britain first. In fact, Stalin considered the evidence that pointed towards a German offensive to be an attempt by the Germans to get the Soviet Union to act foolishly. Constantine Pleshakov also did a good job at explaining why the purge of senior of Senior Soviet Union Military Officers led to inefficiency and paralysis within the Red Army when the Germans invaded.

Bill says

I was disappointed in this book. I don't believe the author supports his contention that Stalin was preparing to attack Hitler when Hitler beat him to the punch. He can produce no evidence, such as notes from meetings. He does give a good description of the depression that gripped Stalin in the first days of the war, and the ineptness of the high command and a feel for the magnitude of the losses suffered by the Soviets.
