

Brandon M. Schechter, *The Stuff of Soldiers: A History of the Red Army in World War II through Objects*. Cornell University Press, 2019.

The Stuff of Soldiers: A History of the Red Army in World War II through Objects is an important contribution to a general growing interest in experiences of soldiers of the Second World War, especially those of the Red Army. In this work, Brandon M. Schechter reveals interesting layers of analytical potential in the field of military history by focusing on objects and using material culture to understand everyday lives of Red Army soldiers. This work takes its readers on a well-conceptualized journey of time and space in order to examine some of these objects. The book follows a general trajectory of soldiers during the war, beginning with the home front, continuing through various battlefields and trenches, entering enemy territory beginning in 1944, and following through until their return to the Soviet Union. Each soldier's final destination was, of course, dependent on whether or not they survived the war.

This work is composed of three parts, each with three chapters. Part One, entitled "Mortal Envelopes," discusses the initial experiences of Red Army soldiers through intimate objects, such as pots and spoons. More generally, however, this section interacts with the broader issue of the relationship between the state and the Red Army. Schechter's analysis of various objects reveals both the standardization and uniformity that the state hoped to imbed in its "war machine," and yet each thing could be personalized by the individual soldier themselves. There is an expectation for soldiers to use state property and care for it but also to improvise, such as with making makeshift lamps. In "Violence," or Part Two, the reader enters the battlegrounds soldiers may have been in through objects. Schechter examines things meant to destroy and kill, but also protect. A significant portion of this part is devoted to tanks that became some soldiers' literal homes and protected space but were also intended to attack. The third and last part, "Possessions," delves into a discussion about looting on enemy territories. Such trophies reveal complicated questions regarding the state's ideological stance toward "bourgeois" booty from the enemy yet also its

encouragement of such looting and appropriation. Similarly, soldiers were conflicted in their opinions about taking trophies back home with them, which reveals much nuance in their experiences and opinions.

Ultimately, Schechter's analytical categories of "objects" and "subjects" are not as separate or delineated as may seem. Essentially, though soldiers certainly used and depended on objects, soldiers too began to become things themselves. Being part of the landscape in "cities of rubble" or "earth" made them susceptible to elements of war they had little control over. They were objects preyed on by lice, mice, and other rodents. Corpses became objects of looting, but also means of survival. Furthermore, soldiers were also spied on by *osobisty*, or NKVD representatives tasked with weeding out potential spies in the army. The spying over soldiers made them objects of scrutiny and sources of distrust. Soldiers of particular backgrounds or identities were more susceptible than others. For example, female combatants oftentimes felt themselves to be vulnerable objects in male-controlled situations.

The relationship between object and subject reveals a complicated web of power dynamics in the Red Army at this time. Practically, this could mean different wage rates—a machine runner and sniper receiving more, whereas regular soldiers less. However, it could also mean being put in a less advantageous position. Soldiers who were conscripted from western Ukraine, western Belarus, and Moldova were deemed to be less reliable and barred from operating tanks. In other words, one's relationship with, and in some case mastery of, certain objects offered privileges. These power hierarchies within the Red Army affected many aspects of life such as the amount of rations one would receive or the weight of packages one could send home. Such dynamics also compromised those who were not in privileged positions.

The Stuff of Soldiers is rich in its use of source material and is a strong attempt to include Red Army soldiers who typically receive less attention, such as female combatants and those of non-Slavic backgrounds. It is through the inclusion of these actors and objects that larger issues of state policing, power dynamics, and post-war memory become more intriguing. It is a work full of analytical value

and insight, but it is very much driven by the human aspect of the war. Schechter elegantly intertwines individual stories, context, and analysis taking the reader to the most intimate parts of soldiers' everyday lives. The interested audience of this work will be very large, spanning individuals interested in military history broadly defined, in the history of the Soviet Union, and in material culture.

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Andrew Monaghan, *Dealing with the Russians*. Polity, 2019.

Monaghan's book, *Dealing with the Russians*, joins the growing body of scholarship concerned with disentangling Russia's manifestations in the international space. After falling outside the purview of great power competition and viewed mostly as a "regional power" in the first decade of the 21st century, Russia surprised policy-makers and the academic community alike with the 2014 Crimean annexation. Tensions between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community further escalated with the war in Eastern Ukraine, Syria, accusations of election interference in the Western democracies, disinformation campaigns, cybersecurity threats, sanctions, and countersanctions. Today, Russia's threat to the international liberal order is not open for debate. What is debatable is the Euro-Atlantic community's response to Russia's newly found assertiveness. *Dealing with the Russians* examines the reactions of the US, the UK, NATO, and the European Union (EU) to shine a light on the profound misunderstanding of Russia's acts in the Euro-Atlantic thinking. Essentially, Monaghan's key point is that the Euro-Atlantic community uses an old mentality and language when interacting with, responding to, and interpreting Russia, which is not useful in solving the "security challenge" the West and Russia face. It is time, argues Monaghan, to leave Cold War mental tools of containment and deterrence behind and engage in "fresh thinking" based on a fundamentally different international