

THE EASTERN FRONT, 1914–1917. By *Norman Stone*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975. 348 pp. Maps. \$15.00.

The writer of military history confronts several baffling dilemmas. In trying gamely to straddle their various horns, the Cambridge historian, Norman Stone, has given us much valuable information and analysis but is unable to do full justice to this significant and neglected subject. Torn between depicting the broad panorama and grand strategy of the Eastern Front and providing sufficient particulars to enliven and make credible his account, the author vacillates between Olympian judgments on the major military moves of the combatants and bewildering and unimportant details concerning units and matériel. Rather, to achieve vividness and to give a personalized flavor to the struggle, he should have drawn on memoirs, soldiers' letters, and even novelistic accounts. Stone also does not quite succeed when he tries to balance between adequate coverage of military affairs per se and analysis of the social, political, and economic developments on the home front that play so crucial a role in modern "total war." At times one is overwhelmed with technical military information, while at others the reader puzzles over Stone's rather naïve account of Russian politics or his pet idea concerning the Russian economy, that is, that it failed because of a crisis of growth and "modernization."

Perhaps with a subject as vast and important as this, such dilemmas can hardly be resolved. Nevertheless, one is left with the impression that Stone began with limited objectives and without a clear realization of the magnitude of the task; then the book, like *Topsy*, "just grewed." The result is particularly disappointing because the author clearly knows so much about the subject and because the book, with all its faults, is still the best overall treatment of the Eastern Front available.

Especially valuable are Stone's clear and sensible discussions of the fundamental strategies, often based on misconceptions, which both sides pursued. He is also adept at presenting the development (or lack thereof) of new ideas about warfare on the Eastern Front. He gives high marks to Brusilov as an innovative general but regrettably he does not treat the July offensive in 1917. Stone relates the East to the other fronts, although not always successfully; we seldom see how the war as a whole, or the role of the Eastern Front in it, looked from the center—the planners and leaders in Berlin, Vienna, Paris, and London.

When the author recounts particular campaigns, the narrative at times becomes almost a parody of military history: "Following skirmishes further north, the right of the army had been pushed forward; and the expected cooperation of X Army with the offensive of XII had led to an over-extension of the front-line. . . . That two of the three divisions on the right had been told to garrison Kovno in case of emergency did not lend X Army greater weight; while, to hold the newly extended line, the commander—Sievers, had had to commit virtually all of his reserves to the front line" (p. 117). The maps are confusing and unhelpful, which makes it almost impossible to follow some of Stone's battle descriptions.

At times Stone considers himself a good deal more iconoclastic than he really is. For example, he argues, as if it were a new idea, that most Russian defeats in the war were attributable to disorganization, mismanagement, and poor leadership rather than material shortages. Yet this is fairly generally accepted. (To be reminded how the incompetence and vanity of a few generals led to the slaughter of tens of thousands of men at a time remains no less enraging and chilling.) In a final and seemingly "tacked-on" chapter, the author concludes that inflation, the breakdown of exchange between the countryside and the cities, and poor distribution brought on the revolution. Few would disagree that this sort of economic collapse was a key element in creating a revolutionary situation—though most historians would add some political and social causes as well.

The book is impressively documented. Occasionally Stone relies too heavily on Soviet historiography, which on some issues may have a particular slant. He gives short shrift, for example, to the various voluntary organizations on the Russian home front (War Industries Committees, Union of Towns, and so forth) but refers mainly to Soviet writings which have good reason to show such groups in an unfavorable light. Sometimes Stone's conclusions outrun his evidence. As noted earlier, he makes a good case that material shortages were not the main reason for Russian setbacks, yet his own evidence demonstrates that a serious shell shortage did exist in 1915 and that it was a factor in the disasters of that year, though not perhaps the decisive one. Later, he argues that the army did not dissolve in 1917 yet notes evidence that its morale and fighting effectiveness had declined nearly to zero.

For all its drawbacks this study contains much new and fascinating material. It resurrects a gloomy, desperate struggle which should not have been forgotten. Perhaps future students of modern history, stimulated by this account, will accord the Eastern Front the attention it deserves.

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THE SECRET POLICE IN LENIN'S RUSSIA. By *Lennard D. Gerson*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976. xvi, 332 pp. + 8 pp. photographs. \$15.00.

The early years of the Soviet secret police apparatus have gone without detailed, objective historical treatment for a surprisingly long time. Surely the first eight and one-half years (down to the death of Felix Dzerzhinskii rather than, strictly speaking, Lenin's own demise) is the most researchable period of police history. Yet this epoch of the Cheka is critical, as a myth and as a seminal period, for understanding the future of the police in Soviet politics. I have never studied the first years of the Soviet system intensively and am not competent to criticize Professor Gerson's treatment in terms of specifics, but the study is clearly written, meticulously documented, and as unbiased as a man of evident humanist sympathies can make a discussion of such a grim subject. I should think the book (as previous reviewers have suggested) will retain a valued position in the array of works on the formative years of the Soviet regime. My own interest in the book is primarily for the light it throws on the future; in stressing the advantages and disadvantages Gerson's approach presents in this context, I must acknowledge that my critique may at certain points appear to fault the author for not doing things he never set out to do. It seems to me important, nevertheless, to suggest what remains to be done as well as how much this monograph has already accomplished.

Gerson emphasizes Lenin's personal role in sponsoring and encouraging the Cheka, particularly in its ruthless disregard for procedure (or, precisely, for everything we associate with the rule of law). This fatal tendency in the Soviet system goes back, then, to its origins. Stalin enters the narrative only in the most peripheral manner, as an *apparatchik* with obvious affinities for the dark machinations of police activity. Gerson also clarifies the way in which the structure and spheres of activity of the Cheka—institutional features of lasting significance—evolved. The All Russian Extraordinary Commission (VCheka) took over political police activities as early as December 1917 because the Left Social Revolutionaries had to be given posts on the Collegium of the Commissariat of Internal Affairs. Consequently the formal break in continuity with tsarist administrative institutions was exceptionally sharp. Not until February 1922 did the police apparatus return (as the notorious State Political Administration—GPU) to its "normal" position as part of the internal affairs organization, and then only as a superficial concession to critics of Cheka arbitrariness.