

in Whitehall and whether policy was formed on its basis. Nonetheless, this is an enjoyable and worthwhile book.

Keith Neilson
Royal Military College of Canada

Burgess, William H., III, ed. *Inside Spetsnaz: Soviet Special Operations - A Critical Analysis*. Novato, CA: Presidio, 1990.

It is a telling statement on the rapidly changing nature of the global strategic situation that when this book was published, the Soviet Union and its armed forces still existed, but had dissolved by the time this review was published. While that fact may diminish the volume's immediate currency, the subject it explores retains considerable historical interest and value for the student of the Soviet armed forces and its successors.

The authors of *Inside Spetsnaz* clearly would empathize with the Soviet military correspondent whose article, "A Posting to *Spetsnaz*", appeared in a military magazine in 1990.¹ The article was an effort to explain to a confused letter writer and to readers generally what "real" *Spetsnaz* are and the kinds of actions they undertake. The author underscored the "fragmented, unclear, and contradictory" information associated with the topic. He acknowledged a Soviet military love for the prefix "*spets*" (special), pointing to the existence of "special" troops like chemical, highway and pipeline units; the use of terms like "special services" (*spetsobsluzhivanie*), "special equipment" (*spetsoborudovanie*), and "special designation" (*spetsnaznachenie* – the source of the contraction *spetsnaz*); and the creation of Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) *spetsnaz* subunits and "even" MVD militia detachments of special (*osobyi*) designation (the now-famous OMON). All of these, he suggested, were most often lumped together by the press.

This Soviet author, no doubt still limited by security considerations, did his best to address what he called "real army *spetsnaz*" intended for operations in the deep rear of the enemy, and in a narrow sense did add to the public knowledge. However, for a broad understanding of the richness and complexity of Soviet special operations theory and practice, the reader should go to *Inside Spetsnaz*, the most successful effort thus far to assess the history and development of Soviet special operations forces. The book sets itself the task of correcting the many misunderstandings and fictions surrounding Soviet special operations, while providing context, sources, and guidance to scholars and military specialists doing research in this important area of Soviet security studies.

Inside Spetsnaz meets this goal through the extensive use of Soviet primary source writings (rarely used by most writers on this topic); the selection of contributors from a variety of pertinent military, intelligence, and

academic backgrounds; and finding a balance in approach and assessment that is lacking in many previously published works on the topic. William Burgess, a US Army Special Forces officer, both edited the book and wrote or co-authored several of the chapters. In the introductory chapter he reviews the current state of knowledge regarding Soviet special operations forces and emphasizes a need to better define what is really known about *spetsnaz* -- particularly in light of the unlikely and often absurd assessments that have gained some authority through uncritical repetition. Air Force intelligence specialist Robert Smith's chapter examines these "misperceptions" more closely, taking particular exception to writings such as those of a former Soviet officer who writes under the name of Viktor Suvorov.

Dr. John Dziak, a well known and highly regarded specialist in Soviet intelligence and security matters, provides a useful chapter on Soviet special operations force experience from the earliest days of Soviet power, considering those forces associated with the Ministry of Defense (MoD), the Committee for State Security (KGB), and the MVD, whose interaction is becoming so visible in today's interethnic conflicts. The still-relevant Soviet special operations experience in the Spanish Civil War is treated by Soviet specialist Owen Lock, who notes the enduring nature of innovative Soviet approaches developed in that conflict. Even military specialists who have studied Soviet special operations forces for some years, may be surprised at the important and effective role played by Soviet "engineer units of special designation" in World War II. In a chapter addressing the formation and employment of these engineer *spetsnaz* forces, Burgess notes how they -- drawing on the experience of the Spanish Civil War -- were employed in enemy rear areas to destroy especially difficult targets and to train and operate with Soviet partisans among other missions.

In a joint chapter, Burgess and US Army officer and historian James Gebhardt, identify and document -- for the first time -- the origin and development of Soviet naval *spetsnaz* in World War II. While a naval *spetsnaz* operator such as Viktor Lenov may be unfamiliar to most in the West, the special operations skills and successes he and his Northern Fleet colleagues demonstrated are extraordinary by any standards. In a subsequent chapter Gebhardt goes on to assess instructive Soviet ground and naval *spetsnaz* actions in the fall 1944 Petsamo-Kirkenes strategic operation, while he and Burgess then examine little known, but most insightful aspects of Soviet ground and naval special operations during the 1945 Manchurian Campaign.

While these chapters stand out in the reviewer's estimate, there is much of value in the rest of the book: Kirsten Amundsen's chapter assessing Soviet *spetsnaz* potential in the Far North (particularly Sweden), John Merritt's look at Soviet special operations force employment and interaction during the invasions of Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan, David Isby's discussion of Soviet special operations forces during the Afghan war, Burgess' look at the role of *spetsnaz* as a dimension of the "deep operation," and Jim Short's treatment of today's *spetsnaz* selection and training, are all worth the reading.

Even in the relatively brief time since *Inside Spetsnaz* appeared, extensive contemporary and historical materials addressing Soviet special operations forces have become available in the West. These include previously classified Soviet war experience volumes from World War II and earlier; KGB and MVD periodicals which until recently were restricted; far more forthcoming reports on the Soviet counterinsurgency experiences in Afghanistan; and Soviet reporting on the widespread employment of "special" units to counter internal unrest, "terrorism," narcotics trafficking, and other challenges to central authority and control inside the USSR. The availability of these new materials make *Inside Spetsnaz* all the more valuable for Western analysts seeking to identify, understand, and evaluate a confusing array of special operations forces under MoD, KGB, and MVD control -- forces that have an historic trail the book has done much to mark.

Graham H. Turbiville, Jr.
Foreign Military Studies Office
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

Endnotes

1. Sergei Ptichkin, "Kommandirovka v spetsnac" (A posting to spetsnaz), *Sovetskii voyn* (Soviet soldier), no. 22 (1990), pp. 10-14.

Todd, Olivier. *Cruel April: The Fall of Saigon*. New York: Norton, 1989.

A French journalist, Olivier Todd began his professional coverage of the Viet Nam wars very sympathetic to the Communist side. His extensive experience in South Viet Nam and in Hanoi changed his views.

In Saigon during the final months he constantly confronted the illusions that many Westerners harbored: that the revolutionary forces in the South were independent of Hanoi, that Hanoi did not wish to conquer the South but only liberate it (that is, get the Americans out), and so forth. In his view, the public image of the Viet Nam wars, in France, the United States, and elsewhere, remains clouded by confusion and misinformation.

This book is perfect for the general reader, because Todd is right on all of the big questions. He rejects the myth that the South Vietnamese citizenry and Army were too passive or too pro-Hanoi to offer serious resistance to the Communist forces. He emphasizes the failure of the southern populace to rise up against the allegedly hated and hateful Saigon government. (Quite the contrary, as in 1968 and 1972, so even in what were clearly the last days of the independent South in April 1975, the population of Saigon remained orderly, a terribly revealing but often overlooked fact). He makes clear the incredulity