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Obfuscating the Eastern Front: How it Dealt With Our Nation's Public and Publishers

The on-going project of my sponsors focuses on American understanding of World War II in Russia both during the conflict and especially after the war. More specifically, how through the written works of former Wehrmacht officers, such as Heinz Guderian, Erich von Manstein, as well as subsequent authors like Charles Witting, James Lucas and others have managed to romanticize the people and events of the Germans who fought on the eastern front, and show how a subculture has evolved out of this romanticization.

My task was to investigate the popular opinion of these works. Of particular interest to my sponsors was the opinion of not only the contemporary public, but also of the people who published these works, as well as the academic circles both within and outside of the US military.

This investigation brought me to a variety of sources. Major sources such as "The New York Times Book Review" and "Book World" provided a national perspective. "Military Affairs Magazine" and "Library Journal" provided sources more closely connected to academic circles.

For contemporary public opinion I retrieved both reviews and

Times Book Review." A most valuable resource appeared through "Amazon.com", where readers would express their reactions. To increase sales, distributors like "Blitzbooks" would also post their opinions and preferences.

The reaction of US critics to the first generation of German accounts of the war in Russia were mixed. Reviewers tied to the US military praised the German authors for their authenticity and analysis. Academics, on the other hand, roundly criticized Manstein and others for their deceptive accounts. After the 1960s such critics gradually diminished and slowly the German view emerged as the dominant vision of the east. As a result, a subculture exonerating the actions of the Wehrmacht and the SS began to develop.

As the subculture further developed, authors like Charles Whitting published works of virtual fiction, notably his book on the infamous Joachim Peiper. Now, very few legitimate scholars even review these books. Their absence leaves only military personnel and civilians sympathetic to this subculture to review the bulk of these through some publications, but mostly through the internet.