Germanys surprise attack on June 22, 1941, shocked a Soviet Union woefully unprepared to defend itself. The day before the attack, the Red Army still comprised the worlds largest fighting force. But by the end of the year, four and a half million of its soldiers lay dead. This new study, based on formerly classified Soviet archival material and neglected German sources, reveals the truth behind this national catastrophe. Drawing on evidence never before seen in the West, including combat records of early engagements, David Glantz claims that in 1941 the Red Army was poorly trained, inadequately equipped, ineptly organized, and consequently incapable of engaging in large-scale military campaigns--and both Hitler and Stalin knew it. He provides a complete and convincing study of why the Soviets almost lost the war that summer, dispelling many of the myths about the Red Army that have persisted since the war and soundly refuting Viktor Suvorovs controversial thesis that Stalin was planning a preemptive strike against Germany. Stumbling Colossus describes the Red Armys command leadership, mobilization and war planning, intelligence activities, and active and reserve combat formations. It includes the first complete order of battle of Soviet forces on the eve of the German attack, documents the strength of Soviet armored forces during the wars initial period, and reproduces for the first time available texts of Soviet war plans. It also provides biographical sketches of Soviet officers and tells how Stalins purges of the late 1930s left the Red Army leadership almost decimated. At a time when the war in eastern Europe is being blamed on a fallen regime, Glantzs book sets the record straight on the Soviet Unions readiness, as well as its willingness, to fight. Boasting an extensive bibliography of Soviet and German sources, Stumbling Colossus is a convincing study that overshadows recent revisionist history and one that no student of World War II can ignore. This book is part of the Modern War Studies series.
My Personal Review:
In STUMBLING COLOSSUS, David Glantz captures a moment in time critical in understanding how the world wound up the way it did. From the time that Stalin became undisputed leader of the Soviet Union as First Secretary, his singular goal was the exportation of communism as the world's sole political system. During the late 1920's through the late 1930's Stalin built up a huge war machine that, as primitively equipped as it was, still had to be respected as the brute power he had intended it to be. With the emergence of Nazism, Hitler quickly and illegally rebuilt the German Army to the extent that year by year, Stalin came to be increasingly intimidated by it. As Glantz points out, Hitler was not the only cause for concern to Stalin. The Japanese were making threatening noises in Manchuria, and Stalin had somehow to factor in his paranoia this Japanese expansion into Soviet territory. To complicate matters from Stalin's perspective was his own paranoia. To put matters bluntly, Stalin did not trust his own military. Comrade First Secretary Stalin tended to see more snakes in his own garden than in Hitler's. He determined to remove any potential threat to his own iron grip on power. Glantz writes that "After the expulsion from the Soviet leadership of Commissar of War, L. D. Trotsky, who had been the principal defender of the 'military experts,' and the rise to power of I. V. Stalin, the cleansing of the army began."

This 'cleansing' began in 1937 and continued until the very day that German divisions rolled into Russia. The bag of officers purged was appallingly high. Any officer over the rank of colonel in the Red Army had a one in three chance of facing a firing squad or a tenure in one of Stalin's gulags. It did not take a rocket scientist for the survivors to figure out that their best chance to avoid the fate of their predecessors was to become spineless 'yes-men' who could advance in rank only by cringing before Stalin's bizarre refusal to face reality: that Hitler truly planned to take the Soviet Union as his own and to exterminate the greater mass of the Russian people.

It is here, on the point of deciding the culpability for Russia's poor intitial performance of the war, that scholars are divided. There are the mainstream historians who place the disgraceful state of readiness of the Red Army squarely on Stalin's unwillingness to antagonize the Wehrmacht before he had cleaned up his own messy situation both in Manchuria and in his recognizing that his military was not able to fend off, let alone launch a pre-emptive strike in 1941 or 1942. Reviewer Michael Petukhov insists that Glantz's book is less reliable than the ones written by fellow countryman Viktor Suvorov, whom Petukhov supports by writing in his own recent review that "Stalin was actively preparing the offensive against Nazi Germany sometime in July of 1941." I am not sure what criticism Petukhov intends toward Glantz's thesis that Stalin and Stalin alone was responsible for the near defeat of the Soviet Union in 1941 and 1942. If Petukhov
insists that Stalin's generals ought not to have worried due to the massive size of the Red Army, then perhaps the inner lesson of Glantz's book suddenly takes on a crystal clarity. When any army corps of generals has to look over its shoulders towards a leader who rewards creative thinking and constructive dissent with disgrace and death, then the stumbling of their military colossus takes on a reverberating of aftershocks that lingers even until today.

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