

Fruits of the Revolution

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***THE ROUT*, by Alexander Fadeyev; Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, undated (first published in the U.S. as *The Nineteen*, International Publishers, 1929).**

Although everyone is familiar with the 1917 October Revolution that brought the Bolshevik Party to power in Russia, most Americans know little – and care less – about the Civil War by which the Bolsheviks consolidated that power afterward. But while that struggle has left but scant impression upon our public consciousness, it did produce at least one work of interest to the American military leader of today, particularly to junior officers and young noncommissioned officers. That book is Alexander Fadeyev's slim novel, *The Rout*.

Originally published in 1926 as *The Nineteen*, the novel is based upon Fadeyev's experiences as a Soviet partisan during the Civil War, when in 1919 his unit was forced to retreat deep into the wilderness. Fadeyev was an ardent Communist, whom one student of Russian history and language that I know described as a "sycophant and toady of Stalin." Despite this background, his book is a gritty, candid, interesting read that contains valuable material for aspiring young combat leaders. An example is the story of Metchik, a fresh-faced and naïve young man who joins the partisans at the opening of the book. From the moment of his arrival at the company, Metchik's socioeconomic background as a middle class, urban youth isolates him from the seasoned veterans—none of whom make any effort to integrate or socialize him into the company. Save for a perfunctory class on the care of his horse, the chain of command ignores Metchik, while the enlisted soldiers “abuse [him] on the slightest pretext: for his city jacket, his correct speech, his not knowing how to clean his rifle...”

Ignored or ostracized by those who could exert a positive influence upon him, Metchik falls in with the worst elements in the company, performs his duties poorly, develops an attitude of self-pity, and grows increasingly alienated. Having been neither trained nor mentored, Metchik panics upon contact with the enemy, flees, and ultimately deserts. The lesson for the junior leaders of today is clear: soldiers require the careful training and cultivation of their leaders if they are to develop the skill, will, and trust that will make them effective members of the unit.

Further food for thought for aspiring young leaders comes near the end of the book. In the riveting final chapters, Fadeyev describes the company's harrowing flight through a nearly impassable swamp after being mauled by White Cossack troops, vividly depicting the deleterious effect of extreme fatigue upon the judgment and decision making faculties of leaders and led alike.

Despite Fadeyev's politics, *The Rout* is largely free of intrusive ideological content. If there is anything overtly ideological in the book, it may be in the contrast between the weak, cowardly Metchik and his brave, sturdy partisan comrades—a contrast that Fadeyev may have intended as symbolic of the difference between what he saw as the corrupt, venal, *bourgeoisie* intelligentsia and a noble, virtuous, proletarian/peasant class. This, however, is speculation.

Fadeyev's last years were marred by illness, alcoholism, and depression. He committed suicide on May 13th, 1956, leaving behind a note that bitterly denounced the post-Stalin party leadership.