

Introduction: Experiences of the “Front” during Russia’s Great War and Revolution

John W. Steinberg, Laurie S. Stoff,
Anthony J. Heywood, and Boris I. Kolonitskii

Despite the obvious importance of Russia’s military involvement in the Great War, not only for the outcome of the war itself, but in shaping the subsequent trajectory of history in that region as a catalyst for revolution, the history of Russia’s land war has not been studied extensively by scholars outside Russia nearly as intensively and thoroughly as the campaigns on the Western Front.¹ Likewise, Russia’s naval war remains largely unexplored compared with the conflict at sea elsewhere.² Viewed in global geographic terms, the military historiography in English about the war has evolved in a distinctly imbalanced way over the last century. The overwhelming majority of publications on this topic have focused on the war not as a global phenomenon but as, firstly, a conflict in Western Europe between the Central Powers, on the one hand, and, on the other, the operations of the Western Allies together with the United States; and secondly, as a struggle for control of the Atlantic Ocean and North Sea. Russia’s military involvement has traditionally been marginalized, and there have been few English-language book-length studies of the so-called Eastern Front (defined to encompass Russia’s struggle not just with Germany and Austria-Hungary but also with the Ottoman Empire in the Caucasus and

¹ See Dominic Lieven, *The End of Tsarist Russia: The March to World War I and Revolution* (New York: Viking, 2015), 17–91 and 343–85, for an authoritative recent account of the war’s impact on the Russian Empire and especially for the author’s comments on the significance of the Eastern Front to World War I history. Other recent important studies of Russia during World War I include Joshua A. Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

² This has long been the case, perhaps best described by Winston Churchill in *The Unknown War: The Eastern Front* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1931).

Persia). In fact, somewhat remarkably, Norman Stone's history has remained the foremost exemplar for over 40 years since its publication in the mid-1970s.³

Even within Russia the volume of publications about Russia's Great War has never matched the level of interest in the West (although there are more published studies in Russian than in English). Until very recently, Russia's "Second Patriotic War," as it was sometimes called at the time, was something of a forgotten war in the country's historical collective memory. Even though, as Karen Petrone notes, "the absence of official commemoration did not mean the absence of war memory itself," Soviet citizens found it difficult to learn anything about the conflict in their history books or to find memorials to its victims.⁴ This situation persists to a considerable extent even as this book is brought to completion following the centennial year of 2017. Books about World War I are vastly outnumbered in Russian (as well as Western) bookshops by the enormous and still rapidly growing literature about World War II, and a significant proportion of the current offering consists of Russian translations of older Western studies by such authors as B. H. Liddell Hart, John Keegan, and David Stevenson.⁵

In many respects, the reasons for the relative paucity of scholarship on Russia in the military historiography of World War I are familiar, obvious, and by no means limited to just this field of late tsarist and early Soviet history. Dismissing the war as an imperialist conflict and mere prelude to the October Revolution, the Soviet regime deemphasized its importance in the historiography, established very narrow boundaries for research, and severely restricted access to the archives and contemporary printed matter. Indeed, foreign scholars were routinely denied access even to the valuable Soviet military history publications from the 1920s, let alone the archives.⁶ Also crucially

³ Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front 1914–1917* (New York: Scribner's, 1975). At the time of writing the most recent survey in English, adhering to orthodox military history, is David R. Stone, *The Russian Army in the Great War: The Eastern Front, 1914–1917* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015).

⁴ Karen Petrone, *The Great War in Russian Memory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 6. Petrone challenges the idea that there was no such attempt at keeping alive the memory of the war. Another work that explores the memory of the war is Aaron J. Cohen, *Imagining the Unimaginable: World War, Modern Art, and the Politics of Public Culture in Russia, 1914–1917* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

⁵ B. H. Liddell Hart, *The Real War 1914–1918* (London: Faber & Faber, 1930) (later re-published as *History of the First World War*); John Keegan, *The First World War* (London: Hutchinson, 1998); David Stevenson, *1914–1918: The History of the First World War* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

⁶ The outstanding work published in the 1920s was Iu. K. Tsikhovich, ed., *Strategicheskii ocherk voiny 1914–1918 gg.*, 7 vols. (Moscow: Vysshii voennyi redaktsionnyi

important, as with every other field of Russian and Soviet history, has been the relative lack of knowledge of the Russian language outside of that country. Even the writings of émigré Russian authors have tended to suffer obscurity, with the exception of the few that have been translated into English. Decades later, this problem continues to prevent many academics and students alike from engaging directly with Russian secondary as well as primary sources, and generally the work of Russian historians still needs to be translated in order to be accessible outside Russia.⁷ Additionally, a more specific problem for this field—especially research into military operations—has been a heightened sense in the Soviet Union of the military need for secrecy, above all during the 1930s, as the danger of another great war with Germany loomed.

The evolution of the Soviet military historiography of World War I thus differed in several fundamental respects from its Western counterpart.⁸ If, initially in the 1920s, both were dominated by memoirs and operational and campaign histories written by every type of participant in the conflict, there was a dearth of similar Soviet publications during the 1930s. By contrast, this was a time of much activity and innovation in the West, when historians began seeking both to integrate archival materials into their source-base and to broaden the range of analysis from the Grand Strategy of Nations and Empires to the war aims of monarchs and politicians, the operational plans of generals and admirals, and the detailed examination of new weaponry (albeit the military literature still focused almost exclusively on the battles between the Central Powers and the Western Allies).⁹ Moreover, Soviet military his-

soviet, 1922–23). Each volume had a prominent lead author who served as an operational commander during the war and General Staff officers in the imperial army such as A. M. Zaionchkovskii, and the volumes were published as a series as part of the work of the Commission for Researching and Using the Experience of the World and Civil Wars under the direction of A. A. Svechin.

⁷ The best example of a translated work is N. N. Golovin, *The Russian Army in the World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931). Golovin wrote this book while in emigration in France.

⁸ Nonetheless, there were some important exceptions, of which one recommended book from the Soviet period is I. I. Rostunov, *Russkii front pervoi mirovoi voiny* (Moscow: Nauka, 1975).

⁹ Much of the work produced after the 1920s consisted of books and articles written by former tsarist officers in emigration. A systematic list of this material is in Aleksei Gering, *Materialy k bibliografii Russkoi voennoi pechati za rubezhom* (Paris: Passé Militaire, 1968). Before the war ended, British memoirs and official histories started to appear, and this material dominated the early English-language historiography of the war. An example of a key early work using such sources is the aforementioned Basil Liddell Hart's *The Real War 1914–1918*, which was published in 1930, and C. R. M. F. Cruttwell, *A History of the Great War 1914–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934). Both of these

torians did not follow the lead of their Western counterparts when the latter began to take their work in new directions from the 1970s and 1980s, seeking to break away from national and military histories of World War I by reframing the study of the conflict through a rich variety of largely cultural and social themes, and looking beyond military history archives for sources that revealed broader, more cultural approaches. Ranging from studies about the war's impact on cities and on social groups such as workers and women, to the civil-military consequences of mass casualties, death, and dying during the war effort itself as well as in the aftermath of the war, this new research allowed for a more complex portrait of the level of mobilization of nations and the extent and its impact on a much greater diversity of participants in the war effort.¹⁰ But crucially, the lack of access to the primary sources prevented Western historians like Norman Stone from applying this approach to Russia's war. Thus, if the historiography of the Western Front during recent decades has offered a more extensive definition of World War I as a "Total War" by focusing on every aspect of the war from its human experience to its impact on civilization in its broadest conceptualization, the same could not be said concerning the scholarship about Russia.

Only with the collapse of the Soviet Union did historians both within and outside Russia begin in earnest to examine the social and cultural aspects of the war in Russia.¹¹ The resultant new body of literature has start-

books offer a few chapters on the Eastern Front. One of the earliest books in English to focus exclusively on the Eastern Front is Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis, 6: The Eastern Front* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1931).

¹⁰ Examples of this literature include Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *1914–1918: Understanding the Great War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002); John Horne, ed., *State, Society, and Mobilization in Europe During World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); J. M. Winter, *Capital Cities at War: London, Paris, Berlin, 1914–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Eric Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). These titles represent just a very few of the many books that have broadened the content of World War I studies. The point remains: none of these books offer a systematic analysis of anything that happened on the Eastern Front. In most cases the Eastern Front is not mentioned at all.

¹¹ For examples of this emerging literature, see William C. Fuller, Jr., *The Foe Within: Fantasies of Treason and the End of Imperial Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Peter Gatrell, *Russia's First World War: A Social and Economic History* (Harlow, UK: Longman, 2005); Hubertus F. Jahn, *Patriotic Culture in Russia during World War I* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Joshua Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905–1925* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003);

ed a process of revealing Russia's limited strength and multiple weaknesses that determined the course of its Great War experience, helping significantly to broaden, deepen, and better define our understanding of the "Total War" that culminated in the collapse of the empire and the emergence of the Soviet Union. Inevitably, much remains to be done, and it will be a long while before historians of the Eastern Front begin to ask, as some historians such as John Horne are now beginning to do for the Western Front, whether this more cultural approach is reaching the limits of its utility.¹²

This book—the first part of an entire volume in the Russia's Great War and Revolution series about military affairs—seeks to promote and extend this nontraditional form of military history in relation to Russia.¹³ The point of departure for this type of examination rests with the premise that the military history of World War I in the Russian theater cannot be sufficiently understood by focusing exclusively on descriptions of war plans, strategy, and operations, and that, precisely because war is a human activity, it is crucial to establish the place of humans in this military story. After all, no military activity could proceed if the rest of society failed to contribute to the war effort, as became vividly clear in Russia in 1917. So whereas "traditional" military histories often overlook this issue, reducing warfare to planned strategies and their execution and numerical representations of troops and their movements on maps, this book aims to foreground the military experiences of the people who endured the demands, the challenges, and the deprivations of the war.

Our intention for this volume initially was to highlight and explore the "frontline" experiences of the troops who had to fight in the trenches and the sailors who manned the warships during World War I. As such, it was intended to complement the second book in volume 3 of the Russia's Great War and Revolution series, which focuses on experiences of the war and revolution on the Home Front.¹⁴ Almost immediately, however, the scope was expanded to include the experiences of people conventionally excluded from the traditional definition of "military personnel," such as nurses, chaplains, and civilian

and Melissa Kirschke Stockdale, *Mobilizing the Russian Nation: Patriotism and Citizenship in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹² See, for example, Horne, *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe*.

¹³ Important examples of this emergent literature in English are Igor Narskii, "The Frontline Experience of Russian Soldiers in 1914–1916," *Russian Studies in History* 51, 4 (2013): 31–49; and William G. Rosenberg, "Reading Soldiers' Moods: Russian Military Censorship and the Configuration of Feeling in World War I," *American Historical Review* 119, 3 (2014): 714–40.

¹⁴ Adele Lindenmeyr, Christopher Read, and Peter Waldron, eds., *Russia's Home Front in War and Revolution, 1914–22, Book 2: The Experience of War and Revolution* (Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2015).

workers, but whose presence in the zones of war was essential for making military operations possible. As in the West, beginning in the summer of 1914, huge and diverse swaths of the Russian population became part of the empire's military effort in a wide variety of ways beyond conventional combat. The resultant variety of human experience means that in order to draw a more comprehensive picture of Russia's war, it is essential to study not just those people traditionally understood as primary participants in military conflict, i.e., soldiers and sailors, but also those who have been categorized outside this rigid designation.

Furthermore, adopting this approach led to the realization that the traditional divisions not just between "combatant" and "non-combatant"/"civilian" but also between the military "front" and "rear" or "home front" are insufficient, or at least too calcified, for adequate description of war experiences in the Russian theater. The categories of participant were very porous, with identities and definitions shifting over time and place, not least under pressure from the state as the regime struggled ever more desperately to mobilize people and resources for the war effort. Additionally, and crucially, the military "front" was not the static or consistently delineated space so familiar in France and Flanders. Russia's Great War was in fact relatively mobile, particularly during 1914–15 and the summer of 1916—so much so that for many months the Stavka's¹⁵ daily press statements used a variety of terms such as "line" and "direction" to describe parts of what we know today as the Eastern Front.¹⁶ Furthermore, garrisons in cities across the empire and tens of thousands of deserters played significant roles in the revolutionary events of 1917, most notably in the capital and on the railways. A significant impulse to such thinking was also given by the receipt of several chapter proposals about the experiences of prisoners of war: if our aim is to analyze the experiences of people in uniform, why exclude the experience of POW camps? In the Russian context, then, to ascribe terms such as "frontline" and "rear" can be problematic, indicating a somewhat false, or at least highly fluid and mutable divide. As the activities of war expanded and moved, they encompassed actions and actors that increasingly erased clearly designated divisions between the military and civilian zones. Thus, as these studies indicate, the conditions of total war reveal the extent to which it is necessary to think of the "front" as something determined less by geographic space than by functionality.

¹⁵ Shtab verkhovnogo glavnokomanduiushchego—Headquarters of the Supreme Commander in Chief.

¹⁶ These statements were printed daily in key newspapers like *Novoe vremia* and *Russkie vedomosti* as well as in the weekly periodical *Letopis' voiny*.

As result, the notion of the military "front" must be interpreted very broadly. Anticipating the Civil War years when the fighting would spread throughout the former tsarist empire, the "front" in this book extends far beyond the lines of trenches and even beyond the military-controlled front-zone—the *zone de l'armée* in French military terminology. It was in all the vastly different circumstances where soldiers and other wartime personnel lived, fought, and died; it was where medical staffs worked around the clock to administer aid to the wounded and sick (both military and civilian); it was where railway workers were essential to moving people and goods for military purposes; it was even in POW camps. To some extent, the "front" could be wherever military conflict had an impact on those who intersected with it. This is not to say that the "front" and the military experience encompassed all areas of Russian life, but that it is extremely important to consider the ways that it reached into the lives of many people and into many territorial realms that have not previously been included in the historiography and ultimately shaped their experiences of war in significantly militarized ways. The common theme here is the military character of the experiences in a nebulous and fluctuating, ill-defined zone of conflict we can only loosely term the "front." In other words, although the front was not necessarily everywhere, it could be almost *anywhere*.

Furthermore, although Russia's Great War did share many of the characteristics of the campaigns in Western Europe, more importantly for present purposes, it was also characterized by a host of important factors that were significantly different from the war experiences there. Indeed, the wartime experience in the Russian theater was not monolithic even in its own context. Aside from the mobility and fluidity of the front, noted above, these other factors included time and space, nationality, religion, gender, the vast numbers of casualties, status, and politics. That means that while this book seeks to add to the growing literature about Russia's Great War by examining these types of themes through the prism of "human experiences," it does not aim simply to mimic existing studies of war experiences on the Western Front. For example, one understudied theme that emerges in the research presented in this book is the impact of the multiethnic composition of the empire on the military effort. This characteristic of the empire by definition meant that for Russia the war was going to be a transnational experience even before one single Russian soldier marched toward the lines of the Central Powers in 1914. While we make no claim to offer a comprehensive examination of the impact of the war on the empire's many ethnic groups—a vast project in its own right that has yet to be tackled—we hope that the works presented here will serve as

a starting point and stimulus for extensive research on the multiethnic character of the armed forces.¹⁷

Additionally, much in need of further research are military experiences during the Civil War. As noted above, the intended focus of this book was the period of Russia's involvement in World War I. But the subject matter of some of the chapters—for example, those dealing with the repatriation of POWs or the experiences of disabled veterans—naturally extended into the period of the Civil War and beyond. Since this perspective accords with the broader schema of the RGWR project, it seemed reasonable to accept a chapter proposal that focused on the troops of a Red Army unit in 1918. Unfortunately, we do not have a chapter about anti-Bolshevik soldiers for comparison, and we can but hope for more research on military experiences of the Civil War years.

The chapters that follow have been grouped under three organizational rubrics: Soldiers and Sailors; Command, Supervision, and Support; and Disintegration, Captivity, and Death. The first section, "Soldiers and Sailors," features chapters that focus on the experiences of those traditionally labeled as combatants during 1914–17 together with the chapter noted above about the Civil War. While the standard image of a World War I Russian soldier was that of an Orthodox male peasant that was often accompanied by idealized tropes such as patriotic, brave, stoic, loyal, fatalistic, simple-minded, and child-like, combatants also shared a common war experience that is not well understood. These chapters combined, therefore, seek to understand better the more complex question of the war experience for Russian soldiers and explode some of the myths. They explore categories of participants who fall outside those narrow parameters and reveal the diversity of experience. Thus, the opening chapter by Alexandre Sumpf indicates the complexity of Russian representations of one of the most important spaces of the war, the elusive "No Man's Land." Chapters by Liisi Esse on Estonian soldiers, Oleg Budnitski on Jewish soldiers, and Franziska Davies on Muslim soldiers reveal the differing wartime experiences of some of the ethnically and confessionally diverse groups of people who composed the imperial army. Together, these chapters

¹⁷ See, for instance, Mark von Hagen, "The Limits of Reform: The Multi-ethnic Imperial Army Confronts Nationalism, 1874–1917," in *Reforming the Tsar's Army: Military Innovation in Imperial Russia from Peter the Great to the Revolution*, ed. Bruce W. Menning and David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 34–55; Robert F. Baumann, "Subject Nationalities in the Service of Imperial Russia," *Slavic Review* 46, 3 (1987): 489–502; and Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *Jews in the Russian Army, 1827–1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). There is still much work to be done given that the 1897 census listed 71 different ethnic groups as subjects of the Russian Empire. For an easily accessible source on this issue, see Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multi-Ethnic History* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 397–98.

demonstrate that the varied wartime experiences for these subjects of the tsar ultimately alienated them from the body politic as a result of their standard treatment within the army and throughout the war. Complimenting this interpretation is the work of Laurie Stoff: her chapter demonstrates the limitations of the masculine conception of soldiering, stressing the story of women soldiers in the army and their experiences of war as primary participants.¹⁸ D. A. Bazhanov casts new light on the role of the Baltic Fleet sailors in 1917 by using the Russian archives to examine the role of the navy's discipline code and its enactment in building identity and ultimately cohesion among the officers, non-commissioned officers, and sailors in the Baltic Fleet during World War I.¹⁹ E. O. Naumov then elaborates on the everyday lives of Red Army soldiers on their Eastern Front (Siberia) in 1918, reflecting the core theme of the whole RGWR project that Russia endured a continuum of violent crisis between the outbreak of World War I and the early 1920s.²⁰ The first part of the book concludes with a chapter by Karen Petrone, which discusses the memoirs of imperial army medical doctor and officer Lev Naumovich Voitlovskii, who served in both the Russo-Japanese War and World War I, but not as a typical combatant. As Petrone demonstrates, his memoirs are an invaluable source for enriching our knowledge of military experiences.

Part II, "Command, Supervision, and Support," addresses the military experiences of people who cannot easily be defined as "combatants" but nonetheless participated in and intersected with the war in extremely significant and influential ways. It begins with a chapter by Paul Robinson on perhaps the most important person in Russia, short of the tsar, at the beginning of the war—Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, the commander in chief of the imperial army for the first year of the war who, famously, never visited the frontline trenches. Usually portrayed in hagiographic terms, the grand duke has not been well understood, and this chapter aims to provide a better sense of the sources and forms of motivation that governed his decisions as commander in

¹⁸ For more complete treatment of this phenomenon, see Laurie Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland: Russian Women Soldiers in World War I and the Revolution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

¹⁹ Work on the activities of the Baltic Sailors in 1917 was done many years ago by Norman E. Saul, *Sailors in Revolt: The Russian Baltic Fleet in 1917* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1976); and Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Revolution and the Baltic Fleet: War and Politics, February 1917–April 1918* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1978).

²⁰ On the presumption that Russia endured a persistently continuing crisis from July 1914 until sometime in the 1920s, see Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

chief.²¹ Next, Aleksandr Astashov uses documents found in the censors' files at the central Russian State Military-Historical Archive to assesses the extent to which soldiers supported the war effort or became increasingly radicalized, together with the tsarist government's attempt to control the war effort and the soldiers' reactions.²² Laurie Stoff then introduces readers to the nurses (called sisters of mercy) who, throughout the war, sought to redefine their role in Russian society both as medical workers and as women in their struggle to cope with the vast numbers and often horrific experiences and fates of the wounded—a situation that had been unimaginable in Russia prior to the world war.²³ These chapters are complimented by Dietrich Beyrau's work on the role of the Russian Orthodox chaplains, ever present with the Russian soldiers on the battlefield and yet little known. This section concludes with Anthony Heywood's chapter about a large group of civilians in the army-controlled front zone—railway personnel—whose work was critically important for the war effort and whose experiences reveal how the war increasingly promoted the militarization of civilians.

Vital to understanding Russia's wartime experience is the impact of the tumultuous events of 1917 on the lives of soldiers throughout the empire. To understand better the conditions for soldiers as the empire approached 1917, the third section of this book, entitled "Disintegration, Captivity, and Death," offers chapters that demonstrate the destructive effects of the war on the morale of the soldiers and of Russian society in general. Reaching a climax in 1917, these trends are portrayed in Aleksandr Astashov's chapter about fraternization at the front and in Paul Simmons's chapter about desertion. These chapters reveal how discipline and morale collapsed across the empire, which culminated in the Officer Corps losing its command authority and ultimately its control over the army in 1917.²⁴ Alexandre Sumpf's chapter follows, focusing on the experiences and treatment of soldiers whose partic-

²¹ The long-time standard biography of the grand duke is Iu. N. Danilov, *Velikii kniaz' Nikolai Nikolaevich* (Paris: Imprimerie de Navarre, 1930). Robinson's chapter is developed from his recent book: Paul Robinson, *Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich: Supreme Commander of the Russian Army* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2014).

²² Further conclusions of this type can be found in Aleksandr Astashov, *Russkii front v 1914–nachale 1917 goda: Voennyi opyt i sovremennost'* (Moscow: Novyi Khronograf, 2014).

²³ This chapter builds on her recent book: Laurie Stoff, *Russian Sisters of Mercy and the Great War: More Than Binding Men's Wounds* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015).

²⁴ For the deep background on the imperial army in 1917, see Allan K. Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982 and 1987).

ipation in the war left them permanently disabled. These disabled veterans haunted the European landscape for the next generation, and the chapter offers a poignant portrait of a long-term impact of the war that was experienced not only in Russia but across all the belligerent nations.²⁵ Three chapters then examine the conditions, activities, and experiences of POWs on both sides of the Eastern Front, and show how the prisoners' experiences affected their loyalty to their respective sovereigns.²⁶ Specifically, Oksana Nagornaia discusses Russian prisoners in POW camps and their integration into early Soviet society, Julia Walleczek-Fritz examines the experiences of Russian prisoners in Austria-Hungary, and coauthors Mattias Egger and Christian Steppan compare Russian and Austro-Hungarian efforts to provide aid to compatriot POWs.²⁷ Next, Boris Kolonitskii's chapter on Aleksandr Kerenskii, the army, and the fate of soldiers and citizens trying to navigate the confused politics of 1917 demonstrates that the collapse of the notorious June 1917 offensive constituted a key moment in the failure of the Provisional Government.²⁸ Lastly, Alexandre Sumpf discusses the death of troops—tragically the final experience of the war for so many people—and their burial in the midst of a war that is now famous for its unprecedented numbers of fatalities.²⁹

In addressing the significance of the Eastern Front, this work opens a portal into a complex yet critically transformative moment in Russian and world history. It spotlights an empire struggling to survive a mighty military endeavor by mobilizing extensive human and material resources. As part of that process, Russian authorities encouraged ethnic minorities and women

²⁵ See, for example, Heather R. Perry, *Recycling the Disabled: Army, Medicine, and Modernity in WWI Germany* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2014).

²⁶ Analysis of the experiences of Russian POWs in the Ottoman Empire and Ottoman POWs in Russia would usefully extend this work.

²⁷ For an earlier work on POWs in Russia during World War I, see Alon Rachamimov, *POWs and the Great War: Captivity on the Eastern Front* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002).

²⁸ See also Boris Kolonitskii, "Tovarishch Kerenskii": *Antimonarkhicheskaia revoliutsiia i formirovanie kul'ta "vozhdia naroda," mart–iiun' 1917 goda* (St. Petersburg: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2017).

²⁹ Much research on themes related to society and culture during World War I has been published in earlier volumes of the RGWR project, most notably in Murray Frame, Boris Kolonitskii, Steven G. Marks, and Melissa K. Stockdale, *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914–22, Book 1: Popular Culture, the Arts, and Institutions*, and *Book 2: Political Culture, Identities, Mentalities, and Memory* (Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2014); Sarah Badcock, Liudmila G. Novikova, and Aaron B. Retish, *Russia's Home Front in War and Revolution, 1914–22, Book 1: Russia's Revolution in Regional Perspective* (Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2015); and Lindenmeyr, Read, and Waldron, *The Experience of War and Revolution*.

to defend the motherland despite previously considering them unsuitable or at the very least unreliable for military service. At this level, the chapters of this book dovetail nicely with some of the existing literature that investigates emerging notions of citizenship based on the loyalty of subjects to the tsar and his regime as well as to the powers that replaced him. They indicate that such notions created a cohesive idea about the role of the military in Russia, a task with which tsarist authorities had struggled since the universal conscription act of 1874 and the creation of a conscript army.³⁰ While movement toward a unified military system was a work in progress, the failure to create one by World War I contributed to the events that culminated with the 1917 revolutions.

This body of research, therefore, leads us to consider the extent to which the tsarist and even Provisional Government war efforts actually worked at counter-purposes with the needs of empire. As the human experience of Russia's Great War is examined and assessed, the image is emerging of an empire in serious distress not only because the loyalty of many of its subjects/citizens was simply not strong enough for the regime to prevail, but also because it was unable to adapt to the demands of modern total war. Of course, long-term considerations that range from the aristocracy's self-serving concerns to nepotism and corruption throughout government and industry should not be marginalized in this discussion. But this book demonstrates that, in addition to those long-term challenges, the efforts of Russian authorities in World War I to mobilize all aspects of society to contribute to the military effort had, at best, a limited benefit for the empire's ability to wage war. The war taxed even those whose commitment had been unwavering previously and who saw the war as an opportunity to demonstrate their worth as citizens. It required the autocracy to adapt and adopt modern techniques and approaches, and yet the regime found this demand increasingly difficult and even undesirable. Old forms of social organization prevented the modernization that might have allowed Russia to wage total war effectively. Rather than creating national cohesion, they stirred disillusionment, tensions, and pressure for separation; and with the regime incapable of using the civilian population in effective ways, the war intensified divisions and social dislocations. Ethnic groups, instead of "rallying around the flag," became ever more disenchanting as their military service highlighted their disingenuous treatment both at the front and throughout the empire, and as conditions deteriorated. The ineffectual use

³⁰ On the transformation of the Russian army from a serf to a standing army, see John L. H. Keep, *Soldiers of the Tsar: Army and Society in Russia, 1462–1874* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Bruce W. Menning, *Bayonets Before Bullets: The Imperial Russian Army 1861–1914* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation*; and most recently, Stockdale, *Mobilizing the Russian Nation*.

of especially human resources prevented the tsarist regime from generating much support for itself or unity for the empire. This, combined with material and technical shortcomings, made World War I an ordeal that ultimately cost the Romanovs their empire and their lives. As the deprivations of wartime escalated, the regime's efforts to strengthen itself to persevere in this all-consuming "Total War" actually contributed to the destabilization of society and ultimately the outbreak of revolution in 1917.

The chapters in this book should be seen as merely a point of departure for considering these aspects of World War I on the Eastern Front. We hope that this collection will inspire scholars to engage in further research aimed at enriching our understandings of both the universal and the specifically contextual nature of the wartime military experiences of Russia, allowing us better to comprehend the conflict and its impacts on people, not just as a causal factor leading to the revolution, but especially as a profoundly important and poignant moment in the continuum of crisis that encompasses Russia's Great War and Revolution.