Studies of the Red Army officer corps from 1937 to 1941 have focused exclusively on the terror of the Ezhovshchina: the arrest and execution of officers by the secret police of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD), headed by Nikolai Ezhov. These studies have conveyed the sense that the Ezhovshchina was the overwhelming influence on officer quality in those years and that Stalin's purge in 1937 and 1938 destroyed the military's top leadership, leaving the army poorly led when the Nazis invaded in 1941, and that other shortcomings in the army arose from its effects. A frequent contention, professed equally in the West and in Russia, holds that because its best officers were either dead or languishing in the GULag, the Red Army suffered defeat after defeat at the hands of the Wehrmacht, buying time while a new Soviet Army was formed that eventually forced the Germans back.

Between 1989 and 1991, with apparently unhindered access to military and Party archives and freedom to publish, Soviet historians and the Communist Party press published a wealth of statistical data suggesting that Stalin and not the army caused the early defeats of the eventually victorious, gallant and blameless Red Army, claiming that without a purge, the Red Army would have not only performed heroically, but would also have successfully averted the tremendous devastation visited on the USSR. Yet as more exact figures on the casualties of the purge become available, the less such conclusions hold up. Hard numbers weaken the depiction of the purge as a cataclysmic catastrophe for the military and suggest other explanation of Red Army failures in 1941 and 1942. The purge was only one of several factors that incapacitated the Red Army on the eve of Operation Barbarossa, and not the primary one at that. A great
deal more was happening in the Red Army to disrupt preparation for war.

*Izvestiia TsK SSSR*’s publication in 1990 of the reports below, originally compiled by E. A. Shchadenko, Chief of Officer Personnel of the People’s Commissariat of Defense in 1940, provides reliable figures on the total number of officers purged. Table 1 presents a breakdown of the number of men discharged from the army and the various reasons why, such as arrest, expulsion from the Party for associations with enemies or foreigners, political-moral, or medical. All told, 34,301 army, air force and Political Administration of the Red Army (PUR) leaders were discharged from the army during the *Ezhovshchina*. Of these, 11,596 were reinstated, leaving 22,705 purged as of May 1940. Laying aside years of speculation on purge casualties, we can begin to ask what these numbers mean.

**Tables 1 A, B, C**

Cleaning out the army and reconsidering discharges (excluding the air force).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Discharge</th>
<th>Discharged in 1937</th>
<th>Reinstated in 1938-39</th>
<th>Remained discharged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Arrested (by NKVD)</td>
<td>4,474</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>4,268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Discharged (expelled from the KPSS for associations with conspirators)</td>
<td>11,104</td>
<td>4,338</td>
<td>6,766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Discharged for political-moral reasons (drunkenness, moral depravity)</td>
<td>1,139</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>1,030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Dropped from the rolls due to death or medical discharge</td>
<td>1,941</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1,933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18,658</td>
<td>4,661</td>
<td>13,997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of nachal’sostav</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>