

Book Reviews

Shaun Walker, *The Long Hangover: Putin's New Russia and the Ghosts of the Past*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. 253 pp., plus notes, index and illustrations. Hardcover, \$29.95.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia and its people have grappled with a crisis that is not atypical for nations with a troubled past—the question of how to create a new identity that incorporates the positive achievements of its history. Shaun Walker's book, *The Long Hangover: Putin's New Russia and the Ghosts of the Past*, is a study of Vladimir Putin's popularity in Russia and his use of memory politics and Soviet nostalgia to create a new national identity of which modern Russians can be proud. In the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, the Russian people were left with a sense of confusion and emptiness. Their nation, a superpower for decades, had crumbled and long-buried secrets were exposed to the scrutiny of the world. From the time Vladimir Putin became president in 2000, one of his chief concerns has been the construction of a new sanitized version of Russia's history, one that selectively focuses on the nation's best and most heroic moments, particularly its victory over the Nazis in World War Two. This carefully curated image would satisfy the desires of the Russian people who needed an outlet for their patriotism. The generation of Russians who witnessed the end of the communist system are often sentimental about the past, but for the most part they do not long for the resurrection of the Soviet Union; what they want is the sense that Russia is still a strong and respected nation. Putin strategically elevated the victory over Germany to new heights, harnessing the people's thirst for purpose and meaning to weave together a new mythology of Russian greatness. Not surprisingly, this agenda necessarily involves a great deal of state-sponsored whitewashing and forgetting.

Walker is the Moscow correspondent for *The Guardian* and has spent a great deal of time in Russia, on the ground, witnessing the events and atmosphere of Putin's presidency. He was, for example, in Crimea

and Donetsk, in eastern Ukraine, during the events of 2014. His presence there allows him to explain the conflicts through its historical roots and through conversations with individuals on all sides. In Crimea, he reports that while few people were passionately pro-Ukraine and a larger number were pro-Russian, most residents were fairly neutral. The real longing was for stability and sense of meaning. In the end, however, Putin succeeded in taking Crimea for Russia, appealing to leaders within the region with promises of political appointments and financial support. When the question was put to a vote, officials' claims showed overwhelming support, but this failed to show that many Crimean Tatars and pro-Ukrainians boycotted the referendum. The situation in eastern Ukraine was similarly complicated, as Walker describes that there were indeed many pro-Russian individuals in Donetsk, but also a great deal of "fake news," Russian propaganda, and the presence of Russian soldiers. Walker's actual presence during and after these conflicts makes these sections particularly interesting and enlightening, and his conversations with both the actors in and the helpless victims of these events brings an authenticity to his work and reminds us of the human cost of Putin's plan to make Russia great again. To his credit, Walker also avoids one of the pitfalls of some journalistic writing; while much of his book is based on personal experiences and interviews, he keeps the focus on his subjects, not himself.

Similarly, Putin inherited the problem of a rebellious Chechnya when he became president and ending the conflict was a major priority. The Chechens had suffered greatly under the Soviet regime. Tens of thousands had been purged in the 1930s, and during World War Two, nearly half a million people had been deported to the Kazakh steppe, accused of collaboration with the Nazis. At least twenty-five percent of those deported died within the first four years. Now, as Putin tried to crush the current rebellion, the Chechen people suffered again as Russia bombed Grozny, claiming that the goal was protection, not defeat. Putin's ultimate victory, however, was the conversion of the local leader Akhmad Kadyrov and, after Akhmad's death, his son Ramzan, who struck a cynical deal with the president—money and personal power in exchange for peace and forgetting. In the first decade of Putin's presidency huge amounts of money were funneled into Chechnya, rebuilding Grozny and lining Ramzan's pockets. Ramzan was given free rein to settle old scores and crush any opponents of the new pro-Russian agenda. The acceptable story was that Chechnya had been liberated by Russia and anyone who questioned the narrative did so at the risk of torture and/or death.

There is one major problem with Walker's book, however, one that may already be evident from the content of this review: *The Long Hangover* is really two books in one. Walker promises in his introduction and first chapters to demonstrate how Putin harnessed contemporary pride in the Soviet defeat of the Nazis to create a sanitized version of history that provides a sense of meaning and national identity in a post-Soviet world. But then he spends the majority of his book (seven out of twelve chapters) explaining the complex events in Crimea and Ukraine. He dedicates one chapter to the Olympics in Sochi, but it is mysteriously short (only six pages) and fails to fully tie in his purported thesis. Other sections discuss Chechnya and Kolyma, a remote area in Russia's far east that served for decades

as an enormous prison colony for the Gulag system. These sections mention the Soviet victory in World War Two, but focus more on the state-inspired forgetting of Soviet crimes and atrocities in contemporary Russia.

This shortcoming of Walker's book is unfortunate because the question of how contemporary Russians deal with the Soviet past while still retaining a feeling of national pride is a fascinating one. As Walker aptly explains, many Russians today mourn the loss of Russian greatness that was part of the Soviet past, but for the most part this has nothing to do with Lenin or Communism. In 1991, Russians "experienced a triple loss ... The political system imploded, the imperial periphery broke away to form new states, and the home country itself ceased to exist." On an emotional and philosophical level, Russians had lost "not an empire or an ideology, but the very essence of their identity." He points out that while many people remember the Soviet period with more affection than they probably felt at the time, memory is fickle and malleable and can be manipulated by one's own needs and the influence of outside forces. As the architect of the post-Soviet narrative for contemporary Russia, Putin has been a master manipulator, offering a message of stability and glory through the reestablishment of Russian international strength and a selective narrative of Russian historical greatness.

The utilization of the Soviet victory in World War Two, historically a rallying point for Russian patriotism, to create a new cult of the Great War deserves a greater place in Walker's book, if his intent is to fully explore his thesis. One recent manifestation of this growth of World War Two celebration is the Victory Day event known as the march of the "Immortal Regiment." Conceived in 2011 by three journalists in Tomsk, the event involves a parade of individuals carrying portraits of their relatives who fought in or experienced the Second World War. The first year, 2012, the parade in Tomsk included about 6000 locals. The numbers grew as the movement spread to other cities, and the nature of the event changed from a popular procession to one that became state controlled with mandatory displays of patriotism and the appearance of Soviet and Stalinist symbols. Since 2015, Putin and other top Russian officials have participated. In 2019, an approximate 750,000 people marched in the parade in Moscow alone. Walker's book, published in 2018, fails to even mention the Immortal Regiment movement, an enormous oversight in a study that claims to explore Putin's exploitation of Russia's victory in the war. Anyone who has spent time in Russia or interacted with educated Russians who seemingly gloss over Soviet sins and praise the actions of their president will find Walker's omission of the Immortal Regiment and other Sovietesque acts of patriotism frustrating. Still, Walker's book is well written and his chapters on Crimea and Ukraine are interesting and useful in understanding the complexities of the crisis there. One wishes, however, that he had written a separate volume solely on these areas and more completely explored the search for Russian identity under Putin in the current volume.

Lee A. Farrow

Auburn University at Montgomery

James Carl Nelson, *The Polar Bear Expedition: The Heroes of America's Forgotten Invasion of Russia, 1918-1919*. New York: William Morrow, 2019. Viii + 309 pp.

The stories of US military interventions in the Russian Civil War have continued to draw chroniclers in the twenty-first century. In 2001 Carol Willcox Melton, a professor at Elon College, published *Between War and Peace: Woodrow Wilson and the American Expeditionary Force in Siberia, 1918-1921* (Mercer University Press, 2001). Following in the footsteps of Betty M. Unterberger, Melton reiterated the view that Woodrow Wilson sent US soldiers to Vladivostok in order to rescue the supposedly beleaguered Czechoslovak legion and facilitate humanitarian relief while remaining neutral in the struggle between various Russian forces. The next year two other professors, Donald Davis and Eugene Trani, presented a strikingly different perspective in *The First Cold War: The Legacy of Woodrow Wilson in U.S.-Soviet Relations* (University of Missouri Press, 2002). While concentrating on the interventions at Vladivostok and Archangel in only one chapter, Davis and Trani insightfully argued that those expeditions were part of a broader Wilsonian effort to accelerate the demise of the Bolshevik regime. Then Robert L. Willett, a Florida resident who had traveled to the Russian Far East in 1998 as a member of the Citizen Democracy Corps, produced *Russian Sideshow: America's Undeclared War, 1918-1920* (Brassey's, 2003). Willett was more critical than Melton of President Wilson's misguided decision to intervene, but refrained from taking a clear stand on different interpretations of the episode and focused instead on the experiences of US soldiers—"a tale of heroism, hardship, cowardice, and comradeship" that ended with the loss of 446 American lives in northern Russia and Northeast Asia. More recently, Carl J. Richard, a professor at the University of Louisiana, published *When the United States Invaded Russia: Woodrow Wilson's Siberian Disaster* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2013). Elaborating on ideas he first presented in an article in 1986, Richard argued that Wilson originally intended to help Czechoslovaks and patriotic Russians rebuild an eastern front against the Central Powers but after the end of World War I he left the US expedition in eastern Siberia in order to assist the overthrow of Bolshevism and to contain Japanese expansionism.

Now James Nelson, a former journalist who published three books about US military experiences in the First World War, has written a new account of the military expedition to northern Russia. Nelson's subtitle appears to be an allusion to a statement by one of the leading critics of Wilsonian policy toward Russia, Senator Hiram Johnson, who welcomed the return of the 339th infantry regiment to Detroit in July 1919 by saying, "To have done their duty as they did it marks every one of these boys a hero, for all time to come" (p. 272). Drawing on limited research in records of the American Expeditionary Force to North Russia at the National Archives, as well as memoirs by veterans of the expedition, Nelson colorfully retells the stories of their fights against Bolshevik troops who greatly outnumbered them. He clearly shows that many of the American doughboys had little understanding of why they had been sent to "the hostile wilds of north Rus-

sia” (p. 281). Yet his own analysis of Wilsonian motivations is not very incisive. “Woodrow Wilson had sent in troops with instructions to guard stores [of military supplies at Archangel] and stay the hell out of Russia’s internal affairs” (p. 275), he simply concludes. Nelson’s lack of familiarity with many scholarly studies of Wilson’s decision-making, including the books by Richard and Davis and Trani mentioned above as well as an earlier book by this reviewer, seems to have contributed to his having little more understanding of US policies than the soldiers of “Detroit’s Own” regiment.

Historians of Russian-American relations may find it valuable that Nelson’s book contains reproductions of a number of photographs from the Polar Bear Expedition collection at the Bentley Historical Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan. However, they will find little else of value in this work of popular military history.

David Foglesong
Rutgers University

Michael Pullara, *The Spy Who Was Left Behind: Russia, the United States, and the True Story of the Betrayal and Assassination of a CIA Agent*. New York: Scribner, 2018. 322 pages, plus illustrations, appendix, and index. Hardcover, \$28.00.

In August, 1993, Freddie Woodruff, a branch chief for the CIA in the former Soviet Republic of Georgia, was shot in the head and killed while riding in the back seat of a car driven by the chief bodyguard for the president of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze. According to officials in the Clinton administration, Woodruff was in charge of training Shevardnadze’s security forces, a joint project of the CIA and US Special Forces. Woodruff had reportedly been on a sightseeing trip in the mountainous Georgian countryside when struck and the seriousness of the injury and the remoteness of the location had made it impossible to save him. Nine days after the murder, the Georgian government declared the case solved, announcing that the shooting was an accident, the carelessness of a twenty-one-year-old off-duty soldier who had drunkenly fired at the car Woodruff was riding in when it failed to stop. Within a few short months, the young soldier was tried and convicted to fifteen years in prison.

Michael Pullara, the author of *The Spy Who Was Left Behind: Russia, the United States, and the True Story of the Betrayal and Assassination of a CIA Agent*, is an attorney who grew up in Searcy, Arkansas, where Freddie Woodruff and his family also lived. When he read about Woodruff’s death in the *New York Times*, he was intrigued by the story and suspicious of the circumstances and explanation of the shooting. He was especially interested in the possible connection between the murder and the arrest only a few months later of CIA agent Aldrich Ames for espionage. Ames had been chief of an antinarcotics intelligence task force in the Black Sea region and had been in Tbilisi a week before the shooting. At the time of his arrest, the FBI suspected that Ames had betrayed at least ten CIA agents spying on the USSR, leading to their deaths. As this story unfolded over

the next year or so and the CIA began to question the story of Woodruff's death, Georgian officials changed their tune and asserted that a successor organization to the KGB's foreign operations and intelligence branch was behind the murder. At the same time, the "press"—Pullara does not specify where—revealed that at the time of the trial, the convicted soldier has claimed that he had been tortured into confessing. This jumble of claims prompted Pullara to submit several Freedom of Information Act requests in 1997, and thus began his search for the truth.

What followed was a decade and a half of research, interviews, and secret meetings in the United States, England, Georgia, and Russia. Pullara spoke with a wide variety of people, from Woodruff's sister, who still lived in Searcy, to Georgian President Shevardnadze. With the help of an intrepid translator, he interviewed virtually everyone involved in the case at all levels, including the other individuals in the car, the accused murderer, the attorneys, and a cast of shady characters. Pullara enjoys regaling his reader with stories of bribes paid, unusual meetings, and the danger he faced by investigating a case that others wanted to forget. In the end, Pullara believes he comes as close to the truth as anyone is likely to get. Spoiler alert: Woodruff's death was not an accident.

Pullara's book is informative, as much for the story of his investigation as for his descriptions of post-Soviet Georgia and its corrupt political and security networks. There are many agencies, sub-agencies, and information services in this case, and the sheer number of them can be a bit confusing at times. As one might expect in this type of book, the author gets a little too self-absorbed at times, focusing on his own role in the examination instead of the tangled tale itself. Moreover, the book lacks citations of any sort, failing to include even a bibliography, so readers are left wondering about sources. Nonetheless, those who are intrigued by the world of spies and post-Soviet espionage will find the book an interesting read.

Lee A. Farrow
Auburn University at Montgomery

William J. Burns, *The Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for its Renewal*. New York: Random House, 2019. 501 pages, and index. Hardcover, \$32.00.

Over the past forty years, American diplomatic relations with many nations in the world have gone through many changes. The end of the Cold War and the 9-11 attacks radically altered the way American foreign policy has been conducted. William J. Burns' memoir, *The Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for Its Renewal*, documents a career in the American foreign service that took him to many of the most critical parts of the world.

Burns' career spanned from the Reagan to the Trump administration. His nearly forty years public service started with a failure in Lebanon in 1983. The attack on the U.S. Marine barracks rattled the Reagan administration and also

proved to be a defining event in Burns' career. His service under the Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations allowed Burns to work closely with James Baker. Burns credits Baker's wisdom and expertise with helping ease the end of the Cold War and help him develop as a diplomat. He spent most of his time between the Soviet Union (and later Russia) and Lebanon and other areas of that region. The early part of the memoir is less detailed than the later sections on Russia under Vladimir Putin and Dmitri Medvedev.

Burns' work in the 2000s under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama in Russia in particular illuminate a great deal about attempts by the United States to foster better relations with Russia in this new era. While this era in Russian-American relations was quite complicated and Burns reveals much about how and why the U.S. took the positions that it did, his account also reveals much about how and why Putin, Medvedev, Obama, and Clinton were re-establishing better Russian-American relations. Burns acknowledges that both sides many mistakes and competing interests did not allow the relations to improve, but rather deteriorate.

Throughout the memoir, Burns emphasizes the centrality of the State Department in American diplomacy. Burns drives home the point that American diplomacy, especially the State Department, has been diminished over the past three years of the Trump administration under Secretaries of States, Rex Tillerson and Mike Pompeo. Burns argues that the drift away from diplomacy and toward military responses needs to be reversed to avoid escalating conflicts. His role in the negotiating the Iran nuclear agreement supports this argument, but the abandonment of this agreement by the Trump administration further drives Burns to make this point.

The memoir is instructive and revealing, but the lack of detail early in the book leaves the reader with more questions than answers, especially about his work in Lebanon that he would return to later in his career. The later sections are more detailed, but also seem to give an aura of caution related to some of the most pressing matters in the relations with Russia during the Obama administration, in particular the story of the Magnitsky Act of 2012 which is not even mentioned in the work.

In the end, most political memoirs are cautious by design and Burns' work continues that tradition. However, his life and career illustrate clearly a person dedicated to public service who recognizes and is concerned about the current state of professional diplomacy in the United States. It is a worthwhile read for scholars of Russian-American relations.

William Benton Whisenhunt
College of DuPage