 UNIFORMS ILLUSTRATED No 8

Soviet Army Uniforms Today

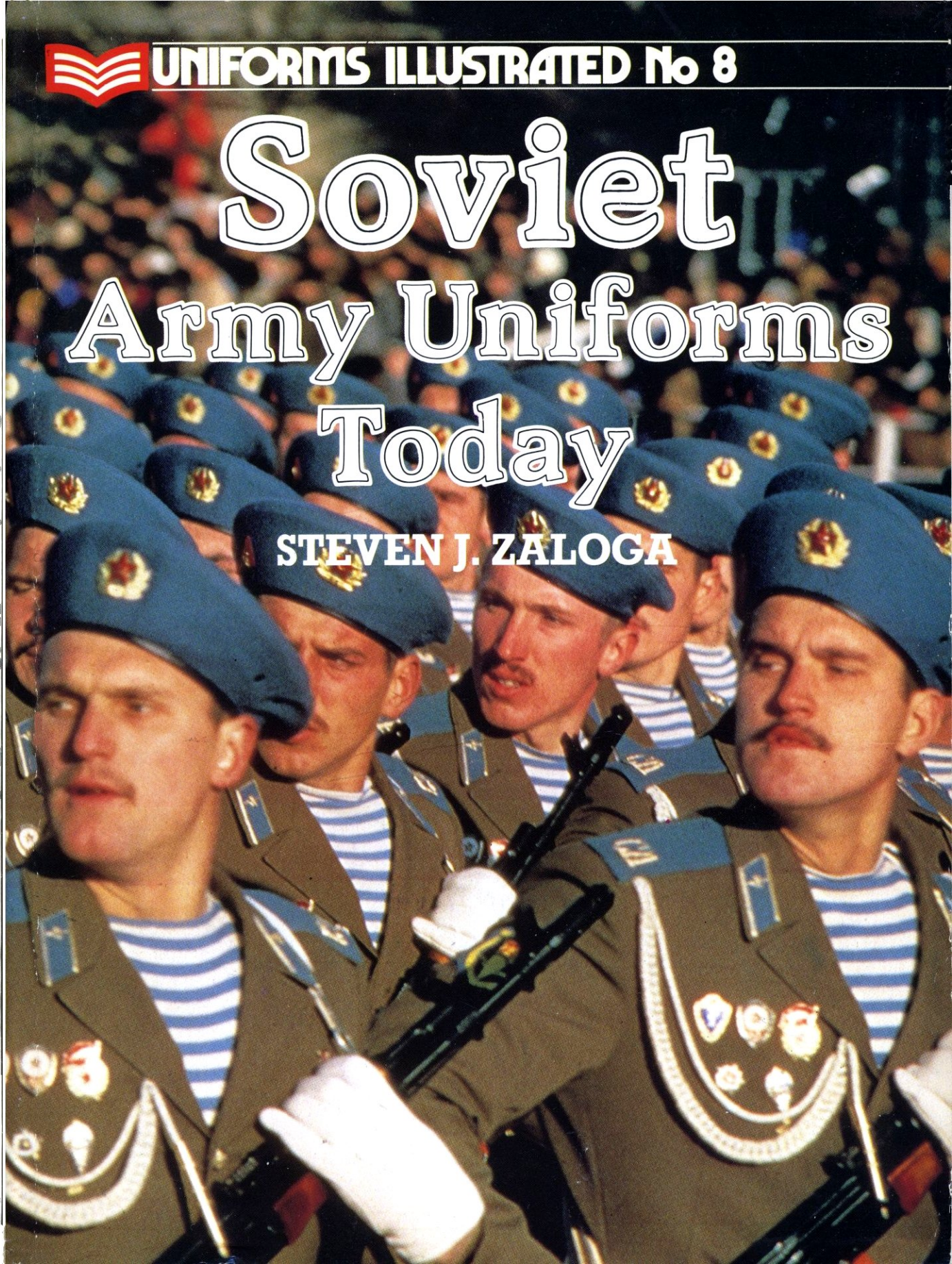
STEVEN J. ZALOGA

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2000



Cover illustration: A BMP scout patrol in full camouflage overalls. The troops are armed with the AKS 5.54mm assault rifle. (Sovfoto)

1. Troops of the Tashkent Military Academy on exercise with their BMP-1s, March 1982. (Sovfoto)

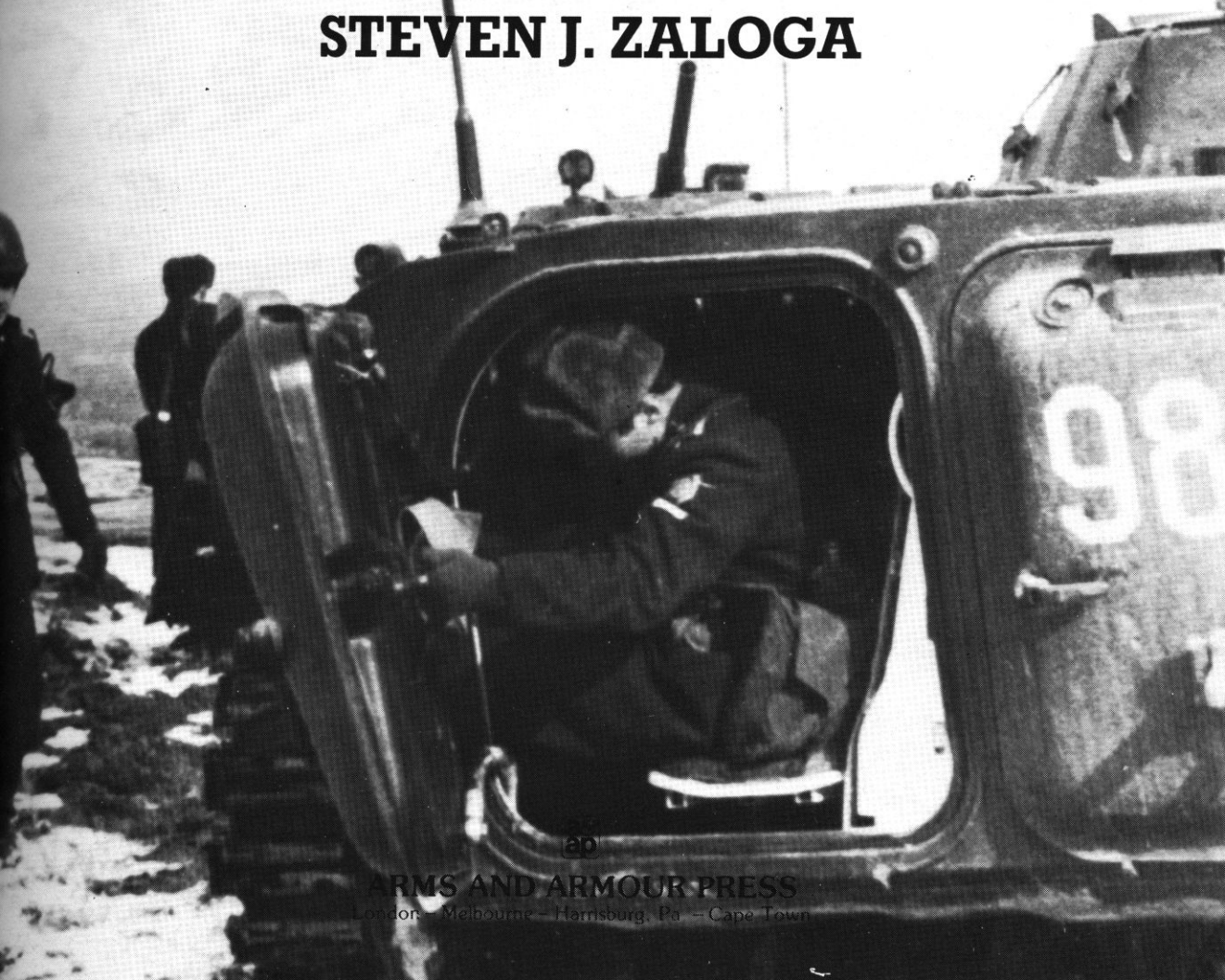




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Introduction

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The Soviet Army is the world's largest, deployed across the vast Eurasian land mass from the Polish border to Vladivostok and from the Arctic Circle into the arid deserts of the Middle East and Central Asia. This book is intended to present a pictorial guide to this army today, emphasizing its uniforms, small arms and equipment, tanks and armoured vehicles having been covered in *Tanks Illustrated 4: Soviet Tanks Today*.

The Soviet Army of today differs from that of the Second World War in both substance and appearance. Unlike its 1941 counterpart, it has not been plagued by catastrophic political interference or purges; indeed, the military leadership today controls the Soviet Union, hand-in-hand with the Communist Party. Its role in defending Russia against foreign invasion has placed it in a particularly favoured position in Soviet society – and its equipment reflects this.

In appearance, certain traditional Russian uniform details remain, but generally they have disappeared with the gradual adoption of Western styles of dress. For example, the winter service cap remains the *ushanka* fur cap, but the padded *telogreiki* jacket and trousers have given way to the greatcoat. Soviet elite forces wear the very un-Russian beret, and the *gimnastyorka* peasant blouse is less commonly seen than jackets and shirts of Western pattern. Perhaps the most striking change in the Soviet Army is its soldiers' uniformity of appearance compared to the very heterogeneous appearance of Soviet troops during the Second World War. During the 'Great Patriotic War', it was possible to see the standard national uniform; remnants from the Civil War days like French helmets and *shelm* padded winter caps; Cossack *papashkas*, Caucasian capes and cavalry gear; Lend-Lease uniforms; and the oddments of partisan dress. The modern Soviet Army has dispensed with the revolutionary heritage of the Civil War and its various ethnic dress in favour of a simpler, more mundane apparel not significantly different in appearance from that of most other contemporary armies; where it does differ from most other armies is in its sheer size.

The photographs in this book have been selected primarily from the Sovfoto bureau archives in New York. Other photos have been added from private collections, and also from certain published Soviet sources when particular detail not available elsewhere is evident. The author would like to thank Vika Edwards of Sovfoto for her help in finding many of these photos.

Steven Zaloga



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3. A Soviet soldier with an R-105 portable manpack radio. He is wearing the standard *ushanka* fur winter cap and a wool greatcoat of dark olive green. (Sovfoto)

4. An interesting view of an infantry platoon in 1959; the troops

look hardly distinguishable from those of the wartime generation, except for the AK-47 rifles. They still wear the peasant-style *rubah* shirt, and carry their personal gear in bed-rolls.



5. Although a part of the Soviet Armed Forces, the Border Guards are controlled by the KGB. They wear uniforms which are identical to Army uniforms but carry the green insignia of their service. The Border Guards have seen considerable action along the USSR's frontiers in the past decade, mainly against the active smuggling rings in Central Asia and the Caucasus. The troops in the boat are wearing the sun cap, first introduced in the Army in 1938 for troops in arid desert regions; the two soldiers in the centre wear the usual *furazhka* peaked cap. (Sovfoto)

6. The Border Guards still have mounted units, mainly for patrolling the Soviet Union's vast and sparsely populated eastern territories. They use both horse and camel, depending on region.

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7. A Border Guard unit, wearing the popular sun caps, on patrol in 1966. (Sovfoto)

8. Soviet troops during the 1966 'Vltava' manoeuvres in Czechoslovakia. By this time, the Western-style web belt with cartridge pouches and other means of stowage had become standard, replacing the outdated bed-roll of the previous era.

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9. Border Guards in the southern USSR wearing long sheepskin coats. These are not standard Army issue, but they are usually permitted to troops serving in areas of extreme temperatures. (Sovfoto)

10. A good view of the simple horse gear of a Border Guard patrol unit. These days, the main combat arena for the Border Guards is the Afghan frontier. K. Chernenko spent his military service in a Border Guard unit in this region in the 1930s. (Sovfoto)



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11. The heaviest towed mortar now in Soviet service is the Model 53 240mm breech-loader. A self-propelled version, based on the same chassis as the SO-152 self-propelled gun, has been in service since the early 1970s.

12. Soviet troops on winter exercise. The officer with the map wears the field dress winter short coat with fur collar; the skier next to him, also an officer, wears the same coat beneath a simple white cloth camouflage coverall. (Sovfoto)

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13. This line-up shows the major uniform styles of the 1969 regulations. Left to right: officer's summer parade; reservist's summer parade; officer's off-duty summer parade; officer's summer overcoat; enlisted man's summer parade; cadet's summer parade; enlisted man's summer field dress; airborne summer field dress; Navy officer's summer parade; and Navy officer's sea duty uniform. (Sovfoto)

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14, 15. In 1969, the Soviet Army introduced a comprehensive new set of instructions for both field and dress wear. These two photographs show the field dress of enlisted men in the airborne (14) and other combat arms (15). Airborne troops wear blouses with open collars which reveal the white and blue striped knitted shirts peculiar to this branch of the service. They also are issued with pale blue berets in lieu of the other headdress of the Ground Forces. (Sovfoto)

16. Soviet Border Guards prepare for inspection. All that distinguishes them from regular Army troops is the green cap band. Passing in front of them is an Alsatian puppy, 'Groza', which will be raised as a guard dog. Dogs are used extensively by the Border Guards for patrol work. (Sovfoto)

17. A motorcycle scout detachment from a reconnaissance battalion on an M-72 motorcycle. Scout troops are one class of soldier provided with camouflage smocks. These are dark green with a pattern of small, cream coloured disruptive patches.

18. The crew of a BM-14 multiple rocket launcher of the Guards Order of the Red Banner Suvorov Taman Motor Rifle Division at practice, May 1970. The officer and enlisted man both wear camouflage smocks, although the pattern of each garment differs. (Sovfoto)

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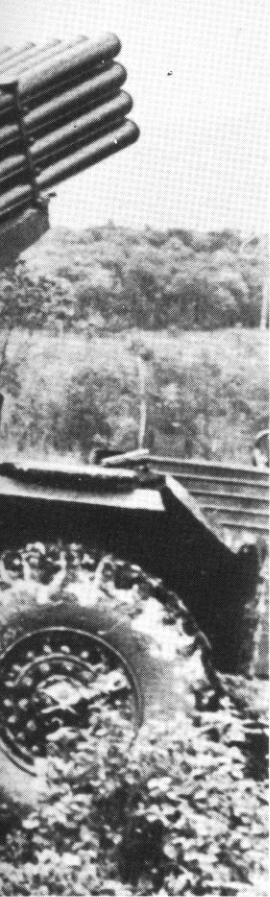
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19. A BM-21 launcher battery on exercise in 1970. Both officers carry distinctive map cases. One of the officers has a number painted on the front of his helmet; such a number is usually a unit designator. (Sovfoto)

20. A scout patrol in action. These scouts wear the usual camouflage smock, but in this instance the hood is raised. They are armed with the ubiquitous AK-47 assault rifle.

21. The crew of a Luna-M ('Frog-7') battery take a breather while on manoeuvres in November 1970. They are in winter field dress. The black collar tabs with the crossed gun barrels identify them as artillery troops, and the black (arm-of-service) shoulder strap with two bars identifies the nearest soldier as a junior sergeant. (Sovfoto)

22. An MDK-2M ditching machine crosses a tank-laid bridge. These vehicles are used to dig anti-tank ditches or defensive positions, and this particular example belongs to the Tyumen Higher Engineer Command School.



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23. Although Soviet infantry is heavily mechanized, the old Second World War tactics of tank-riding are still practised in this October 1971 exercise. The troops are wearing white winter coveralls over their normal winter field dress. (Sovfoto)

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24. A combat engineer detachment crosses a tank-launched bridge; in the background is a BAT-M engineer tractor. Assault engineers in combat are usually issued with camouflage coveralls.





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25. Airborne troops use the lightweight RPU-16 rocket launcher in lieu of truck mounted types. These troops are in only partial chemical protection gear, lacking the usual protective suit or gloves. (Sovfoto)

26. A BM-21 crew prepares its vehicle for firing from a safe launch distance. The nearest trooper has the arm-of-service badge on his left coat shoulder, a black shield with red star and crossed cannon and trim. (Sovfoto)

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27. A captain marches his V-750K missile battery (SA-2) crew around the perimeter. In front are a corporal and a junior sergeant – judging from their one and two stripes respectively. (Sovfoto)

28. A Border Guard on patrol along the Soviet Union's northern frontier. The Border Guards regularly wear the Arm camouflage smock in certain patrol areas. (Sovfoto)

29. A January 1973 assault exercise conducted from an Mi-8 helicopter. These troops wear standard field dress. (Sovfoto)

30. A BMP-borne motor rifle unit advances in skirmish line. Each BMP has two PKS gunners like this one; also evident, to the far right, is the BMP's RPG-7 gunner. (Sovfoto)



29▲ 30▼





▲31 Although the 122mm Model 1938 howitzer is intended mainly as a direct-fire weapon, Soviet artillery crews do practise employing it as a direct-fire anti-tank gun in certain circumstances. These artillery crewmen are in winter field dress, and have their *ushankas* under their helmets with the ear and neck back flaps pulled down for warmth. (Sovfoto)

32. Winter exercises for a motor rifle squad of the Kiev Military District in 1974. This view clearly shows the red motorized infantry arm-of-service patch worn on the left sleeve, an insignia which is not evident on the RPG-7 gunner as it is obscured by the position of the rifleman's AKM. (Sovfoto)

33. Some KGB units, like this one, are fully equipped with armoured vehicles, including armoured troop carriers (a BTR-60PB is shown) and tanks. (Sovfoto)

34. The crew of a BMP of the Siberian Military District is briefed by its commander. The latter wears a tanker's helmet, so that, once inside the BMP, he can hook up to the vehicle's intercommunication system. These troops are in full winter gear, which includes backpacks. (Sovfoto)

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35. A Soviet scout patrol on winter manoeuvres.

36. A Soviet artillery command post on operations in the Siberian Military District in 1975. These officers wear the usual fur-collared greatcoats, which in this case are of sheepskin rather than the wool type typical for enlisted men. The 'shoulder boards' are the subdued green woven type worn in the field, which are difficult to read except at very close range. (Sovfoto)

37. First-year cadet tankers train in vehicular communication at an academy in the Far Eastern Military District in 1975. The small tank silhouette can be seen on their black collar gorgets. (Sovfoto)

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38. The crew of a 122mm D-30(2A18) of an airborne division on exercise in 1975. The airborne troops are provided with leather flight helmets and seldom wear 'hard' headgear. (Sovfoto)

39. A private is given instruction on a PKS light machine gun while training in the Siberian Military District. The Cyrillic 'SA' on the shoulder straps simply indicates 'Soviet Army'. The two chevrons

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on the sleeve of the soldier to the left indicate the completion of two years of service. (Sovfoto)

40. A rifle patrol clad in special rain coveralls, 1976. (Sovfoto)

41. A rifle squad on exercise. The soldier with the RPG-7 and his immediate neighbour both have length-of-service badges on their sleeves. (Sovfoto)





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42. An anti-tank subsection sets up its 9M14M Malyutka ('Sagger') missiles. The nearest soldier has the guidance unit, which is usually located some distance away from the several missiles he controls. (Sovfoto)

43. Mi-8 helicopters fly overhead as Soviet troops participate in the June 1976 'Sever' exercises. The soldier nearest the camera is carrying an RPG-7 anti-tank rocket launcher. (Sovfoto)

44. A soldier using a mine detector to clear a path during exercises in the Caucasian Military District. (Sovfoto)





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45. Troops man an R-105D radio station at an artillery command post. The collar gorget tabs are black felt with yellow metal, or simulated yellow metal, crossed cannons, indicating the artillery branch. (Sovfoto)
46. A good view of the standard Soviet camouflage smock, in this

case being worn by troops of a Border Guard unit. (Sovfoto)
47. A clear view of the business end of an AKM assault rifle, its bayonet in place. Both men wear the green and cream camouflage smock. (Sovfoto)



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48. A platoon command post during manoeuvres in the Siberian Military District, February 1977. The *ushanka* fur caps of enlisted men are usually of cheap, synthetic material, whilst officers' caps are of better quality, as is evident by comparing the two troopers on either side of the lieutenant with the binoculars. (Sovfoto)
49. Mi-8 helicopters bring in ski-troops during exercises in the Far

Eastern Military District in March 1977. (Sovfoto)
50. Certainly not the normal service issue greatcoat! In Arctic regions the rules are 'bent' to permit more suitable clothing for severe weather conditions. This photograph was taken at a Siberian Military District V-750K (SA-2) base. (Sovfoto)

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51. Chemical warfare is of considerable concern to the Soviet Army. This photograph shows a Hungarian soldier in a complete protective suit, including mask and rubberized overgarment. (Sovfoto)

52. Winter exercises in March 1979. The gunner second from the right is armed with an RPK assault rifle. (Sovfoto)

53. Target practice during February 1979 exercises. The small metal infantry branch emblems can be seen on the men's red collar tabs, as can the arm-of-service patches on the shoulders.

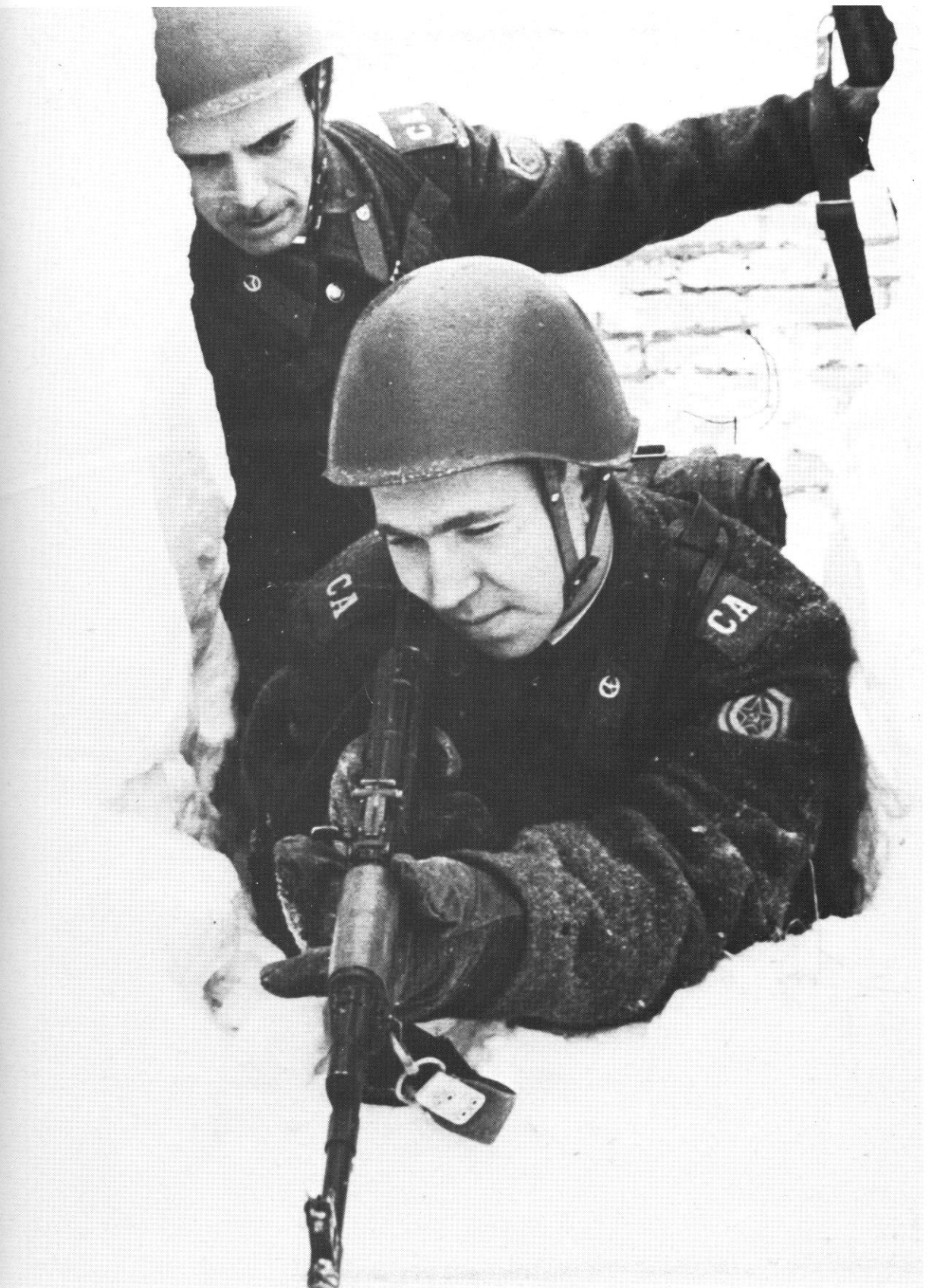
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54. Judging from the service marks on the sleeves, this 122mm D-30 gun crew is well experienced: the yellow woven stripes below the shoulder arm-of-service patches indicate that several of them have completed four years of service.

55. A PKS gunner during winter exercises, February 1979. The *ushanka* fur cap is worn under the helmet in the winter, and its flaps

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are folded down for warmth if necessary. (Sovfoto)

56. Officer cadets undergo training at the Tbilisi Higher Artillery Commanders' School, December 1979. The 'K' on the shoulder straps indicates the cadet school. The candidate on the right has four service stripes, indicating four years of prior service. These stripes are yellow on a pale blue cloth backing. (Sovfoto)

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57. An artillery command post during winter exercises. The Soviet Army is camouflage conscious – even the rangefinder is camouflaged with sheeting. (Sovfoto)
58. A BMP battalion commander. BMP commanders wear standard infantry garb but don tankers' helmets while in the BMP in order to plug into the vehicle intercommunication system. (Sovfoto)
59. Although apparently an ordinary motor infantry unit on manoeuvres with its BMP-1, this is in fact a Border Guard unit. Such units are well equipped since they have a secondary internal security role. (Sovfoto)
60. Airborne soldiers practising marksmanship with their AKM assault rifles. Airborne troops regularly wear a pale blue beret as a field cap, except when jumping. (Sovfoto)

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61. Airborne units use a special derivative of the D-44 85mm anti-tank gun – the SD-44 – which has a small motor that provides self-propulsion for the weapon.

(Sovfoto)

62. In airborne operations, airborne division troops usually wear the green and cream camouflage coveralls and a tight-fitting leather aviator's helmet.

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63. A company command post during an airborne exercise. This photograph provides a clear view of the leather helmet worn in airborne divisions during exercises.

64. The combat camouflage coveralls are fitted with a hood, and a camouflage face mask is also available for special purposes like sniping.

65. (Next spread) Border Guards respond to an alert. Their Mi-8 helicopter has hardpoints for carrying extensive airborne ordnance if needed. (Sovfoto)





66. Although leather helmets are worn during the jump, in some units the blue airborne beret is also taken, to be worn after the jump is complete.

67. An airborne trooper after landing. He is armed with an AKS 5.54mm assault rifle.

68. These soldiers might easily be mistaken for Army troops, but they are in fact naval infantry. As an elite force, naval infantry often wear the camouflage coveralls, but can be distinguished by the use of a black beret, the Navy red star insignia, and the red anchored pennant sometimes worn on the left of the beret.

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69. Border Guards, along with an Alsatian, are dropped off at their patrol post. They are wearing the usual *furashka* peaked cap.

70. A BM-21 battery commander issues instructions over a megaphone during exercises in the Siberian Military District, January 1981. (Sovfoto)

71. A BMP-1 motor rifle platoon stands by for vehicle inspection at a base hardstand. These vehicles each have a two-man crew, the rest of the troops on board being considered part of the infantry section and not responsible for the vehicle's upkeep. (Sovfoto)

72. New recruits in the Siberian Military District are issued with their AKS assault rifles during a ceremony in June 1980. They are wearing the summer *pilotka* side cap. (Sovfoto)

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73. An Mi-8 deposits a Border Guard unit during a simulated border incident exercise. (Sovfoto)

74. Troops from the Leningrad Artillery Academy, February 1982. Judging from the air control BTR-60 behind them, they are probably practising forward air control or forward fire team manoeuvres. Both are wearing the camouflage coveralls over their fur caps.

(Sovfoto)
75. Another artilleryman of the Leningrad Artillery Academy; this soldier is adjusting his optical rangefinder. The Russians are switching over to laser rangefinders, but photographs of these are seldom released. (Sovfoto)

76. Since the late 1950s the Soviets have permitted their Warsaw Pact allies to revert to more national styles of uniform. This group photograph shows officers from (left to right) East Germany, Bulgaria, the USSR, Poland, Hungary, Mongolia and the Ukrainian Military District. (Sovfoto)

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77. The crew of an SO-122 self-propelled gun. As members of the Armoured Force, the men wear the black tanker's coveralls.

78. Soviet chemical warfare troops during a decontamination exercise. They wear a pale blue-grey rubberized protective suit over their usual uniform.

79. An infantry patrol wearing pale blue-grey rain protective gear. This gear is supposed to be olive green, but it is frequently of other colours.

80. Motorized infantry of the Moscow Supreme Soviet Military Academy on manoeuvres in March 1983. The lieutenant (second from right) wears normal shoulder straps, whilst those of the cadets are marked with a 'K'. (Sovfoto)



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81. Troops of the Leningrad Motor Rifle Training Regiment practise on skis while advancing behind an OT-55 flamethrower tank. (Sovfoto)



▲ 82
 82. Tank troops wear black coveralls as their field uniform, with a black beret in lieu of the usual service cap. On the right breast is a black felt diamond with a yellow tank silhouette. (Sovfoto)
 83. T-54 crewmen of the Leningrad Military District in September
 ▼ 83

1983 wearing the usual black cloth tanker's helmet. (Sovfoto)
 84. Two 1st Class Specialists of a T-55M unit of the Ciscarpathian Military District, each wearing the black beret and carrying the padded tanker's helmet worn on board the vehicle. (Sovfoto)

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85. The crew and commander of a BMP-1 of the Rezhitskaya 'Panfilov' Guards Mechanized Division on exercise in the Kirgiz SSR, September 1981. The commander, in the centre, wears normal infantry garb and a tanker's helmet, while the driver and gunner wear the black tanker's garb. (Sovfoto)
 86. The crew of a Luna-M ('Frog-7') on exercises in 1983. Rocket

vehicle crews usually wear armour crew uniforms. (Sovfoto)
 87. Young cadets receive field instruction on T-72s. Note the 'K' designation on the shoulder straps. (Sovfoto)
 88. (Next spread) A group of engineer troops practises mine-sweeping in the snow. The two soldiers to the left have sleeve badges indicating two years of service. (Sovfoto)





89. A Soviet infantryman practises on the new AGS-17 Plamya grenade launcher.

90. A BMP-1 motorized rifle platoon, showing the mixture of vehicle crews in tankers' uniforms and the motor rifle in infantry garb.

91. A commissar's role in the modern Soviet Army is primarily one of political indoctrination, morale building and propaganda; he no longer has tactical command responsibility, as he had in 1941.

92. The winter headgear for general officers is the traditional astrakhan cap, as seen here during a winter field exercise.

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93. On the field uniform, an officer's shoulder insignia is a subdued woven green, without the arm-of-service colour.

94. A Soviet infantry unit training in mountain warfare techniques in Afghanistan. The figure closest to the camera is armed with an

SVD sniper rifle.

95. During winter months, airborne units use the traditional fur *ushanka* instead of the leather aviator's cap, as shown in this photograph.



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96. A Soviet infantry unit in Afghanistan. Note that the helmets have been camouflaged.

97. Soviet infantry in Afghanistan armed with the AKS 5.54mm

assault rifle. This photograph gives a clear idea of the style of camouflage applied to the helmet.

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98. A poor quality, but nonetheless interesting, photograph of Soviet infantry in Afghanistan wearing sun caps in lieu of the usual *pilotka* side caps.

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99. A posed propaganda photograph of Soviet airborne troops in Afghanistan talking with their Afghan counterparts.



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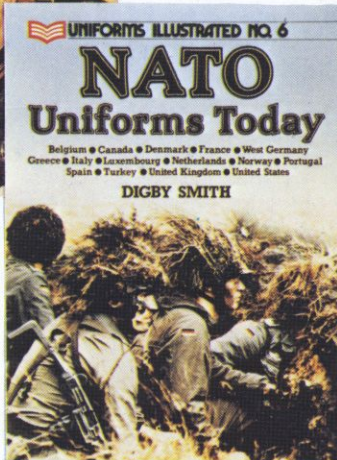
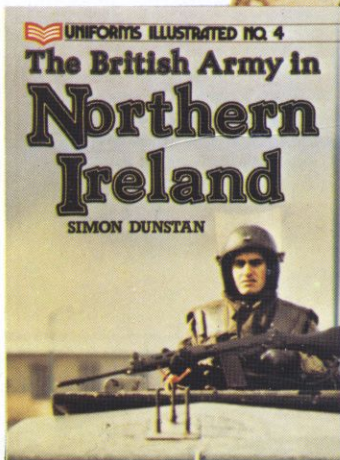
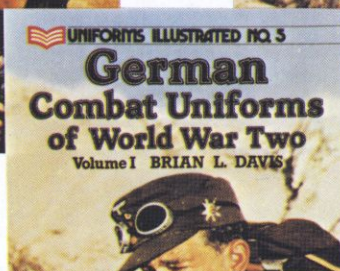
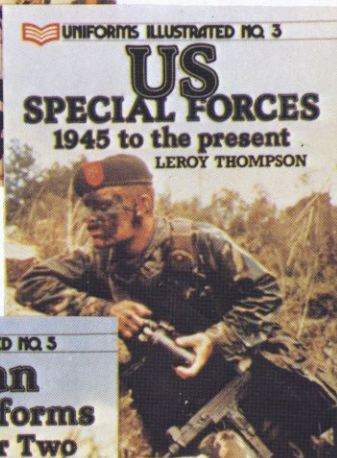
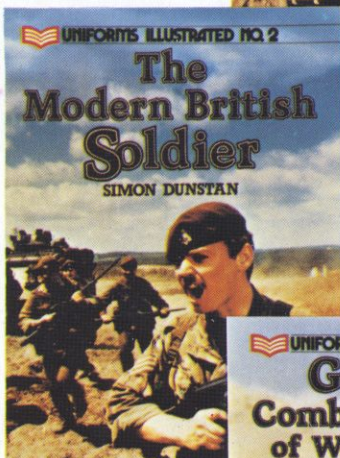
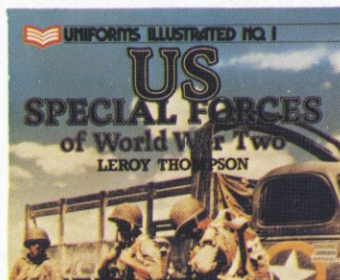
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