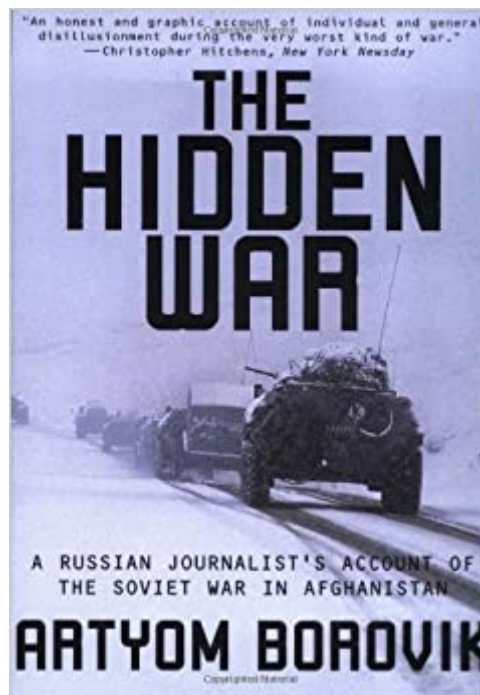




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# The Hidden War: A Russian Journalist's Account Of The Soviet War In Afghanistan



## Synopsis

Until his death in 2000, Artyom Borovik was considered one of the preeminent journalists in Russia. With *The Hidden War* he provided the world its first glimpse inside the Soviet military machine, capturing the soldiers' terror, helplessness, and despair at waging war in a foreign land against an unseen enemy for unclear purposes. When first published, Borovik's groundbreaking revelations exposed the weaknesses beneath the Soviet Union's aura of military might, creating an enormous controversy both in Russia and around the world. A vital and fascinating portrait of the Soviet empire at the twilight of its power, this is a book that still resonates today. "An honest and graphic account of individual and general disillusionment during the very worst kind of war." -Christopher Hitchens, *New York Newsday*; "Alternately fascinating and horrific.... A fascinating look at the life and death of Soviet soldiers." -- Bill Wallace, *San Francisco Chronicle*; "I have read no other account of the war in Afghanistan equal to this ... this is literature." -- Graham Greene

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## Customer Reviews

Borovik, foreign editor of the Soviet weekly *Ogonyok*, spent a month with Soviet troops in Afghanistan near the end of the 1979-1988 war. His subjective, impressionistic account is of interest mainly for its startling echoes of the American experience in Vietnam: The Soviet soldiers' awed respect for the elusive enemy, their disgust over the waste of lives, their resentment of the harassment accorded returning veterans by an antiwar populace. And like our GIs in Vietnam, these men found solace in rock music, odd garb and drugs. The pathology of the Vietnam war is mirrored also with stories of Soviet atrocities: rape, murder and a My Lai-like massacre of civilians. Borovik

summarizes the prevalent theories as to why the Soviets intervened in '79. The most interesting: Moscow's fear that the U.S., expelled from Iran, would attempt to turn Afghanistan into an anti-Soviet outpost. Although in its raw candor the book stands as a manifestation of glasnost, the writing is uneven, often jarring: "Oh, how harsh is my fate!" cries one veteran. Photos. Author tour. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A maverick young Russian journalist, Borovik covered the Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan from early 1980 through the final phase of withdrawal in February 1989. Currently foreign editor of Ogonyok, the USSR's leading weekly news magazine and a staunch supporter of glasnost, he offers in this work an introductory essay which speculates on the scenario for the Soviet Union's entry into Afghanistan in late December 1979, followed by two gripping accounts of Russian soldiers under fire--one in the spring of 1987 ("Meet Me at the Three Cranes") and one during the withdrawal ("The Hidden War"). While this is a subjective account of what Borovik labels "a nine-year-long tragedy," The Hidden War catches the human drama in what was clearly the Soviet Union's Vietnam. The book will appeal to a general audience as a fresh reminder of the universally grim reality of war.- James Rhodes, Luther Coll., Decorah, Ia. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a fascinating book, as much a document of the social upheaval of the Soviet Union in the 80s as a narrative about the Soviet Afghan War. It seemed to me to be a Soviet equivalent of Dexter Filkins' recent book on America's war on terror, The Endless War. Filkins, also a reporter, knit together his reportage and personal experiences throughout Af-Pak and the Middle East to give a more personal and intimate sense of the struggle the US is engaged in. Borovik does something similar, cobbling together his own reports for Soviet publications dating from the early and late years of the war. Other reviewers have noted the stylistic and reportorial disconnect between the first and second halves of the book, the former seeming more gung-ho, while the latter is pessimistic in tone. However this must be seen in context: it is attributable to the huge and unimaginable changes that were taking place in the USSR. In the first years of the war, almost nothing was publicly said about it, other than vague references about helping a comrade socialist state with their "socialist revolution". Many Russians were under the impression that their soldiers were mostly building schools and irrigation canals. There were no announcements when a soldier's body was shipped home in one of the notorious sealed zinc coffins. Borovik's early reporting was, therefore, already

pushing the official limits in terms of its honesty about the conflict; but as Gorbachev's Perestroika gained steam it became possible, even fashionable, to openly criticize the war and the corruption of the Soviet Army. It's not entirely clear from the narrative how much actual combat Borovik personally witnessed, although he does seem to have been present during a successful night-time Soviet platoon's ambush of a mujahidin mission; he also describes embarking on a long-range reconnaissance patrol, but then shipping back early to base with several soldiers whom he describes as malingerers. Borovik leaves unsaid why he decided to desert the patrol but one imagines that fear played a role! Perhaps the most gripping part is the description of the final Russian pullout, which Borovik narrates through a conflict between two Russian officers, the stuttering but compassionate Lt Col Ushakov and his superior, the corrupt and cruel Col Antonenko. After a soldier is shot, Antonenko orders the massacre of an entire Afghan village in retaliation and later tries to bully Ushakov for not using such heavy-handed tactics. Ushakov, in turn, sees Antonenko's behavior as indicative of the rot and corruption plaguing the whole Soviet system, and a symptom of the failure of the Soviet project in Afghanistan. Finally, Borovik tells the sad story of Igor Liakhovich, the last Russian casualty in Afghanistan. Sadly, Borovik himself died in 2000 at age 39 in an airplane crash that some deemed suspicious, as he was openly critical of Vladimir Putin in his reporting. The Hidden War is a riveting document from a unique writer and reporter.

There are actually 2 books combined in "Hidden War". The first is a few years in to the war when the writer a journalist, who has been to the USA several times and knows a bit about the west, writes as a adventure, propaganda piece. He includes the feeling of the soldiers and commanders at the time. Several years pass and the writer has been back to the USA and interviewed several soldiers who have surrendered to the mujahadin and been expatriated to the west. Also Glasnost or Openness is in full force in the USSR. The army is pulling out after 8 years of a war that produced nothing. The change in tone of the second book is sharp when compared to the hope of doing their duty in the first book. Mistakes are made by people attempting to draw parallels between America's wars in Vietnam or Iraq. This would be a mistake and reading 'Hidden War' would prove this. The United States is not the Soviet Union, decayed and on the brink of collapse. No is the media as tightly controlled as in the first part of this book (the book was written after the Soviet Union imploded, it could not have been published before then). There are no conscripts in the American Army as there is in the Soviet or Russian armies. This is a good book about a war many in the west have forgotten due to the current war in Afghanistan.

Amazing look into the Russian experience in Afghan. Very relevant for US. Would have been good to read and learn from this in 2001

As a Vietnam combat veteran I found Artyom Borovik's book, *THE HIDDEN WAR*, to ring so clear, true and familiar that I didn't mind the puzzle-like story pieces that made up this remarkable and historic account. As a journalist Borovik covered many aspects of the Soviet War in Afghanistan during the years and accurately and vividly reported what he found. From the lowly infantryman, the elite airborne soldiers, helicopter and MiG pilots, field and political officers, and various mid and high level commanders we get more pieces of the puzzle to slowly put into place as we read. And too there were the rebel dukhi, the 'Black Tulip' casualty flights, the deserters and traitors who fled or fought against their own, the ever present dust and harsh cold of the mountain campaigns, the criticism or resentment the war veterans received at home afterwards, and so many other interesting bits that by the end of the book a better overall picture of the war emerged to contemplate. I have new respect for the Soviet veterans of Afghanistan and salute their service, sacrifice, and courage in their hidden war. Is Borovik's book the definitive history of the Soviet war in Afghanistan? No. But it is nonetheless a remarkable achievement.

If you are looking for a historical account of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, this is not it. This book was written by a Soviet journalist and recounts many of the experiences of the Soviet army in the last couple of years of the war. He also interviews some Soviet troops that either defected to the Mujaheddin or were captured and later went to the US to live. Anyone even remotely familiar with the US experience in Afghanistan will get a feeling of Deja-vu. The experience really is no different than how it is now for our guys. You really feel bad for the Soviet soldiers as they not only have to deal with the enemy, but with corrupt and incompetent officers, a home front that either doesn't care about them anymore or is even hostile, and the inability to get even the most basic of comforts and supplies. It is not quite certain what the strategic aims of the invasion were as most of the top leaders of the time are dead and the documents still state secrets, but one of the biggest apparent reasons was to keep the up and coming Muslim extremism from boiling over into Soviet southern republics. Sound familiar?

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