

P. Gallagher (trans.). *Russian Military Mapping: A Guide to Using the Most Comprehensive Source of Global Geospatial Intelligence.*

East View Cartographic, Minneapolis, 2005. ISBN 0974297313. Hardback, 188pp. US\$295.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a large number of Soviet topographic maps found their way to various markets in the West. As a result, many libraries and map collectors own copies that are both valuable and hard to use. Valuable because they are the main if not the only topographic maps available for some countries, and hard to use because of the enormous amount of symbols which are difficult to identify and interpret. Therefore, the initiative of East View Cartographic to translate the Russian Army cartographic manual is both timely and welcome.

Published in 2003 in Russian as an updated edition of a topographic and special maps manual for officers and for students at Russian and Soviet military educational institutions, this work represents a major contribution to the understanding and interpretation of Russian topographic maps. Most of these maps have only recently been declassified and making the manual available in English will undoubtedly facilitate further research into Russian military cartography.

The manual is organized in four sections: general information on the Earth's atmosphere, weather and climate; basic data on topographic and special maps; description of terrain types and their properties with an assessment of battleground pros and cons; and procedures for maintaining the maps. The short Chapter 1: Parts of the Geographic Environment contains very basic information and is clearly aimed at novices—there are basic definitions of geographic concepts, climate and weather phenomena, and time that seem at junior high school level. Chapter 2 Topographic and Special Maps is a more comprehensive overview of cartography concepts and various types of maps. The real value of the manual, lies, however, in its appendices.

There are nine appendices: reference data, sample topographic and special maps, symbols for topographic and special maps, label abbreviations for topographic maps, usage of topographic maps, symbols in combat documents, meteorological symbols, abbreviations in combat documents, and an alphabetical subject index. Perhaps the most interesting one is Appendix 2, Sample Topographic and Special Maps, which includes topographic maps and city plans in various scales, geographic survey maps, an aeronautical chart, a marine chart, a terrain variation map, a geodetic data map, a river segment map, a mountain pass and passage map, a water source map, an aerial photograph with coordinate grid, a photomontage, a photographic plan and a photomap. The issue with complete comprehension of course is the fact that all notations are in Russian with no transliteration or translation provided. For abbreviations one can use Appendix 4, assuming some basic knowledge of the Cyrillic alphabet, where it becomes clear that Бер. is Concrete (dam material) and бет. is Concrete plant.

Appendix 2 captures another major issue with the manual, as well. For those interested in Russian cartography itself, it serves as nothing more than a teaser—there are sample maps, indeed, but it is not clear of what they are samples. Further, the manual is billed as “a guide to using the most comprehensive source of global geospatial intelligence,” yet none of the identifiable maps is ‘global.’

For those interested in being able to read Russian topographic and special maps, the manual presents its most valuable information in the Appendices devoted to the symbols and abbreviations, especially those used in combat documents. It is these that make investing in building Russian military map collections a worthwhile proposition.

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