



JOHN ERICKSON

John Erickson 1929–2002

JOHN ERICKSON made his mark as a historian, scholar, soldier and military analyst in the period of the twentieth century which witnessed the major upheaval in international relations caused by the Second World War—especially in Europe—and the clash between Soviet Communism and the Western group of nations which became known as the Cold War.

John Erickson was born in South Shields, Tyne and Wear, on 17 April 1929, the son of the late Henry Erickson and Jessie, née Heys, in a family with seafaring antecedents, English and Scandinavian, which equipped him for a life devoted to European history, politics and languages, and eventually military affairs. His father, who died in 1981, served with the Royal Navy during the Second World War in wartime convoys, including those to the Soviet Union. His son's education in South Shields High School may have included an early introduction into European languages during the war years which proved very useful to him in later life. On leaving school in 1947 at the age of eighteen he was called up to do National Service, initially in the King's Own Scottish Borderers, and then in the Intelligence Corps. He was posted to the British Army in Austria, where with the rank of sergeant, he interpreted in Anglo-Soviet military liaison meetings of the Allied Control Commission in Vienna. Later in his service he was assigned to the Allied War Crimes Tribunal located in Austria, part of whose responsibilities was the search for German and Austrian, as well as Russian, Yugoslav and other Balkan collaborators with the Axis Powers and their arrest and trial on charges of war crimes. His involvement in the Allied War Crimes effort gave him an early opportunity to

work with our Soviet and Yugoslav allies, and to foster an intense hatred of Nazism and all its works. Perhaps this experience also gave impetus to his growing interest in the history of those nations who had fought against it during the Second World War.

On completing his National Service in 1949 Erickson enrolled in St John's College, Cambridge, to study Slavonic and other East and Central European languages, including German, Russian and Serbo-Croat. He acquired a deeper interest in East European history, and following his first-class BA degree in 1952 he remained at the college to work for a Ph.D. His subject was the European revolutions in 1848. Sadly, he and his examiner were unable to agree on his treatment of the topic, and Erickson withdrew his doctoral thesis in 1956. He was then offered a Research Fellowship at St Antony's College, Oxford, on military history, primarily that of the Soviet Army since its foundation in 1918, which he gratefully accepted. Erickson had the good fortune to study under an acknowledged expert on the Eastern Front, David Footman, and the Warden of the College, Sir William Deakin. The latter was the Head of the first official British Military Mission to serve with Marshal Tito's Yugoslav Partisans in 1943; from him Erickson obtained first-hand information about the Resistance to the Axis occupation forces in Yugoslavia during the war. Erickson began to assemble his own expert data-base from British, American, French and German records on the Soviet-German war, and to make valuable use of his Fellowship travel grants to visit some of the Central and East European countries involved. These included Germany and Austria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Hungary; he was not able to travel to the Soviet Union at this stage in his research. Erickson developed a special admiration for Poland and the Poles—whose language he successfully learnt—particularly in the light of their record in resisting aggression throughout the whole of the conflict in Europe from 1939 to 1945.

While he was at St Antony's College he met a visiting Yugoslav student, a Serbian girl named Ljubica Petrovic. Her father, Dr Branko Petrovic, had served in the Yugoslav Resistance during the Second World War; he, and a brother and other family members were captured and executed by the Germans in September 1943. John and Ljubica were married in Oxford on 18 July 1957. They had a very happy and fruitful marriage. They had two delightful children Amanda-Jane born on 20 August 1962, and Mark, born on 16 April 1964—both in Manchester. It was indeed a very successful union: Ljubica dedicated herself to helping her husband in his career and his study of the war, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia,

collaborating in his research and especially in the editing of his books and articles and providing expert handling of photographs and other source material. She co-authored a number of his publications and was his invaluable supporter as well as a devoted wife and mother. In the years ahead the family enjoyed many holidays and travels to Ljubica's native Yugoslavia.

When he was in Oxford Erickson completed his first major book on the Soviet Armed Forces: *The Soviet High Command, 1918–1941* in 1960 and published it in 1962. This work of over 650 pages opens with an account of the foundation, on 23 February 1918, of the Red Army of Workers and Peasants under the orders of the revolutionary Communist government established in Russia after the defeat of the Imperial Army in the First World War, and the arrival in Russia from abroad of the Bolshevik Party leaders led by Vladimir Il'ich Lenin in 1917. The book describes in detail the birth-pangs of the new army in fighting foreign enemies and a civil war in Russia between the Communist forces and those of the old Tsarist regime which came to be known as the White Armies. Erickson successfully combined in this first book his deep understanding of Russia and the revolution which had swept the country. He describes how the new Army was organised and led by Communist activists under Lenin's collaborator Leon Trotsky helped by numbers of professional officers of the Imperial Army sympathetic to the Bolshevik cause. Erickson's treatment of the civil war demonstrates the ad hoc nature of the creation of the new Army and underlines his ability to assess the roles of the various elements which the Bolsheviks used to establish their new instrument of state power.

After the civil war and the introduction of Soviet communist rule over the whole of the vast country, Erickson's book describes the emergence of the Soviet Union as an isolated and impoverished state ruled by a dictator of Georgian Caucasian origin, ruthless and conspiratorial in temperament, Josef Stalin (born Dzhugashvili) who was to dominate its policies and its armed forces for the best part of thirty years. The book traces the development of the Red Army during this period, which exhibited some improvements in organisation, training and fire-power in the 1920s and 1930s. But these were cut short in 1937 to 1939 by Stalin's decimation of the Army's High Command in the military purges of those years. Among those eliminated were three of the five Marshals of the Soviet Union (Russia's highest rank) and many thousands of commanders and political commissars. Some were simply executed; others condemned to die after show trials or secret court hearings, or given lengthy

prison terms in concentration camps. Erickson presents the details in two significant chapters: 'The Killings' and 'Exeunt Omnes'. He shows how when the Red Army did go into action in the war against Finland in 1939–40 and in the early phases of the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, most of the senior commanders and staff officers were woefully unable to carry out their tasks. This army was accurately described by one distinguished American military historian, David Glantz, as 'The Stumbling Colossus'.¹

Erickson recounts how unprepared and confused the Red Army was when the German attack came on 22 June 1941. He quotes a message from a command post in the Western Special Military District to the Commissariat of Defence in Moscow saying: 'We are being fired on: what shall we do?' He traces the rapid advance of the main German Army Groups into Soviet territory leading to the virtual collapse of the Soviet forces deployed in the frontier areas in full military detail, including the relevant order-of-battle information, and underlines the low morale of the retreating Russians. For in a matter of weeks the German armies were at the gates of Leningrad, in the main cities west of Moscow and in the western areas of the Ukraine. Few Soviet commanders in the field were able to withstand the German onslaught: many were killed or executed for their failures. Erickson singles out one Soviet General who seemed to keep his nerve: namely the Chief of the General Staff, Army-General, later Marshal, Georgi Zhukov, whom Stalin sent first to consolidate the defence of Leningrad and then to take over the preparations for the protection of Moscow. Erickson shows in impressive detail how Zhukov and his best army commanders, including the future Marshal Rokossovski, held the line before Moscow and launched the successful counter-offensive on 6 December 1941 which, though slow in pace, forced the German army to retreat. Zhukov's victory at Moscow, described in precise and convincing terms, brings Erickson's first book on the Second World War to a fascinating conclusion.

When completing *The Soviet High Command* in Oxford Erickson was offered in 1958 what turned out to be his first regular teaching post: a lectureship in the Department of History in St Andrews University in Scotland, an appointment recommended by the then Principal, Sir Malcolm Knox. Three years later he left St Andrews for Manchester University. In 1961 he joined the Department of Government there, first as a lecturer, then as a senior lecturer and finally as a Reader in Politics.

¹ David Glantz: *The Stumbling Colossus* (Kansas, 1998).

It was during his fruitful years in Manchester that Erickson achieved his rightful place among scholars working in the field of Soviet military history and contemporary developments in the Soviet Armed Forces—including Soviet historians and senior serving officers in the Soviet forces. It was clear that Erickson's *The Soviet High Command* became known and widely read in Russia: a book which Soviet experts found well-written, accurate and unbiased. Among his admirers apparently were Academician A. M. Samsonov, the Head of the Department of Military History of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and Lieutenant-General S. P. Platonov, Head of the Military-Historical Directorate of the Soviet General Staff. They and their colleagues probably sought opportunities to meet this Western military historian who had published such detailed accounts of the evolution of the Red Army before and during the Soviet-German war. Even more significant for them, Erickson's writing demonstrated a genuine admiration for the Soviet armed forces, for those who organised and commanded them, and for the ordinary soldier, sailor and airman who carried out their operations.

Their opportunity to meet and collaborate with Erickson came in 1963. In the previous year the highly respected American war reporter and author, Cornelius Ryan, who had made his name in a major book and film on the Allied landings in Normandy in 1944, was preparing a study of the capture of Berlin by the Russians in April–May 1945 to be called *The Last Battle*. In the course of his negotiations with the Soviet authorities about a visit to Moscow in order to study Soviet military documents, reports and diaries of important participants in the battle for Berlin, Ryan expressed a wish to meet and interview them if possible. The Soviet military historians, primarily Academician Samsonov, agreed, and asked Ryan: 'Please bring John Erickson as your adviser and interpreter; he knows more about our Armed Forces than we do, and we are very anxious to meet him!' Ryan, it is said, agreed at once (although he and Erickson had never met) and the two set off for Moscow in April 1963.

The 1963 visit to Moscow gave Erickson too the opportunity to meet and interrogate Soviet military leaders who were not only participants in the Berlin operation but in many of the major battles of the war on the Eastern front. He had already read many of their published works, but was now anxious to read their own war diaries, their battle reports and their individual accounts of the conduct of the war by the Soviet leadership, including their Supreme Commander-in-Chief, Stalin. Naturally he attended all the meetings organised by the Russians for Ryan, acting mainly as his interpreter. But as his relationship with his Soviet hosts

developed favourably, he was able to borrow or copy documents never released before to foreign scholars which helped him in his on-going studies. He was already planning to write two further volumes on the war in the East: *The Road to Stalingrad, 1941–1943* and *The Road to Berlin, 1943–1945* with military details drawn from both official Soviet materials and personal memoirs.

Erickson's first interviews in Moscow were with participants in the Berlin campaign. Among the first was Marshal Vasili Sokolovski who had been Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Marshal Zhukov's First Belorussian Front in 1945, and after the war Commander-in-Chief of Soviet forces in East Germany and Chief of the General Staff from 1952 to 1960 and was the author of a book on the Berlin campaign. Erickson and Ryan interviewed him on 17 April 1963 and found him helpful and ready to enlarge on the archive material that he and his team of military historians had brought with them. Sokolovski told them that his book had contained the first evidence made available to the Russian people that Hitler had died in Berlin in 1945. Erickson records that he found the interview with the then commander of the Eighth Guards Army, Colonel-General Vasili Chuikov and in 1963 a Marshal of the Soviet Union, Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Ground Forces and part-time Head of Civil Defence extremely interesting—and emotional—as the Russian commander recalled the capture of the city and the enormous number of Soviet casualties that the war entailed. Equally worthwhile was his talk with Marshal Ivan Koniev, commander of the First Ukrainian Front in 1945 and Commander-in-Chief of the forces of the Warsaw Pact from 1955 to 1960. Koniev read out (with his spectacles perched on the end of his nose) extensive passages from his personal war diaries, stressing that he had held Front commands since the beginning of the war. Erickson also had a rarely granted interview with Marshal Konstantin Rokossovski, whom he regarded as the Red Army's best tactical and strategic commander, who expressed disappointment at not participating directly in the storming of Berlin. He had criticised Marshal Zhukov, the High Command and Stalin for their conduct of the early stages of the war, including their tactical decision-making in the defence of Moscow in 1941. Other senior Soviet war leaders whom Erickson saw were Marshal Andrei Yermenko, one of the most experienced Front commanders and a veteran of the battle of Stalingrad, and the Head of Soviet Artillery, Chief Marshal Nikolai Voronov, as well as some distinguished middle-ranking officers of Army, Rifle Corps and Divisional levels. Erickson subsequently stressed that although this visit to Moscow

was short, it enabled him to add personal experience to his growing archive of documentary and other historical evidence on which to base his further research and writings.

Erickson returned to Manchester University in 1963 to resume his teaching in the Department of Government. Under this heading he ventured for the first time into the field of military–political relations in Britain, collaborating with Professor J. N. Wolfe in editing a book entitled *The Armed Services and Society* which was published in 1969. His work in this area also involved studying cost-efficiency techniques designed to produce the most efficient Armed Forces for democratic Britain without antagonising the professional career officers. But Erickson's main work was in Soviet military history. He returned to the preparation of his major war history of the Eastern front: *The Road to Stalingrad*, and *The Road to Berlin* on which he worked during the next decade.

While these books were under way, Erickson found himself in increasing demand for expert advice on the Soviet Union in journals, newspapers and at conferences in Britain and overseas. A book on Pan Slavism in 1964 was followed by *The Military-Technological Revolution* which he edited, written by a number of other scholars including Raymond L. Garthoff, Thomas W. Wolfe and the Soviet military analyst Major-General Nikolai Talensky in 1966. In 1967 he collaborated with the late Professor Leonard Schapiro and Peter Reddaway in a reappraisal of Lenin as a war leader during the Russian revolution, and paid his first high-level teaching visit to the United States in that year. He was a Visiting Professor at the Russian Research Center in the University of Indiana, and in 1968 visited the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor to contribute to an important book edited by Richard Pipes on the origins of the Red Army. He also taught at Berkeley, Princeton, Harvard and Chicago during many visits to the United States at this stage in his career. Erickson's appetite for academic and technical studies proved insatiable. A personal visit to his home in Manchester would find him and his wife Ljubica engulfed in stacks of papers, books, documents and draft studies which demonstrated how hard-working a scholar he was and how sought-after an expert he had become on the Soviet armed forces past and present—including among Soviet officers and military historians in Moscow.

In 1967 Erickson took a major decision to leave Manchester and seek a post in the University of Edinburgh. In 1968 the Ministry of Defence under Denis Healey's inspired leadership encouraged and financed a number of universities to establish posts of 'Higher Defence Studies', and the University of Edinburgh appointed Professor Harry Hanham, later to

be Vice-Chancellor of Lancaster University, to the position in Edinburgh. He then asked Erickson to join him there as a lecturer in Higher Defence Studies.

In this capacity, while continuing to write his books and articles on Soviet military affairs, he developed growing contacts with scholars and government officials around the world. He launched extended programmes for students at the university, mostly postgraduates, and also British and American serving officers working on these subjects. He widened the range of his expertise into the more contemporary aspects of events, including Soviet–American strategic relationships, Sino-Soviet relations, and the Warsaw Pact—as it was in the 1970s—and the naval and air elements in the East–West balance in military power. Erickson, ably assisted by Ljubica, his wife, and a closely knit team of followers in Edinburgh University, concentrated on the growth of the strength of Soviet and NATO Armed Forces. He was also able at this time to complete and publish his *Road to Stalingrad 1941–1943* book in 1975 and to begin work on his second volume on the war on the Eastern front, *The Road to Berlin 1943–1945*. The latter included a masterly account of the largest tank battle ever fought: the Battle of Kursk in central European Russia in July 1943, culminating in the Soviet offensive along the whole of the Eastern front from Leningrad (liberated in January 1944) to the campaign on the Black Sea coast. This massive offensive shattered the German and Axis armies in Russia and opened the way for the final advance of the Red Army to the German capital which was taken in May 1945. In 1969 Erickson paid his second visit to the Soviet Union as a member of a BBC documentary team preparing programmes on that country to be broadcast on Radio 4. The team interviewed Ivan Maisky, the wartime and pre-war Soviet ambassador to London, and Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space and cosmonaut, as well as some historians writing on international affairs.

Erickson's increasing interest in the balance of forces between the two alliances drew him to pay further attention to the problems of arms control in the 1960s and 1970s. This coincided with greater interest on the part of Western and Eastern governments and ministries of defence. Here the Centre for Higher Defence Studies in Edinburgh University showed increasing promise as an academic base where international study and debate of defence and arms control issues could take place in a realistic atmosphere. This growth in the Centre's potential role coincided with the first high-level super-power negotiations between Moscow and Washington on the limitation, agreed by treaty, of both sides' strategic (nuclear)

forces. The first of these treaties was the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT I) signed in 1972, followed by SALT II signed in 1979. Simultaneously the two governments signed an Anti-Ballistic Missile Defence Treaty (ABM) in 1974. In a sense these agreements turned the intercontinental strategic nuclear element of the armed forces of both countries into a separate strategic 'umbrella' whose size, modernisation and development could be 'controlled' through negotiation between the powers concerned. The main remaining arms control problem which particularly exercised Erickson appeared in Europe. Here both NATO and the Warsaw Pact were anxious to modernise their Intermediate Range Nuclear Missile Forces (IRBM) and to deploy them in accordance with evolving military doctrines—partly in order to strengthen their conventional capabilities and to avoid nuclear conflict. Soviet modernisation deployment came first: in 1977 with the SS-20 missile deployed forward in Europe. This, along with the establishment of upgraded Theatre of Military Operations headquarters in the East, gave the Soviet Forces a head-start over NATO. The American equivalent, the Pershing-2 missile and the Ground-Launched Cruise missiles (GLCM) systems were not deployed until 1983. These developments made the extension of the strategic nuclear weapons talks into the European theatre extremely difficult. The new deployments of forces and weapons aroused deep suspicions of intentions to resort to war on both sides, and the continuation of negotiations on arms control stalled in the early 1980s. At the strategic level the ongoing talks—the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START)—successor to SALT came to a halt in 1984. Moreover, President Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) announced in 1983 alarmed the Soviet leaders apparently to the point where they became convinced that the United States was deliberately bypassing the SALT and ABM treaties. As early as 1980 it could be said that military diplomacy between the East and the West was virtually at a standstill. Another negative factor was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 and the shooting down of a Korean civil airliner over the Pacific in 1983. All these elements led to a reluctance in Western governments to continue negotiations or even discussions with the Soviet Union.

This complex and worrying scenario helped to influence Erickson's forthcoming role in attempts to re-establish an informed academic dialogue between East and West on arms control issues. The earliest initiative came in Edinburgh through a process which became known as the Edinburgh Conversations. Thanks to the initiative of the late Lord Ritchie Calder, then the Chairman of the Scotland-USSR Society, who paid a

visit to Moscow in 1980, initially to discuss some of the existing contentious issues between the West and the Soviet Union, including the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, human rights, nuclear weapons and disarmament. The tone of the meetings was said to be vigorous and even hostile, and Lord Ritchie Calder returned to Scotland sure that no further meetings could be held. To his amazement, it was reported, that shortly afterwards he received a message from his Russian hosts asking him to bring a group of Scots able and willing to continue the discussions on terms acceptable to both sides. Lord Ritchie Calder welcomed the suggestion, and after consulting senior figures in Edinburgh University, including the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Dr John Burnett, and Erickson, he arranged for ten Scottish academic representatives to visit the Soviet Union to plan the discussions. Erickson, who had been in Washington to brief senior American military officers on other issues when Lord Ritchie Calder was in Moscow, accompanied the Scottish group and took part in talks with the Soviet Deputy Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Communist Party, Vadim Zagladin. It was agreed that three Soviet officials would visit Edinburgh in February 1981 in the hope of organising a meeting in the city in the autumn of that year.

It was obvious in Edinburgh that if these talks were to succeed the key figure on the British side must be Erickson. He called a meeting of the university representatives with the Russians to exchange views on what might be the main subjects for debate. They put forward international law, physics, computer engineering, genetics, medicine and history, and also laying down an information base. Other topics might be awareness of the problem of disinformation and deciding how the discussions might exert influence on the policymakers and prepare a mechanism for resolving differences about facts, for example, on how much in terms of military power, each side had. On the following day, the three Soviet representatives met the Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the university, Dr Burnett. It was agreed that a meeting on the theme 'Survival in the Nuclear Age' of three or four days should be held in Edinburgh University in the autumn of 1981, that the sessions should be informal but with prepared papers provided where appropriate, and that numbers should be restricted to not more than ten on each side. Dr Burnett stressed that the 'Conversations' would not be concerned exclusively with nuclear-military matters, but that wider ranges of topics involving survival should be brought into the agenda.

These contacts and discussions led to the first set of the Edinburgh Conversations which was held in Edinburgh from 5 to 7 October 1981.

From the start it was accepted by both sides that Erickson would be a central figure in keeping the talks going, realistic and worthwhile in content, and carried on in an atmosphere of mutual trust. First of all, he held the vital post of Professor of Higher Defence Studies in the university which gave him the status (especially in Russian minds) for directing a debate of this kind. He clearly enjoyed good relationships with the most senior officials in the university, including the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, and with other academics, government servants and trade-union leaders, and this became ever more evident as the Conversations proceeded. More significantly he was already *the* accepted Western academic expert on the Soviet Armed Forces, past, present and future, the author of two major books on the history of the Second World War on the Eastern Front, and a scholar consulted by all NATO and many neutral governments and universities on the facts and figures of the East–West military balance. The Russians whom the group planned to meet were, in many cases, well known to Erickson already as was the range of published and some unpublished material for which Soviet military analysts were responsible. Moreover, these Russians shared the West's admiration for his knowledge, fair-mindedness and skill in communicating his views, verbally and in print.

Erickson also had other advantages when dealing directly with the Russians. His Russian was fluent and wide-ranging; he also spoke other European languages including French, German and Norwegian, and from Eastern Europe: Polish, Czech and Serbo-Croat. He had a fantastic memory for military detail ranging from strategic decision-making to precise information on the order-of-battle of East European and Soviet armies, navies and air and air-defence formations and units and the growing deployments of Strategic Missile Troops within the Soviet Union and abroad. He was equally knowledgeable on weapons systems of various kinds, their capabilities and their weaknesses. He also understood the problems of morale, discipline and society within the armed forces which he was studying. Deeper still, he had developed a kind of instinctive understanding of how the Russian mind worked on the issues being discussed, how the Russians argued their case, and how and when to stand back and listen and when to press an opposing view vigorously. And all these advantages benefited the Conversations alongside his unique qualities as an interpreter which won the respect of both groups. When the sessions were under way, it was Erickson who was responsible for checking draft reports of the debates and the accuracy of other interpreters' versions of what had been said. Perhaps above all, Erickson's contributions

to the whole process clearly indicated that he had a personal and professional dedication to the success of the Conversations, stressing always the academic nature of the talks and refusing to give them any kind of governmental or official status. Nor would he allow propaganda elements to enter his contributions, although he did agree to, and take part in, press conferences. At one of these, in the Second Edinburgh Conversations session in October 1982, a Soviet journalist asked him: 'Are you a member of The Peace Movement?' He replied: 'No, I'm not. I am a member of the movement for peace.'

The first set of Edinburgh Conversations was, as planned, held from 5 to 7 October 1981 in Edinburgh. The British delegation was headed by Lord Ritchie Calder and Dr John Burnett, with Erickson as the main contributor to the discussions. The Soviet group was led by Professor Vitaly Kobysh of the Department of International Information of the Communist Party. The British group was joined by a distinguished retired General, Sir Hugh Beach, who was an acknowledged expert on the military and military-political aspects of the organisation and policy-making processes of the NATO armed forces and on arms control. He had been a much-admired Commandant of the Army Staff College in Camberley, where he contributed greatly to the quality of the work of the college's students. The Soviet delegates, like their British counterparts, debated the concept of 'limited nuclear war', and agreed on the principle of 'no first use of nuclear weapons' should war break out. Those present also ruled out defining Europe as a 'Theatre of War', especially as a 'Theatre of Nuclear Weapons'. Media coverage in Scotland was favourable, as were the official comments in the Soviet press.

It was agreed at this session that the second set should be held in Moscow from 25 September to 2 October 1982. Erickson led the group from Scotland, which included Professor Iain McGibbon of the Department of International Law at the university, Dr John Loraine of the Centre of Human Ecology and representatives of the Scottish Trade Union movement. On arrival in Moscow this group was joined by delegates flying from London who included Dr Burnett, a son of Lord Ritchie Calder, Nigel Calder, General Sir Hugh Beach, and a very distinguished soldier, Field Marshal Lord Carver, whose last post had been Chief of the Defence Staff. During the Second World War he had been, at the age of 27, the youngest brigadier in the British Army serving in the Middle East. The Soviet delegation had a new leader, Gennadi Yanaev, then the Deputy President of the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies, and later to become famous (or infamous) in 1991 as one of the leaders of the

unsuccessful coup d'état against Gorbachev. However, he carried out his duties as head of the Soviet group in the Edinburgh Conversations with good sense and some humour during the 1980s. The main military representative in the Soviet team was Major-General Konstantin Mikhailov, an artillery officer with many years of service in the General Staff working on arms control. Another member of the Soviet team was Academician Georgi Arbatov, Director of the Institute of US and Canadian Studies, a Deputy of the Supreme Soviet, and a well-known presenter of the Soviet point of view on international affairs. His military advisor was Lieutenant-General Mikhail Mil'stein, a veteran of the Second World War and a respected military analyst and historian. Apparently at the request of the Russians, an American representative was added to the British team: the person chosen was Colonel Lynn Hansen, an Air Force officer with experience of arms control policies and a former student of Erickson in the Centre of Higher Defence Studies at Edinburgh University. Lynn Hansen was to remain in the delegation until the end of the Conversations; he then continued his work on arms control with the rank of ambassador.

As the Conversations got under way it became clear that a procedural problem had arisen which took all Erickson's Soviet expertise to solve. It was a Russian and Soviet tradition to enter negotiations with a draft communiqué compiled before the talks began which their delegates presented as the accepted basis for the final conclusions of the negotiations. This principle was unacceptable to the British side: among other issues it led to increasing delays in the completion of the sessions involved, and to some degree of acrimony in some of the exchanges between the delegations. Erickson, with some assistance from his colleagues, succeeded in persuading the Russians to agree to a more balanced procedure although as the Conversations progressed they did try to reinstate their ideas without much success.

Meanwhile the second set of the Conversations on the Soviet side was dominated by accusations of 'intransigence' by the Americans in 'failing to stop the arms race' and by calls on the British side for new thinking on war, as nuclear hostilities could solve nothing in the problems faced by the world. In the final agreed communiqué all participants were united in their view that the Soviet/United States talks on strategic arms limitation and reduction (SALT/START) and on limiting medium-range nuclear systems in Europe should aim to achieve the speediest possible results. A particularly moving moment during the visit to Moscow came when Field Marshal Lord Carver laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

on 27 September in Red Square. This was much appreciated by the Russians present, but had a special poignancy for Erickson in view of the murder of his father-in-law and other members of Ljubica's family in Yugoslavia during the Second World War.

The third set of Conversations took place in Edinburgh from 17 to 22 September 1983. Sixteen days before the conference was due to open a diplomatic crisis emerged following the shooting-down of a Korean civil airliner over the Pacific by the Soviet Air Defence forces with loss of 269 lives. Retaliatory diplomatic action was taken by Britain and the United States, and some hostility was expressed in both countries to the continuation of the Conversations with the Russians. The university authorities decided, however, that academic discussions should resume, and the British welcomed their Soviet counterparts in Edinburgh on 17 September. Erickson and the university Principal explained to the press that in their view these academic non-governmental talks should continue. The Americans agreed and sent a senior negotiator and former Director of their Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, Professor Eugene Rostow. The British added Vice-Admiral Sir Ian McGeoch, a former Flag-Officer Scotland, to their group. Given the existing international crisis atmosphere, this set of the Conversations broke no new ground and press comment was muted. The challenge was regarded by Erickson as an important one, and he used his authority and his friendly relationships with all concerned to keep the delegations together—and talking.

During this set of negotiations both sides agreed that it would be sensible for a small group of senior members of the teams to visit their opposite numbers prior to the main sessions of the Conversations in order to agree on the agenda in advance. This was done before the fourth set held in Moscow from 15 to 22 September 1984. At the main meeting the British team was strengthened by the addition of Nicholas Soames, a British Member of Parliament, and what was of special interest to the Russians, a grandson of Winston Churchill, and also by Admiral Sir James Eberle, a distinguished sailor and then Director of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. The Americans added Ambassador Max Kampelman, to their delegation. The session was taken up with an energetic exchange between Ambassador Kampelman and Georgi Arbatov (who had clashed previously on East–West issues including arms control) but the heat was taken out of the atmosphere by an intervention by Admiral Eberle which, it was said, 'levelled the score'. Erickson disliked the way in which Arbatov presented the Soviet case, and spent much time balancing the two versions of the dialogue to the satisfaction of both

sides. A press conference which was chaired jointly by Erickson and Gennadi Yanaev apparently went well, and Erickson was described by one of his colleagues as much more relaxed than in previous days.

The fifth set of the Conversations, preceded by a preparatory visit held in Moscow to decide the agenda, took place in Edinburgh from 12 to 17 April 1986. This meeting took place against the background of an American air strike against targets in Libya, which was carried out on 16 April by bombers which had taken off from airfields in Britain. The Conversations, however, continued, and the atmosphere was said to be unaffected by the Libyan crisis. Gennadi Yanaev would only say that the attack could not contribute to world stability, but there was no formal discussion on the subject.

The sixth set was held in Moscow from 27 September to 5 October 1987 following an agenda meeting in February that year which turned out to be one of the most important preparatory sessions prior to a full Conversation. The main reason was that in March 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev, a younger member of the Politburo, had succeeded to the post of General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and had begun the process of reforming the Party and the Government under the general headings of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*. Although the exact translation, let alone meaning, of these Russian terms was far from clear either in Moscow or abroad, one Soviet diplomat interpreted the former as 'refurbishment' of government, society and the relationship between the Party leadership and the people. *Glasnost* was stated to mean 'limitation of censorship', leading, eventually perhaps, to freedom of speech or writing. Not unnaturally, both Westerners and Russians called on Erickson to give his views on the messages coming out from the Kremlin at the preparatory and the full meetings of the groups. Erickson commented that he was very impressed by the new policy of *Perestroika* and the probable link with 'reconstruction' or 'refurbishment', but there was danger that such interpretations could cause confusion among people on both sides. The time had now come to inject new ideas on military and technical issues. He also stressed that the Edinburgh Conversations should stick to the pattern of no formal agenda and simply go on allowing for a free exchange of views and ideas on a few themes.

This set of the Conversations saw the addition to the British team of Field Marshal Sir John Stanier, a former Chief of the General Staff, to present the British thinking on the military issues to be discussed, and Sir Clive Rose, a former Ambassador to NATO. Once again the main business was redrafting the communiqués put forward by the Soviet side on

arms control, the nuclear balance in Europe, the importance of the meetings between the leaders of the Soviet Union and the United States in Reykjavik opening up real steps towards nuclear disarmament and arms control, and visible lowering of military tensions in the balance of power in the world. As before, Erickson was at the centre of this process, and his contribution helped to bring this set to a successful conclusion.

In December 1987 Erickson visited the United States and learnt that the Americans involved would like the Conversations to continue. In Scotland the holder of the post of Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University had changed, but Sir John Burnett (who was knighted in that year), agreed to carry on as a British Co-Chairman of the Conversations, and, after the preparatory agenda meeting was held in September 1988, he led the British team in Edinburgh for the seventh—and final—meeting, which opened on 4 December 1988. The Western delegation, led by Sir John Burnett, included Erickson, General Sir Hugh Beach, Lynn Hansen, and Colonel David Glantz, editor of the American *Journal of Soviet Military Studies*. The Soviet team was headed by General Mikhailov and Professor Vladimir Trukhanovski, a former ambassador and a famous historian.

The agenda for the seventh set of the Conversations, though basically similar to that of its predecessors, was strongly influenced by changes in the political and military relationships between the Western powers and the Soviet Union brought about by the new leadership in the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev. The themes discussed at the meetings included interpretations by both sides of the new policies put forward by Gorbachev on 'Common Security: Perspectives and Possibilities'. Discussion centred on the impact of his *Perestroika* concept, the defence-orientated doctrine of 'sufficiency' in the military strengths of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and his offer in a speech at the United Nations to reduce the strength of the Soviet Armed Forces by 500,000 men—a proposal that was welcomed by all participants. There appeared to be general agreement that, in spite of the significant lowering of tension between Gorbachev's Soviet Union and the West the issues involved deserved a further Conversation in 1989, and in April of that year Erickson went to Moscow to discuss arrangements. Meetings were held for the first time in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and an agenda was agreed, but after the British delegation's return to Edinburgh, diplomatic relations deteriorated between Britain and the Soviet Union, hopefully, temporarily. The British side decided that since the overall international situation had improved to the point where state-to-state relations had overtaken the

achievements of the Edinburgh academic links, the Conversations should be brought to a close. The university leadership agreed, and Erickson notified the American and Soviet participants to this effect. The termination of the Conversations was an amicable one. There can be no doubt that they contributed significantly to the retention of worthwhile contacts between East and West during a period of very tense diplomatic and military relationships, and that the key figure in their origins and continuation was Erickson, whose reputation as a diplomat, especially in a liaison capacity, was added to that of a historian, analyst, teacher and scholar in an admirable way.

In the concluding stages of the Edinburgh Conversations Erickson's career in the university moved further ahead. He was appointed a University Endowment Fellow in 1988, while retaining his post as Director of the Centre of Higher Defence Studies which enabled him to continue his teaching, his writing and research into Soviet military history. He also accepted the offer of the Presidency of the British Association of Civil Defence and Emergency Planning Officers in 1985 which he held for one year. Meanwhile Erickson had been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1982, a Fellow of the British Academy in 1985 and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in 1991. It would take too long to list all his books, let alone his articles, lectures and attendance at conferences as well as his appearances on television and talks on the radio. But some of his writings cannot be omitted. His editorial role was enhanced, for example, in the book *Barbarossa: the Axis and the Allies* which was published in Edinburgh in 1994. In 1996 he contributed a chapter based on Soviet military archives on the Battle for Berlin (printed in Russian as *posledny shturm*) in the book *The End of the War in Europe* edited by Gill Bennett in London.² In the same year he wrote with Ljubica *The Soviet Armed Forces 1918–1992: A Research Guide to Soviet Sources*. Of particular value and artistic quality as well as historical importance was his book published in London with Ljubica, *The Eastern Front in Photographs*, a beautifully prepared volume which brings to light the essence of the war in the east as seen by the camera. Perhaps his last completed book which came out in 2000 was *From Barbarossa to Stalingrad and Berlin*. When he died on 10 February 2002, other works remained unfinished: among them a study of the Soviet Home Front provisionally entitled 'Blood, Bread and Steel', and a history of the Russian General Staff. John Erickson's and Ljubica's decision to leave his archive of Soviet military records

² Gill Bennett (ed.), *The End of the War in Europe* (1996).

which they had built up together over many years to the National Library of Scotland, is a gift of characteristic generosity to all interested in the evolution of international relations following the end of the Second World War. In the words of one of this country's outstanding soldiers, scholars and teachers, Professor Sir Michael Howard, in praise of Erickson: 'Nobody deserves more credit for the ultimate dissolution of the misunderstandings that brought the Cold War to an end and enabled the peoples of Russia and their western neighbours to live in peace. The magnificent archive that he has left to the University of Edinburgh is a fitting memorial.'

One of the most attractive elements in Erickson's life and character was the quality of his capacity for friendship. Whatever he was engaged in professionally he never allowed the hardest workload or the most complex challenge to interfere with his search for happy relationships with his colleagues, his personal generosity, or his readiness to help and encourage other scholars. Mention has already been made of his long and happy marriage to Ljubica and his devotion to their children Amanda-Jane and Mark. In parallel came his admiration for Ljubica's homeland, Yugoslavia, in whose defence, as already mentioned, her father, Dr Branko Petrovic lost his life as a patriot during the war. Erickson and his wife spent most of what spare time they could find on holiday there, especially with the children. It was with deep sadness that they witnessed the break-up of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia—and some resentment that the NATO Alliance had unfortunately played a part in that country's dissolution.

Finally, a more personal memory: the writer of these lines had the good fortune to know Erickson for over fifty years, and enjoyed the privilege of sharing some work with him on Soviet political and military affairs. With all the burdens of his achievements he remained unwaveringly loyal to his friends, was always delightful company, the recounter of many witty and relevant anecdotes and a generous listener to others. He will be remembered professionally as surely the earliest explorer into the once-great fortress of Soviet military power and the scholar with the expertise to explain it to the West. He carried out this task with understanding, clarity and humanity that have never been matched.

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