

The hope in London was that Hitler would realize that aggression would now mean a two-front war and that he would draw back. But how credible was that possibility? No knowledgeable person in England believed that the Western powers could provide tangible military aid to the Poles, which meant that the Eastern front would be a very temporary one, and this calculation remained unchanged even after the British reluctantly pledged their support to Rumania. The British chiefs of staff never for a moment believed that the deterrent would work unless the Russians were brought in. The real question after March 1939 was whether this could be done considering the patent dislike which Mr. Chamberlain had for the Soviet government, the fears of the Poles and the Rumanians, and the ambivalent nature of Soviet policy. The answer in the end was negative.

The story of why this was so has often been told before, but never perhaps in the detail that Sidney Aster tells it. The author has profited from the fact that the British state papers bearing on the events of the spring of 1939 have now been declassified and opened to the public. He has worked through an extraordinary number of private archives and he has interviewed key figures in the diplomacy of his period, including Sir William Seeds, the British ambassador to Moscow from January 1939 to 1940, and the late Dr. Viorel Virgil Tilea, who, as Rumanian minister in London, was principally responsible for overcoming British hesitation about granting a guarantee to his country.

In addition to the account of the Tilea affair, Mr. Aster provides new information about the evolution of Soviet policy and the beginning of the negotiations that resulted in the Nazi-Soviet pact, and also about the ill-starred Anglo-French military mission to Moscow in August 1939, demonstrating in the latter case that much of the criticism that has been made of the mission's composition and procedures has been naïve. Most interesting are his revelations concerning the late manifestations of the appeasement spirit in British political circles—in the group of Dominion High Commissioners ("a hotbed of appeasement"); in the grasping at straws of R. A. Butler, parliamentary undersecretary for foreign affairs; and in the personal diplomacy of people like the Duke of Buccleuch, Lord Kemsley, C. R. Buxton, Ernest Tennant, and Robert Hudson. As Mr. Aster writes, the attempts at appeasement added "to the growing German impression that the British were faltering, having second thoughts, and weakening in their support of the guaranteed states."

Considering what lay ahead, these hesitations are understandable, and it is not strange that Mr. Chamberlain found it agonizing—even when German troops were already rolling into Poland—to have to admit that his efforts to preserve peace had failed. In the end, Mr. Aster points out, it took a kind of sit-in strike at No. 10 Downing Street by more determined ministers to get the prime minister to the sticking point and to make good the pledge of March 31, 1939.

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THE SOVIET AIR FORCE IN WORLD WAR II: THE OFFICIAL HISTORY, ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED BY THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE OF THE USSR. Edited by *Ray Wagner*. Translated by *Leland Fetzer*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1973. xiii, 440 pp. \$12.95.

Histories and memoirs of the war on the Russian front published so far have paid relatively little attention to the German-Soviet struggle in the air. The pres-

ent excellent translation of the official Soviet history of the operations of the Soviet Air Force during World War II offers a detailed, if not unbiased, account of that struggle. The usefulness of this book to students of the Second World War and the development of the Soviet Air Force is enhanced by editorial notes, comments, and tables on Soviet aircraft types and characteristics, as well as by forty-three photographs of Soviet and German aircraft and an extensive index.

This volume shows that, at the start of the war, Soviet numerical superiority in aircraft over the *Luftwaffe* was offset by the large number of obsolete planes in the inventory, greater experience of the German pilots, and the success of the initial German surprise attack. The Soviet account acknowledges the loss of over 1,200 aircraft in the first day of the war (as against a German claim of 1,811 aircraft), most of which were destroyed on the ground. While the quality of the Soviet war planes greatly improved during the course of the war, the initial superiority of German planes and pilots prevented the Soviet Air Force from gaining air supremacy until 1943. German superiority was especially marked during 1941 when the Soviet Air Force lost some 7,800 planes in the first three and one-half months of the war. That it recovered from such a massive loss was because of the ability of the Soviet aircraft industry to produce large numbers of planes (some 137,000 during 1941–45) despite the loss of vital industrial regions to the Germans. The official history, however, omits giving any credit to U.S. and British shipments of aircraft to the Soviet Union which helped make up for Soviet losses and offset, to some extent, the initial German qualitative advantage.

It is clear that the Soviet Air Force was essentially used in a ground support role. Soviet wartime strategy called for the massing of 1,500 to 2,000 aircraft on a relatively narrow front in support of ground offensives. In contrast to U.S. and British air forces, the Soviet Air Force was weak in strategic bombardment capability and much of its bomber force operated only in daytime because the pilots had not received sufficient training in night and instrument flying. And, despite the Soviet claims of having defeated the “best squadrons” of the *Luftwaffe* and of having received little benefit from Allied air operations in the West, the record shows that the Germans were able to make effective use of relatively obsolete aircraft on the Russian front far longer than in the West.

The Soviet Air Force has come a long way since 1945. Even so, its war history is worth studying. As the Soviet authors point out, “the battle experience acquired by the airforce during the war years is still of great value” for the present-day Soviet Air Force.

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KHRUSHCHEV REMEMBERS: THE LAST TESTAMENT. By *Nikita S. Khrushchev*. Translated and edited by *Strobe Talbott*. Foreword by *Edward Crankshaw*. Introduction by *Jerrold L. Schecter*. Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1974. xxxi, 603 pp. \$12.95.

While the authenticity of the tapes and transcripts from which this and the preceding volume of Khrushchev's memoirs (*Khrushchev Remembers*, trans. and ed. by Strobe Talbott [Boston: Little, Brown, 1971]) were compiled is now established beyond reasonable doubt, their value as a historical source remains disappointing.