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BOOK REVIEWS

LITHUANIA AND WORLD WAR II

Alexander Werth, RUSSIA AT WAR, 1941-1945 (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1964).

Paul Carell, HITLER MOVES EAST, 1941-1943 (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 1965).

Recently several extensive studies on the Russo-German War of 1941 -1945 have appeared in English. The concern of this review are the works of Alexander Werth and Paul Carell and how they view hostilities in Lithuania.

No treatment of this titanic struggle between two totalitarian systems could be complete without reference to the non-Russian nationalities of the Soviet Empire. It is the geopolitical misfortune of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to be situated on the European plain between two aggressive powers. The opening phase of Operation Barbarossa (code-name for the German invasion of the USSR), for instance, was executed in Lithuania.

How do (he new studies present these operations and Lithuania? "The result, I think, is the best book we probably shall ever have in English on Russia at war, "was William Shirer's comment on Mr. Werth's book. Unfortunately, the serious reader will find this comment mere editorial puffing. For one thing, Mr. Werth has the tendency of quoting *Pravda* and other Soviet periodicals at face value. For example: "Already on June 17, *Pravda* reported that there was 'great rejoicing at Kaunas', as the Red Army entered Lithuania, adding significantly that 'its Fascist dictator, Smetona' had 'fled to Germany' (p. 87). No analysis or comment on this statement follows. Then Mr. Werth goes on to state: "On June 18 it was already announced that Mr. Paletskis 'who had been put in a concentration camp by the (pro-Nazi) Smetona gang in 1939', had become Lithuanian Premier" (p. 88). The bracketed "pro-Nazi" epithet is Mr. Werth's. Although President Smetona was a nationalist dictator, his policies and ideology were far from racist or pro-Nazi, as Mr. Werth's inference would have us believe.

He also brands all anti-Soviet movements, such as Bandera's Ukrainian nationalists and the Baltic resistance movements, stooges of Hitler. For an expert on the Soviet area Mr. Werth shows lack of depth when it comes to differentiating between anti-Soviets in general and Nazi sympathizers. He condones the wave of deportations in the Baltic States during June of 1941: "Meantime in the three Baltic States a purge was being carried out among the 'Fascist' and other unreliable elements..." (p. 94) His sovietophil proclivity gets the best of him when he refers to the return of the Russians to the Baltic as "liberation". ("During the June 1944 offensive the Red Army liberated... nearly the whole of Lithuania" p. 765.) The thousands of Baits who fled westward during the Soviet advance are tarnished by Mr. Werth as Nazi-sympathizers and war criminals, to wit: "The middle class and many government officials, who had more or less collaborated with the Germans, had either followed them in their retreat or were now laying low. All three countries had their own Nazis and their own Gestapo men" (p. 932). If a modification of Shirer's comment be permitted, Werth's book can be evaluated as "the best pro-Soviet book we shall ever have in English on Russian at war."

Mr. Paul Carell views the war from the German side. His first chapter gives a detailed account of German operations in Lithuania during the week of June 22-29, 1941. It is interesting to note that he uses the Lithuanian spelling for place-names: Raseiniai, Dubysa, Ariogala, Kaunas, Liepoja, Siauliai. Even the seaport of Memel (German variation) is designated by the Lithuanian Klaipeda. He refers to the operations of Army Group North (von Leeb) as taking place in "Soviet-occupied Lithuania." Mr. Carell gives a dispassionate account of the unpreparedness and disorganization of the Red Army in the Baltic during the German offensive. His heroes are the common soldiers of both the Wehrmacht and the Red Army. The study is saturated with meticulous details of troop dispositions and minor skirmishes. For instance, we learn that second lieutenant Weinrowski of the 501st Infantry Regiment (290 Infantry Division) was the first German soldier killed "by the bullets of Soviet frontier guards up in the North" (p. 21). Unfortunately, in spite of Prussian thoroughness, Mr. Carell totally omits a basic factor, the attitude and reaction of the Lithuanian populace to Operation Barbaros-sa. The reader receives the impression that Lithuania is an uninhabited area where two heroic antagonists clash.

Neither Werth nor Carell make any comments on the Lithuanian uprising of June 22-27, 1941. Both writers mention the unbelievable rapidity with which the Germans advanced through Lithuania and the chaotic reaction of the Red Army. Lithuanian insurgents played a major role in facilitating the rapid German progress through the country by harassing and

demoralizing the Soviet rear, by saving the key bridges across the Nemunas, Dubysa and Neris from destruction until the arrival of German military units. Kaunas and Vilnius were in the hands of the Lithuanian insurgents before the arrival of German forces.

The revolt of June 22-29, 1941, cost Lithuania over 12,000 casualties, but it enabled the people to reassert, if only for a brief interval, their will to independence. Far from being pro-Nazi, it was a desperate attempt to confront the oncoming German incursion with a functioning national government. After six weeks this government was suppressed by the Germans.

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