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Admiral Gorshkov: The Man Who Challenged the U.S. Navy

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the panoply of evidence provided to establish definitive answers to the original questions. Furthermore, Platt's brief treatment of the consequences of the war itself may not convince the reader that the conflict truly marked the turning point of China's last golden age, as the book's subtitle suggests.

However, Platt is successful in reminding modern readers of the many unknowns that remain regarding the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century worlds; the capricious nature of the process by which interstate relationships emerge; and the dangers that arise when wealth bleeds into politics to entice governments to take action, however contrary to public opinion those actions may be—a lesson modern readers would do well to heed.

BENJAMIN E. MAINARDI



Admiral Gorshkov: The Man Who Challenged the U.S. Navy, by Norman Polmar, Thomas A. Brooks, and George E. Fedoroff. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019. 304 pages. \$38.95.

This book is long overdue. Few individuals have put their personal stamp on an aspect of world affairs as conclusively as Sergey G. Gorshkov, who almost single-handedly developed the Soviet navy from a gaggle of vessels and competing strategies into one of the most formidable forces in maritime history. For nearly three decades, the Soviet navy was his navy and Soviet naval strategy was his strategy. No other figure in maritime history can quite compare in how completely he created a military service.

For U.S. naval officers serving during the latter half of the Cold War, Gorshkov's navy was the only real threat. It was not a question of whether the Soviet and U.S.

fleets would clash, but only of when. At sea, U.S. tactical action officers served as living computers, memorizing the entire Soviet naval and air orders of battle—from the peculiarities of ship and aircraft types to weapons systems to electronic sensors—to enable them to deal with a bewildering complexity of threats in as rapid and effective a manner as possible. The U.S. Navy's initial role in the predicted war for Europe would have been to move ten Army divisions and their equipment across the Atlantic in ten days while running a gauntlet of Soviet submarines, fleets of Badger and Backfire bombers, and cruise-missile-firing surface ships. It is fitting that former Secretary of the Navy John Lehman wrote the foreword to *Admiral Gorshkov*, as it was Lehman's six-hundred-ship Navy that was going to have to match and defeat Gorshkov's fleet. Under Lehman, the U.S. Navy embraced a much more offensive-minded way of thinking and prepared not only to get the Army across the Atlantic but to harry the Soviet flanks while destroying the USSR's maritime forces wherever they were.

The authors have delivered a riveting account of the growth of the Soviet fleet. They chronicle how Stalin's desire for major warships gave way to a more defensive, coastal, and submarine-based strategy, only to return to a big, blue-water idea. Gorshkov's forces were designed and built neither for maritime supremacy nor for sea control, but these would come as the fruits of victory if the Soviet navy could achieve its mission: destroying the U.S. Navy, primarily by sinking its aircraft carriers. Whether it could have done so remains a matter of conjecture; that the Soviets would have failed in the effort remains a matter of faith among most Cold War–vintage U.S. naval officers.

Gorshkov joined the Soviet navy before World War II and served extensively in the Far East. He gained his first command and saw combat against the Japanese while supporting Soviet ground forces in 1938. It was during this period that he had his first brush with disaster. Gorshkov commanded an operation that involved the towing of a newly built destroyer to port. Things went wrong and the ship was lost; his career was in peril. However, support from his seniors in the chain of command saved him.

As a young captain in World War II, Gorshkov saw combat in Crimea and the Black Sea. He displayed personal bravery, and he played a role in the defense of Stalingrad. After the war, and particularly after the Cuban missile crisis, Gorshkov became adept at explaining the role of the Soviet navy in defending the homeland—at ever-increasing distances from home waters. In doing so, he also embraced and demonstrated the power of warships as tools of statecraft. Soviet port visits expanded to harbors all over the globe, demonstrating the USSR's strategic reach, maritime prowess, and suitability as a partner.

Admiral Gorshkov embraced technology, and there were areas in which Soviet advances ran ahead of those of the United States. These ranged from

fabricating the titanium hulls of *Alpha*-class submarines to putting gas turbine engines into warships well before the United States. He was able to acquire massive amounts of matériel—steel and electronics, among others—and trained personnel to grow his fleet.

It can be easy to lose sight of all the other challenges Gorshkov had to face while he built his fleet. There were political alliances to manage, political enemies to avoid, and the couching of every plan and decision in a manner acceptable to party ideologues and leaders. Polmar and company do fine work in covering these aspects.

If there is a weakness in the work, the authors identify and acknowledge it. Although they make a valiant effort, it is hard to reveal Sergey Gorshkov the man. It is doubtful whether anyone could have done a better job, but those wanting to know about Gorshkov's personal life will have to wait.

An easy read and a compelling work, *Admiral Gorshkov* is a welcome addition to biographies of great naval leaders, builders, and thinkers. Gorshkov too often is neglected in discussions of naval strategists; it is high time for him to be included.

RICHARD NORTON

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