

## REVIEWS

(it being one minor part of a battle that has, itself, been overlooked). Atter does, however, claim a greater significance for the volume than it perhaps warrants. He argues that the book challenges the historiography of the battle, which has been critical of the New Army divisions generally (including 8/Lincolns), claiming that they were routed or 'bolted' from the battlefield. Atter believes that this is incorrect and defends the battalion from such a calumny. While some historians have made broad comments to this effect, it must be stated that my work on Loos (*Loos 1915*, published in 2006), which examines the experience of the reserve divisions in detail, does not come to this conclusion. It defended the performance of these units and argued that the idea of a 'wild panic' from the battlefield was 'unlikely'. But Atter does not cite this, which is surprising.

*In the Shadow of Bois Hugo* is an interesting account, written by someone with a deep attachment to the subject, but ultimately it will be of interest only to specialists in the field or those with a specific connection to the Lincolns.

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**Peter Sikora, *The Polish 'Few': Polish Airmen in the Battle of Britain*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2018. xvii + pp. 574. ISBN: 978-1526-714855. Price £30.00.**

Peter Sikora's study of the Polish 'few' begins not in 1940 but with a more contemporary story. He says that 'A few years ago' (it was actually 2009), a British political party (which Sikora did not name) had used a picture of a Spitfire on a leaflet which was critical of immigration. Sentiment in Britain against immigration was at that time focused on people coming from eastern Europe, perhaps especially Poland. The un-named political party (it was the British National Party) had not done their homework, for the Spitfire pictured was very obviously flown by a Polish pilot, displaying as it did the distinctive red and white checkerboard. The error was repeated by the right-wing group Britain First in 2014.

The ignorance shown by these groups can hardly be because the role of Poles in the Royal Air Force in 1939-45 has been completely 'forgotten' in the UK. There are visible signs on both the Battle of Britain memorial near Folkestone unveiled in 1993,

## REVIEWS

and the Polish War Memorial in Ruislip unveiled as long ago as 1948. Television and film representations of the war have for decades been replete with airmen wearing 'POLAND' on the shoulder of their RAF uniforms. The 2018 film *Hurricane* has more recently brought the story to a new audience. What has been lacking, however, is the sort of painstaking research carried out by Peter Sikora in this comprehensive volume. Nearly half of the book is an encyclopedia rather than a narrative, containing detailed biographies of the 145 Polish pilots in the Battle of Britain. These represent very thorough research: life stories of all the men, focusing on the wartime years but also containing information on, for example, the naming of streets in Poland after the pilots.

As for the narrative, there is some useful context-setting beyond the immediate circumstances of 1940, going back to the presence of Poles among Russian Tsarist airmen based at Northolt in 1917. The story of Poles fleeing first to France in 1939 and then on to Britain is well-told by Sikora who provides rich sources of material on how they adjusted to a new country. The book is full of insights into the practicalities of this, including British tea being strange to Polish tastes. However, as the title suggests, the book is primarily about the air war above Britain in 1940. Sikora skillfully reconstructs the minutiae of the conflict into an engaging narrative. Much of that is focused on the two Polish fighter squadrons, 302 and especially 303 which as a member of 11 Group was in the frontline for longer than was 302's 12 Group. Indeed, 303 Squadron famously became the highest-scoring RAF squadron during the Battle of Britain. In telling this story, Sikora has engaged with previous work on the subject and used his findings to tackle some problems with previous writing. For example, his research shows that a visit by King George VI to 303 Squadron at Northolt on 26 September 1940 did not, as often thought, involve the King leaving when the squadron was suddenly given the order to scramble. Instead, the King witnessed the squadron's action from the Operations Room, greeting the pilots as they returned. Beyond the story of 302 and 303 squadrons, Sikora's diligent research has led him to Poles serving in several other squadrons, so this is as complete a story of the contribution of Polish pilots to the Battle of Britain as it would be possible to tell.

There is always a limit to how much information can be included in a book which is already lengthy. However, it would have been interesting to know more about Group Captain Kwieciński, who was the Polish military and air attaché in Britain. The interest in him comes from the fact that he had served in the German air force in Palestine in the First World War and was held captive by the British. A little more on his story would have been fascinating. Footnotes would have been helpful in the biographies (which do not have any), including at least the key sources for the 145, as they might have been an aid to other researchers.

Of the 145 Polish pilots in the Battle of Britain, twenty-nine were killed during it. Another thirty-three were killed later in the war and three died in flying accidents

afterwards. Nearly three-quarters of the survivors did not return to Communist Poland, with a few of the 'few' remaining in the RAF. Others were not welcome in Britain and told they had to leave. By the time the book appeared, none of the Polish 'few' survived. Had they lived to see it, they would have had good reason to feel that the story of their involvement in the Battle of Britain had at last been set down in the detail it deserves.

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**Mark Edele, *Stalin's Defectors: How Red Army Soldiers became Hitler's Collaborators, 1941-1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-0198798156 (hardback). 224pp. Price £60.00.**

In no other allied army during the Second World War was the problem of defection so severe as in the Red Army. Nowhere else did the phenomenon of defection generate such political controversy as in the post-war Soviet Union. Moreover, in modern-day Russia, where historical memory continues to be shaped by on-going political, economic, and military struggles, the study of Red Army defectors is shackled to a nationalist historiography (p. 163). For these reasons, Mark Edele's fascinating book is important and not only for its much-needed forensic examination of Red Army defectors. This study of Red Army defectors is a 'military history from below' (p. 8), encompassing social, cultural, and detailed statistical analyses. More broadly, the book presents convincing challenges to recent research on popular support for Stalinism. In this way, Edele's book will remain the definitive account of defection in the Red Army and it moves contested debates about the nature of Soviet society further forward.

*Stalin's Defectors* is structured into nine chapters that systematically examine the phenomenon of Red Army defections. By way of introduction, chapter one begins with the case of Major Ivan Kononov, a Soviet defector who gave himself up to the Germans along with his unit in August 1941. Kononov would later organise one of the first units to fight against the Soviets for the Nazis. Yet Kononov's motivation – that of deep political opposition to the Stalinist regime – was untypical. As Edele shows, the vast majority of defectors were not in fact ideologically motivated traitors; they were 'refugees from Stalinism' seeking escape from death, dictatorship, and total war. Survival was the primary motivating factor (p. 10).