

Manhattan Book Review

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Project Zebra. Roosevelt and Stalin's Secret Mission to Train 300 Soviet Airmen in America.

By M.G. Crisci

Orca Publishing Company USA, \$32.95, 355 pages, Format: Hard

★★★★★/5

LOCAL AUTHOR

Given the enmity and distrust between the United States and Russia these days, it's hard to imagine our countries working together to rid the world of the scourge of Adolf Hitler during World War II. It's even harder to imagine that the US and Russia would collaborate on an aircraft project that reaped great rewards for Soviet pilots and soldiers alike.

Project Zebra dives deep into the history of our two countries and surfaces with an amazing, untold story. A small town in North Carolina not only hosted a group of Russian soldiers on American turf, but served as their home and their training ground to fly specially-built state-of-the-art planes in the last years of the war.

The whole affair sounds impossible nowadays, let alone during wartime, as the Allies rallied together to banish the Nazi threat. The word "far-fetched" comes to mind... Soviet soldiers in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, visiting the local ice cream shop on the weekend or making pilgrimages to Kitty Hawk to honor the brothers who gave us the gift of flight.

It seems utterly ludicrous, unless you read *Project Zebra*, and learn the story as it's meant to be told... by those who lived it. Crisci's narrative is supported by dozens and dozens of images of official paperwork, photographs, images, and artifacts from the period, including memos, updates, and performance reviews on both the American and Soviet sides.

All the homework done by the author, and all the materials saved by the descendants of the soldiers and officers involved, bring to life this fascinating tale, a lost mission, a grand collaboration between two peoples who so often found — and find — themselves on opposite sides of history.

It's a thoroughly enjoyable read, representing an incredible wealth of research and work that has clearly gone into the writing process. There's a sense of wonder and optimism that practically infuses the book. This is as much a historical revelation of a forgotten military success story as it is a celebration of those who made Project Zebra work. The sincerity of their efforts, their hopes, and their attempts to work together to end the German threat never wavers.

The finale of the book, complete with photos of the officers involved, is a classy and heartfelt way to conclude the book with that message of sincerity and respect intact. We, as readers, never met any of these intrepid men, but we are given the privilege of learning about them, of appreciating their sacrifices and their hard work.

That's history done right.

Reviewed by Glenn Dallas

