Russia's Captured Cagles Or Gorky Park

VLADIMIR KOTELNIKOV STARTS A TWO-PART EXAMINATION OF THE SOVIET UNION'S 'WAR TROPHIES'



n June 22, 1943, the second anniversary of the Nazi invasion of the USSR, an exhibition of captured materiel was staged in Moscow at the magnificent Gorky Park on the banks of the River Moskva. Opened by Joseph Stalin – newly honoured with the title of Marshal of the Soviet Union – it was a massive propaganda coup with journalists and foreign delegations invited to the previews.

The outcome of the war was far



from certain, but this was a grand occasion to showcase to the world and the citizens of Moscow that the USSR was turning the tide. Rows of guns, tanks and other army hardware were eclipsed by a dazzling array of aircraft. Here was proof that the Third Reich was on the wane, the Red Army having stripped it of valuable trophies as it started the march westwards – to Berlin.

Similar displays, but with a smaller number of exhibits, appeared in other

large cities across the Soviet Union to boost morale. The aircraft assembled at Gorky were but the tip of the iceberg of those captured by the USSR.

While the airframes in the riverside park were selected for their propaganda role, many others were used to gather intelligence on the enemy's capabilities, for operational sorties including clandestine missions and to increase the Soviet Union's technological prowess. This is the story of the Soviet Union's 'alternative' air force.



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Clockwise from top left Joseph Stalin with Georgii Malenkov, a prominent member of the State Defence Committee, and Nikolai Vlasik, Stalin's head of security, along with members of the high command inspecting the Gorky Park exhibition. Junkers Ju 87D to the right and Focke-Wulf Fw 200C behind. GENNADY PETROV ARCHIVE

Moscow citizens inspect the Gorky exhibition.

An avenue of Messerschmitt Bf 109s at Gorky Park, surrounded by captured tanks and artillery pieces. GENNADY PETROV ARCHIVE

Stalin and his entourage among the aircraft at Gorky – Junkers Ju 88 behind.

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types, those that existed in prototype form only. It was not until the battles began that Soviet experts understood that the Bf 109E, considered to be the principal German fighter, was by then a rarity. Most units had by that time converted to the Bf 109F version, unknown to Soviet specialists. And reports from the fronts often mentioned 'phantoms' such as the He 113 and the Messerschmitt Me 115, both mythical types.

#### WINDFALLS

From the outbreak of what the Soviets called the Great Patriotic War, soldiers began to capture

**Top** Profile artwork of a Bf 109G-2 captured near Stalingrad, early 1943.

Above The captured Bf 109G-2 in Russian markings. GENNADY PETROV ARCHIVE "During testing, its Soviet pilot fell victim to the Messerschmitt's narrow-track undercarriage: one of the legs failed and the wing tip was damaged. He was not alone: untold numbers of Luftwaffe pilots suffered this ignominy throughout the war"

When German forces flooded into the Soviet Union by land, sea and air in June 1941, knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of their enemy was essential to the commanders in Moscow. Intelligence regarding the Luftwaffe's potential was vital in the defence of the motherland in what evolved into a massive war on a front stretching from the shores of the Baltic to the Black Sea.

Up to the summer of 1941 Soviet specialists had used every opportunity to study the enemy. During the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin had backed the Republican forces against the Nationalists, who were supported by the Germans and the Italians. That conflict had secured a Heinkel He 51 biplane fighter, Messerschmitt Bf 109Bs, an He 111B and Junkers Ju 52 bombers and the wreckage of a Ju 86 bomber.

During a short period of fairly good relations between the USSR and Germany – from the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August 1939 – several aircraft were purchased, including Bf 109E, Bf 110C and He 100 fighters, Dornier Do 215 and Ju 88A bombers and Bf 108 and Fieseler Fi 156 liaison types. Orders were also placed for batches of Ju 52/3m transports and Arado Ar 196A shipboard reconnaissance monoplanes, of which only a few of the Junkers tri-motors were successfully accepted and delivered to the Soviet Union.

Soviet delegations visiting Germany were meanwhile afforded opportunities to become familiar with several other types, while Luftwaffe aircraft that force-landed across the USSR border were also studied.

All this intelligence did not, however, give Soviet planners vital up-to-date tactical insights or a comprehensive overview of the enemy's fleet. For example, Soviet references on the Luftwaffe often listed, among mass-manufactured THE GREAT PATRIETIC WAR 1941 - 1945



German aircraft making emergency landings beyond the front line. On June 23, 1941, a damaged Ju 88A bomber of III/KG 1 (third Gruppe of Kampfgeswader – bomber wing – 1) landed on a beach on the Gulf of Riga. It was inspected and meticulously photographed.

Two days later a Ju 88A-6 taking part in a raid on Brovary airfield was damaged by anti-aircraft fire and landed near Kiev. The crew surrendered to local residents and Red Army soldiers quickly arrived on the scene. Photos of the bomber were used for propaganda purposes. Similar incidents took place in

other locations; however, such

forced landings were only inspected by competent personnel from nearby units, not specialists. With Soviet troops constantly on the retreat, there was no opportunity to carry out repairs and fly 'windfalls' out - or remove them by road or conduct thorough examinations. On July 30, a reconnaissance Ju 88 intercepted and hit by Soviet fighters near Istra made a forced landing. This aircraft was successfully dismantled and evacuated, but not for evaluation: it was placed

in the square in front of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow as evidence of the achievements of Soviet pilots. Wrecked Luftwaffe aircraft were similarly exhibited in Leningrad, Kiev, and Kharkov.

#### **FIGHTER STUDY**

A permanent Commission for Captured Materiel, chaired by Major General M V Shishkin, was established by the Scientific Test Institute for the Soviet Air Force (NII VVS – see panel on page 122) on July 29, 1941. Not surprisingly, its main task was to study the Luftwaffe's fighters.

Meanwhile, on July 20, an almost serviceable Bf 109F-2 was captured. Leutnant G Raub of I/JG 54 (first Gruppe of Jagdgeswader – fighter wing – 54) lost his way, landed near Tosno and was killed in a gunfight with Soviet soldiers. This trophy was not earmarked for evaluation but for display to the citizens of Leningrad. In the second half of November two more Bf 109F-2s, this time from JG 52, came down to the northwest of Moscow, one of the pilots being taken prisoner.

A Bf 110C-5 captured near Bryansk on September 13 later arrived at the Central Aerohydrodynamic Institute (TsAGI) where, first and foremost, its photorecce equipment was studied. Up to the end of 1941 not one captured German aircraft was flight-tested. During the winter counter-

offensive after the Battle of

Left

Soviet and British pilots inspecting a Ju 88A, which made a forced landing on a beach near Murmansk in the autumn of 1941.

#### **Below left**

An artist's impression of a captured Heinkel He 111H during testing at NII VVS in May 1943.

#### Below

The captured Heinkel photographed in Russian markings.

Above Focke-Wulf Fw 190D-9 as flown by the Baltic Fleet Air Force at Marienburg, 1945

## "There were some attempts to use captured aircraft over the front line for reconnaissance, but such sorties were frequently shot down by Soviet anti-aircraft artillery and fighters"

## SOVIET TEST AND EVALUATION CENTRES

Abbreviation	English/Russian
GAZ	State Aircraft Factory
	Gosudarsstvenny Aviatsionny Zavod
LII	Flight Research Institute
	Lyotno Issledovateľski Institut
NII VVS	Scientific Test Institute for the Soviet Air Force
	Nauchno Ispytatel'ny Institut Voenno-Vozdushnye
	Sili
OKB	Experimental Design Bureau
	Opytnoye Konstruktorskoye Byuro
TsAGI	Central Aero-hydrodynamic Institute
	Tsentral'ny Aerogidrodinamicheski Institut

Below An Fw 190A-4 during testing at NII VVS in the summer of 1943. GENNADY PETROV ARCHIVE Moscow, from December 5 to 31, Soviet troops captured 34 aircraft which had been abandoned at airfields or had made forced landings. Among them were several Bf 109s, Bf 110s, He 111s, Henschel Hs 126s and Ju 52s. Most were unserviceable or had been booby-trapped. Some were useful and taken to TsAGI, the air force engineering academy or a relevant design bureau for study. A team of specialists from the academy, led by Brigade Engineer V A Semyonov and operating on the Kalinin Front, inspected aircraft, removed the most interesting equipment and armament and familiarised themselves with groundsupport equipment.

### **COMPARING** '109S

Testing of enemy types did not begin until the spring of 1942. Piloting a Bf 109F-2 on February 22, the leader of 8/JG 51 (eighth Staffel – flight – of JG 51) lost his bearings and appeared over Tushino airfield, near Moscow. Subjected to anti-aircraft fire, the fighter forcelanded immediately. Technicians from the resident 47th Air Division then effected repairs.

During testing, its Soviet pilot fell victim to the Messerschmitt's track undercarriage:

narrow-

one of the legs failed and the wing tip was damaged. He was not alone: untold numbers of Luftwaffe pilots suffered this ignominy throughout the war.

The damaged Bf 109 was repaired at TsAGI and handed over to NII VVS. On delivery, it was emphasised that the aircraft was not new, had undergone repairs more than once and had a worn-out engine.

The fighter was tested by Major Y P Nikolayev, who had experience of the Bf 109E. Despite wear and tear, the Bf 109F-2 demonstrated fairly good performance, although it failed to fully reveal its capabilities at altitude. Nikolayev was in a position to brief others on the differences between the 'F-2 and earlier versions. He also flew several simulated combats against a Yakovlev Yak-1.

A pair of Bf 109F-4s of III/JG 3 lost their way near Chuguyevo and put down on ploughed land on March 29; the pilots were taken prisoner. One of the Messerschmitts was, at the request of the Americans, sent by sea to the US for testing. (This was almost certainly werk nummer – w/nr, constructor's number – 7640 which was tested as 'EB-100' at Wright Field, Ohio – ED.)

In June 1942, the Luftwaffe began to operate Bf 109Gs on the Eastern Front. On August 27 one was brought down near Stalingrad and the pilot taken prisoner. There was no time to salvage the whole aircraft but its Daimler-Benz DB 605A engine was taken away, repaired and bench-tested.

Studies of German aircraft were aimed mainly at finding out their strong and weak points, to develop efficient tactics for air-to-air combat. Layout charts showing the location of fuel and oil tanks, radiators and armour plating were distributed to aviation units to familiarise pilots with points to aim for and those to avoid. There were some attempts to use captured aircraft over the front line for reconnaissance, but such sorties were frequently shot down by Soviet anti-aircraft artillery and fighters.

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HE GFEAT PATFIET

#### **STALINGRAD BOUNTIES**

The Saratov Military Aviation and Glider School had taken on an He 111, which was converted into a glider-tug. Flown by Lt Kostyukhin's crew, it conducted at least one mission in November 1942, taking an Antonov A-7 assault glider into enemy-held territory.

The Battle of Stalingrad (August 1942 to February 1943) produced a rich harvest of trophies, most of which were gathered on airfields inside the encirclement. At Bolshaya-Rossoshka there were up to 40 comparatively intact aircraft – and 300 wrecks – of various types. Another 17 airframes were captured at Basargino, mostly Ju 52s.

Few of these were operable. Inspections revealed missing equipment or hidden defects; others had been booby-trapped. One of the Junkers was 'furnished' with an anti-tank mine and six 50kg bombs which would have detonated had the airframe been moved.

After Stalingrad, the use of captured aircraft became more widespread. Flight testing continued, with bombers coming under scrutiny as well as the fighters. In late February, an He 111H-6 was ferried to NII VVS, where Lt Col G A Ashytkov's crew evaluated it until May. Soviet technicians deemed the Ju 87 'Stuka' dive-bomber archaic and unpromising, and wondered why the Germans were still using it. On March 18, an anti-tank Ju 87G-1 was brought down and its pilot taken prisoner. Its 37mm cannons were removed and tested on a firing range. Four months later a Ju 87D-3 was tested by NII VVS.

On January 31, 1943, an almost operable Fw 200C-3/U2 was captured at Pitomnik, the last airfield held by the Germans inside the encirclement – the entire crew, led by Oberfeldwebel Karl Wittman, becoming prisoners of war (PoWs). The Condor was tested at NII VVS by Colonel A I Kabanov's crew, whose opinions of it were low.

Also tried out at NII VVS, a Gotha Go 145 trainer biplane, found on an airfield near Kalach, had been converted by the Germans into a light night-bomber, conducting 'nuisance' raids. Having compared the so-called 'Ersatz-Bomber' with the Soviet equivalent, the Polikarpov U-2, the latter was determined more efficient.

Another Gotha type evaluated was the Go 242 assault glider. Several were found near Stalingrad, among them an ambulance version equipped as a flying surgery.

By far the greatest prize at this stage of the conflict was the notorious 'Butcher Bird', the Fw 190. On January 16, 1943 Unteroffizier H Brandt of I/JG 54 lost a propeller blade and landed in his Fw 190A-4 on the frozen

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A Ju 87D-3 dive-bomber at NII VVS, 1943. GENNADY PETROV ARCHIVE

#### Above

Fw 200C-3 Condor w/nr 0034, Pitomnik, February 1943.







## "A rare Arado Ar 232B-0 twin-engined tactical transport had been discovered southwest of Rzhev. It had been secreting agents behind Soviet lines to assassinate Stalin; the attempt failed and the saboteurs were neutralised"

#### Top A Junkers Ju 388L-1

tested at NII VVS in the spring of 1946.

#### Above

The hulk of an Arado Ar 232B-0 after a hard landing near Rzhev. It had been part of an abortive raid to assassinate Stalin. Lake Ladoga, near Petrograd. He attempted to get away on skis, but was captured.

Soviet specialists had studied the type's technical specification in the summer of 1941. But the opportunity for a 'live' familiarisation aroused immense interest, and from late June 1943 the '190 was tested at NII VVS by Major Y A Antipov.

#### **TRANSPORT FLEET**

With the war turning slowly in favour of the USSR, the Soviets considered the possibility of using German aircraft to top up their civil fleet. As early as March 14, 1942 the head of the Civil Air Fleet administration, V S Molokov, asked Stalin to authorise the operation of captured aircraft in regions away from the front. But it was not until spring the following year that sufficient transports had been gathered and repaired.

By April 1, 1943 there were 14 Ju 52s in service plus another at the disposal of the People's Commissariat of Air Industry. The tri-motors served the Sverdlovsk–Krasnoyarsk and Kuybyshev–Tashkent–Alma-Ata routes but were not allowed any closer to the front line as they were a 'red rag' to Soviet anti-aircraft artillery.

On May 12, a Ju 52 was damaged while flying over a bridge across the Volga in Ulyanovsk and had to make an emergency landing. Spares were in short supply and Soviet mechanics had to be adaptable to keep the Ju 52s airworthy. Tyres from Tupolev TB-3s and skis from Lisunov Li-2s (licencebuilt Douglas DC-3s) were fitted and missing or faulty instruments and radios replaced with Soviet-made equipment.

Engines proved more of a problem. One Junkers was fitted with a Mikulin M-25V radial but its mount failed during static tests. Another was modified with a pair of M-62IRs, but it's not known if it flew with them.

By October 25, the Civil Air Fleet had 31 Ju 52s, of which 23 had been restored to serviceable condition.

#### **INCREASING NUMBERS**

By the summer of 1943, the number of captured Bf 109s alone had reached more than 50. They were demonstrated to novice pilots to show the opposition's weak points and used for simulated air-to-air combats to demonstrate correct attack methods.

As well as other captured types, Bf 109s were deemed supernumerary, so their operation was not regulated. In late June, an order came through to make a thorough inventory of all German aircraft and to assess the possibility of their restoration. It turned out there were nearly 100 suitable for return to the air, mostly Fw 190s.

A question arose as to how to use the He 111s as, by 1943, there were 25 – of which 16 were combat-capable. Four were repaired by the shops of the Moscow Military District and used to equip the 132nd Regiment, under the command of Major A S Khlebnikov, at Yoshkar-Ola, near Kazan. The crews flew the bombers for two months, mastering them successfully.

On approach to Yoshkar Ola, pilots in other units were astonished to see rows of familiar silhouettes once regarded as hostile. Many felt a conditioned reflex which 'told' them they had lost their way and were landing on the wrong side of the front line. For that reason, high command did not take the risk of sending the

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Some trophies were transferred to training institutions. The Lipetsk Higher Aviation School had a Bf 109, a Bf 110 and a He 111 at its disposal, while the Higher School of Air-to-Air Combat at Lyubertsy operated a Bf 109, an Fw 190, a He 111, a Ju 52, Ju 87 and a Ju 88. He 111s and Do 217s were in service with the 8th Support Brigade in the Volga Region.

In late 1944, a number of captured aircraft were handed over to Bulgaria, a former Axis power that had changed sides. Its air force mostly consisted of Luftwaffe types and, to avoid time on conversion training to new Soviet machines, the Bulgarians were given Luftwaffe types they were familiar with.

Soviet troops advanced deeper into German-occupied eastern Europe and finally entered Reich territory in 1945. Special groups ransacked factories, institutes and design offices, taking everything of interest. By this time, they were not looking for aircraft to put into operational service but for innovations and experimental designs to evaluate.

132nd's Heinkels to the front; instead,

the crews went to war in new Tupolev

In 1944 the number of the trophies

Byelorussia alone, around 70 aircraft

serviceable. Sometimes Soviet troops

came across interesting innovations:

at Otopeni airfield in Romania. One

for example, capturing two radarequipped Bf 110F-4 night-fighters

kept growing. During battles in

were captured, some perfectly

was later studied at the

Tu-2 bombers.

A Ju 388 high-altitude interceptor and an Me 410B-2 night-fighter twin were brought to the Soviet Union and tested, while a Dornier Do 217M bomber was among the last piston-engined aircraft evaluated by NII VVS.

Two helicopters were captured by the Red Army. A Flettner Fl 282 with intermeshing rotors flew several times at the Flight Research Institute (LII) in 1947; and a twin-rotor Focke-Achgelis Fa 233 arrived at Ivan Bratukhin's experimental design bureau (OKB) for study. Scaled-up versions were produced until 1948.

As the Red Army stormed its way into Germany, specialists searched for even greater technological treasures in a country well known for its lead in the development and operation of jet fighters and bombers. The hunt was on for the USSR to acquire knowledge of these new weapons.

Concludes in the February FlyPast, on sale from January 2. All photos from the author's archive unless noted. Colour profiles by Andrey Yurgenson.

#### Left

One of the last pistonengined types evaluated by NII VVS was a Do 217M, in 1946. GENNADY PETROV ARCHIVE

#### Below

A Ju 388L during testing at NII VVS, March 1946. GENNADY PETROV ARCHIVE

CONCLUDING VLADIMIR KOTELNIKOV'S REVIEW OF AIRCRAFT CAPTURED BY THE SOVIET UNION

#### Above

Me 262A-2 werk nummer 110426 during testing at NII VVS. autumn 1945.

#### Top right

A Siebel Si 204D, borrowed from Polar Aviation, at Khorog in the Pamir Mountains.

#### Right centre An Me 262A-2 jet fighter

at NII VVS, summer 1945. GENNADY PETROV ARCHIVE

#### **Bottom right**

Some of the aircraft at the Gorky Park exhibition - with the River Moskva in the background - in Moscow, June 1943. Among them are Bf 109s, a Do 215, an Fi 156, an Fw 58, an Fw 200, He IIIs (both conventional and all-glazed cockpits), an Hs 129, Ju 52s, a Ju 87 and a U 88. GENNADY PETROV ARCHIVE elentlessly heading west, the Red Army swept decaying German resistance away as it rushed towards Berlin. In the wake of the ground and air forces, special teams of technicians were bent on salvage, not destruction. The technological future of the Soviet Union lay with equipment and personnel that could be captured and moved east for examination, and high on Stalin's shopping list were examples of the Luftwaffe's jets.

Probably the greatest trophy was the Messerschmitt Me 262 twinjet fighter and fighter-bomber. On March 30, 1945, the Scientific Test Institute for the Soviet Air Force (NII VVS - also see last issue) received its first one. It had forcelanded near Schneidemühl – now called Pila – in Poland.

Restored and first tested by A G Kochetkov, the jet's evaluation ended when Kochetkov experienced severe difficulties pulling out of a dive. On September 17, F F Demida perished in a crash in another Me 262.

By the end of 1945, seven Heinkel He 162 jets, ten Me 163 rocketpropelled interceptors, three Me 262s and two Arado Ar 234 twinjet bombers had been found. One of the latter, a 'B-2 version, was repaired by German technicians at the factory at Ribnitz, near Rostock on the Baltic coast, and tested at Putnitz by a team from NII VVS in January and February 1946, A Kubyshkin making five flights. Two Junkers Jumo 004 turbojets were replaced during testing Of two He 162s put together at Rostock from sub-assemblies, parts and components, one was tested at NII VVS by G M Shiyanov on May 8. The other went into the Central Aero-hydrodynamic Institute (TsAGI) wind tunnel.

The Me 163 never flew in the USSR with its rocket operative but was tested as a glider, towed by a Tupolev Tu-2 bomber. In May 1946 the prototype Junkers EF 126 interceptor, powered by an Argus pulse-jet as fitted to the V-1 flying-bombs, underwent testing in Germany, towed into the air by a Ju 88 – but it crashed on landing, killing its pilot, Flugkapitän Matthias.

The greatest interest was devoted to the Me 262, and there were discussions about copying the twinjet and putting it into production in the USSR. But designers persuaded Soviet leader Joseph Stalin they could create a better aircraft, given their acquired experience.

German turbojets *were* manufactured in the Soviet Union. The RD-10 and RD-20 engines were essentially facsimiles of Junkers Jumo 004s and BMW 003As. The RD-10 powered the Yakovlev Yak-15 and -17 *Feather* while the RD-20 equipped the Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-9 *Fargo*. The first of these engines types were assembled from parts brought from Germany.

#### **COASTAL PATROL**

Luftwaffe aircraft were almost never used in the USSR in their intended roles as there were sufficient Soviet-made types, as well as others supplied by the Allies, in production or service. Arado Ar 196 reconnaissance floatplanes were the only significant exception.

The first of these were captured on the Polish coast in the spring of 1945, with many more taken in Germany. At Dassow, on the Baltic, no fewer than 20 intact Ar 196s and a spare parts depot were discovered. It was decided they should be used as replenishments for the aviation element of the border troops.

Repairs were carried out by German personnel at Damgarten, under the supervision of Soviet officers, as well as in various repair shops, leading to a total of 37 serviceable Arados – which were fitted with Soviet-made instruments, radios, direction finders and machine guns. Those destined for service on the Baltic and Black Seas were ferried by air. A long rail journey lay ahead for the Ar 196s that were to patrol the Pacific coast from bases around Vladivostok.

Spare nine-cylinder BMW 132

radials were expected to be in short supply, so experimental design bureau OKB-30 modified the Ar 196 to fly with a Shvetsov ASh-62IR. The prototype appeared in late 1949 and underwent testing for operational service from June to July 1951, but it later transpired that captured BMW 132s were so numerous

there was no need for the conversion. 🔊



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"The greatest interest was devoted to the Me 262, and there were discussions about copying the twin-jet and putting it into production in the USSR. But designers persuaded Soviet leader Joseph Stalin they could create a better aircraft, given their acquired experience"

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lines. He was later decorated with the Order of Lenin. At the end of the war many Storchs were discovered in Germany and Czechoslovakia and in the summer of 1945 Sweden handed over four interned Fi 156s to the Soviet Union. Most of them remained in service with the VVS, with only six issued to civil operators.

When one crashed in late June 1946, flying was suspended and

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An He 162 jet fighter during testing. GENNADY PETROV ARCHIVE

#### Above

An Me 163B-1a rocketpowered fighter at NII VVS. The type was only tested in glider form. GENNADY PETROV ARCHIVE

Right

Two-seat Me 163A trainer during testing at NII VVS. The last Ar 196s were withdrawn in 1955.

The Baltic Fleet operated a Ju 52/3m tri-motor as an ambulance and three Junkers Ju 52MS minesweepers, nicknamed 'Mausi', were used to clear the Crimean coast of mines – see the October 2016 *FlyPast*.

#### **VERSATILE STORCH**

As early as 1942, the USSR adopted Fieseler Fi 156 Storch liaison aircraft for frontline operation. One was used by General A Y Savitsky, who toured his corps' airfields in it and once even flew to Moscow and back. Storchs were typically assigned to regiment or division headquarters: the 812th Regiment had one at its disposal, for example.

On October 4, 1943, pilot A Kovyazin escaped from a prisoner of war camp, stole a Storch from Spilve airfield near Riga in Latvia and succeeded in crossing the Soviet

## TRIPLE HERO

Soviet fighter pilots visiting an exhibition of captured enemy aircraft. On the right is fighter ace and triple Hero of Soviet Union, Major I N Kozhedub. To the left is the tail of an Avia B.534 fighter with Slovenian markings and an RWD-14 Polish reconnaissance type flown by the Romanians. N BODRIKHIN ARCHIVE



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within a year all had been decommissioned. Polar Aviation had one in service but it never flew in the frozen north.

### **GULAG WORKHORSES**

During the post-war period, the Civil Air Fleet operated some 37 Ju 52s as well as Siebel Si 204Ds light twins. The Junkers were typically used to carry cargo, in particular sulphur from the Karakum Desert. From late 1944 both types had been gradually ousted to the remote territories of the Soviet Union – Siberia and Central Asia.

Two Ju 52s, one fitted with floats, served with Polar Aviation. The Ministry of Air Industry operated ten and the Ministry of Fisheries had three at its disposal. Several more belonged to the so-called 'utility aviation' of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, its trimotors servicing the infamous gulag camps.

The gulags took their name form a shortened version of their administrator, Glavnoye Upravleniye Lagerey (Chief Directorate of Labour Camps). Two Ju 52s were based in Norilsk and assigned to the aviation detachment serving the camps of the Chief Administration of Mining and Smelting Industry.

Although the Ju 52s were reliable, the Chief Civil Air Fleet Administration issued an order in June 1947 for their thorough examination and to gradually write them off – and all had been scrapped by late 1948. Polar Aviation and the Ministry of Fisheries ceased operating the type in early 1949 but the gulag aircraft were not withdrawn until the following year.

Among captured German aircraft were more than 20 Junkers W34s – obsolete single-engined transports and trainers – the first of which was captured on the southern front in 1943. At the end of the year, the Civil Air Fleet management persuaded the VVS to hand it over but it remained grounded in Vnukovo near Moscow before undergoing repairs in Tashkent. It was not operational until 1945.

In 1946 the Civil Air Fleet took on two more W34s. Each of the trio flew for a short period in Latvia, Kazakhstan and the Ukraine and made non-regular flights with passengers and small cargos up to the end of 1947.

"The internal affairs Junkers serviced the infamous gulag camps... Air detachments assigned to the Ministry of Internal Affairs were partially manned by gulag prisoners"

The Ministry of Internal Affairs had four W34s in operation with the gulag, while four more were with Dalstroi, the so-called Far North Construction Trust, another forced-labour organisation. They flew in the 'backwoods', where camps were situated in Mordovia, Komi and remote regions of Siberia and the Far East, and air detachments assigned to the Ministry of Internal Affairs were partially manned by gulag prisoners. All the W34s were written off before the end of 1949.

#### **POLAR CALAMITY**

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The VVS began operating Siebel Si 204Ds at the end of the war, mostly for headquarters communications. Between June and August 1945, Polar Aviation crews ferried nine from Germany – two were left in Moscow and the rest sent to Krasnoyarsk in Siberia.

Those in Siberia were equipped with heaters and skis. But their Argus As 410 engines proved unsuitable for use in sub-zero conditions. Crashes frequently occurred, prompting pilots to dub the Siebel 'Giebel' (calamity). After losing four, Polar Aviation handed the rest over to other agencies.

#### Above

Single-engined W34 transport in Soviet service.

#### Below

Unloading blocks of sulphur from a Ju 52/3m from the Turkestan Administration of the Civil Air Fleet, Ashkhabad, 1947.

#### Below An Arado Ar 196A floatplane in service with Aviation of Soviet Border Guard, on the Baltic Sea.

The Civil Air Fleet began to operate Siebels in autumn 1945 in Tajikistan, Central Asia, where they proved reliable in the highlands. Later the type flew in Armenia, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. The final Si 204D arrived from Czechoslovakia in 1948, but gradual decommissioning had begun by then and the last was scrapped in late 1949.

Five Siebels served with the Ministry of Air Industry but were retired in early 1950. The Ministry of Internal Affairs also flew its last one that year. Meanwhile the Hydrometeorological Service had nine scattered around different cities up to mid-1950 and the Agricultural Aerial Survey Group based a single Si 204D at Orsha until early 1951.

#### **REICH ASSORTMENT**

Other German types were available in small numbers, including two Dornier Do 24T flying-boats. One was ferried to the USSR in the summer of 1945 by S Verebryusov's crew for Polar Aviation. It was repaired in Krasnoyarsk before flying to Zakharkovo near Moscow. In October 1948 it suffered a gashed hull while being heaved on shore. Never flown again, it was scrapped in 1950.

The second Do 24 served the Ministry of Internal Affairs. After an accident at Igarka in the Russian Arctic in 1950, the ministry attempted to transfer it to Polar

## SURVIVING TROPHIES



A Ju 52/3m, operated by the Civil Air Fleet but abandoned in Siberia, has been brought to Novosibirsk. B OSETINSKY

Aircraft captured from the Axis powers remained in Soviet service only into the mid-1950s, after which they were not needed. Only a few have survived in present day Russia.

On display in the Museum of the Great Patriotic War at Poklonnaya Hill in Moscow is a Messerschmitt Bf 109G, a Nakajima Ki-43 and a Kawasaki Ki-48. Among

exhibits at the Armed Forces Museum in Moscow is the tail portion of a He 111H, which was downed as a result of being rammed in mid-air near the city in August 1941. The fin of a W34, which belonged to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, is stored in the Ukhta

Museum of Local History and a crashed Ju 52 was found in Eastern Siberia and brought to Novosibirsk for restoration.



Aviation or to border troops, but both rejected the 'offer' and it was written off at the end of the year.

Of the many captured He 111s, only one remained postwar – flown by the Ministry of Internal Affairs as a cargo carrier until it was destroyed in Siberia in 1947.

In 1945 four incomplete Focke-Wulf Fw 200Cs were discovered at the factory in Halle, Germany. Three were completed, under Polar Aviation's supervision, with BMW-Bramo 232 radials supplied by Czechoslovakia.

The first arrived in the USSR in April 1946 after being ferried by M A Titlov. That summer, he and his crew spent a season in the Far North but the German engines had trouble starting up in sub-zero temperatures and tended to over-cool in flight. A decision was made to substitute Soviet-made ASh-62IRs.

Departing to Moscow for

## "Four incomplete Focke-Wulf Fw 200Cs were discovered at the factory in Halle, Germany. Three were completed, under Polar Aviation supervision, with BMW-Bramo 232 radials supplied by Czechoslovakia"

modification on December 13, 1946, an engine failed in flight, shortly joined by another. Titlov just about managed to land the Condor on drifting ice in Baydaratskaya Bay. The crew were evacuated with difficulty by two Polikarpov Po-2 biplanes and the Fw 200 abandoned.

Two more Condors arrived from Germany in 1947 and, fitted with ASh-62IRs the following year, were designated MK-200s. One was written off after a crash in Yakutsk in April 1950 and the second came to grief at the end of the year.

Other German types brought to the Soviet Union included singleengined Arado Ar 96s, Bücker Bü 131s, Bücker Bü 181s, Klemm Kl 35s, Messerschmitt Bf 108s and Focke-Wulf Fw 58s twins.

#### **AXIS ODDITIES**

During the war, Soviet troops also captured non-German types. In the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran in August/September 1941, several biplanes found in Mashad and recorded as Hawker Harts were actually Audaxes fitted with Pratt & Whitney Hornet S2B radials. Two were handed over to the Armenian Detachment of the Civil Air Fleet before being withdrawn from service in April 1945.

Occasionally Italian aircraft encountered on the Eastern Front became Soviet Army trophies. Macchi C.200 Saetta fighters were discovered near Stalingrad and a Savoia-Marchetti SM.81 threeengined bomber-transport captured near Lvov. **Top** An unarmed Do 24T flying-boat at Igarka, 1947. GENNADY PETROV ARCHIVE

Above Fi 156C-2 Storch in VVS service.



Top A Mitsubishi A6M5 'Zeke' in Soviet markings, Sakhalin Island, 1945.

#### Above

A Ki-46 'Dinah' during testing at NII VVS, 1946.

Below

Japanese aircraft at Mukden in August 1945. On October 13, 1943 Italy left the Axis and declared war on the Nazis, whose forces captured and operated at least one SM.82 bomber-transport, later discovered in Germany by the Red Army. All these Italian types were deemed obsolete and not subjected to significant study. Some were displayed at captured materiel exhibitions – for example, in Kiev.

Hitler's other allies had non-German aircraft at their disposal. Polish-made RWD-14 reconnaissance and Lublin R-XIII army co-operation parasol monoplanes were found in Romania and Avia B-534 biplane fighters, of Czechoslovakian manufacture, in Slovakia. In autumn 1944, a Fokker C.VM/33 was discovered in Tallinn, Estonia – a two-seat reconnaissance biplane built under licence in Denmark and captured there by the Germans. Of no value, these aircraft were used only for propaganda purposes.

#### JAPANESE TROPHIES

The war ended with an onslaught in the Far East. The USSR declared war on Japan on August 9, 1945, just 24 days before its surrender, and many Japanese aircraft were captured at airfields around Mukden, Harbin and Anshan.

Among them there were Nakajima Ki-27 Nate, Ki-43 Oscar and Ki-84 Frank fighters; Mitsubishi A6M Zeke fighters; Kawasaki Ki-48 Lily and Nakajima Ki-49 Helen bombers; Mitsubishi Ki-51 Sonia and Tachikawa Ki-36 Ida ground-attack aircraft; and various transports and trainers.

Most of the Japanese machines were deemed useless and, contrary to belief, were never handed over to Mao Tse Tung's troops, but scrapped. Only a few types were found worthy of study. The most serviceable of the Ki-84s at Anshan was tested in situ by B Vinnitsky, who opined that it was inferior to new Soviet fighters.

In October 1946, two Mitsubishi Ki-46-III *Dinah* high-speed reconnaissance twins were brought to NII VVS. The following April one airframe was created using parts from both Ki-46s, but due to the poor condition of its engines nobody took the risk of flying it.

A Mitsubishi Ki-57 Topsy transport

put into operation with the 51st Transport Regiment of the Transbaikal Front Air Force was later handed over to the Ministry of Fisheries. During a flight from Khabarovsk to Nikolayevsk on November 26, 1946, the pilot lost his way and stalled the Ki-57 in a turn. It crashed into the ice on the River Amur, killing all on board.

Three Nakajima AT-2 *Thora* transports served with the squadron attached to the Pacific Fleet Air Force Headquarters, while the Dalstroi forced-labour organisation had two Kawasaki Ki-56 *Thalia* transports (licence-built Lockheed 14s) on strength. Both were written off in 1946.

Unlike the German types, Japanese aircraft saw very little service in the USSR because of a lack of documentation, spare parts and the language barrier. Many Soviet citizens spoke and wrote German, but few could translate Japanese.

The Soviet invasion of Japaneseoccupied China produced little in the way of useful booty. The real aeronautical bounty for the Soviet Union lay around 6,800 miles away to the west beyond its borders with eastern Europe: like the other Allies, German technology was the ultimate prize of war.

All photos from the author's archive unless noted. Colour profiles by Andrey Yurgenson.

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