

*Moscow 1941: A City and Its People At War.* By Rodric Braithwaite. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006. xiii, 399 pp. Maps. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$30.00, hard bound.

Rodric Braithwaite, British ambassador to Moscow from 1988 to 1992, has written an excellent account of the Battle of Moscow from the point of view of the city and the people in it and around it. It will appeal to the scholar, student, and lay reader.

Braithwaite's story is divided into three parts. Part I sketches the history of Moscow, Russia, and the Soviet Union up to the outbreak of war, introducing some of the people whose personal narratives thread through the book; Part II examines the shocking impact of the German invasion and the first individual and collective responses to it. Part III takes us through the period of the battle itself, from the launching of the German operation to capture Moscow through the breakdown of order in the city as the enemy approached to the harsh but effective measures that stabilised the urban society and the military front and the Soviet counter-offensive that threw the German forces back from their nearest approach. The biggest battle of all time measured by the number of the military combatants, this was also a decisive encounter: defeat for the Red Army would have ensured German domination over all of continental Europe. An afterword takes the main themes of the book, and the lives of a few of the participants, to the end of the war and beyond.

Wars are excellent data sources for social scientists, the reason being that, in wartime, things rarely go to plan. In normal times, the way that we behave towards each other is governed by expectations that are stable, matching, self-fulfilling, and rarely put to any severe test. When they are suddenly exposed as deeply mistaken, however, each must recalculate their best options in circumstances that they did not anticipate: to remain loyal or get ready to welcome the enemy, for example. From this, we learn about values and capabilities that were previously hidden.

In the second half of 1941, after more than a decade of Stalinism and terror, many Soviet citizens found themselves unexpectedly able to choose again under which regime they would rather live. Speaking many years later about the prewar purges, Molotov commented: "Stalin in my opinion, pursued an absolutely correct line: so what if one or two extra heads were chopped off, there would be no vacillation in the time of war and after the war." If he sincerely thought that, his memory led him astray. For me, the most fascinating chapter of Braithwaite's book is his detailed account of the Moscow "panic" of October 16 and 17. The trigger for the panic was the decision to evacuate the core of the civilian government and the foreign embassies from Moscow, accompanied by the burning of records, and matched by a tendency to "self-evacuation" among many with inside information about the true military situation and the means to flee. It was rumored that Stalin and his generals had gone too. While some groups of workers were paid off, others left their

posts, or remained without orders. There was panic buying. While some mobs looted government stores, others attacked those who were making evacuation preparations or were leaving to save themselves.

The truth is that, even while the German military offensive was achieving its greatest successes, it was also encountering much more stubborn resistance and bearing heavier casualties than Hitler had anticipated. Stalin was shocked and enraged at what he saw as the cowardice and vacillation of many. But the others' courage, national feeling, and readiness to sacrifice themselves, always reinforced by Stalin's (and Marshal Zhukov's) intransigence and readiness to sacrifice them, were a still greater source of shock to the German generals. (If the book has a hero it is not Zhukov but Marshal Rokossovskii, whom Braithwaite considers to have been the better commander.)

Braithwaite moves seamlessly between the general and the particular, from the Kremlin to the workplace, the street, and the apartment block. He has a wonderful range of sources from the Russian archives and the secondary literatures in three languages to diaries and interviews. Unlike some, he handles scale and numbers well, using the most complete and up to date sources and making appropriate comparisons, for example, between deaths in battle and in captivity in different theatres; he knows which numbers can be relied on and which deserve scepticism. He draws telling international comparisons between, for example, the sources of Soviet resistance in 1941 and French collapse in 1940. These things make *Moscow 1941* a pleasure to read.

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