

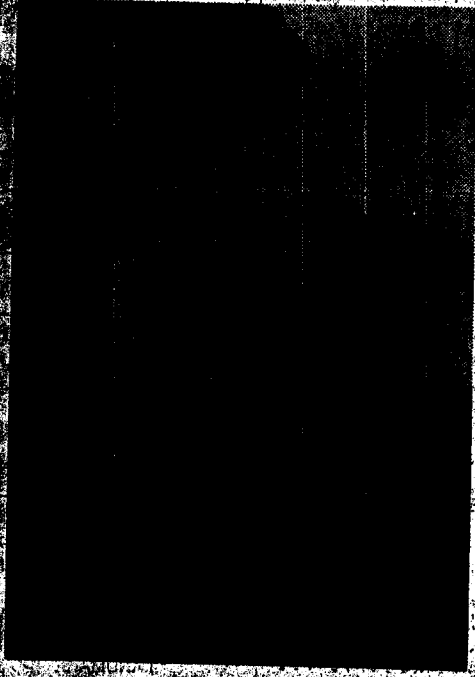
KHRUSHCHEV REMEMBERS. With an Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Edward Crankshaw. Translated and Edited by Strobe Talbott.

(Little, Brown; 639 pp.; illustrated; \$16)

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Khrushchev and Stalin, May 1, 1952.

His Own Story

Books

It needs to be said first about Khrushchev Remembers, Nikita's own marvelously juicy and revealing story, that it is in fact his story. Any lingering doubt that I had about its authenticity was utterly dissipated by his report on his first trip to Moscow—made at age 31, by the way. This bumpkin from the Ukraine, who was later, of course, to run the whole country, to be "the Kremlin," couldn't find it: "The first morning after we got to Moscow [for a Party Congress] I tried to take a streetcar to the Kremlin, but I didn't know which number to take and ended up getting lost." His followup, however, was beautiful: "From then on I woke up early and walked to the Kremlin. It took longer, but at least I learned my way around. I even skipped breakfast in order to be sure of arriving in time to get a good seat." That little anecdote, I submit, entirely obviates any further requirement to measure the credentials of the book.

It is apparently made up of spliced tapes—just why Life, which first published excerpts, and Little, Brown do not tell more about this process is mystifying and irritating. Occasional references to an anticipated audience make explicit the implicit purpose of any me-



"The parts of Superman, D'Artagnan and St. Francis of Assisi were all played by me"

morist—the desire to tell his side of the story. Throughout the book, you keep asking what part of the omissions is due to Khrushchev's own narrowness of outlook and self-serving discretion ("I've always found," he says about Soviet marshals, "that you can't expect an objective analysis of a battle from someone who acutally took part in it"), and what part of the omissions is due to the KGBnicks who seem to have supervised the dis-

patch of the tapes to the West.

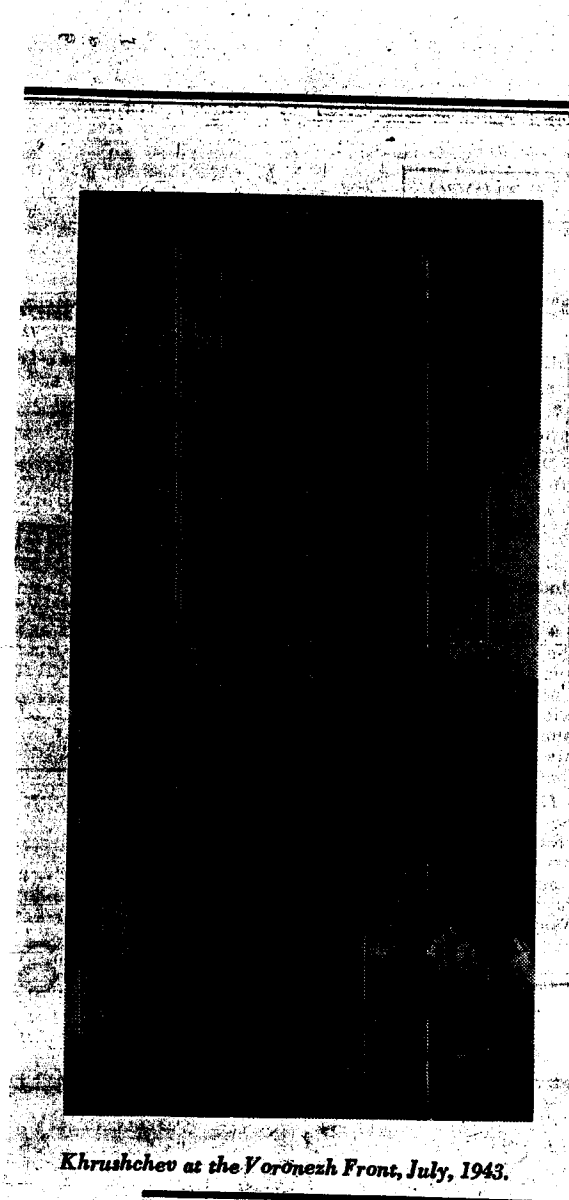
The answer is never clear but my own sense of it is that Khrushchev did most of his own censoring. More importantly, the reader is not nagged by a suspicion that this is a heavily censored book. It tells enough, and the idiom is fresh enough, to stand on its own.

The great seeming paradox of Khrushchev's life has always been how one of Stalin's undeniably bloody-

handed apparatchiks could become, after the tyrant's death in 1953, a man so courageous and humane that he dared expose Stalin's crimes, first and foremost in his "Secret Speech" to a Party Congress in 1956. (In this book, Khrushchev for the first time acknowledges that speech.)

It should be noted that the memoirs, issued from the enforced tranquillity of

See BOOKS, C2, Col. 4



Khrushchev at the Voronezh Front, July, 1943.

Khrushchev: In His Way a Great Man

BOOKS, From C1

retirement, are incomparably smaller in personal and political importance than that speech, delivered as it was in circumstances of unparalleled drama and personal risk. Here the book's value is to show how uncharacteristic it would have been for a rough son of the Party, completely steered to the "class struggle" and extremely ambitious, to challenge Stalin's purges ("the meat-mincer"), "Suddenly I got a call saying that Yaroslavsky had to be brought down. This order was very hard on me personally, but I had to obey." He did the dirty work as he once had to dance the Gopak for Stalin: "It wasn't very easy for me. But I did it and I tried to keep a pleasant expression on my face."

Often, Khrushchev says, he tried to soften the blows, by sticking up for men whom he felt to be wrongly accused and even by interceding directly with Stalin. By far his most difficult test came after the war when he was running the Ukraine at a time of terrible famine. Stalin, he says, accused him of being "soft-boiled" for trying, for instance, to let farmers keep some grain for the next season's seed instead of giving it all to the state for distribution elsewhere. Yet it was

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not so much a conflict of duty and sympathy that Khrushchev felt in himself as a difficult assignment which he performed nontheless.

Similarly, in respect to the purges, he had no real objection to Stalin's power, only to its misuse. "I'm all for arresting people," he says, but with "an honest approach."

In these matters as in every other, Khrushchev's view of Soviet communism and the concentration of arbitrary power—which was and is its essence—is abominably uncritical. There is not a second thought, except on implementation, in the whole book. Even his plea for allowing Soviet citizens to come and go across the borders as they please is tempered by an innately Russian condition—to "introduce as much freedom as the matter of conditions would permit."

Khrushchev's stories about life in Stalin's court are fab-

ulous. The courtiers, himself included, were "temporary people"—perfect phrase.

The first part of this book is called "From the Coal Mines to the Kremlin" and the second starting on page 355 and covering the post-Stalin period (but with no mention of internal affairs).

"The World Outside." It might better have been called "The Education of Nikita Khrushchev." He mentions that he didn't start seeing foreign policy materials until the Korean War. Even then he was startlingly naive, not recognizing, for instance, that the reason Stalin withdrew Soviet advisers from the North Korean army once it got in trouble in the South was because Stalin didn't want to have his men captured and thus his policy compromised.

It is stunning to read what importance Khrushchev (and presumably others) read into such a zippy but trivial event as Truman's rebuke to Washington Post music critic Paul Hume, who had criticized Margaret's singing. "That incident alone," Khrushchev writes, "told us something about Truman's statesmanship, to say nothing of his suitability for so important a post as the Presidency of the United States." He records his surprise to find Eisenhower aide Nelson Rockefeller, at Geneva in 1955, dressed "fairly democratically."

Khrushchev never abandoned the total certitude of his own side's rightness in any international dispute. Nor did he ever step outside the framework of perception

in which all foreign policy was a retraction of the class struggle. His Russian farm boy's inferiority complex and awe of city slickers never left him. Yet Khrushchev "learned his way around."

In the Berlin crisis of 1961, he sensed that because the United States had moved its tanks up first, it "would have been in a difficult moral position" to move them back first. So he ordered Soviet tanks withdrawn, expecting the Americans to follow suit in 20 minutes (after checking for orders), as they did. And in the Cuban missile crisis, which he counts as an unalloyed Soviet success because he felt he'd saved Cuba, he kept control and did what had to be done to avert war.

Khrushchev's book ends with a plea for open borders and a criticism of the "new trend of military overspending." It is fascinating to speculate how things would be today if he had not been ousted in 1964. Personally, I am full of regret that he was bounced. "Nobody's perfect," he says in his book, "I'm no saint myself." But he was in his way a great man.

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