

## Army of the Sky: Russian Military Aviation before the Great War, 1904-1914 (Studies in Modern European History)

Gregory Vitarbo

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Army of the Sky addresses the development of military aviation from 1904 to 1914 in order to explore the relationship of modernization and Russian Imperial officer culture. Utilizing archival material, army reports, the military and popular press, published tracts, and comparative literature, this book explores the response to aviation within the tsarist military in the realm of hopes and fears, institutional adaptations, projects drafted to tap the power of the airplane, the politics of command, policies of recruitment and training to build a cadre of aviators, and the rituals that paid homage to this revolutionary new weapon. In contrast to a historiography which generally portrays aviation as incompatible with an extremely conservative, even backward, military culture, this study paints a far more complex and dynamic picture. Numerous tsarist officers recognized that the airplane presented both a serious challenge and a real opportunity: it exposed the limitations of Russia's economic, technological, and infrastructural development while simultaneously offering a way to overcome them and a means to assert Russia's development, pride, and place as a great European power despite heightening fears of failure. Army of the Sky illustrates further how disparate responses to this situation influenced tsarist officer culture. Although the concept of «modernization» remained framed around familiar binaries, aviation recast and infused with new meaning juxtapositions of Russia and the West, imitation and contamination, and the imperatives of progress and the legacies of backwardness. Aviation helped to remold prevailing paradigms of hierarchy, authority, deference, and duty. This volume concludes that the tsarist officer community ultimately offered unique opportunities to cultivate a culture of military aviation and thereby to master the challenge of modernization in a uniquely Russian, an Imperial Russian, manner. This book will be of great interest to historians of both the military and late Imperial Russia as well as aviation enthusiasts.



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