P.S. to the NEWS
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RELEASE: September 6

LINDBERGH/SEVERSKY

Two great men who shared much credit for America's once-superior air force died on the same day last week. Charles Lindbergh test-flew German fighter planes before World War II, and then helped our country to mass-produce thousands of B-24 bombers which inflicted heavy damage on Nazi and Japanese targets. He flew 50 fighter combat missions against the Japanese and developed techniques to improve the range of our fighter planes.

Alexander Seversky helped develop the Thunderbolt fighter plane used extensively during World War II. His book Victory Through Air Power had much to do with developing and deploying the B-29s which bombed Japan into surrender, and made it unnecessary to risk the million U.S. casualties estimated for a land invasion of Japan.

When World War II ended, the American Air Force was superior to the combined air forces of the rest of the world. That superiority is now passing to the Soviet Union. It is the Soviets, not the Americans, who have by far the most modern, most effective, and fastest strategic bomber in the world -- the supersonic bomber called the Backfire. The Soviets probably have more than four squadrons of Backfire bombers already deployed, and can have hundreds operational within the next three years. They fly at more than mach 2, which is more than twice as fast as our subsonic B-52s.

Our new advanced bomber is called the B-1. The only trouble is, we don't have it in production, or anywhere near production. According to the last official report made just before he retired by

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Joint Chiefs Chairman Thomas H. Moorer, the B-1 will only begin flight tests with the first prototype late this year, "a production decision" will not be made until November 1977, and the B-1 force is planned to be operational "in the early 1980s." In other words, we may have in the 1980s a bomber force comparable to what the Soviets have right now.

The Soviets are also years ahead of us in fighter-interceptor aircraft. The Soviets have 3,000 of which more than half are nearly new, including the Foxbat, the fastest military aircraft in the world. We have only 500 old and slow interceptor aircraft, which are substantially useless anyway because of the scrapping or obsolescence of our aircraft warning system. Thousands of miles of our borders are unguarded and open.

In the face of this Soviet bomber threat, Secretary Schlesinger has ordered the scrapping of all our remaining bomber defenses. This means that, if the Soviets give the Cubans 17 old bomber aircraft and 17 one-megaton bombs, the Cubans could attack 17 U.S. cities with a total population of more than 50 million Americans -- and not encounter any anti-aircraft missile opposition.

What the United States needs today is another farsighted leader, of the caliber of Charles Lindbergh, Alexander Seversky or Billy Mitchell, who believes that American airpower should be superior to that of any possible enemy.

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