



# Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky: The Red Army's Gentleman Commander

*Boris Sokolov*

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The author Boris Sokolov offers this first objective and intriguing biography of Marshal Konstantin Konstantinovich Rokossovsky, who is widely considered one of the Red Army's top commanders in the Second World War. Yet even though he brilliantly served the harsh Stalinist system, Rokossovsky himself became a victim of it with his arrest, beatings and imprisonment between 1937 and 1940.

The author analyzes all of Rokossovsky's military operations, in both the Russian Civil War and the Second World War, paying particular attention to the problem of establishing the real casualties suffered by both armies in the main battles where Rokossovsky took part, as well as on the Eastern Front as a whole. Rokossovsky played a prominent role in the battles for Smolensk, Moscow, Stalingrad, Kursk, Belorussia, Poland, East Prussia and Pomerania. While praising Rokossovsky's masterful generalship, the author does not shy away from criticizing the nature of Soviet military art and strategy, in which the guiding principle was "at all costs" and little value was placed on holding down casualties. This discussion extends to the painful topic of the many atrocities against civilians perpetrated by Soviet soldiers, including Rokossovsky's own troops.

A highly private man, Rokossovsky disliked discussing his personal life. With the help of family records and interviews, including the original, uncensored draft of the Marshal's memoirs, the author reveals the numerous dualities in Rokossovsky's life. Despite his imprisonment and beatings he endured, Rokossovsky never wavered in his loyalty to Stalin, yet also never betrayed his colleagues. Though a Stalinist, he was also a gentleman widely admired for his courtesy and chivalry. A dedicated family man, women were drawn to him, and he took a 'campaign wife' during the war. Though born in 1894 in Poland, Rokossovsky maintained that he was really born in Russia in 1896. This Polish/Russian duality in Rokossovsky's identity hampered his career and became particularly acute during the Warsaw uprising in 1944 and his later service as Poland's Defense Minister. Thus, the author ably portrays a fascinating man and commander, who became a marshal of two countries, yet who was not fully embraced by either.

## REVIEWS

“ ... Stuart Britton once again has provided an excellent translation from the original Russian and Helion, the publisher, has produced a book of the highest quality. Sokolov deserves high praise for his work and the attention that he has brought to a little known but superb Russian Commander. His writing style is quite different from traditional Western authors as it reverts periodically to an almost spoken text; however this only requires getting used to and does not take away from the quality of the research. He also provides a selected bibliography, unfortunately for the Western reader it primarily refers to Russian sources. A very interesting and engaging read.”

Canadian Army Journal

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