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ROKOSSOVSKIY, THE FOURTH POLISH MARSHAL

Ryszard Wraga

[The following report presents highlights from an article by Ryszard Wraga, a Pole who was for many years before World War II in charge of the study of Communism and the USSR for Polish military intelligence. The article provides interesting data on the early career of Marshal Rokossovskiy.]

In late 1921, I was assigned to the Polish Consulate at Kiev. I had previously visited it in 1920, as an officer candidate with Smigly's army. In 1920, there had been much destruction in the city as well as in the suburbs.

In the autumn of 1928, large joint maneuvers were organized there. The military attaches of West Europe, as well as the Polish military attaches, were not invited. However, German officers arrived in Kiev with General Blomberg (later marshal) at their head. Colonel von Hammerstein was chief of staff of this mission. Voroshilov, People's Commissar of Defense USSR, also was present. The maneuvers, planned on an extensive scale, were definitely for offense. Although they did not extend west of Zhitomir, it was easy to uncover their anti-Polish character. I worked feverishly to obtain as much information as possible and for the first time felt the confining observation of the OGPU.

Shortly after the maneuvers had been completed, while I was substituting for the consul who was absent on vacation, I was visited by a young cavalry officer. It was immediately evident that the visitor had received Russian military training, was very intelligent, and well disciplined. He said that his name was Rokossovskiy and that he wanted to take care of certain formalities connected with his inheritance in Polish Volhynia. He spoke Russian, while I answered in Polish.

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Rokossovskiy said that although his parents were Polish, he only knew a few words of Polish. He commented that he was a Communist and that a Communist has no country. He added that he had taken no part in the Soviet-Polish war and preferred to fight Ukrainian and Russian counter-revolutionary groups.

I inquired whether he had any brothers and whether Capt Jerzy Rokossovskiy of the Polish Army was his brother. My question embarrassed him, but he managed to answer that he had cousins of the same name in Poland but never had anything to do with them.

I had asked this question because immediately after the Soviet-Polish war while in the 21st Infantry Regiment, the Dzieci Warszawy, I had met a young lieutenant, later captain, Jerzy Rokossovskiy, an excellent soldier, who had the Virtuti Militari decoration. I knew that Jerzy Rokossovskiy had a half brother by his father's first marriage to a Russian. The half brother had served in 1916 as a volunteer in the Russian Army, had joined the Bolshevik Party in 1917, and had reached a high rank in the Soviet cavalry. In 1925 or 1926, Jerzy Rokossovskiy transferred to the air force. He was assigned to an air squadron at Lwow and committed suicide there. There are various rumors about the suicide. Jerzy had always been a hell-raiser and a ladies' man. It had also been said that he was mixed up in some spying and there were rumors of connections with his half brother in the Soviet Army.

I suggested that Rokossovskiy return the following day to take care of his business, but he had to have the matter settled on the same day since his garrison was stationed at Berdichev and he managed only with difficulty to get one day to come to Kiev. I then asked him to return that evening.

When Rokossovskiy came back that evening, his papers were not yet ready. We discussed Kiev and the Ukraine, and Rokossovskiy showed interest in Polish matters. He commented on the poor Polish spoken at the Polish Theater at Kiev, saying that there were too many Jews in the company.

I used this anti-Semitic theme to start a political discussion mentioning Trotsky. At this time Trotsky was on Principe Island, Turkey. Rokossovskiy stated that, for a world revolution, Trotsky was not needed by the Bolshevik Communists who had other ideas. I brought up the Bolshevik agreement with the Junker Prussians, and the comradeship of Voroshilov and Blomberg, and finally asked whether Trotsky was not closer to the idea of world revolution than the Bolsheviks who were then on such friendly terms with the real enemy of the working classes.

Rokossovskiy began to expound a long and complicated thesis which I had previously heard from Communist military personnel and from Popov and Pugavhev, that this was only a tactical maneuver to obtain information from the Reichswehr [sic] and that this information would be used against an aggressor but never for offensive purposes.

Rokossovskiy claimed that the USSR was preparing armies to repel invasion and not to attack, that the Soviets had no intention of imposing revolution by force, that revolution must mature within a country, and that the Soviets were convinced that it would mature everywhere. In fact, the USSR had decided to fortify the entire western border, and was then building defense fortifications on the Polish border, particularly below Kiev on the Irpen' River.

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For me this was news. The Irpen' valley, marshy and wooded, was not an attractive invasion point, and what Rokossovskiy said constituted important information. I then asked what the purpose was of so much cavalry and their haste to motorize the cavalry, which certainly did not seem to be a defensive measure. Rokossovskiy reiterated that the Soviet Army was too weak to repel the West and that strategic and tactical military doctrines would require years to work out. Therefore, the Russians were using the Germans to gain information which would later be used against the Germans.

I asked whether Rokossovskiy was aware that the Germans could also take advantage of their knowledge of Russian terrain. Rokossovskiy became excited and said that Communists in Germany would never permit the rebirth of German militarism. He accidentally betrayed the fact that he himself had taken special military courses in Germany.

Rokossovskiy appeared to be a narrow-minded professional soldier, not particularly agile mentally but somewhat versed in the party literature. He believed in the supremacy of military over political and social matters, and showed no deep devotion to ideals. He appeared to be a cynical and amoral person who considered his career above anything else. His whole bearing showed physical courage and brutality. After receiving the documents he was waiting for, Rokossovskiy left.

A few months later, while traveling from Kiev to Odessa, I met Rokossovskiy again near Kozhatin. Over a few drinks we discussed Trotskiy. At that time, in 1929, mass arrests were taking place throughout the USSR and particularly in the Ukraine to uncover Trotskiyites.

Rokossovskiy considered Trotskiy an opportunist who, to gain personal victory, was doing the greatest harm to world Communism. I recalled that those were the exact basic tactics followed by Lenin: During a long and violent tirade, no mention was made of Stalin. Rokossovskiy sneeringly mentioned Voroshilov, with whom he connected a clique of old Bolsheviks without much influence, who, sooner or later, would have to make way for the younger set. A continuous repetition of "we" made me wonder if a new conspiracy was forming, since it had no resemblance to that of Bukharin or any of the national Communist groups -- all the more since Rokossovskiy spoke of the Ukrainians with contempt and hatred.

Suddenly Tukhachevskiy was mentioned. At that time, Tukhachevskiy was the commander of one of the military districts, possibly the Volga. Although he was not in favor with the Kremlin at that time, as far as popularity among the military leaders was concerned, he was second only to Bluecher. Rokossovskiy was enthusiastic about Tukhachevskiy, stating he had created a new revolutionary strategy.

Rokossovskiy no longer believed in popular revolution and despised the working masses. I did not realize at that time that Stalin also shared the same scorn of the masses. They felt that the cattle would not break their shackles of their own accord and reach for freedom.

The next morning we parted company at the station at Birzul.

In 1931, I was made head of Polish intelligence on the USSR, and naturally had an interest in higher Soviet leaders. The discussions with Rokossovskiy, as well as other observations on the USSR, suggested to me that spontaneous conspiracies were forming among certain Red Army leaders. They were unrelated conspiracies, or intimate groups centered around individual Red Army commanders. In the Ukraine, there were a few such circles. There was a group attached to Bluecher, who was in the Ukraine. He was

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later transferred to the Far East, and finally appointed marshal. There was the talented group of his successor, General Yakir, the commander of Ukrainian Military District, well known to the Poles from the war of 1920 as the brilliant commandant of the 45th Division. There was the group of cavalrymen centered around Buden, Krivorachko, and Primakov. There were such groups in other military districts, especially in Belorussia, in the Caucasus and in Turkestan, and in 1932 - 1935 in the Far East. All these groups centered ultimately around two people: young Marshal Tukhachevskiy, then Vice-Commissar of Defense, and Gamarnik, chief of the Political Administration of the Army.

Through Soviet propaganda, the Tukhachevskiy conspiracy is presented as an attempt of the leading Soviet military clique, which was anti-Stalin and pro-German, to provoke German intervention, thus providing the opportunity for a coup d'etat to remove Stalin and his Politburo. I believe that such a viewpoint is false. Soviet military leaders -- such as Bluecher, Yegorov, Uborevich, Kork, Eideman, and others -- like Tukhachevskiy, were for a long time in favor of a secret military German-Soviet alliance. But, Hitler's rise to power in 1932 - 1933 brought these people to their senses. Their original concept was based on the fact that they did not think the German military forces as rebuilt by the Junkers were supported by the masses, and that the army could very easily be overthrown in time of war. When German militarism was bolstered by the nationalist movement, the Russians understood that this military force could very easily be turned against the USSR, and that it would be impossible to eliminate without fighting the whole German nation.

The situation then appeared paradoxical. The leader of world Communism, Stalin, became the proponent of a movement toward a closer alliance with Germany at any price to exploit Hitler's hatred for the rest of the capitalist world, while the Soviet military leaders, with Tukhachevskiy, Gamarnik, and Bluecher, opposed this alliance. The conspiracy began to support the West, France, and Britain, and even the Cordon Sanitaire (Poland, the Baltic States, and Rumania). Soviet military attaches were delicately sounding out European capitals. Putna in London, Vientsov in France, Semenov in Warsaw began to make semiofficial contacts, seeking an agreement and an understanding toward a coordinated action against the Germans.

I discuss this subject in my new book, All My Life I Spied <sup>[sic]</sup> Russia [title appeared in English in original]. (A chapter from the book appears under the title "Trust" in Kultura, issue of 21 April - 22 May 1949.) Because of imprudent inquiries and discussion in the West, the conspiracy was discovered not only by Soviet intelligence, but also by German intelligence.

In 1932, Rokossovskiy was sent to the Far East. It appears that during this time he made contact with a group founded there by Gamarnik. Lushkov, one of the most important Soviet refugees and a former NKVD general, who fled to Manchuria in 1938, told me many very interesting details concerning Rokossovskiy's role in this conspiracy. In Lushkov's opinion, Rokossovskiy played the part of an agent provocateur.

In 1936, Rokossovskiy was assigned to the Leningrad Military District. The cavalry officer Prymakov, patron of Rokossovskiy while the latter had been in the Ukraine, became commander of this district. In 1937, the NKVD liquidated Tukhachevskiy and his closest adherents, Uborevich, Yakir, Kork, Eidemann, Alksnis, Putna, Bluecher, Yegorov, Orlov, Muklewich, and others. Thousands of generals and commanders -- Duboviy, Popov, Vasilenko, Vostretsov, and others -- many of them good friends of mine, were arrested and sentenced to prisons or concentration camps. Gamarnik committed suicide. Among those arrested was Rokossovskiy.

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Rokossovskiy's role in prison is not exactly clear. According to some sources, his evidence played a large part in the liquidation of the cavalry commanders by the NKVD. In any case, Rokossovskiy fared better than other Soviet military officers. In 1941, when Stalin asked for a list of Soviet commanders who were in prison and not yet liquidated, Rokossovskiy's name was one of the first on the list along with Zhukov.

[After his release] Rokossovskiy was made a major general. According to the opinion of the people who came in contact with him during this period, he was cynical, completely devoted to Stalin, and devoid of any revolutionary ideals.

Rokossovskiy's career was henceforth assured. During his 3 years in prison, he evidently came to the conclusion that the army and military personnel are subject to the political rulers, specifically Stalin. From then on, Rokossovskiy was an efficient organizer, military leader, and crafty intriguer. He and others were responsible for removing Zhukov from the limelight.

The official biographical sketches of Konstantin Rokossovskiy which came out with his appointment as gauleiter in Poland do not have much truth in them.

According to the official Soviet sketches of a few years ago, Rokossovskiy was born in Belorussia of bourgeois parents. Today, the official view is that he is of pure Polish stock, from Warsaw, even a descendant of the proletariat, a passionate revolutionary, etc. There is no mention of what he did in 1938 - 1941, or of his role in the Warsaw uprising.

Poland has reached that point in Sovietization, where even extreme opportunism and compliance within the country will not satisfy the USSR. The next stage, changing a people's democracy into a socialist totalitarian state, can be executed only by uncompromising Bolsheviks, bred by the Kremlin. Soviet experience teaches that such Bolsheviks can never be produced within the country being Sovietized. It is necessary to import gauleiters.

Such gauleiters in Poland are Berman, Zembrowski, and Ochab, and now Rokossovskiy has arrived. The gauleiters in the Ukraine gradually but systematically liquidated the Ukrainian Communists, socialists, and revolutionaries: Skrypnik, Yefremov, Lubczenka, Piotrowski, Szumski, Czubar, and thousands of others. The gauleiters in Poland have already liquidated Mikolajczyk, Gomulka, Spychalski, Zymierski, and possibly also Walter-Swierczewski. Next will be Cyrankiewicz, Bierut, Modzelewski, Jedrychowski, Mira, and many others, who still think that they will be tomorrow what they are today. The supergauleiter, Rokossovskiy, has had a good education in the Ukraine, the Far East, concentration camps, and war. He must think that for service rendered he has purchased permanent favors, but the revolution goes on.

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