

Screenplay for the film "1944 — Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky. Historical Chronicles with Nikolai Svanidze" written by Marina Zhukova, translated by AI, and preceded by a summary also written by AI.

Screenplay Summary:

The text uses the life and wartime role of Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky as a thread to explore the Soviet experience of World War II, mixing battlefield history with political terror and moral ambiguity. It opens in July 1944 with a striking scene in Moscow: 57,600 German prisoners of war, captured during the great Belorussian offensive, are marched through the city in a silent, almost eerie procession, watched by crowds informed only that morning. This episode symbolizes the turning of the tide: the Red Army is no longer defending but crushing the Wehrmacht.

Operation Bagration, the Belorussian campaign, is presented as a masterpiece of planning and logistics. Rokossovsky insists on an unconventional plan with two main axes of attack, defying established doctrine and the objections of both Stalin and Zhukov. After repeated insistence, Stalin approves his version. The narrative shows how far Soviet operational art has evolved since 1941: detailed reconnaissance, extensive camouflage, dummy positions, special equipment for marshes, and carefully prepared logistics. Yet the war remains just as bloody: early sacrifices were made to avoid defeat; later ones to hasten victory.

The text highlights Rokossovsky's fraught relationship with Zhukov and, indirectly, with Stalin. In his memoirs, he criticizes the reckless offensives of winter 1941–1942, launched when the Red Army lacked the strength for a decisive breakthrough and the Germans were still combat-capable. These assaults, he argues, exhausted Soviet forces more than the enemy and reflected the short-sightedness of the Stavka. The author notes how, when Rokossovsky speaks of Zhukov, he is often really speaking about Stalin's decisions, while still avoiding open condemnation.

A central theme is the gigantic human cost on the Soviet side. The text dwells on penal battalions, where disgraced officers and soldiers — sometimes for minor infractions or personal conflicts — are thrown into the deadliest sectors, with casualty rates many times higher than regular units. It describes the "black infantry": poorly trained peasants from recently liberated territories, suspected of disloyalty, sent into battle without uniforms and often without weapons, told to arm themselves from the fallen. Their chances of survival are minimal, and unlike penal soldiers, they have no route out.

In a powerful biographical strand, the text recalls Rokossovsky's own earlier ordeal: arrested in 1937, tortured in an NKVD prison in Leningrad, twice taken to a mock execution, his family stigmatized and exiled. Without explanation, he is released in 1940, reinstated, and eventually promoted to marshal. After the 20th Party Congress, when Khrushchev asks him to denounce Stalin, he refuses, calling Stalin "a saint" in his eyes — a mix of officer's loyalty, contempt for Khrushchev, and refusal to reopen his trauma. He continues to carry a pistol, determined never to be taken alive again.

The text broadens out to Stalin's policies of collective punishment: whole peoples — Chechens, Ingush, Crimean Tatars, Balkars, and others — are deported en masse to Central Asia for alleged collaboration, in operations that amount to ethnic cleansing and include massacres like the burning and machine-gunning of civilians in the Chechen village of Khaibakh. Juxtaposed with this is the reminder of massive Western aid: American, British, and Canadian Lend-Lease deliveries of

weapons, vehicles, steel, food, and clothing, without which, as Zhukov and Mikoyan later acknowledged, the Soviet war effort would have been far more precarious — a reality airbrushed from official Soviet history.

The final part focuses on Poland, Rokossovsky's homeland. After the liberation of Belorussia and the discovery of the Maidanek death camp near Lublin, his 1st Belorussian Front reaches the outskirts of Warsaw in summer 1944. Radio Moscow encourages a popular uprising, which the Polish Home Army launches on 1 August. Politically, this is led by forces loyal to the London-based Polish government-in-exile, not Stalin's newly created Polish Committee of National Liberation. The text portrays Stalin as deliberately slow-walking assistance: for weeks he denies Allied planes the use of Soviet airfields and allows the Germans to crush the uprising. Soviet and Polish air drops begin only in mid-September, when the uprising is already doomed. To Stalin, the destruction of a non-communist resistance movement is a grimly convenient "solution" to the Polish question.

Rokossovsky, who has a sister hiding in Warsaw and dreams of liberating his native city of Praga, is emotionally torn. Yet on 14 September 1944, the very day Praga is liberated, Stalin abruptly transfers him to the 2nd Belorussian Front and puts Zhukov in his place, calling it "politics, not disfavour." After the war, Rokossovsky is imposed on Poland as Minister of Defense and Marshal, hated by many as a "Russian," while in the USSR he is seen as a Pole. He sums up his fate bitterly: the most unfortunate marshal of the Soviet Union, considered a foreigner in both of his countries.

Screenplay:

1944 – Konstantin Rokossovsky

On 11 July 1944, eleven trains arrive in Moscow at the "Moscow-Tovarnaya" freight station of the Western Railway. In them are tens of thousands of German prisoners. In Moscow they are placed on the grounds of the Moscow Hippodrome.

On 17 July at 11 a.m., 57,600 prisoners of war, among whom are more than a thousand officers and 18 generals, set off on the march. They are led along Leningrad Prospect and Gorky Street. At Mayakovsky Square, the column splits in two, right and left along the Garden Ring. For five hours the German prisoners walk through the streets of Moscow. Muscovites were told about the upcoming march only on the morning of the 17th, over the radio and in *Pravda*. But there were still many people in the streets. Everyone remained calm, silent; there was almost complete quiet — one could hear only the shuffling of more than a hundred thousand feet. Vladimir Vysotsky, six years old at the time, sticks his head out of the little window in his family's flat on Karetny and shouts: "Hitler kaput!"

In NKVD documents, the march of German prisoners of war through Moscow is listed under the codename "The Great Waltz."

The Germans who march through Moscow have only just been taken prisoner by the troops of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Belorussian Fronts. Their capture is the result of the full-scale operation to liberate Belorussia. The 1st Belorussian Front is commanded by Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky.

The Belorussian operation, or Operation Bagration, begins on 24 May 1944. The final plan of the offensive is worked out at the Stavka on 22 and even 23 May.

The actions of the left wing of the front are approved by the Stavka. On the right wing, Rokossovsky proposes to deliver two blows. Moreover, both blows are to be the main ones. This runs counter to the established view that in an offensive one main blow is delivered, with the bulk of the forces concentrated there. Rokossovsky's proposal for two main blows meets sharp criticism. The Supreme Commander-in-Chief and the Deputy Supreme Commander-in-Chief, Zhukov, are categorically opposed. Twice, Rokossovsky is asked to step into the adjoining room and think over the Stavka's proposal. Each time, he returns and again defends his own plan. Stalin approves his plan for the offensive. This is how Rokossovsky remembers the episode, quoting a fragment from Zhukov's memoirs:

"The version, current in some military circles, about 'two main blows' in the Belorussian direction by the forces of the 1st Belorussian Front, which Konstantin Rokossovsky allegedly insisted upon before the Supreme Commander, is groundless. Both these blows, envisaged by the front, had been previously approved by I. V. Stalin as early as 20 May on the General Staff's draft, i.e. before the arrival of the commander of the 1st Belorussian Front at the Stavka."

Relations between Rokossovsky and Zhukov are difficult. Years later, Rokossovsky writes about the grim November of 1941 near Moscow:

"In vain did some commanders think that they alone desired success, and that with the others one must use shouting and intimidation. To those people I would also add our front commander. It went so far that the army chief of staff, Malinin, begged me to locate the command post away from the roads, wanting to get rid of the HF telephone on which he had to listen to Zhukov's reprimands. I recall that after one HF conversation with Zhukov I was forced to declare that if he did not change his tone, I would break off the conversation. That day his rudeness exceeded all bounds."

In the twenties of November 1941, after yet another talk with Zhukov, Rokossovsky goes out onto the road and, under hurricane fire near the village of Peshki, tries to stop retreating troops. Someone shouts, "What are you doing, Comrade General!" and pulls him out from under the fire.

"What else was I supposed to do," Rokossovsky will later say, "if I was answerable with my head for failing to stop the enemy? With what could I stop him? You see it yourselves."

Rokossovsky recalls January 1942, when, after the victory near Moscow, our further offensive is brutally choked off. He writes: "It was absolutely clear that the enemy, although driven back more than a hundred kilometres from Moscow, had not yet lost his combat capability, while we did not have the strength for a decisive assault. We needed to build up our forces. Why then are we continuing not to wear down the enemy, but ourselves, in a hopeless offensive? What guided the commander of the Western Front, who knew the situation, I still do not understand to this day." The commander of the Western Front is Zhukov. At times, when Rokossovsky speaks of Zhukov, he is in fact speaking of another — of Stalin. "The endless attempts at offensive action in January 1942 were a gross mistake of the Supreme Commander's Stavka. It was a futile offensive venture that benefited only the enemy." And later, on various pages of the full version of his memoirs, published only in 1997, Rokossovsky will repeat: "The Stavka's wishes do not correspond to the capabilities of the troops. In the hasty measures of the Stavka there is a lack of the foresight required of such a responsible body."

In addition, Rokossovsky writes: "More than once I had to deal with the fact that the Deputy Supreme Commander Zhukov and the Chief of the General Staff Vasilevsky, in the course of crucial

events, were with the front commanders, in the field, while the Supreme Commander remained in Moscow. Alone.”

In Belorussia, Rokossovsky’s troops will advance through swamps. They will move through deadly places, fight as they go, and advance swiftly.

The troops have been prepared with the utmost care. This is not 1941, not early 1942; this is 1944. Preparation goes in every direction. Special “swamp skis” are made, as well as sledges for light artillery. Tanks are equipped with logs for crossing ditches. Careful camouflage is carried out. Dummy crossings are built. Artillery is concentrated; several fire raids are conducted, then the guns are withdrawn to the rear while mock guns are placed on dummy firing positions. Rokossovsky says: “The front chief of staff, General Malinin, was inexhaustible in such tricks.”

Intelligence is actively working — both aerial and radio intelligence. Aerial photographs of enemy fortifications are taken; maps are sent out to the troops. Prisoners (“tongues”) have been captured with documents. Finally, on the eve of the offensive, staff exercises with war games are held. The front’s rear services keep a pool of motor vehicles ready for moving troops and equipment. In terms of preparation, this is already a very different war. In terms of the blood spilled, the war is the same. In the first two years, huge sacrifices were made to avoid defeat; in the last two — to hasten victory.

The Germans in Belorussia fight like beasts. In his memoirs, Rokossovsky cites the testimony of the commander of the 108th Division, General Teremov:

“At least two thousand enemy soldiers and officers, supported by artillery fire, advanced on our positions. Our guns opened fire on the attackers at 700 meters, the machine guns at 400. The Hitlerites kept coming. The machine guns mowed them down. The fascists moved forward, stepping over the corpses of their own men. It was a mad attack. No, there was not a trace of military valour in it. The Hitlerites were in a kind of semi-shock. In the movement of this vast mass of soldiers there was more of the animal stubbornness of a herd than anything like troops. Yet the impression was nonetheless overwhelming.”

On 29 June, Bobruisk is liberated. The Germans had organized an all-round defense in the city. Houses had been turned into firing points. The streets were barricaded, tanks dug in at intersections, approaches to the city mined. The city is liberated in extremely heavy fighting, down to hand-to-hand combat in the dark of night. The Bobruisk enemy group is encircled and destroyed.

Rokossovsky is made a marshal.

A rapid advance then develops towards Minsk and Baranovich.

On 3 July, the troops of the 1st Belorussian Front under Rokossovsky, together with the troops of the 3rd Belorussian Front under Chernyakhovsky, liberate Minsk, the capital of Belorussia. The Minsk enemy grouping is smashed. On 8 July, Baranovich is freed.

On 18 July, the left wing of the 1st Belorussian Front begins an offensive aimed at liquidating the Lublin grouping. The right wing of Rokossovsky’s front advances on Brest. The Brest enemy grouping is encircled. Brest is liberated on 28 July.

Five fronts take part in the grand Belorussian operation. The result of the operation is the defeat of the German-fascist Army Groups Centre and Northern Ukraine.

Before Operation Bagration, which ends with a Soviet advance beyond the borders of the USSR, there occurs, in February 1944, an episode in Rokossovsky’s life of a kind almost unheard of for an army general. He does not mention it in his memoirs. It is recalled by Alexander Pylytsyn. Pylytsyn commands a platoon in a penal battalion. He himself is not a penal soldier. In the penal battalions

there was what was called a permanent cadre of seconded officers, and a variable cadre — the penal soldiers proper. They might hold ranks up to colonel. Or rather, could hold. Here they are all privates. A spell in a penal battalion could be punishment for cowardice or panic on the battlefield. Or it could be punishment for failure to carry out an impossible task, a means of settling personal scores, revenge for refusing to tolerate a superior's abuse, simply a way of winning the struggle for a woman's heart.

Dead penal soldiers are not buried in uniform. Their uniforms are removed and sent to rear-area depots for repair and reissue. On such clothing a "B/U 2" ("used twice") stamp is put. It is issued to those mobilized to penal companies from among the inmates of the Gulag. In the camps, mobilization of all categories of prisoners is allowed, except those sentenced under Article 58 — political prisoners.

The leadership of penal units is entrusted to the most strong-willed and battle-tested commanders and political officers. In principle it is to be done on a voluntary basis, although that is far from always observed. Many are drawn from those who fought at Stalingrad. Alexander Pyltsyn, seconded to a penal battalion, is a lieutenant, 20 years old. The 8th Separate Penal Battalion, entrusted to him, is formed within the Central Front in 1943 before the Battle of Kursk. The Central Front is then commanded by Rokossovsky. In 1944, Rokossovsky commands the 1st Belorussian Front. The 8th Penal Battalion follows Rokossovsky to the 1st Belorussian Front, although its composition has changed greatly over time. In the penal battalions one dies six times more often than in regular units. And the non-penal officers die more often, too. On the other hand, promotion is quicker, ranks come faster. Of the 18 officers who came to the penal battalion with Pyltsyn to take command posts, only three fought through to the end of the war. Alexander Pyltsyn recalls: "When I arrived, the battalion had about a thousand men, about three times the size of a normal battalion. And by the end of the war, when reinforcements were already insufficient, we fought by companies: form a company — and into battle. While one is fighting, the next is being formed."

The problem of replenishment, and not only for penal units, is extremely acute in 1944. The call-up of the 1927 class is being prepared — boys of seventeen. In addition, a special draft begins among the inhabitants of the territories that had been temporarily occupied, that is, abandoned by the Red Army. After liberation, these people all fall under suspicion simply because they had, against their will, found themselves on land captured by the enemy. From among them battalions are formed to increase the mass of attacking troops. They are mostly peasants. Many are elderly. They are untrained. They are expected to get their weapons from the fallen. They do not know how to use them. They are not given uniforms. They go into battle in their own clothes. Usually dark, black. They receive the name "black infantry."

Lieutenant Valentin Dyatlov, commander of an artillery communications platoon, recalls: "The attack. A black chain of unarmed men rises up. Behind it, a second. Black on the snow — a perfect target. The German pours dense lead into these chains. They lie down. The battalion commander yells: 'Forward! Forward! I'll shoot you myself!' But try to tear yourself, unarmed, from the ground under artillery, machine-gun and automatic fire."

Still, they got up, these not-so-young men who had lived through the despair of occupation. Only a few survived. The predicament of these peasants was worse than that of the penal soldiers. From the "black" village infantry — a special variety of penal unit — one could never get out. From a penal battalion one could. Through a wound, the lifting of a conviction, for distinguished conduct in battle

or on completion of the term of service. That term was up to three months. Assuming you weren't killed, of course.

And so, in February 1944, Army General Rokossovsky personally visits the trenches of the 8th Separate Penal Battalion, in whose command cadre is Alexander Pylytsyn. Rokossovsky comes after very heavy fighting near Zhlobin in Belorussia. Losses in the penal battalion are enormous. The general is calm, kind to everyone — both officers and penal soldiers. The very fact of a front commander visiting a penal battalion is an event without equal. Generals treat penal soldiers differently. General Gorbатов, commander of the 3rd Army under Rokossovsky, frees and decorates penal soldiers regardless of whether they are wounded — simply for bravery and courage in battle. General Batov, commander of the 65th Army of Rokossovsky's front, rehabilitates only those penal soldiers who are killed or wounded.

The penal soldiers explain this difference simply: Gorbатов and Rokossovsky, unlike Batov, have personal experience of imprisonment.

Rokossovsky does not mention in his memoirs his three years in the internal prison of the Leningrad NKVD Directorate.

His memoirs begin with the words: "In the spring of 1940 I visited Sochi with my family. After that I was invited to see the People's Commissar of Defense S. K. Timoshenko. He received me warmly and cordially. Semyon Konstantinovich suggested that I again take command of the 5th Cavalry Corps. I had held this post in 1936–37."

Of what happened between 1937 and the spring of 1940 in Sochi — not a word. In August 1937, the commander of the 5th Cavalry Corps, Rokossovsky, is arrested and brought from Pskov to Leningrad, to the internal NKVD prison. He is accused of organizing a military-fascist conspiracy and of spying for the Polish and Japanese intelligence services. He is denounced, under torture, by Army Commander 2nd Rank Velikanov.

The only time Rokossovsky publicly recalls what happened is in April 1962 during a meeting with students of the Frunze Academy. He says: "They beat me two at a time, three at a time. Alone they couldn't handle me. I held out. I knew that if I signed, it would mean certain death." His cellmate, General Baldynov, says: "Each time he returned to the cell after an interrogation, he stubbornly repeated: 'Under no circumstances make false confessions, don't incriminate yourself or another. If we must die, then with a clear conscience.'"

Nine of Rokossovsky's teeth are knocked out, three ribs broken. His toes are smashed with a hammer.

Rokossovsky's family — his wife and daughter — after his arrest are deported from Pskov to Armavir. His wife gets a job as a cashier in a hairdresser's. His daughter goes to school. She has to change schools. In each school the new principal enters the classroom and says: "Children, I want you to know that among you is the daughter of an enemy of the people. Stand up, stand up, little girl." The girl stands up. Later she travels alone, at 12 years old, to Moscow, to Lubyanka, with a parcel for her father.

Twice, Rokossovsky is led out to be shot. He is placed at the edge of a pit. On command the soldiers fire. The generals standing to his right and left fall. He is left alive.

After the 20th Party Congress, which condemns the cult of Stalin's personality and the Stalinist repressions, Khrushchev suggests that Rokossovsky write an article in the spirit of the "thaw."

Rokossovsky flatly refuses, saying: “Comrade Stalin is a saint to me. I will not change my opinion of him.”

First of all, this answer reflects Rokossovsky’s personal attitude towards Khrushchev — something like “get lost,” from one front-line man to another, as a commander to a political officer. But it also expresses his idea of an officer’s duty. And the unwillingness of a man who was beaten and then rose high — and how high — to rake up the past: after all, he was released, he rose, so there must be some justice. And much else besides.

Perhaps something is explained by an episode recalled by Zhukov. He, Zhukov, once reproached Rokossovsky for having weakly supported him in a dispute with Stalin. Rokossovsky retorted: “Didn’t you see how Beria was glaring at us? That’s enough. I’ve already been ‘his guest’ once!” After his release from prison, Rokossovsky always carried a Browning pistol. When his wife asked why, he replied: “If they come for me again, I won’t let them take me alive.” Marshal Rokossovsky never spoke aloud again about those three and a half years in prison. When he left prison in April 1940, it was raining. He missed his train. He had nowhere to sleep. He went back for the night — to the prison.

The year 1944 is the year of the final liberation of Soviet territory. For three years, up to 70 million people had lived on occupied land. Up to a million and a half Soviet citizens collaborated with the Germans. Collaboration with the enemy is one of the most terrible features of the Great Patriotic War. The Patriotic War of 1812 knew no such phenomenon. The faces of those who chose collaboration are many. First of all, those driven by cowardice and greed. Then the criminals. Although by no means every criminal was a traitor. It is known that criminals in penal units fought honestly and washed away their guilt with blood. On Rokossovsky’s Bryansk Front in the summer of 1942 there was a rifle brigade composed of criminals. Rokossovsky writes: “We became convinced that serious missions could be entrusted to them.”

In addition, there were those who were forced by the Germans and who did not find in themselves the strength to part with life; those with small children and no other way, as they saw it, to save them. Some among them bitterly hated the Stalinist regime, whose families had suffered under the repressions, whom the regime provoked and drove to the last step — treason, the futile notion that Hitler might be a liberator if he got rid of Stalin. A tragic example is the fate of thousands of Cossacks from the Kuban and Stavropol regions. In 1918, during the Civil War, the Cossacks could not decide, they wavered between Reds and Whites and never managed to defend themselves and their way of life. During Stalin’s collectivization and after, they were subjected to the harshest repressions. In the war, a part of the Cossacks — small in terms of the people as a whole but numbering tens of thousands — throw themselves into the arms of the Germans. When the Germans retreat, they go with them, with their families.

Separately, there are those who collaborated with the Germans in Crimea and the North Caucasus.

Betrayal remains betrayal. It demands inevitable punishment under the law. But in Crimea and the Caucasus, Stalin declares entire peoples guilty of treason.

On 29 January 1944, Beria signs instructions on the procedure for deporting Chechens and Ingush. A similar method had already been tested successfully on the Russian population during collectivization. The experience is there. In the preamble it is stated that all inhabitants of the republic who are Chechen or Ingush by nationality, including children, are subject to deportation.

Everyone is deported, including party, Soviet and economic officials. Russian women married to Chechens or Ingush are deported if they do not express willingness to divorce.

Local NKVD offices, together with attached troops, must cordon off the auls (villages), organize ambushes in gorges and on mountain paths. One hundred thousand soldiers and nineteen thousand officers take part in the operation. In the middle of the war, 150 million rubles are allocated to this action. That is the cost of 700 T-34 tanks.

On 31 January 1944, the State Defense Committee adopts two resolutions. The first is called “On measures for settling special settlers within the Kazakh and Kirghiz SSR.” The resolution does not say a word about the deportees being Chechens and Ingush. The second document, about the deportation, goes under the title “On the procedure for receiving livestock and agricultural products in the North Caucasus.” The operation receives the codename “Chechevitsa” (“Lentil”). A few days earlier, under the guise of exercises, a tank army is brought into Checheno-Ingushetia. The operation is made easier by the fact that the male population is serving in the Red Army or partisan detachments. On 20 February, Beria arrives in Grozny to direct the operation personally.

At two o’clock in the morning on 23 February 1944, all populated areas are encircled. Everyone is dragged from their beds and driven into the streets. People are told that they are all traitors and are being deported to Kazakhstan and Kirghizia. They have twenty minutes to pack. Many soldiers of the regular army understand what is really happening. They do what they can to calm people, help them collect their belongings. NKVD troops, meanwhile, behave brutally.

The Belorussian village of Khatyn, burned together with its inhabitants, has forever become a symbol of Nazi savagery. In the list of crimes against humanity, alongside Khatyn, should stand the Chechen village of Khaibakh.

When it turns out, after the mass deportation, that the inhabitants of some mountain villages have remained, the NKVD carries out a series of punitive actions.

The inhabitants of Khaibakh are told that the sick and elderly must remain where they are, awaiting transport. Women with children, pregnant women, the sick and elderly are separated from the main column. They are driven into the stable of the kolkhoz named after Beria. Straw is piled around the stable. Some soldiers try to prevent the crime. Their weapons are taken away. The action is commanded by State Security Commissar 3rd Class Gvishiani. The straw is set alight. Under the pressure of the frenzied burning people, the stable doors give way. Gvishiani orders: “Fire!” Those who rush out are shot. A young woman, who had given birth to twins the previous day, tries to throw the surviving baby out. Someone catches him and throws him into the flames.

The same happens in Ingush villages.

Before Chechnya and Ingushetia, mass deportation had been carried out in Karachay-Cherkessia and Kalmykia. Then the Balkars are deported. From Crimea, Tatars, Bulgarians, Armenians and Greeks are removed. After the liberation of the Baltic states, a second wave of deportations begins in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The deportation of populations to Siberia is carried out under the codename “Spring.”

On 5 June 1944, the main planners of the Belorussian liberation operation — Zhukov, Rokossovsky and Vasilevsky — go over the details of the coming actions on the ground. On 6 June at 6 a.m., with the Anglo-American landing in Normandy, Operation Overlord begins. 6 June is the day the Allies open the second, Western front in the war against Nazi Germany.

In fact, 6 June 1944 marks the opening of the second chapter in our relations with the Allies. The

first chapter is longer, but less well known. From the autumn of 1941, almost from the very beginning of the war, British, American and Canadian aid deliveries begin to the fighting Soviet Union.

Marshal Zhukov says: “The Americans sent us so much material, without which we could not have continued the war. We had no explosives, no powder. We had nothing with which to load rifle cartridges. The Americans really saved us with their powder and explosives. And how much sheet steel they sent us! Could we have quickly organized the production of tanks without American help with steel? We received 350,000 vehicles — and what vehicles! Without them we would have had nothing with which to haul our artillery. They basically provided our entire front-line transport. And the high-octane gasoline for the MiGs.” Anastas Mikoyan says: “In the autumn of 1941, we had lost everything, and if it had not been for Lend-Lease, the American deliveries — weapons, food and warm clothing for the army — it is still an open question how things would have turned out.”

On 7 November 1941, at the parade on Red Square, British tanks march alongside ours. Stalin wanted to show that aid was already arriving. Then he changed his mind, and the British tanks were cut from the newsreels. They are still not there to this day. The USA, Britain and Canada provided the USSR with aid worth more than 13 billion dollars — in the dollars of that time. The USA accounted for 11.2 billion.

Under the famous Lend-Lease program, the USSR received from the USA 14,500 aircraft, 7,500 tanks, military equipment worth 1 billion dollars, 475,000 tractors, artillery tractors and other vehicles, 30,000 machine tools, 300,000 tons of non-ferrous metals, 11 million pairs of shoes, 20 million meters of military textiles. Many Soviet soldiers would wear uniforms made from American khaki cloth. Plus 2 million tons of foodstuffs: American canned meat, meat soufflé, egg powder, grated American chocolate.

Britain supplied 100,000 tons of food, 100,000 tons of rubber, power units, 15,000 electric motors, 100,000 tons of non-ferrous metals.

Canada: 200,000 tons of wheat, 100,000 tons of non-ferrous metals, rails, agricultural machinery, foodstuffs, military textiles.

Thanks to the Allies, our navy received: 1 battleship, 1 cruiser, 9 destroyers, 4 submarines, 202 torpedo boats, 49 landing craft, 28 tankers, 3 icebreakers.

Marshal Zhukov says: “These days they like to present things as if we had all this in abundance ourselves. This is not the history that happened, but the history that has been written. A varnished history.”

Rokossovsky will meet the Allies on 9 May. In Wismar he is received by Field Marshal Montgomery, with gun salutes and a guard of honour. Rokossovsky is extremely cautious in his description of the meeting. On the first day after the war he writes: “The meeting took place in a warm atmosphere and left us with a good impression. The British officers, and Montgomery himself, turned out in reality to be simpler and more approachable than we had imagined.”

Later Rokossovsky receives the British in Karlshorst. He recalls: “For the guard of honour we put the Kuban Cossacks of Oslikovsky’s 3rd Guards Cavalry Corps on horseback, in full Cossack dress. They made an enormous impression on Montgomery and his officers.”

As for those Kuban Cossacks who left with the retreating Germans, the British will hand them over to Stalin — 40,000 of them, with wives and children. The decision by Hitler to abolish kolkhozes in the Kuban, his attempt to flirt with the Cossacks, led to this tragic episode of Cossack collaboration

with the Nazis. But the Kuban is an exception. On the whole, kolkhozes suited Hitler. He considered them the ideal form for exploiting conquered populations.

On 20 July 1944, the shock groupings of the left wing of the 1st Belorussian Front reach the Western Bug and, after forcing it at three points, enter Polish territory. Lublin is taken unexpectedly — so unexpectedly that the administration of the Maidanek concentration camp, a few kilometres from Lublin, does not manage to flee. All the land between the city and the camp is planted with cabbage. Red cabbage. Huge heads. The fields have been fertilized with ashes from the crematorium. When our units approach Maidanek, smoke is still coming from the crematorium chimneys. Rokossovsky visits the camp. Later, at a rally in Lublin, he speaks in Polish about how deeply Maidanek shook him.

Along with the formations of Rokossovsky's front, units of the 1st Polish Army under Zygmunt Berling enter Poland. Berling's units are part of Rokossovsky's front. Rokossovsky is a Pole. In August 1944, Stalin intends to play on Rokossovsky's national feelings, on his personal feelings and memories. Rokossovsky was born in the Warsaw suburb of Praga. On 31 July 1944, Rokossovsky's troops reach the outskirts of Praga, on the eastern bank of the Vistula. Rokossovsky has a great chance to liberate his native city "off the march." The German garrison in Warsaw numbers only about 15,000. It is demoralized. First because of the defeat of German forces on the central sector of the front. Second, because of the situation in Germany itself. On 20 July 1944 there has just been an attempt on Hitler's life. The bomb is planted by a staff officer, Colonel Stauffenberg. The main motive for the attempt: the Third Reich is a criminal state, a disgrace and a catastrophe for Germany. By pure chance Hitler survives. Stauffenberg is seized and shot in Berlin the same evening. Soon another 200 people are executed. Among them are the head of intelligence, Canaris, and the former ambassador to Moscow, Schulenburg.

Philipp von Boeselager, who brought Stauffenberg the bomb, survives. He says: "We were convinced that even if on 20 July 1944 we succeeded in our plan, we would be hanged, because the whole nation believed fanatically in Hitler."

At the end of July, as Rokossovsky's troops approach Warsaw, Radio Moscow, in a special broadcast, calls on the city's population to rise up. Marshal Rokossovsky confirms this fact in an interview with English journalist Alexander Werth in August 1944. In Warsaw there are about 40,000 fighters of the Armia Krajowa (Home Army), which supports the Polish government in exile in London. In addition, there are detachments of the pro-Soviet Armia Ludowa (People's Army). On 1 August 1944, against the background of fighting by Rokossovsky's troops in Warsaw's suburbs, the Armia Krajowa begins an anti-fascist uprising in the Polish capital. On 2 August, the leadership of the Armia Ludowa joins the uprising and places its detachments at the disposal of the Armia Krajowa. On 6 August, Stalin orders Rokossovsky, Zhukov and the General Staff to report their views on a plan for taking Warsaw. On 8 August, Zhukov and Rokossovsky report to Stalin: "It is not possible for us to go over to the offensive before 10 August." That is, Zhukov and Rokossovsky believe that a breakthrough to Warsaw is possible within just a few days, despite the fact that the Germans are already pulling significant tank forces up to the city. Rokossovsky tries to establish contact with Warsaw, with the commander of the Armia Krajowa, General Bór-Komorowski, by dropping an airborne detachment. Bór-Komorowski does not respond. During the same days in Moscow, Stalin twice receives the head of the Polish government in London, Stanisław Mikołajczyk.

Mikołajczyk opens the conversation with what is most painful for both sides: the future administration of the liberated regions of Poland and the future Soviet-Polish border. Only after that does he speak about the outbreak of the uprising in Warsaw and add that he intends to return to Poland and form a government there. Stalin notes that in fact Warsaw is still in German hands. Mikołajczyk says that Warsaw will soon be liberated. "God grant that it be so," Stalin replies. In place of the Polish government, Stalin already has the Polish Committee of National Liberation, created in July 1944.

At their second meeting, Mikołajczyk asks for weapons for the Warsaw insurgents. Stalin says that it is easy to drop weapons: one simply needs to have call signs and codes. He, Stalin, will try to do all he can.

On 12 August, three days after these words, TASS publishes a special statement in which the Soviet leadership completely dissociates itself from the actions of the Polish government in exile and places full responsibility for what is happening in Warsaw on it.

In Warsaw, at this time, the poorly prepared and ill-armed uprising wins broad support from the population. It takes on a new character and enormous scope. Unarmed residents of Warsaw join the fighters, build barricades. But the Germans hold the city. Warsaw in arms is drowning in blood. Rokossovsky has a sister in Warsaw. She is hidden, as Rokossovsky's sister. Rokossovsky is at breaking point.

Stalin writes to Churchill: "The uprising in the capital of Poland is a reckless adventure for which the population has paid with countless victims. It would not have happened if the Soviet command had been informed before the Warsaw action." This thesis will long serve as a simple explanation for the extremely complex situation around the Warsaw Uprising. The complexity lies in the fact that Mikołajczyk refused to merge his government with the pro-Soviet Polish Committee of National Liberation. And to Stalin, a pro-Western Polish government in the event of a successful uprising is absolutely unacceptable.

Stalin is firm in his intention to draw Poland into the Soviet orbit. He will provide material aid to Warsaw. But Soviet and Polish pilots will not be allowed to fly to Warsaw until September, when the uprising is already gasping for breath. Rokossovsky says: "Aid to Warsaw begins on 13 September." The pilots will make 2,253 sorties, at great cost. They will drop mortars, anti-tank rifles, automatic weapons, rifles, food, medicines. Sacks of ammunition fell in the very centre of the city, on the junction of Jerusalem Avenue and Marszałkowska Street. That night the junction was lit by the fires of blazing buildings. The Americans and British also constantly drop supplies to fighting Warsaw — 5,000 sorties — and they too suffer heavy losses.

Throughout August, the Allies do not receive permission to land on Soviet airfields. They receive it only on 9 September.

The attempt by Rokossovsky's troops to advance on Warsaw will be made only in early September. September, for Rokossovsky's troops, is very different from July, when they had just reached Warsaw. Then it was the crest of the record-breaking summer offensive, then there was German panic, then there was a special, healthy fighting excitement that brings success. Then the dream of Marshal Rokossovsky — to bring freedom to his native city — was close to fulfilment. Now all that has been knocked down. In September, Polish units of Rokossovsky's front will cross to the western bank of the Vistula, fight there, and with enormous losses return to the eastern bank. Warsaw will only be liberated in January 1945. The Warsaw Uprising means 200,000 dead inhabitants of the city

who rose up against the occupiers. The Warsaw Uprising is an outburst of hatred for fascism in a country that lost a quarter of its population in the war.

For Stalin, the defeat of the Warsaw Uprising is a kind of solution to the Polish problem by German hands. The Armia Krajowa, which he does not control, is bled white in the course of the rising. The final settling of accounts with it by Stalin's forces will occur on 28 March 1945. On that day, NKVD General Serov invites its leaders to talks in the little town of Pruszków near Warsaw, where they are arrested. Men who had fought against fascist occupation will be tried in Moscow as "accomplices of fascists." The Allies will ask the Soviet leadership only one thing: not to impose the death penalty.

After the war, in 1949, Stalin will appoint Rokossovsky as Minister of Defense of Poland. He will make him Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Poland, a member of the Politburo of the Polish United Workers' Party, and a Marshal of Poland. In 1950, shots will be fired at Rokossovsky twice. In the troops they shout at him: "Go back to Russia!" "Down with the Red Marshal!" Shortly before his death, Rokossovsky will say: "I am the most unhappy marshal of the Soviet Union. In Russia they considered me a Pole, and in Poland, a Russian."

But that will be later. On 14 September 1944, Rokossovsky has a day of great personal joy. The Warsaw suburb of Praga, where he was born, is liberated. He, Rokossovsky, is commander of the 1st Belorussian Front. The liberation of Warsaw opens the shortest road to Berlin for his front's troops. In the evening, the duty officer reports a phone call from Moscow. Stalin is on the line. Without any preamble he says: "Comrade Rokossovsky, you are appointed commander of the 2nd Belorussian Front." — "Comrade Stalin, why such disfavour? Why am I being transferred from the main direction to a secondary sector?" — "This is not disfavour, this is politics," Stalin replies. "Zhukov is appointed in your place."