

Norman Polmar, Thomas A. Brooks and George E. Federoff. *Admiral Gorshkov: The Man Who Challenged the U.S. Navy*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2019. Pp. 304.

Written by one former member and one current member of the US intelligence community and one US civilian defence analyst, the three authors of *Admiral Gorshkov: The Man who Challenged the U.S. Navy* have done a superb job with this biography of the architect of the Soviet Union's naval forces and eventual Fleet Admiral of the Soviet Union, Sergey Gorshkov. The collaborative work of Norman Polmar, Thomas A. Brooks and George E. Federoff is a readable, informative work that tells the story of a son of academic parents who went on to take command of the Soviet Navy in mid-January 1956, holding onto his command until December 1985, a total of twenty-nine years.

The first book by western authors on the admiral, this work stakes new ground in the western historiography of the Soviet Navy of the Cold War era. While certain military leaders have had multiple studies published regarding their careers and exploits, this is the first for Gorshkov, an important military leader within the Warsaw Pact forces for a significant period of time. Using a wide variety of translated Soviet period and anglophone secondary sources, the authors have collaborated to adequately investigate every aspect of Gorshkov's life, career and military accomplishments as naval commander within the USSR military forces. Also utilised was data from extensive interviews with former Soviet Navy commanders who knew Gorshkov and provided insight into his decisions and accomplishments in both war and peace.

A dynamic leader who steadily advanced over decades of service within the Soviet Navy, Gorshkov overcame many obstacles and rivals to eventually advance into the elite circles of power within the Kremlin and Soviet military command structure. His military career was focused on one goal in its latter stages: building the naval forces of the Soviet Union into a blue-water navy that could credibly pose a threat the dominance of the United States Navy (USN) and other NATO navies in the world's oceans, potentially contesting vital commercial trade and communication routes.

The upward trajectory of Gorshkov is tracked accurately, beginning with his birth in 1910, his upbringing and his entrance into the Navy in 1927 at age seventeen. Holding minor commands

during the 1930s, he partook in supporting operations against the Japanese before his redeployment to the west at the onset of the Second World War. The three authors then trace his involvement in both ground and land operations in the Sea of Azov, the Black Sea, the Caucus and later in support of Russian land operations by conducting riverine operations on the River Danube in the last year of the war. He was notable in his organisation and execution of multiple amphibious operations. Landings of this type were very much within the Soviet naval mentality of supporting ground operations. He was accordingly promoted to Vice-Admiral in 1944, Admiral in 1953, Fleet Admiral in 1967 and eventually Fleet Admiral of the Soviet Union in the same year. He was also named “Hero of the Soviet Union” twice.

On taking full control of the Soviet Navy in 1956, the authors relate how he strove to realise the construction of a powerful fleet with surface, submarine and naval aviation assets that could effectively challenge the US and other NATO navies. Previously focused on a submarine fleet that would accomplish nearly all of the USSR’s naval goals, Gorshkov purposefully added significant surface fleet units to comprehensively support the submarine force, in effect creating a navy of such numbers and capability that it was balanced and world-class, numbering by 1985 a total of 697 warships of all types and capabilities (p. 193). This was accomplished by three factors. First, he successfully pushed his military shipbuilding agenda of adding comprehensive surface support for their submarine fleet, seen previously by the Khrushchev politburo of being sufficient for virtually all the tactical and strategic requirements of the Soviet Navy. Secondly, his very long tenure as overall Commander in Chief (C-in-C) of the navy—a post he only relinquished in December 1985 when he was transferred to the Group of Inspector Generals of the Ministry of Defence, a post reserved for semi-retired elderly senior officers—allowed him the time to accomplish his strategic goals. Finally, he simultaneously served as deputy Minister of Defence for the Soviet Union, operating easily within the political sphere. In this area he avoided making enemies and thus assured his long-term political survival. He outlasted others, as well as served successive First and General Secretaries of the Soviet Union Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov and finally Constantin Chernenko.

The actual blue-water navy that Gorshkov built was extremely impressive. It contained aircraft and helicopter carriers, missile and

attack submarines and a significant number of guided missile equipped cruisers, destroyers and two nuclear-powered guided missile equipped battlecruisers. The jewel in the Soviet Navy's crown was of course its diesel and nuclear-powered submarine fleet. Gorchov's tenure as C-in-C saw the equipping of nuclear intercontinental ballistic missiles on Soviet submarines and several technological advances in both the attack and ballistic missile submarine fleets. The nuclear powered and armed variants of this undersea force were especially potent, equipped with nuclear tipped cruise and ballistic missiles. Numbering 113 in 1985, this force would have fought decisively in the event of nuclear war to utterly annihilate targets within the continental United States (p. 195). All of these warships contained a vast array of powerful weaponry not intended to simply defend themselves with, but to go on the offensive to sink USN and other NATO naval assets. This capability was seen as strategically vital to the Soviet Navy in that it would allow it to have a vital role within the international and military affairs of the Soviet state.

While the authors utilise a great number of English and Russian secondary sources, a possible shortcoming of the book is the lack of access to primary documents of the Soviet Navy in the Cold War, which would have only improved an already good book. For example, no data from his naval personnel file is present in the book as this may still be classified in the Russian Federation archives.

This book would be recommended to anyone with an interest in Cold War history and twentieth-century naval affairs. It is written in an understandable manner and is well edited. It moves quickly from point to point in Gorshkov's life, allowing the reader to gain a full understanding of the man, his career and his accomplishments.

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