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**Thaddeus Kościuszko : The Purest Son of Liberty** by James S. Pula (1999), 355 pages.



This is the first English-language book about Kosciuszko in 50 years. It focuses mainly on Kosciuszko's sojourn in America while only about forty pages are devoted to his youth, the Insurrection, and the post-American activities in Western Europe. Thus the book addresses an English speaking audience and offers an opportunity for Polish-Americans to get better acquainted with Kościuszko's life in this country. - - Professor Pula (currently a Dean at the Catholic University in Washington DC has done considerable research, screening scores of memoirs and collections of letters which he cites. Many of them are baroque in form and quaint in style, typical of the 18th century. This effort was of particular importance because Kościuszko wrote no memoir of his own so, as he never married, we inherited no records from his family. Even today some parts of his biography are not too

clear.

This remarkable man (1746-1817) was born on a modest estate halfway between the Bug River and Nowogródek, the youngest of four children. His name is of Ruthenian origin, but the family had been polonized since the 16th century. The land the family owned offered only moderate means of support since this area is not very fertile. Kościuszko was only 12 years old when his father died. With a great deal of luck he finished secondary school near Pinsk and then became a cadet in the newly formed two-year military academy, *Szkoła Rycerska*, in Warsaw. As an outstanding student, he received a scholarship from the King and the Czartoryski family to study in France 1769-1774, and this fine education is evident throughout his life. During this time, dramatic changes took place in Poland: the First Partition caused the loss of one third of the country, without serious resistance. The study money exhausted, Kosciuszko returned to Poland and found himself without means of support as the Polish army was reduced to a pitiful number of 80,000 men. As a result, he went back to the West and, along with his many French friends, sailed via Haiti to Philadelphia.

This all-important period in Kościuszko's life is narrated by the author in painstaking detail. The eight years spent with the young American Army, first as captain, then as colonel, and ultimately brigadier general, brought his personality traits and inclinations to the fore: his immense diligence, superb skill in the engineering field and, surprisingly for a military officer, a deep interest in philosophy driven by ideas of social justice advocated by Jean Jacques Rousseau. He was indeed a child of the Age of Enlightenment and, in the eyes of historians, the first true Polish democrat. As a volunteer in the rapidly growing American armed forces, he was assigned to the Northern Command in New York State a few months after the nation declared its independence in 1776. He served under Gen. Horatio Gates who became his life-long friend, and his engineering talents served him well.

Unfortunately, the book has no maps or battle diagrams which would better illustrate Kosciuszko's activities, but his name will always be associated with Fort Ticonderoga, the Battle of Saratoga (some historians consider it the turning point in the American Revolution), and with the fortress at West Point. - - When he moved to the Southern Command, his contributions were readily recognized in various battles in the Carolinas, where he served under Gen. Nathaniel Greene. Incidentally, his complicated last name was constantly misspelled, and there are at least 15 variants including Koshiosko, Kuziaskie and even Coscdusko.

The book offers us a most interesting synopsis ad the post-American years of Kosciuszko after he returned to Poland in 1784: his leadership in the 1792-1794 Insurrection as Commander-in-Chief, the astounding victory at Raclawice; the Polaniec Manifesto, which truly represents his social testament and corresponds closely to his American experience. We follow Kosciuszko through his defeat at the Maciejowice battlefield which, in effect, ended the Polish State; his imprisonment in St. Petersburg; a surprise return to America for a little while; the friendship with Thomas Jefferson; his stay in France 1798-1815 while resolutely rejecting Napoleon's promises, though Dąbrowski and Poniatowski felt otherwise; finally the last years in Switzerland. Poland, forever grateful and proud of Kościuszko brought his remains to the Wawel Cathedral in 1818, just one year after a similar interment of Poniatowski.

This is a most worthy biography, but it will require the reader's patience because of the wealth of military material. Kościuszko's life could easily be used as source for half a dozen novels. Here in Washington, we are constantly reminded of his life as we pass the White House and view the monument dedicated to him and

erected in 1910. Also, when we visit the Jefferson Memorial we can admire the overcoat he is wearing: it was a gift to him by his friend Tadeusz Kościuszko.

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