



The Book about Igor Sikorsky



Mikhail A. Sudakov

Ulyanovsk Civil Aviation Institute, Ulyanovsk, Russia.

✉ dzintars80@mail.ru.

Mikhail A. SUDAKOV

Obraztsov, P. A. Igor Sikorsky: four wars and two homelands of the famous aircraft designer. Moscow, Molodaya gvardiya publishing house, 2021, 239 [1] p.: ill. (Series of biographies: The life of remarkable people; issue 1875). ISBN 978-5-235-04435-7.

Igor Sikorsky created a family of the world's best helicopters, which transported marines and doctors during

Keywords: aviation, Sikorsky, helicopter, history of transport.

Throughout the 20th century aviation significantly changed the face of our civilisation, opening unprecedented opportunities for people. In this regard, the study of various aspects of development of domestic and world aviation is an important area of modern historical science. The desire of researchers to analyse and comprehend the most significant events in this area can be of great benefit, identifying the most successful social practices in this area. Modern aircraft designers and managers tackling the problems of air traffic control can gain food for thought from such research. In this regard, the appearance in the series «The life of remarkable people» of the biography of the outstanding Russian and American aircraft designer Igor Ivanovich Sikorsky (1889–1972) should be considered very timely.

almost all wars of the 20th and 21st centuries, mail and fire extinguishing equipment, oversized cargo, ordinary passengers and even US presidents. In Russia, this Russian-American genius created the world's first huge multi-engine aircrafts Russky Vityaz [Russian Knight] and Ilya Muromets, and in America, where he was respectfully called Mister Helicopter, extraordinary seaplanes that crossed the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans even before World War II.

The author of the book, Petr A. Obraztsov, turned to a topical and interesting issue. For a long time in our country, the life and work of the hero of the above-mentioned book has hardly been studied. This was due to the monarchical views of Igor Ivanovich Sikorsky, who emigrated from Soviet Russia to the West in the spring of 1918. After 1991, following changes in ideological orientations in our society, interested Russian readers had the opportunity to discover many outstanding figures of the Russian Diaspora, to become familiar with their rich heritage. Igor I. Sikorsky is part of this constellation. The book of the writer, translator, journalist, Ph.D. (Chemistry) Petr A. Obraztsov is an important milestone in the study of the activities of this outstanding personality.

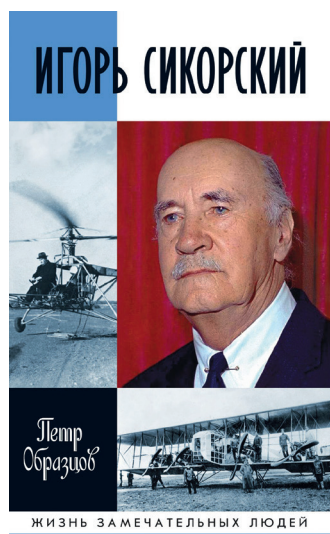
For citation: Sudakov, M. A. *The Book about Igor Sikorsky. World of Transport and Transportation*, 2021, Vol. 19, Iss. 4 (95), pp. 308–310. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30932/1992-3252-2021-19-4-17>.

*The text of the review article originally written in Russian is published in the first part of the issue.
Текст статьи-рецензии на русском языке публикуется в первой части данного выпуска.*

The biography of Igor I. Sikorsky is distinguished by a well-thought-out structure. The first seven chapters are devoted to the life of an aircraft designer in Russia (he had lived in our country for 29 years). Chapters 8–14 talk about the stay of the hero of the book abroad. This period of his life turned out to be longer than the first and lasted 54 years. In the remaining seven chapters, the author focuses on various aspects of Igor Sikorsky's biography, associated with both the Russian and American periods of his life. These chapters allow the reader to appreciate the versatility of the hero of the book and expand the understanding of his family, friends, and colleagues. The text of the book is also supplied with appendices (the first of them contains an overview of the world helicopter market compiled by V. Shoshin, and the second contains a list of works by Igor I. Sikorsky). In accordance with the traditions of the biographical series, the main milestones in the life and work of the hero of the book and a list of publications dedicated to him are offered as well.

Analysing the life of Igor I. Sikorsky, the author identifies the factors that influenced formation of his interest in science and technology. The beneficial effect of the intellectual environment in which the future aircraft designer developed is noted: he studied at the famous First Kiev classical gymnasium (within the walls of which, for example, M. A. Bulgakov and K. G. Paustovsky were educated), the Naval Cadet Corps in the capital of the Russian Empire, Technical School in Paris, as well as at Kiev Polytechnic Institute. The family also had a noticeable influence on formation of Igor I. Sikorsky's vision and opinions (for example, the father of the main character of the book, Ivan Alekseevich Sikorsky, was a well-known psychiatrist and a well-educated person).

Describing the achievements of Igor I. Sikorsky during the first, Russian, period of his life, Petr A. Obraztsov draws attention to the emergence of his hero's interest in creation of helicopters at the dawn of his professional career. The author quite reasonably explains Sikorsky's transition to creation of aircraft, which happened soon after, with relative failures in the field of helicopter design. The main achievements of Igor I. Sikorsky before emigration were, as the author rightly notes, creation at the Russian-Baltic Carriage Works (RBCW) of heavy multi-engine planes called Russian Knight and Ilya Muromets. These aircraft turned out to be unique even at the world level. The first of them was made in a single copy and was distinguished by a high level of



comfort, unusual for that time. It set a record for flight duration. Emperor Nicholas II, who paid tribute to this aircraft, awarded Sikorsky with a gold watch. Ilya Muromets biplane, designed in 1913 based on Russian Knight, became the world's first passenger aircraft, and was produced in series. During the World War I, it was re-profiled and used as a combat aircraft. At the end of 1914, a whole squadron of Muromets bombers was created.

The author of the book highlighted the foreign period of Igor I. Sikorsky's life in no less detail. Political views forced the aircraft designer to emigrate soon after the Bolsheviks came to power, and his whole further life passed outside Russia (first in France, and then – for more than 50 years – in the USA). Petr A. Obraztsov succeeded in describing in detail the greatest achievements of his hero during the American period of his life. Relying on the support of other Russian emigrants, Igor I. Sikorsky founded the Sikorsky Aero Engineering Corporation. The author showed that during the 1920s and 1930s Igor I. Sikorsky created seaplanes, outstanding in flight and technical feature, but nevertheless stopped the development of such aircraft.

Petr A. Obraztsov explained Igor I. Sikorsky's transition to helicopters in the late 1930s both by the appearance on the market of powerful competitors who created more efficient aircraft (first in Holland and Germany, and then in the USA), and by the sagacity of Igor I. Sikorsky. The latter, soberly assessing the international situation of that time, could not help but understand how high the chances of the USA entering a major war were. The use of helicopters at the front would be quite promising since these aircraft were to become an



important means of rescuing the wounded from the battlefield. The arguments given by Igor I. Sikorsky convinced the management of the «parent» company, and Igor I. Sikorsky set foot on the path already partly familiar to him from the pre-revolutionary period. He was engaged in creation of helicopters for a long 30 years, starting with the VS-300 and ending with the S-67 Blackhawk.

Analysing various types of helicopters of Igor I. Sikorsky, the author of the book skilfully shows their specifics, points to their widespread use not only at the battlefield (and they were used with great success in World War II, the Korean and Vietnam wars), but also in civilian life.

The author rightly calls the latter's tendency to create single-rotor helicopters as a feature of the creative style of Sikorsky the designer. He retained his adherence to it over the course of thirty long years in the New World (although in his youth he paid tribute to coaxial helicopters).

Depicting the ups and downs of Igor I. Sikorsky, Petr A. Obratzov creates a relief image of his main character, reveals important features of his personality, which largely ensured the outstanding professional success of the designer. The author convincingly shows that Sikorsky was inherent in the ability not to give up in case of temporary failures, a tendency to take risks and a striving for self-improvement that runs like a keynote throughout his long life.

The strong point of the book, of course, is the author's serious attitude to the conceptual apparatus. Because the books of «The life of remarkable people» series are addressed to a wide range of readers, Petr A. Obratzov clearly explains the meaning of those aviation terms that are used in the book (swashplate, gyroplane, rotorcraft, tiltrotor, etc.).

Separately, I would like to note the polemical fervour characteristic of Petr A. Obratzov, which enlivens the text of the book. On the pages of the biography of Igor I. Sikorsky, we find the author's desire to debunk various myths associated with the name of his hero. For example, he quite reasonably claims that, despite his many merits, Igor I. Sikorsky was still not the creator of the helicopter as a type of aircraft. He also points out the fallacy of the widespread point of view,

according to which helicopters of the Sikorsky company were shown in the F. F. Coppola's «Apocalypse Now» film.

Noteworthy is such a feature of the author's style as the tendency to deviate from the main theme of a particular chapter. At the same time, the digressions are quite justified and contribute to deepening of the readers' understanding of the problems under consideration.

The author could not ignore another important aspect of the creative activity of the indefatigable Igor I. Sikorsky: his works on philosophy and theology. But we must admit that in this case the author's tone changes: Petr A. Obratzov speaks out about the designer's books written on «humanitarian» topics, quite sceptically. Thus, the analysis of the prayer «Our Father» conducted by Sikorsky is subjected to criticism (it was made by Igor I. Sikorsky, as the author notes, not based on the original text).

Some (albeit minor) shortcomings of the book should also be noted. Sometimes Petr A. Obratzov allows himself to cite not completely verified information. For example, talking about the history of creation of aircraft heavier than air, the author calls the Russian designer of 20th century A. F. Mozhaisky Major General (while he was Rear Admiral). The reader can also come across a contradictory description of the Russian Knight aircraft (on p. 91 it was called a passenger aircraft, and earlier – an aircraft intended for long-range strategic reconnaissance). But these shortcomings do not detract from the author's contribution to the study of the life and work of Igor I. Sikorsky.

It must be admitted that an interesting, vivid biography of Igor I. Sikorsky appeared thanks to the pen of Petr A. Obratzov, allowing readers to trace his entire path, filled to the last days with inspired creative work and an unquenchable interest in various problems of technology and philosophy issues.

The book can be useful to scientists and professors who teach courses on the history of transport, to students of secondary profiled and higher educational institutions, as well as to all readers who are interested in the history of science and technology. ●

Information about the author:

Sudakov, Mikhail A., Ph.D. (History), Associate Professor at the Department of Humanities and Socio-Economic Sciences of Ulyanovsk Civil Aviation Institute, Ulyanovsk, Russia, dzintars80@mail.ru.

Article received 26.08.2021, approved 07.09.2021, accepted 10.09.2021.