

ALL RUSSIA

Encyclopedia from A to Z



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THE ELECTRONIC MULTIMEDIA ENCYCLOPEDIA

Georgy Konstantinovich
ZHUKOV



Georgy Konstantinovich ZHUKOV

In the very center of Moscow, next to Red Square, stands a monument to a distinguished Russian general who has been preserved in people's memory as the great Marshal of Victory: Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov. There is some higher justice in the fact that the monument has been erected here in the capital, which he did not surrender to the enemy in 1941 and in which on June 24, 1945 he inspected the legendary Victory parade. It is known that in the final days of the war, right before the ultimate collapse, Hitler, in despair, said this memorable phrase, «If only I had a single general like Zhukov, the whole world would already be lying at my feet».

Zhukov's character had many facets: he could be harsh and unjust in his decisions and assessments, yet at the same time he would never hide behind other people's backs; nor was he afraid to tell the truth to the man who held in awe so many people. And Stalin, the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, very often, against his will, was forced to agree with him and accept the decisions on which Zhukov insisted. Let us try and browse through several pages in the life of this extraordinary personality, let us try and imagine what Zhukov felt in moments of his greatest victories and precipitous downfalls.

The nineteen sixties. Georgy Zhukov's memoirs, «Reminiscences and reflections», came off the press. Here are several pages from this book.

ZHUKOV. *Well, I guess I should also write about my roots. I came into this world from a very common stock on December 1, 1896. The house in the village of Strelkovka, Kaluga Guberniya, where I was born, stood plumb in the middle of the village. It was very old, with one corner deeply sunk in the ground, and the walls and roof grown over with moss and grass. The house had a single room with two windows. My father and mother did not know who and when had built it. Old people said that a childless widow, Annushka Zhukova, had lived in it at one time or another. Feeling very lonely, she took a two year-old boy from an orphanage – who later became my father... My father was an ordinary cobbler, who surely had nothing in common with the Arian race. I always loved him a lot, and he used to spoil me, too. But there were also occasions when he meted out tough punishment. As for physical strength, I inherited it from my mother. She could easily lift five-pood (80-kilogram) sacks of grain off the ground and carry them over long distances. Looking back at those times I'd say, we were rather poor. We would be happy when our parents could bring us each a ring-shaped roll or gingerbread from Maloyaroslavets. And when we managed to save a little money for a pie with some filling for Christmas or Easter, then we were simply overjoyed! So my needy childhood was a springboard which launched me on the way to the Bolshevik party...*

One of the rare pleasures Georgy had as a child was the parochial school, where he studied willingly and diligently.



Ustinya Artemyevna
Zhukova. Photograph of the '30s

Afterwards, he was sent to work in a furriers shop, but shortly after the First World War broke out Georgy Zhukov was drafted in August 1915, and from that time army service became the essence of his life. He was twice awarded the St. George cross, and after the February 1917 revolution he headed the regiment committee. From 1918, Zhukov was in the Red Army, fighting the White Army and suppressing the revolt in Tambov province. In the 1920s-30s, he commanded a cavalry squadron, and later a regiment. His military career was swift and successful, yet his military talents fully surfaced in the campaign that brought about a crushing defeat of Japanese samurai on the Khalkhin Gol River.

It was then that Georgy Zhukov was awarded the Order of Red Star. «The name of the distinguished commander, Hero of the Soviet Union, corps commander Zhukov evokes love and admiration. A brilliant organizer, a man of indomitable will and immeasurable courage, he managed to rally together people entrusted by the government with combat missions» — this is what his citation said.

ZHUKOV. *Those were hard times, for any miscalculation, any error, and even any absurd accusation could drastically change the fate of anyone. I repeat, anyone! So many intelligent people perished in those years... I was also accused of all kinds of nonsense. This is why, when the Khalkhin Gol operation was over, I felt truly highly satisfied. Not only because I successfully executed the operation which I am proud of, even now, but also because my actions sort of vindicated me, sort of rebuffed all false accusations and informers' secret reports that had piled up over previous years, some of which I was aware of, others I could only guess at. I was happy about everything — our success, my new military rank, my getting the Title of Hero of the Soviet Union. All of this confirmed that I had done what I had been expected to, whereas all previous charges against me turned out to be obvious lies!*

However, the life of Georgy Zhukov, after this success and well-deserved fame, did not become any easier. The years of trial — the Second World War was looming ahead, Hitler was moving his troops across Europe, and soon the war was inexorably coming closer to the borders of the Soviet Union, yet Stalin refused to believe it was inevitable. Zhukov and other commanders were bluntly accused of wishing to provoke an armed conflict with the Third Reich, seeking more fame, trying to satisfy their martial ambitions. Nevertheless, the inevitable thing happened. The rank shortsightedness brought innumerable sufferings to peoples of our land. This is what Georgy Zhukov recalls of that time.

ZHUKOV. *Stalin knew a lot more than the army command. Yet even from what military intelligence reported to him he could have seen the obviously growing threat of war, but he didn't, and so, overestimating his capacities, he kept following a false scent. They say that in the first week of the war Stalin was allegedly so confused that he was not even able to make a radio address and devolved this task to Molotov. This view is, however, not true to reality. Of course, Stalin was nonplussed in the initial hours, but he soon was his old self again and worked with great energy — showing, maybe, excessive nervousity, which quite often*



Ugodsky zavod, currently village Zhukovo



Subaltern officer Georgy Zhukov Georgy Zhukov. 1916



Georgy Zhukov, commander of the 39th Cavalry Regiment. 1924



With flying colors



Commander of the Western Front, Army General Georgy Zhukov

hampered our productive work. I once was late for a meeting. On entering, I said, «Comrade Stalin, I am an hour late... «An hour and five minutes» — answered Stalin — «Take a seat and, if you are hungry, have something. You did it well with the Yel'nia salient. I admit you were right then. We here have once again discussed the situation with Leningrad. The enemy has captured Schlisselburg, and on September 8 bombed out the Badayev food stores. Large food stocks are lost. We can no longer reach Leningrad by land. People are in a grave situation there. The Finnish troops are advancing from the north in the Karelian Isthmus, while German fascist troops of the «Nord» army group, reinforced by the 4th tank group, are rushing towards the city from the south. And what is your view, Comrade Zhukov, of the situation in the Moscow direction?»

I answered at once. Germans currently need to substantially beef up their army units. According to information we obtained from POWs from the «Center» army group, the enemy's losses are very heavy. In some units, they reach 50%. Besides, without rounding out the Leningrad operation and joining Finnish troops, Germans would hardly launch an offensive in the direction of Moscow. Yet this is surely my personal view. The Hitlerite command may reckon and reason differently. At any rate, we need to be constantly prepared to offer stiff resistance in the direction of Moscow. «And how did the 24th army units fight?» — another question followed. They fought well, Comrade Stalin. Especially the 100th, 127th, 153rd and 161st rifle divisions. I learned from our conversation that I was to fly to Leningrad and take over command of the front and Baltic fleet from Voroshilov — for this, I would need to fly across the front line or the Lake Ladoga, which was controlled by German aviation.

Risking his life, Zhukov managed to get through to Leningrad. Soon after that, the enemy was stopped on the outskirts of the city. And wherever Zhukov went afterwards, the military genius of victory invariably followed him - in the environs of Moscow and Stalingrad, in the Oryol-Kursk salient, on the Dnieper, and finally in Berlin. Commander of the First Ukrainian and First Byelorussian fronts, Three times Hero of the Soviet Union, holder of the Order of Victory and other

highest national awards, deputy Supreme Commander-in-Chief Marshal Georgy Zhukov on May 8, 1945 accepted the capitulation of fascist Germany in Berlin.

The year 1945. A publication in US magazine «Life», titled «Zhukov». «Bypassing pockets of resistance and leaving them for the rear-based units to suppress, Zhukov, in the first 18 days of his campaign, rushed his tank vanguard units and motorized infantry over more than 300 miles across swampy and wooded terrain — a record high advance speed that was way faster than the German offensive in 1941». And Nazi General Mellentin wrote after the war, «It is impossible to describe all that happened between the Vistula and Oder in the first months of 1945. Europe had not seen anything like this since the fall of the Roman Empire».

Of course, our allies also had a high opinion of the Marshal's military art. Georgy Zhukov often met with both Montgomery and Churchill. But it was probably Eisenhower with whom Zhukov had the closest relationships.

From reminiscences of General Eisenhower, head of the Allied Expedition Force, about a meeting with Marshal Zhukov: «I am happy, Marshal, that you accepted my invitation to visit my headquarters in Frankfurt, and I am glad that you agreed to stay here. I would like to propose a toast to your valiant soldiers, together with whom we finished off the beast in its den. I believe that now you and me, like old soldiers, will find common language and will work as friends».

There was a lot of gossip about these friendly relations in those times. But it was not the only reason for the subsequent disfavour. Politburo members Malenkov, Molotov and Beriya accused Zhukov of conceit, behavior unbefitting a Party member, and voiced a view that the Marshal is a dangerous person with pronounced Bonapartist aspirations. Zhukov was demoted from the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Army, removed from the Party's Central Committee and sent away to the Odessa military district, and after that, to the Urals. Strangely, it was the service in the Urals that brought him happiness, for it was there that Georgy Konstantinovich met his last wife, Galina. Zhukov loved her for her modesty, but especially for her beautiful warm green eyes...

In 1969, Georgy Zhukov published his memoirs, «Reminiscences and reflections». Its success was truly extraordinary. It was next to impossible to get the book. In the meantime, the Marshal's health was declining. For even in the post-war period his life remained hectic and unpredictable. Stalin, in the final years of his life, once again regarded him with favour and, it is said, even wanted to make him Defense Minister. Later, after Stalin's death, there was the sensational arrest of universally hated Beriya, in which Zhukov was directly involved; the long-awaited appointment as



Portrait of Marshal Georgy Zhukov. Pavel Korin

Defense Minister; the fourth Gold Star of Hero of the Soviet Union; the courageous saving of Khrushchev from imminent dismissal and, finally, his own dismissal, which he regarded as a personal tragedy. For as Defense Minister he probably did more to strengthen our country's defense potential than anyone else in that post. It was always a characteristic feature of Zhukov that he was able to see far ahead. As in his time he realized the critical importance of tank and motorized formations for winning the war, so, later on, he realized the role of the arm of the fighting forces which we now call military space forces. Zhukov was actively involved in setting up a space launch complex that is currently known as Plesetsk. He was one of the founders of the Baikonur cosmodrome, which successfully sends into space not only military missiles but also spaceships that blaze the way to stars for mankind. The untimely death of his beloved wife Galina in 1973 dealt a shattering blow to Zhukov's health. On that day, Georgy Zhukov said only one phrase, «This is something I cannot survive». Medics did their best to save his life. During a council of physicians, the famous French neuropathologist Guillaud dropped on one knee before Zhukov, saying, «I am honoured to be acquainted with you, and I am happy to have the privilege to see the man who saved Europe from Nazism». But all medics' efforts were to no avail, and on June 18, 1974 the heart of the Marshal of Victory stopped beating. Even today the personality of Georgy Zhukov arouses heated controversy. Some people recall his harshness, even rudeness and intolerance, while others refer to his staunchness, courage, loyalty and dedication. For us, one thing is important — that Georgy Zhukov will forever remain in people's memory as the Great Marshal of Victory. And no one will ever be able to take this title away from him!



One of the last photographs