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## An Autobiographical Pact: The Memoirs of Marshal Georgy Zhukov

### ABSTRACT

The “autobiographical pact” is what Philippe Lejeune calls the commitment made by autobiographers and memoirists to speak truthfully about themselves. In his memoirs Marshal Georgy Zhukov (1896–1974) committed to tell the truth about his life and the great events in which he took part and went to inordinate lengths to persuade his readers they could trust what he wrote. This article shows that Zhukov’s autobiographical pact was severely compromised by the process of censorship undergone by the memoirs prior to publication. In post-Soviet times the memoirs were reissued in editions that restored many cuts and changes imposed by the censors. While this restored Zhukov’s original autobiographical pact with his readers it also accentuated the distortions resulting from his striving to set the record straight in his favour. The article also locates Zhukov’s memoirs in the Soviet autobiographising tradition explored by Jochen Hellbeck and others. Like all officially published memoirs Zhukov’s story was intended to celebrate the Soviet project. As a committed communist soldier Zhukov was willing to contribute to this endeavour but not at the expense of his individuality or of the truth as he saw it. As Roy Pascal argued, while the truth in memoirs and autobiography is often elusive, it is not unfathomable.

Keywords: *Zhukov, Soviet memoirs, autobiographical pact, Philippe Lejeune, Jochen Hellbeck, Roy Pascal*

### Introduction: The Autobiographical Pact

In his classic study of autobiography Roy Pascal remarked that while the truth contained in autobiographies is often elusive “not only does the reader expect truth from autobiography, but autobiographers themselves all make more or less successful efforts to get at the truth, to stick to it, or at least try to persuade us they are doing so.”<sup>1</sup>

1 Roy Pascal: *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, Cambridge, Mass. 1960, p. 83.

Philippe Lejeune made a similar, much-discussed point when he argued that what defines autobiography is not just its form (typically narrative) and its content (a self-centred life-story) but a commitment by the author to speak of himself or herself truthfully. This commitment he called “the autobiographical pact” – a contract with the readers that implies the possibility of verification, at least to a significant degree.<sup>2</sup> Taking up this latter theme John Paul Eakin has argued that while autobiographies are, like literary works, aesthetic constructs, they refer to the real world, to things and situations that have supposedly happened. It is the extra-textual referentiality of autobiography that differentiates it from fiction and makes verification possible, if not unproblematic. It is this real-world dimension that makes autobiography so attractive to readers.

The existence of the autobiographical pact does not guarantee that an autobiography will not contain lies, evasions or distortions. All but the most naïve of readers appreciate that an autobiography is a partisan point of view composed at a particular time and is based on memories that may be inaccurate or overly retrospective. Most readers of autobiography also read biographies, where they can find abundant evidence that the truth-claims of autobiographers do not always correspond to reality. Indeed, many biographies are structured by their authors’ engagement with the autobiographies or memoirs of their subjects, usually in the form of an evaluation of their truth-content. Equally, readers understand that an autobiography is a story of a life, a text which selects and relates details and aspects of a manifold reality, and is not to be confused with life itself, which is infinitely more complicated and mundane. As Tony Blowers has put it the autobiographical pact is a textual contract with readers that “provides a means of having our cake (there is a historical reality) and eating it (a text is pure representation).”<sup>3</sup>

The idea of an autobiographical pact works best in liberal, western contexts where autobiographers are the most free to say what they want. In more authoritarian contexts autobiographers may be constrained by formal processes of censorship and will invariably be under more pressure than their western counterparts to conform to regime ideas, attitudes and propaganda. Such was the case in the Soviet Union, a highly authoritarian regime that exercised strict public control over the utterances of its citizens. Yet the Soviet authorities urged its citizens to engage in various forms of autobiographical writing. As Jochen Hellbeck has pointed out, this policy continued a 19th century Russian literary tradition in which members of the intelligentsia wrote diaries, memoirs and

2 Philippe Lejeune: *From Autobiography to Life-Writing, From Academia to Association: A Scholar’s Story*, Plenary Lecture, 58th Annual Kentucky Foreign Language Conference, April 2005, at: <http://www.autopacte.org/From%20Academy%20to%20Association.html> (accessed on 13 June 2014); Philippe Lejeune: ‘The Genetic Study of Autobiographical Texts’, in: *Biography* 14:1 (1991), pp. 1–11.

3 On Eakin and Blowers: Verena Gappmaier: *Narrative and the Self in British Author-Autobiography*, Vienna 2009, pp. 13–15, at: <http://othes.univie.ac.at/4082/> (accessed on 13 June 2014).

autobiographies that linked their fate as individuals to broader processes of social and historical transformation. The Soviet authorities encouraged all their citizens, not just the intelligentsia, to write the same kind of stories about themselves but strove to ensure that individuals identified their unfolding life-histories with the communist project, which involved the transformation of human nature as well as social structures. Autobiographising functioned as a form of consciousness-raising through which the authors changed themselves by actively and creatively integrating themselves into the Soviet party-state and its projects.

The drawback of this policy was that it encouraged individualism. While Soviet citizens did internalise and re-express societal norms through their autobiographies each did so in an individual way. Individuals struggled to express the truth about themselves and their society, and the truth as they saw it did not always conform to the preferred version of the authorities. Neither could the authorities control reader reception of autobiographies. Like their counterparts in the west, Soviet consumers of autobiography expected truth, not just propaganda. The autobiographical pact prevailed.<sup>4</sup>

The subject of this article is the autobiographical pact embodied in the memoirs of Marshal Georgy Zhukov (1896–1974). In his memoirs Zhukov committed to tell the truth about his life and the great events in which he took part and went to inordinate lengths to persuade his readers they could trust what he wrote. While the tone of the memoirs is sometimes partisan and opinionated, for the most part Zhukov affected a tone of lofty objectivity. His memoirs are full of facts, and of evidence demonstrating that the claims he makes are true. When he criticises other people it is usually more in sorrow than anger and not based on personal malice, or so he would have us believe. He displays a prodigious memory in recalling the details of conversations that had taken place decades before. Sounding more like a historian than a memoirist, Zhukov is adamant that past events and actions should be judged in the context of their time. While he is not immodest about his own achievements as a military commander, he is generous in his praise of others.

Zhukov's autobiographical pact with his readers was complicated by the fact that before publication his memoirs were subject to an extensive process of censorship. There was a hidden autobiographical pact with the communist authorities under the terms of which Zhukov was pressured to tell the truth as they saw and wanted it to be told.

When uncensored versions of Zhukov's memoirs were published after the Soviet collapse, it restored his original autobiographical pact with his readers – the one he entered

4 Jochen Hellbeck: *Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi (1931–1939)*, in: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 44:3 (1996); pp. 344–373; Jochen Hellbeck: *Working, Struggling, Becoming: Stalin-Era Autobiographical Texts*, in: *Russian Review* 60:3 (2001), pp. 340–359; Jochen Hellbeck: *The Diary Between Literature and History*, in: *Russian Review* 63:4 (2004), pp. 621–629.

into when he composed his manuscript – and threw light on the nature of his opaque pact with the authorities. Documentation on the process of censorship also came to light, as did additional, unpublished and draft memoirs by Zhukov. These new sources make possible a detailed study of the genesis of Zhukov's memoirs as they were published in Soviet times. It comes as no surprise to learn that changes to his original manuscript as a result of censorship meant that Zhukov's autobiographical pact with his readers was deeply compromised. More surprising is that the censorship was not all bad and worked in favour of the readers in some respects, reinforcing in a positive way Zhukov's autobiographical pact to tell the truth.

Zhukov was a member of the Soviet military and political elite, a true believer who internalised the regime's propaganda, concepts and discourse and made them his own. But the memoirs remained distinctively Zhukov's, a text dominated by his voice, personality and version of events, thus underlining Hellbeck's point that no matter how much Soviet autobiographers tried to assimilate themselves into the communist system they kept rubbing up against it. Such tensions were intrinsic to the process of individuals striving to creatively integrate themselves into the system on their own terms.

My article begins with an overview of Zhukov's life and career.<sup>5</sup> It then considers the circumstances in which he wrote his memoirs and the ensuing process of censorship. It concludes with a comparison between the uncensored and censored versions of the memoirs and an evaluation of what was lost and then retrieved in post-Soviet times.

## Zhukov: A Soldier's Life

Conscripted into the Tsarist cavalry during the First World War, after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution Zhukov joined the Red Army and the communist party and fought in the Russian civil war. Selected for officer training, he remained a soldier after the civil war and began a long climb through the ranks of the interwar Red Army. By the end of the 1920s he was a Brigade commander and in the 1930s his career prospects were greatly enhanced by the massive Soviet rearmament programme and by Stalin's purge of the higher ranks of the Red Army, both of which created vacancies for talented and dedicated officers like Zhukov. By 1938 he had risen to the rank of Deputy Commander of the Belorussian Military District, in charge of training the district's troops.

In 1939 Zhukov was posted to the Far East where he commanded Soviet forces at Khalkhin-Gol on the Mongolian-Manchurian border. In a large-scale border battle with Japan's Kwantung Army in August 1939, Zhukov inflicted a bloody defeat on the Japanese, one that helped persuade them to expand southwards into South Asia rather than northwards in the Soviet direction, a reorientation that led to the fateful decision to attack Pearl Harbour in December 1941.

5 Based on Geoffrey Roberts: *Stalin's General: The Life of Georgy Zhukov*, New York 2012.

Zhukov missed the Soviet-Finnish war of 1939–1940 but was recalled from the Far East in May 1940 and given command of the Kiev Special Military District – the Red Army’s largest and on the frontline of the coming war with Nazi Germany. This was the platform for Zhukov’s appointment as Chief of the General Staff in February 1941. Zhukov was not renowned as a staff officer – he much preferred front-line operational command – but he was offensive-minded and Stalin wanted someone he could rely on to counterattack when the Germans invaded.

When the Germans attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941 Zhukov ordered a series of counter-offensives but these actions exposed Soviet troops to encirclement and compounded the disaster of an invasion that inflicted on the Red Army one of the greatest defeats of any army in history. By the end of 1941 the Red Army had lost four million soldiers and had been pushed back to the gates of Leningrad and Moscow.

Zhukov stepped aside as Chief of the General Staff at the end of July 1941 and was given command of a reserve army of about 50 divisions, tasked to mount a major counter-offensive in the Smolensk region. At Yel’nya in August 1941 Zhukov launched the Red Army’s first successful large-scale counter-offensive against the Germans, recapturing a big tract of territory and blocking Hitler’s path to Moscow – at least for a while.

Zhukov’s next assignment was to save Leningrad from imminent capture by the Germans in September 1941. With that city’s defences bolstered, Zhukov was recalled to defend Moscow from a German attack that succeeded in advancing to within a few miles of the Soviet capital. In December Zhukov launched a counter-offensive in front of Moscow driving the Germans back 100 miles and ending Hitler’s dream of conquering the Soviet Union in a single *Blitzkrieg* campaign.

In summer 1942 Hitler tried again to inflict a devastating defeat on the USSR by seizing the Soviet oilfields at Baku on the other side of the Caucasus. It was this southern campaign that led to the siege at Stalingrad later that year. On the eve of the battle for Stalingrad, Stalin appointed Zhukov his Deputy Supreme Commander. Zhukov’s mission was to save Stalingrad and to prepare counter-actions to halt and then roll back the German southern campaign.

During three months of ferocious fighting in and around Stalingrad the Red Army barely retained a foothold in the city but in so doing drained German human and material resources. In November 1942 Zhukov unleashed a multi-pronged counter-offensive at Stalingrad. Operation Uranus destroyed the Hungarian, Italian and Romanian armies defending the Germans’ flanks, encircled 300,000 German troops in Stalingrad and threatened to cut off *Wehrmacht* forces heading south to Baku. When the battle was over the Germans and their Axis allies had lost 50 divisions and suffered a million and half casualties. The Germans were able to withdraw their other troops from the south but, by early 1943, were back where they started when they had launched their war for oil in June 1942.

Zhukov also played a central role in the next great battle of the Soviet-German war – at Kursk in July 1943 when hundreds of German and Soviet tanks clashed in open war-

fare. The outcome was another German defeat and the loss of Hitler's *Panzer* reserves. Kursk was the last significant German offensive of the war. Thereafter it was retreat all the way back to Berlin.

Zhukov was in the forefront of the Soviet strategic offensive of 1943–1945. In November 1943 he rode into Kiev with the Soviet forces that had just re-captured the Ukrainian capital. A few months later Zhukov supervised Operation Bagration – the campaign to liberate Belorussia from Nazi occupation. Bagration took the Red Army into Poland and to the outskirts of Warsaw. In August 1944 Zhukov drafted plans to capture the Polish capital but, exhausted by its advance and with over-stretched supply lines, the Red Army was incapable of achieving this goal. However, Zhukov did capture Warsaw in January 1945 after the Soviets launched an operation that advanced the Red Army from the Vistula to the Oder – the two great rivers bisecting eastern Poland and eastern Germany respectively.

By this time Zhukov was in charge of the 1st Belorussian Front, selected by Stalin to take Berlin. Zhukov hoped to seize the German capital in February 1945 but was forced to divert forces to deal with enemy dangers on his northern flank. The advance on Berlin resumed in April and it was Zhukov's troops who led the triumphant capture of Hitler's last redoubt, albeit at the cost of 80,000 Soviet soldiers' lives. It was Zhukov who formally accepted Germany's unconditional surrender on the Soviet behalf on 9 May 1945.

Zhukov's fame had been growing since the battle of Moscow and his renown was reinforced by newsreel of the victory parade in Red Square in June 1945 at which he took the salute astride a magnificent white horse. Zhukov delivered the victory speech and then stood alongside Stalin as 200 captured Nazi banners were piled against the Kremlin wall, just as Marshal Kutuzov's soldiers had thrown French standards at the feet of Tsar Alexander I after they defeated Napoleon in 1812.

Zhukov had no idea that a year later he would be sacked as commander-in-chief of Soviet ground forces and dispatched to a provincial military command in Odessa. The charges against him were that he was arrogant, disrespectful of his comrades – especially Stalin – and claimed too much credit for wartime victories. His situation went from bad to worse when he was expelled from the communist party Central Committee in 1947. Zhukov was then accused of looting while serving as commander of the Soviet occupation forces in Germany immediately after the war. In 1948 he was further demoted to the command of the Urals Military District in Sverdlovsk. Many of his associates were arrested and imprisoned and arrest seemed to loom for Zhukov, too. "In 1947 I feared arrest every day", he later recalled, "and I had a bag ready with my underwear in it."<sup>6</sup>

Fortunately for Zhukov, Stalin's ire against him was limited and in the late 1940s and early 1950s he was gradually rehabilitated, being re-admitted to the Central Committee in 1952. After Stalin's death Zhukov was brought back to Moscow and appointed

6 A. Mirkina: *Vtoraya Pobeda Marshala Zhukova*, Moscow 2000, p. 24.

Deputy Minister of Defence. An early assignment was the arrest of Lavrenty Beria, the Soviet security chief, accused of plotting to seize supreme power. In 1955 Zhukov became Defence Minister and attended the Geneva Summit of July 1955, where he conversed with President Eisenhower, another general turned politician who had worked with him in Germany after the war.

In June 1957 Zhukov played a starring role in resisting an attempt by Vyacheslav Molotov, the former foreign minister, to oust from power Nikita Khrushchev, Stalin's successor as the leader of the party. Without Zhukov's support Khrushchev would in all likelihood have fallen from power. Ironically, Zhukov's bravura performance against Molotov transformed him in Khrushchev's eyes, into a political threat, even though Zhukov had no such ambitions. In October 1957 Khrushchev accused him of undermining the role of the communist party in the armed forces and on this pretext he was sacked as Minister of Defence and forced to retire from the armed forces, thus bringing to an end his military as well as his political career.

## Zhukov the Memoirist

In retirement Zhukov worked on his memoirs. During his period of disgrace under Stalin, Zhukov's name had all but disappeared from historical accounts of the Great Patriotic War. The same process happened under Khrushchev but as well as being omitted or sidelined in official narratives Zhukov also came under sharp and public critical attack.

The first salvo was fired by a wartime rival, Marshal Ivan S. Konev, whose 1st Ukrainian Front had raced Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front to take Berlin in 1945. In an article in *Pravda* in November 1957 published after the Central Committee plenum that deposed Zhukov as Minister of Defence, Konev attacked various aspects of Zhukov's war record. More criticism followed in other publications. Zhukov was accused, as he had been in Stalin's time, of claiming too much credit for wartime victories. He was faulted for failing to prepare adequately for the German invasion in June 1941. The finger of blame was pointed in his direction for defeats such as the loss of Kiev in September 1941 and the disastrous battle of Kharkov in May 1942. He was accused of mishandling the battle of Berlin and of failing to capture the German capital when he had a chance to do so in February 1945. Military memoirists also mocked his command style, portraying him as an ineffectual bully and martinet.<sup>7</sup>

Zhukov wrote his memoirs to reply to these criticisms and to set the record straight as he saw it. Not surprisingly, he was inclined to gloss over mistakes, reluctant to admit fault and wary of providing his critics with any ammunition.

7 For some examples see Seweryn Bialer (ed.): *Stalin and His Generals: Soviet Military Memoirs of World War II*, London 1969.

While Khrushchev remained in power there was no chance that Zhukov's memoirs would be published. But when Khrushchev was deposed as party leader in 1964 Zhukov returned to public life and was gradually rehabilitated as a significant military figure. Soviet books and journals began to publish his accounts of the war's great battles – Moscow, Stalingrad, Kursk and Berlin – articles based on his memoirs. In 1965 Anna Mirkina, an editor at the publishing arm of the Novosti Soviet press agency (APN) approached Zhukov about publication of his memoirs. In August 1965 a contract was signed and by autumn 1966 Zhukov had delivered a 1,430-page typed manuscript.<sup>8</sup>

One of Zhukov's authorial role models was Winston Churchill who had published a multi-volume memoir-history of the Second World War in the late 1940s and early 1950s, which Zhukov read in a restricted-circulation Russian translation. As a former Prime Minister, Churchill was allowed privileged access to British archives. He and his team of researchers used this access to great effect, publishing many long extracts from the archives in the memoirs, adding greatly to their authority and authenticity as well as making them an indispensable source for historians in the absence of direct archival access. Unlike Churchill Zhukov worked mostly on his own but he was given special access to the archives of the Soviet military and managed to study some 1500 wartime documents. He used these documents to underpin his personal narrative of the strategic history of the Great Patriotic War, a story in which he played a central role. As in Churchill's case Zhukov's detailed citation of these archival sources made his memoirs an important reference work to historians who at this time did not have any direct access to Soviet military archives.

Another highly effective technique of Zhukov's was to make extensive use of inverted commas to report verbatim conversations he supposedly had with various people, including Stalin. This technique in memoirs and autobiography is not uncommon and it is plain that Zhukov could not possibly remember in such detail what had been said decades before. The point was to establish that Zhukov had a good and reliable memory of the conversations he recalled and of their essential meaning. It also served as a dramatic device to bring his memoirs to life and flesh out their characters.

## The Process of Censorship

All Soviet war memoirs had to be passed by the censors and Zhukov's were no exception, his status as a hero-general notwithstanding. The official vetting and editing proved to be a long, drawn out process, much to Zhukov's frustration who wanted the memoirs to be published as soon as possible so that malicious stories about him dating from the Khrushchev era could be corrected. Eventually, in April 1968, a group headed by Marshal Grechko, the Minister of Defence, reported to the party leadership on the memoirs.

8 A. Mirkina: *Vtoraya Pobeda Marshala Zhukova*, *passim*.

The group's appraisal was generally positive but critical of Zhukov's tendency to inflate his own role in the war and his lack of attention to the collective contribution of the party. The report focused in particular on Zhukov's treatment of the immediate prewar period, arguing that he had undervalued the significance of the party's preparations for war. One specific point was that Zhukov was deemed to attribute too much importance to the negative impact of the prewar purges of the Red Army. The group reported, too, that the importance of Stalin's role was exaggerated by Zhukov, to the detriment of the contribution of the State Defence Committee, the General Staff and Front commanders. Grechko concluded that the memoirs should be published but only after further editing and amendments.<sup>9</sup>

The memoirs were then handed over to a specialist editorial group headed by the historian G.A. Deborin. The Deborin group became, in effect, the censorship team, working on the required changes in consultation with Zhukov and with V.G. Komolov, a journalist employed by APN to mediate between author and editors. According to Komolov the editing was a fraught process and Zhukov bridled at many of the changes proposed. Nevertheless, the work proceeded quite quickly, even though Zhukov was in poor health. By summer 1968 an approved text for publication had been agreed by the Central Committee.<sup>10</sup>

The memoirs, dedicated by Zhukov "to the Soviet soldier" (*Sovetskomu Soldatu Posvyashchayu*), were published in April 1969 to great acclaim and huge sales. As far as the Soviet public was concerned, Zhukov had delivered his side of the autobiographical pact. In the years since millions of copies have been sold, not only in Russia and the Soviet Union but also in numerous translations. The first English edition was published in 1971.

After publication Zhukov received a large amount of correspondence from the Soviet public – about 10,000 letters in all – praising the book but also pointing out mistakes and suggestions for improvement. It was decided to prepare a revised edition incorporating corrections and adding new chapters on topics that interested readers: the siege of Leningrad, the Yel'nya battle, and the workings of Stavka – the headquarters of the Soviet High Command. To help Zhukov with the Stavka chapter the publishers drafted in the historian Evgeny Tsvetaev who had worked with General Shtemenko on his memoirs, the first volume of which had been published in 1968. Shtemenko was Chief of Operations during the war and his memoirs provided a detailed account of the workings of Stavka.<sup>11</sup> Tsvetaev wanted Zhukov to produce something similar but Zhukov insisted he was writing a memoir not a scientific tract. The resultant compromise was a chapter

9 Georgy Zhukov: Stenogramma Oktyabr'skogo (1957 g) Plenuma TsK KPSS i Drugie Dokumenty, Mezhdunarodnyi Fond "Demokratiya", Moscow 2001, part 6, doc. 14.

10 Ibid, docs. 16–17; Mirkina op.cit. pp. 53–55.

11 Shtemenko's memoirs were published in English as: S. M. Shtemenko: The Soviet General Staff at War: 1941–1945, 2 vols., Moscow 1970/1986.

combining elements of memoir with a general description of Stavka procedures. It was the only non-narrative chapter in the memoirs and was destined to become a key text for historians seeking to understand how the Soviet High Command operated during the war, especially Stalin's relations with his generals.<sup>12</sup>

Preparation of the revised edition began in 1973 but was complicated by the aftermath of the severe stroke that Zhukov had suffered in 1968 which left him paralysed on his left side. He recovered somewhat but his speech remained slurred and he could only walk with assistance. He also needed frequent treatments. On doctors' orders he was allowed to work only one hour a day. Then, after the death of his second wife in November 1973 after a prolonged battle with cancer, Zhukov's health deteriorated further. But he did manage to complete the revised edition, including writing a new preface. Zhukov died in June 1974, only a few weeks before his revised memoirs were published.

The revised edition of Zhukov's memoirs was republished in Russian several times in the 1970s and 1980s, and in English in 1985.<sup>13</sup> In 1990 a 10th, expanded Russian edition of the memoirs was published that incorporated a significant amount of new material from Zhukov's uncensored, original typescript. This material was supplied by Zhukov's youngest daughter, Maria, who had inherited part of his personal archive (other papers were taken away by the Soviet authorities). In 1992 an 11th edition of the memoirs included yet more material from Maria.<sup>14</sup> The 10th edition added 125 pages to previous editions while the 11th contained a further 35 pages.<sup>15</sup> Conveniently, these two editions italicised and made easily identifiable the material previously excluded.

## The Censored and Uncensored Memoirs Compared

The post-Soviet edition of Zhukov's memoirs is approximately 40,000 words longer than the Soviet era edition. The additional 40,000 words were cut from Zhukov's original manuscript during the process of vetting and censorship prior to the publication of the first and second Russian editions of the memoirs.<sup>16</sup> Of these cuts about a quarter were

- 12 E. Tsvetaev: *Poslednii Podvig G. K. Zhukova*, in: S. S. Smirnov et al. (eds.): *Marshal Zhukov: Kakim My Ego Pomnim*, Moscow 1988.
- 13 The 1985 English edition of Zhukov's memoirs are reprinted, together with new translations, in Geoffrey Roberts (ed.): *Marshal of Victory: The Autobiography of General Georgy Zhukov*, Barnsley 2014.
- 14 Georgy K. Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, 3 vols., 10th and 11th editions, Moscow 1990/1992. The 11th edition is the one referred to below.
- 15 O. Preston Chaney: *Zhukov*, revised edition, Norman 1996, p. 527.
- 16 The post-Soviet edition of the memoirs also incorporates a small amount of material from other manuscripts by Zhukov, that is, from sources other than the original typescript of his memoirs as first submitted to the publishers in 1966.

editorial – the deletion of excessive detail and repetitions. It is difficult to imagine Zhukov objecting to such cuts and their omission from the censored Soviet era editions was no great loss. Most of the deletions were politically motivated, however. The censors' aim was twofold. First, to make sure the memoirs did not contain too much material that was embarrassing to the Soviet regime and, second, to ensure Zhukov's memoirs were not overly colourful or idiosyncratic but conformed to the norms applied to all Soviet war memoirs. This meant an emphasis on collective rather than personal exploits; lauding the role of the communist party and the Soviet state; no signs of outright political dissent; and a narrative focus on the public not the private life of the memoirist.

In analyses of the difference between memoirs and autobiography a distinction is often made between the person-centred life narrative of autobiography and the situation-centred narrative of memoirs in which the writer is an observer as well as a participant in events. Autobiographies tell what happened to the subject, whereas memoirs show what happened more generally. It is a distinction that disintegrates in practice as life stories often consist of a hybrid of memoir and autobiography. Such is the case with Zhukov's *Reminiscences and Reflections* – in Russian *vospominaniya i ramyshleniya*). They contain much third person narration by Zhukov of the war and the history of the Soviet army, party and state. But the central subject of the story and the focus of attention throughout remain Zhukov and his personal views, experiences and relationships.

To restrain this personal thrust in the memoirs the team working with Zhukov secured a number of different types of cuts prior to publication. First, they reduced the number of Zhukov's criticisms of his fellow Soviet generals. Throughout the memoirs Zhukov explicitly or implicitly criticises those Soviet generals who had attacked him during the Khrushchev era. Quite a lot of this kind of material survived into the published Soviet edition of the memoirs but there was much that did not.

One target of Zhukov's was Konev. Zhukov and Konev, both strong personalities, rubbed each other up the wrong way. During the war a rivalry developed between them, manipulated by Stalin, most famously when he urged both men to be the first to drive their armies to Berlin. When Stalin demoted Zhukov in 1946 Konev, his deputy and successor as chief of the ground forces, gave his fellow Marshal only lukewarm support (which was about as much as could be expected in the circumstances). In 1957 Konev was Zhukov's deputy again and was in the vanguard of the Khrushchevite attack on his superior. These events do not feature in the memoirs, which conclude with Zhukov's return to Moscow from Berlin in early 1946. But Konev featured frequently in the war chapters of his memoirs. In relation to Konev Zhukov took the high moral high ground – criticising him but praising him too.

Zhukov's attitude to Marshal Kliment Voroshilov, a close crony of Stalin's who was People's Commissar for Defence in the 1930s, verged on the contemptuous in this passage deleted by the censors:

It is well-known that in military affairs he was weak. Apart from participation in the civil war he had no practical or theoretical basis in the sphere of military science and military art and depended on his closest aides to lead the defence commissariat and build the armed forces.<sup>17</sup>

Zhukov had a great deal of respect for Marshal Boris Shaposhnikov, the prewar Chief of the General Staff who took on the position again when Zhukov vacated the post in July 1941. But Zhukov was critical of Shaposhnikov's tendency to remain silent during arguments with Stalin (he made the same complaint about other Soviet generals, Rokossovsky, for example).

Zhukov was keen to correct the mistakes of other military memoirists, sometimes sharply so. In his account of the Kursk battle Zhukov noted a new method of artillery preparation, devised by a General P.S. Semyonov, for tanks and infantry to attack during the artillery barrage without waiting for its completion so as to catch the enemy by surprise. In a deleted passage Zhukov expressed his amazement that Marshal Nikolai Voronov, the Soviet artillery chief, had claimed credit for the new technique in front of Stalin – a claim repeated in Voronov's memoirs.<sup>18</sup>

Zhukov had a particular dislike of Marshal A.I. Yeremenko, who together with Khrushchev claimed the credit for the spectacular Stalingrad counter-offensive of November 1942. People did not like him, noted Zhukov in a censored sentence, because he was arrogant and an idolater.<sup>19</sup>

Neither was Zhukov impressed by General P.A. Rotmistrov's claim that at Kursk his 5th Tank Army played the decisive role in the defeat of the Germans' Army Group South's armoured forces. Zhukov pointed to all the fighting done by other units before Rotmistrov arrived to face a weakened German army.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Zhukov was critical of Marshal Vasily Chuikov's memoir of the battle of Stalingrad. Chuikov was in charge of the Red Army's successful defence of the city but Zhukov said he did not give enough credit to the support of the Soviet armies fighting on his flanks.<sup>21</sup>

Behind Zhukov's criticism of Chuikov was a clash between the two men about the battle for Berlin in 1945. Chuikov, one of the 1st Belorussian's Army commanders, claimed that Zhukov wanted to storm Berlin in February 1945 and could have successfully done so but he was overruled by Stalin. Importantly, Zhukov did not demur when Stalin overruled him and Chuikov wanted to know why he had behaved so meekly. Zhukov denied Chuikov's story about being overruled by Stalin and vehemently rejected

17 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 1, p. 186.

18 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 3, p. 52.

19 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 1, p. 248.

20 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 3, p. 58.

21 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 2, p. 317.

the contention that he could have seized Berlin in February 1945, arguing that it was too dangerous because of the threat of a flanking German counterattack.

Another theme of Zhukov's writing that caught the censors' wary eyes were his efforts to humanise his memoirs with personal touches and colourful description. When Zhukov's regiment was visited by a member of the Soviet high command in the 1920s he asked Zhukov what he had donated to the country's gold fund to help build new factories and plants. Zhukov replied four cigarette cases and his wife's ring and earrings, adding that he had no more to give. This last phrase was censored, as was the higher commander's response: "Never mind comrade, some day we will all be rich".<sup>22</sup>

In his account of the Kursk battle Zhukov described the calmness of a staff officer, General Boikov, in the face of a multitude of tasks but added the censored passage: "Looking at Boikov it was possible to think for a while of fishing in some picturesque reservoir near Moscow, not of the great battle that was about to begin."<sup>23</sup>

The humourless censors were not amused by Zhukov's story about the Soviet occupation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina in June 1940. Zhukov's task was to occupy the then Rumanian territories following the delivery of a Soviet ultimatum demanding the return of these lost lands (Bessarabia was occupied by Romania in 1918 and Bukovina was ethnically Ukrainian). Zhukov despatched two airborne brigades and two tank brigades to seize control of bridges over the Prut River. The next day Stalin telephoned him and said the Romanian ambassador had complained about Soviet tanks landing on the river. Stalin wanted to know how that was possible and laughed when Zhukov explained that only the airborne troops had flown to the bridges; the tanks made the way there by road.<sup>24</sup>

Neither were the censors enamoured of Zhukov's description of a dinner with Stalin attended by A.A. Zhdanov, the Leningrad party boss. When Stalin proposed a toast to the gallant people of Leningrad Zhdanov burst into his favourite song – about the Volga- and everyone joined in enthusiastically.<sup>25</sup> One final example of deletions in this vein – and there are many – was Zhukov's description of the meal after signature of the German unconditional surrender agreement: "The dinner was glorious! Headed by Chief of Supplies General N. A. Antipenko and chef V. M. Petrov, our people prepared a fantastic spread which went down well with our guests".<sup>26</sup> Presumably this was felt to be too frivolous a detail for such a solemn occasion. But the censors did allow Zhukov to publish that he celebrated by doing a Russian dance!

Most of the censorship of Zhukov's original manuscript was more straightforwardly political, including the deletion of the names of Soviet political figures still in disgrace in

22 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 1, p. 156.

23 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 3, p. 45.

24 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 1, pp. 290–291.

25 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 3, p. 97.

26 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 3, p. 284.

the 1960s – for example, Georgy Malenkov and Lazar Kaganovich, leaders of the so-called “anti-party group” who had tried, along with Molotov, to overthrow Khrushchev in 1957 and who remained unrehabilitated even after Khrushchev’s fall. Molotov was the main leader of the anti-party group but as Stalin’s right-hand man he was too central and pervasive a figure in Zhukov’s memoirs to be omitted too frequently from the text.

The censorship that must have rankled most with Zhukov was the excision of his extensive writing on the prewar purge of the Red Army. Like many memoirists Zhukov used the opportunity to go on the record about people he admired and respected, some of whom were military officers who had been purged in the 1930s. Zhukov made a point of naming these purged officers, noting they had been unjustly arrested and repressed.

Zhukov also wrote a long general account of the purges and of his own brushes with the process which, he claimed, had almost led him to become a victim, too. Zhukov began the censored section by noting that the year 1937 was a severe test for the Soviet people and armed forces:

Arrested were a majority of the commanders of military districts and fleets, members of military councils, corps commanders, and commanders and commissars of formations and units. There were more arrests among honest workers of the organs of state security. In the county there was a terrible atmosphere. No one trusted anyone else, people feared each other, avoided conversations and were afraid of talking in front of third persons. There was an unprecedented epidemic of slander. Honest people were slandered, sometimes by their closest friends. This happened because people feared being suspected of disloyalty. And this terrible situation continued to worsen.

The Soviet people did not understand why the arrests were so widespread and went to sleep worried that they, too, would be taken away during the night.<sup>27</sup> Zhukov then went on to recount in detail the cases of some of the military purge victims he knew and how, to no avail, he had tried to defend them from false accusations.<sup>28</sup> He came under suspicion himself, later recalling:

The most difficult emotional experience in my life was connected with the years 1937–1938. The necessary fatal documents were prepared on me; apparently they were already sufficient, someone somewhere was running with a brief case in which they lay. In general the matter went like this: I would end up the same way as had many others.<sup>29</sup>

27 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 1. p. 229.

28 A detailed summary of this section of the uncensored memoirs may be found in O. Preston Chaney: Zhukov, pp. 46–54.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

In the Soviet edition of Zhukov's memoirs these many pages on the purges were reduced to the statement that in 1937 there were "unfounded arrests in the armed forces [...] in contravention of socialist legality" and "prominent military leaders were arrested, which, naturally, affected the development of our armed forces and their combat readiness."

Zhukov's original manuscript was peppered with critical remarks about the performance and shortcomings of the Red Army. Many survived the censorship process, but not all. Deleted was Zhukov's comment that until 1940 the Soviet High Command did not have a very good understanding of how to make use of large-scale tank and mechanised formations.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Zhukov remarked in several places how in the early part of the war the Red Army had performed badly but became better with experience. In one instance, the censors allowed Zhukov to say in his description of his tank commanders during the battle of Berlin that he "could only marvel at our commander tank-men, how they had raised their operational and tactical skills during the war." Unpublished were Zhukov's immediately following sentences:

I could not help recalling that during the first months of the war, when our commanders were insufficiently prepared, they frequently found themselves in difficult situations from which they were unable extract themselves. But now these experienced cadres could fulfil any mission.<sup>31</sup>

A slightly different example is the deletion of Zhukov's comment that the receipt of high-performing Studebaker trucks from the United States' Lend-Lease programme was important for the motorisation of Soviet artillery prior to the Kursk battle. The point was to avoid giving too much credit to the cold war enemy, although during the war itself the Soviets had been fulsome in their thanks for American material aid, a view to which Zhukov fully subscribed.<sup>32</sup> In the same vein was the censors' cut of a favourable remark by Zhukov about Eisenhower: "I liked his simplicity, informality and sense of humour."<sup>33</sup>

The biggest challenge facing the censors was what to do about Zhukov's treatment of Stalin, especially in view of the Grechko group's comment that the dictator had been given too much coverage. Stalin's war record had been attacked by Khrushchev in his secret speech denouncing the dictator at the 20th party congress in February 1956. After Khrushchev's fall Stalin was partially rehabilitated by the new leadership headed by Leonid Brezhnev. He remained condemned for his crimes against the party and the Soviet people but his role in building socialism was recognised as was his significant

30 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 1, p. 304.

31 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 3, p. 242.

32 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 3, p. 27.

33 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 3, p. 317.

contribution to the war effort. The official preference was to say as little as possible about Stalin, thereby avoiding either too much condemnation or too much praise. If Stalin's name could be avoided by referring to the "General Secretary" or the "Supreme Commander", then so much the better. But it was inevitable that Stalin as a person as well as the boss would loom large in Zhukov's memoirs. Indeed, Zhukov's positive appraisal of Stalin as a "splendid" Supreme Commander was instrumental in the restoration of Stalin's reputation as a great, if unpalatable, war leader.

The censors responded to this challenge by trimming but not eliminating Zhukov's extensive descriptions of his relations with Stalin.

Zhukov's first meeting with Stalin was in June 1940 and his story of the encounter was retained in his Soviet era memoirs but not his closing remark that "if he was like this with everyone, then why was there all this talk about him being such a terrible person? At that time one didn't want to believe anything bad".<sup>34</sup>

In relation to the disaster of 22 June 1941 Zhukov recalled a number of occasions on which he tried to persuade Stalin to step up the preparations for war with Germany and to take measures that would ensure the Red Army would be ready when the Germans attacked. Some of this material made it past the censors but not all.

During the war there were many disagreements between Zhukov and Stalin about operational matters. Again, some of these disputes made it into the published memoirs while others were censored. There appears to be no particular pattern to these deletions. Maybe the censorship team, who were historians themselves, thought some of Zhukov's claims for prescience were rather retrospective. For example, Zhukov went to considerable trouble to establish how in the summer 1944 he had favoured an advance into East Prussia rather than an attack on German-occupied Warsaw. Zhukov's point is that had his advice been taken then the later Soviet advance on Berlin would not have been complicated by having to contain strong German forces in East Prussia and the adjacent province of Pomerania. The allusion here is to Zhukov's dispute with Chuikov about the capture of Berlin in 1945.

A related issue was the question of when to abandon Soviet efforts to capture Warsaw. According to Zhukov, in October 1944 he argued strongly the advance on Warsaw should be called off because it was getting nowhere. Rokossovsky, who commanded the 1st Belorussian Front which was conducting this operation, agreed with Zhukov but backed away from the argument when it became apparent that Stalin was not happy with the idea of calling off the offensive. Zhukov was unhappy with Rokossovsky's attitude but stuck to his guns and with the support of some other members of the Politburo was able to persuade Stalin to halt offensive operations in the Warsaw area. Stalin was still displeased, however, and Zhukov links this episode to Stalin's decision to take direct command of all the Fronts, whereas previously he had controlled operations via Stavka

34 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 1, p. 287.

representatives and coordinators such as Zhukov. The knock-on from this decision was that Zhukov was placed in charge of the 1st Belorussian Front – the one that was heading directly for Berlin – while Rokossovsky was transferred to the 2nd Belorussian Front, which would protect the northern flank of Zhukov’s advance on the German capital. Rokossovsky was disgruntled and his relationship with Zhukov never recovered, or so Zhukov argued. Stalin’s decision to take direct command of the Fronts was recorded in the published memoirs but not the background and consequences of that decision, as recalled by Zhukov.<sup>35</sup>

When Zhukov’s advance on Berlin in April 1945 encountered difficulties, there were tensions between him and Stalin, only some of which are recorded in the published memoirs. In his original manuscript Zhukov said neither he nor Stalin phoned each other for three days (17–19 April 1945). But Zhukov was not too worried because he knew that “when even the smallest things were not going well, [Stalin] got very irritable.”<sup>36</sup>

More personal material also fell foul of the censors. For example, Zhukov described meeting Stalin at the dictator’s dacha in March 1945 and going for a walk with him. The published memoirs stated that “Stalin unexpectedly began telling me about his childhood.” But omitted was what Stalin reportedly told Zhukov: “He said that he was a very sickly child. His mother loved him very much and had not left his side until he was almost six. In accordance with his mother’s wishes he went to study in a seminary to become a priest. But he had always been a bit of rebel, didn’t get on with the administration, and was expelled from the seminary.”<sup>37</sup>

A well-known story about Stalin omitted from the censored memoirs concerned Zhukov’s meeting with the dictator’s son Vasily just before the June 1945 victory parade. Vasily told Zhukov that Stalin had wanted to take the salute at the victory parade himself but had fallen off the horse during practice.<sup>38</sup> It has to be said, however, that Vasily – who had issues with his father – was not the most reliable of sources and there is no evidence that Stalin ever learned to ride.

## The Costs and Benefits of Censorship

The overall effect of these deletions was to strip Zhukov’s original memoir of much of its negative and critical content in relation to the Soviet system. The result of the cuts was a memoir more positive in tone, one that reflected well on Soviet communism. From the censors’ point of view it was a job well-done. As a life-long communist and a loyal Soviet citizen Zhukov could not have been too displeased either. From the readers’ point

35 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 3, pp. 174–175.

36 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 3, p. 247.

37 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 3 p. 215.

38 Zhukov: *Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, vol. 3, p. 308.

of view the loss was injurious in some respects but far from fatally undermining the autobiographical pact. Zhukov's sharp tongue in relation to some of his colleagues had been toned down and the memoirs had lost much of their judgemental, political edge especially in relation to Stalin's military purges. But what remained was still an interesting, colourful, and revealing account of Zhukov's life and military career.

The diminution of Zhukov's personal voice in the narrative was a definite loss. Zhukov's carping about his colleagues and his efforts to inject a little colour and humour into the memoirs were revealing of his character. This absence was made all the more important because there had been so little of a personal nature in the memoirs to begin with. In conformity with Soviet conventions Zhukov's memoirs were predominantly a narrative of his public life as a soldier. They revealed little about his inner world or his private life. This suited Zhukov because even in private he tended to be reticent. His temperament changed after the war, as he grew older and as a result of his postwar political travails, during which he acquired a little humility. But for accounts of the later, more emotionally mature, open, self-reflective and vulnerable Zhukov we are overly-reliant on the memoirs of others.<sup>39</sup>

In his memoirs Zhukov admitted that he was a disciplinarian but stressed that he was a perfectionist who strove to elicit the best from those under his command in order to save his troops' lives in battle. That self-description masked the reality that Zhukov was a tough, brutal and unrelenting commander, who cursed, threatened and occasionally hit people to impose his will. Such bullying was not uncommon in the Red Army and was commensurate with Zhukov's own experience of being disciplined by his father as a child, as an apprentice furrier, and as a conscript in the Tsarist army during the First World War. During the Great Patriotic War the Soviets executed some 158,000 of their own troops, a good many of them on Zhukov's orders. While he never expressed regret for his harsh actions during the war there is no evidence that Zhukov was personally cruel or callous with regard to the lives of his soldiers. Zhukov's stern approach to military leadership, which is not to everyone's taste, was his command style, his way of getting things done at the time and in the circumstances that confronted him.

Away from military command Zhukov was a more gentle and, indeed, cultured soul. He was not a self-consciously intellectual general but he was widely read in literature, history and military theory and by the time he died he had amassed a library of some

39 The three important texts are Konstantin Simonov's *Notes Towards a Biography of G. K. Zhukov* – based on the writers meetings and conversations with Zhukov from the 1930s through to the 1960s – published in his *Glazami Cheloveka Moego Pokoleniya*, Moscow 1989; the memoirs collected in I.G. Aleksandrov (ed.): *Marshal Zhukov: Polkovodets i Chelovek*, 2 vols., Moscow 1988; and the memoir of Zhukov's youngest daughter Maria: *Marshal Zhukov – Moi Otets*, Moscow 2005.

20,000 books (about the same number as in Stalin's personal library).<sup>40</sup> Zhukov also liked ballet, opera and films as well as the more traditional Russian peasant manly pursuits of hunting, fishing and shooting.

Zhukov is sometimes portrayed as self-centred and egotistical. He was certainly full of himself, particularly when younger and at the peak of his glory days at the end of the war. But, as his memoirs showed, he could also be unstinting in his praise of other people's contributions and qualities. His memoirs were a testament to others as well as to himself. And while Zhukov nursed grudges against those he felt had betrayed him, he remained loyal to his friends and was prepared to recognise the talents of even his worst rivals, such as Konev.

## Authenticity and the Autobiographical Pact

The obvious response to the question of what is the most authentic version of Zhukov's memoirs – the version in which he came closest to fulfilling his pact as an autobiographer to tell the truth as he saw it – is the uncensored or unexpurgated post-Soviet version, the one that Zhukov wrote originally. The problem with this answer is that Zhukov did not authorise publication of the post-Soviet-versions of his memoirs whereas he did authorise the Soviet versions, albeit under protest. We have no way of knowing what he would have preferred to have left out of the original draft of his memoirs. The post-Soviet versions of the memoirs contain a lot of material that was cut for editorial rather than political reasons, probably with Zhukov's approval. In the absence of the complete original typescript (in his daughter's personal possession) it is impossible to identify additions to the Soviet era edition of the memoirs written by the censors or to know if anything Zhukov wrote remains excluded from the post-Soviet version.

The story of Zhukov's memoirs is further complicated by the existence of additional memoir material. In 1989 *Pravda*, at that time the official newspaper of the Soviet communist party, published a piece by Zhukov called *Briefly about Stalin*. This came from Zhukov's private papers held by his daughter Maria. According to Maria this was one of several pieces that Zhukov wrote 'for the writing table'. They were written in longhand by Zhukov and typed up by his mother-in-law Klavdiya (Maria's grandmother), who did all his transcribing. They were kept in a safe and evaded confiscation by the state after his death.<sup>41</sup>

Maria's purpose in publishing the piece was to show that Zhukov was more critical of Stalin than he had been allowed to be in his censored memoirs. The *Pravda* piece did show that to be the case but also reveal Zhukov's mixed feelings about the dictator and

40 V.S. Astrakhansky: Biblioteka G.K. Zhukova, in: Arkhivno-Informatsionnyi Bulletin 13 (1996).

41 Korotke o Staline, in: Pravda, 20 January 1989.

his tendency to blame others for Stalin's misdeeds. Indeed, the villain of the piece was not Stalin but Konev and also Nikolai Bulganin, who had served under Zhukov as a political commissar during the war and clashed with Zhukov when he (Bulganin) became Stalin's right-hand man in the defence ministry after the war. It is clear, too, that Zhukov did not particularly blame Stalin for his postwar troubles; indeed, he expressed gratitude to the dictator for saving him from the deadly clutches of the Soviet security apparatus.

All editions of Zhukov's published memoirs begin with his childhood and conclude in 1946 – on the eve of his demotion and exile by Stalin. They are war memoirs, not a full life-story. In 2001, however, a collection of documents about Zhukov was published that contained a memoir by him of the post-Stalin years, covering the period from Stalin's death in March 1953 until Zhukov's dismissal by Khrushchev in October 1957. It deals with the post-Stalin succession struggle among Soviet leaders and provides a fascinating firsthand account of some of the important events of this period – the arrest of Beria, the attempt to overthrow Khrushchev in June 1957 and the central committee plenum that ended Zhukov's career. But its coverage is highly selective. There is very little on the 20th party congress, nothing on the crushing of the Hungarian uprising in November 1956 (a military operation supervised by Zhukov and executed by Konev) or on Zhukov's meeting with Eisenhower at the Geneva summit. It is notable for its hostility to Khrushchev and for its unflattering portrait of the other Soviet leaders. It has the air of an account related by Zhukov at the height of his exile and alienation from the party.

The original transcript of this memoir may be found in the Russian State Military archive in a personal files series (*lichnyi fond*) of about 190 folders containing manuscripts and materials relating to his memoirs, speeches, articles, correspondence, personal memorabilia and photographs.<sup>42</sup> Most importantly, these files include several with handwritten and typed variants of sections of the published memoirs. These unpublished materials reveal a Zhukov who is more willing to be self-critical and to admit mistakes. He is frank that he was unprepared for the position of Chief of the General Staff when he was appointed. The disaster of 22 June 1941 is depicted as a fundamental failure of the overly offensive orientation of Soviet military doctrine and preparation for war. He is also much freer in his criticism of his peers, especially those generals who had sided with Khrushchev at the October 1957 plenum. For example, he describes Marshal Semyon Timoshenko, who was People's Commissar for Defence in 1941, as a "dilettante" when it

42 Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Voennyi Arkhiv (RGVA), F.41107, Op. 1, D-1-189 and Op. 1, D.1-4. The memoir of the post-Stalin period (*Posle Smerti Stalina*) may be found in Op. 2, D.1. The typescript was published in Georgy Zhukov: Stenogramma Oktyabr'skogo (1957) Plenuma TsK KPSS op.cit pp. 620–639. A translation of this memoir and of the 1989 Pravda article may be found in Geoffrey Roberts (ed.): *Marshal of Victory* op. cit.

came to grand strategy and preparing the country for war.<sup>43</sup> (Timoshenko was another general who had attacked Zhukov in 1957).

A particular detail worth noting is Zhukov's variant account of his departure from the post of Chief of the General Staff in July 1941. In the published memoirs Zhukov wrote that he was sacked by Stalin because he urged a withdrawal of Soviet troops from Kiev. The fall of the Ukrainian capital to the Germans in September 1941 was an unmitigated disaster for the Red Army – the biggest of the war – and the failure to withdraw in time resulted in the encirclement and loss of several hundred thousand Soviet troops. Zhukov's memoir account was designed to distance him from that disaster and to fend off Khrushchev-era criticism of his role as Chief of the General Staff. An alternative account by Zhukov of what happened is preserved in the archive – that he asked to be relieved as Chief of Staff and given a front line command of the reserve armies that mounted the successful Yel'nya counter-offensive.<sup>44</sup> We may never know which story is true but it does pose the question: which is the more authentic memoir – the one he constructed for public consumption or that contained in his unpublished writings?

The dismissal story is one of many in memoirs designed to show that while Zhukov was close to Stalin he was also an independent figure in the Soviet high command who tried to get the dictator to do the right thing during the war but was often overruled. Such self-serving presentations are not uncommon in military and political memoirs and they hamper historians' efforts to establish what really happened. At the same time they reveal how autobiographers see themselves retrospectively if not at the time.

A similar point applies to Zhukov's story about his close encounter with Stalin's purges in the late 1930s. The problem with this story is that there is no independent documentary evidence to back Zhukov's claims that he intervened on behalf of purge victims, and only one surviving witness – himself. Zhukov claimed he only survived the purges because he was posted to the Far East in 1939. However, he was sent to Khalkhin-Gol to carry out an inspection and to investigate the failings of the local command, which had not performed well during the first battles with the Japanese. In other words, his mission was to carry out a purge. Had he been under a political cloud it is unlikely that Zhukov would have been entrusted with such an important mission and then promoted to take charge of the Soviet forces.

In recounting his experience as an almost victim Zhukov was endeavouring to distance himself from Stalin and from the military purges and to dispel the idea that he, along with others, had been a beneficiary of the prewar upheavals in the Red Army. Maybe Zhukov was dissembling but it is more likely that was how he remembered it and saw it when he wrote his memoirs. In reality Zhukov was not an almost victim of the purges but he became one in his mind. Autobiographies are typically an act of becom-

43 RGVA, F.41107, Op. 1, D.17, Ll.38–41.

44 *Ibid.*, D.54, L.57.

ing as well as an exercise in reminiscence and reflection. In Zhukov's case the person he became in writing his memoirs was a loyal but independent servant of the Soviet state; a confidant of Stalin's who was not afraid to stand up to him and did his best to ameliorate the excesses of the Soviet dictator. There is a lot of truth in this self-portrayal but Zhukov was also Stalin's general and in military affairs he could be just as ruthless as Stalin. This was why the Soviet dictator valued Zhukov and entrusted him with so many important missions. Zhukov admitted as much himself when he was asked whether Stalin had been cruel during the war. Yes, he was, Zhukov replied, and so was he, because he had to be.

### Conclusion: The Elusive Truth of Zhukov's Autobiography

As Roy Pascal argued the truth contained in autobiographies can be highly elusive. In Zhukov's case the public attack on him after he was forced to retire by Khrushchev in 1957 led to a less than frank and overly defensive autobiography. Zhukov then had to deal with the depoliticisation and depersonalisation of his memoirs demanded by the Soviet censors. When he came to prepare the second edition of his memoirs Zhukov was quite ill and his wife was dying of cancer.

The publication of uncensored editions of Zhukov's memoirs in the 1990s has complicated rather than simplified this picture, as has the discovery of draft material in the archives. These new materials have enhanced the truth that Zhukov wanted to tell when he wrote his memoirs but have also added new layers of obfuscation since not everything that was censored was true, and neither was everything uncensored untrue.

But if Zhukov's autobiographical pact with his readers was severely compromised, his memoirs remained his own. For the most part the truth he wanted to tell survived these vicissitudes. His memoirs are a unique insider account of the Soviet high command and of Stalin's relations with his generals. As a sustained reflection on his life and career Zhukov's memoirs are invaluable and irreplaceable. New evidence has revealed that they are not to be entirely trusted but the same point applies to most memoirs and autobiography. The memoirs show how Zhukov wanted to be seen as he reached the end of his life and, to a large extent, how he saw himself. To that extent at least they remain a striking example of the autobiographical pact in action.

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