



**STRATEGY
RESEARCH
PROJECT**

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Defense or any of its agencies. This document may not be released for open publication until it has been cleared by the appropriate military service or government agency.

MARSHAL ZHUKOV – WARRIOR, COMMANDER, CITIZEN

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL VLADISLAV A. GONCHAROV
Russian Army

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A:
Approved for Public Release.
Distribution is Unlimited.

USAWC CLASS OF 1999



U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE, CARLISLE BARRACKS, PA 17013-5050

DATA QUALITY IMPROVED 4
20001013 059

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

Marshal Zhukov - Warrior, Commander, Citizen.

by

Goncharov Vladislav A.

Infantry

Mestemaker, Michael J. COL.

Project Advisor

The views expressed in this academic research paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, or any of its agencies.

U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A:
Approved for public release.
Distribution is unlimited.

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Goncharov, Vladislav A.
TITLE: Marshal Zhukov - Warrior, Commander, Citizen.
FORMAT: Strategy Research Project
DATE: 1 April 1999 PAGES: 37 CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

The paradox is as prevalent today as it ever was - almost all the outstanding geniuses that Russia has seen have been out of favor with its leaders for most of their careers.

There are two reasons for this: they were often more talented than the leaders themselves; and, however great they were, they served Russia rather than themselves or their superiors.

Zhukov arose as a great military leader thanks to his natural talent and the influences of those historical events and vital conditions that predetermined his fate. Not one of the talented military leaders from the Second World War can be compared to Zhukov in the profundity, breadth, and foresight of his strategic thought, in his will power, and organizational capabilities. It is for this reason, as William Spar justly writes, "...Zhukov's brilliant ideas were not always demanded by the political leadership."¹

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT iii

PREFACE vii

Marshal Zhukov 1

ENDNOTES 27

BIBLIOGRAPHY 29

PREFACE

"Death is but four steps away".

(Aleksey Surkov. Russian poet)

Victory in the Second World War was accomplished by the combined efforts of the anti-Hitler coalition nations and their military leaders and soldiers.

The major force in the Great Patriotic War was the Soviet people. Contributions to achieving military victory were made by the General Staff and many army and naval leaders, commanding officers, and commanders of various types of troops under the overall command of the Headquarters of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief (Stavka) which was headed by J. Stalin.

Soviet commanders and commanders of the armies allied to us defeated the strongest army in the world which up to that time had taken all of Western Europe and toppled the greatly praised German military school which had for decades been considered to be a model for the entire world.

One of the most talented military leaders of the Second World War was G. Zhukov. His services, high level of military leadership skill and merit were confirmed by numerous victorious battles and operations.

As a soldier Zhukov went through from a conscripted private in the Russian Imperial Army in World War 1, through the Russian civil war and the long years of intense though sometimes misdirected training, to his ultimate positions as deputy supreme commander in chief in World War II and as postwar minister of defense. Zhukov was dismissed in disgrace from the latter post in 1957 and partly "rehabilitated" after the fall of Khrushchev in 1964.

Although we sometimes tend to think of Zhukov, the Russian soldier's soldier, as a typical Russian infantryman, the whole of his military career until he entered the ranks of the

higher command in 1939 was in the cavalry and in the armored mobile forces which developed out of the cavalry of the civil war. Indeed, Zhukov probably owed his survival during Stalin's terrible purge of the Red Army in the 1930's to his membership in the civil war "cavalry clique," led by Marshals Voroshilov, Budenny, and Timoshenko, which enjoyed Stalin's special patronage. All through this period, during which Zhukov moved up through the command of a cavalry squadron to that of a cavalry corps (with brief intervals in Moscow for study and staff work), the future marshal was a dedicated, ambitious, and ruthless commander, whose restless temperament would not allow him to relax until he had made his unit or formation the best in the corps or indeed in the military district.

The main thing that characterizes Zhukov's military leadership skill is the greatness of the victories that he sustained and feats of arms that he accomplished. For Zhukov, this was the defense of Russian's Far East (1939), Leningrad, the battle of Moscow, the Korsun-Shevshchenko, Kiev, Belorussian, Vistula-Oder operations and, like a crown, the Berlin operation.

For the extent of the war, the army in conjunction with the navy under the leadership of the Stavka (Headquarters of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief), and many of our military leaders and commanders, conducted 51 strategic operations, more than 250 operations on the front level, about 1,000 operations on the army level, and an uncountable number of battles on the ground, in the air, and on the sea.

Zhukov enacted his strategic leadership as the representative of the Stavka, but also as the commander of troops on various fronts for a period of 22 months.

MARSHAL ZHUKOV

"For Russians and people everywhere he remains an enduring symbol of victory on the battlefield".

(Chaney, Otto P. COL., Ph.D., Zhukov)

"Marshal G. Zhukov... [was] perhaps Russia's greatest World War II soldier... [More] than any other one man [he] was responsible for the formulation and implementation of Soviet strategy".

(Baldwin, Hanson. W, Battles Won and Lost)

HALHIN GOL, 1939

A war crept ever nearer to Europe and the Japanese grew increasingly bold in the Far East, the Soviet Army became even more deeply concerned about the security of their frontiers.

Particularly worried about its Far Eastern borders, the Soviet Union had signed a mutual-assistance pact with the Mongolian People's Republic.

Thirty-three border clashes erupted in 1936. Japan decided to stage a full-scale test of Russia's military might on the Manchurian and Mongolian frontiers. The Japanese aggression was more than a probing action. Japanese leaders hoped to cut the Soviet Union off from China

and thereby stop the flow of aid. Both sides appear to share some blame for the events of 1938-39 near by lake Khasan (Russian Far East). From July 20 up to August 9, after heavy casualties on both sides, the fighting had virtually ceased, and the Japanese relinquished their hold on the disputed territory. The next day Ambassador Shigemitsu arrived at the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs in Moscow with a proposal for talks.

The Japanese were not deterred by their reversal. In May 1939, hostilities again broke out. The Japanese claimed a border violation by seven hundred Outer Mongolian horsemen along the Khalkhin-Gol (or Halhin-Gol) River, known to the Japanese as the Halha. Soviet historians consider the campaign a renewed test of Russian strength, coupled with Japanese territorial designs on the Soviet Transbaikal and Far East.

On May 11, 1939, Japan struck. Ground forces hit border stations, while the air force bombed an outpost on the mountain frontier. By May 14 about three hundred Japanese cavalrymen had moved up to the Khalkhin-Gol River. Mongolian border troops sent to restore the frontier were scattered by enemy aircraft. The Soviet government, fulfilling its mutual-assistance pact with the Mongolian People's Republic, ordered its troops stationed there to defend the borders of the two countries.

On May 28 the Japanese attacked in an attempt to envelop the Soviet -- Mongolian troops from the flanks, strike them from the rear, and cut them off from crossing points on the Khalkhin-Gol. The numerical superior Japanese at first pressed back the Soviet-Mongolian forces, but were soon halted by artillery and one of the infantry companies. Troops of the Soviet 149th Infantry Regiment began to arrive in trucks and were immediately committed to battle. Fighting continued through the night. On the morning of May 29 the Soviet-Mongolian units

counterattacked and in a daylong battle drove the Japanese back to the border. More than four hundred Japanese officers and soldiers were killed in the two-day engagement.

The change of command, by which all Soviet-Mongolian troops came under Komkor (Corps Commander) Zhukov, and the reinforcement of Soviet forces in the Far Eastern theater were highly significant events. Writes former Red Army officer Ruslanov: "Zhukov's appointment could not have been made without Stalin's knowledge, and it was not accidental. The significance of the Khalkhin-Gol River battles must not be underestimated. The whole world followed their outcome; the matter involved the international prestige of the USSR, and, primarily, it was a rare opportunity to test new material and tactics under actual combat conditions. For Stalin, the losses were of no importance whatsoever. Zhukov himself knew that this appointment was to test his competence and one which he had to pass."¹

In early June 1939, Zhukov was ordered to report to Voroshilov in Moscow without explanation. He and his wife thought that he might be on his way to prison or worse. Once there, he was ordered by Voroshilov to fly to Chita and thence to Tamsagbulag in Mongolia. His mission was to report on the situation and take command of the Soviet and Mongolian troops who were defending against a Japanese incursion across the Mongolian-Manchurian border which had penetrated almost to the Halhin Gol (river).

Zhukov's successful execution of this mission, driving the Japanese back to the recognized border, was to win him fame, promotion to the rank of General of the Army, the gold star of a Hero of the Soviet Union, and command of the Kiev Military District. Most important of all, it brought him to Stalin's attention. Many years after the event, Zhukov added another reason that Halhin Gol was an important turning point in his life. The victory there enabled him

to cast away "all the slander and the accusations that had been assembled against me in the previous years some of which I knew and some of which I figured out."²

Zhukov's solution to the problem at Halhin Gol was characteristic of his method of military problem-solving. On arriving at Tamsagbulag, headquarters of the 57th Special Corps, Zhukov found that the headquarters was located 120 kilometers from the scene of the action and that the corps commander had not visited the area. After a personal reconnaissance, Zhukov recommended to Moscow that the Soviet-Mongolian positions on the right bank of the Halhin Gol be held while a counterattack was prepared to drive the Japanese back across the border. To accomplish this, Zhukov requested additional aviation, not less than three infantry divisions, artillery reinforcements, and one tank brigade. These proposals were accepted and Zhukov was given command of the force, which was to be called the Ist Army Group.*

(*This Soviet designation should not be confused with an U.S. Army Group, which is a group of armies. The Soviet equivalent of an U.S. Army Group was a *Front*. An *armeiskaia gruppya* in the Soviet Army was a temporary combined arms unit established to accomplish a particular mission. Such a group was often called an operational group during World War.)

The Japanese force that Zhukov defeated consisted of two infantry divisions, each of almost 25,000 men plus supporting troops and aircraft. The Japanese tank brigade was used only once, losing almost a hundred tanks to Soviet artillery as they attacked over the only available tank approach, presumably without adequate air and artillery support. The Soviets calculated Japanese and Manchurian losses, in what Zhukov later characterized as "a serious reconnaissance in force"³ at 61,000 killed, wounded, and captured. Soviet and Mongolian losses were more than 18,500 killed and wounded.⁴ This battle, little noticed in the West, ended Japanese attempts to invade Soviet Union and, Zhukov believed, that this outcome later

predetermined the restrained conduct of the Japanese on the eastern borders of the Soviet Union during the Soviet-German war⁵.

The campaign at Halhin Gol demonstrated that serious shortcomings existed in the preparedness of the Soviet territorial divisions. Created after the Civil War, these divisions consisted of a small cadre of regular soldiers and officers, supplemented by local personnel of military service age who underwent periodic training with the unit. In emergencies the entire unit could be called up. The 82d Rifle Division, a territorial division, was one of the units sent to reinforce Zhukov. When it was committed, it attempted to flee the battlefield after some Japanese artillery salvos; and it took all available staff personnel to halt the unit and reposition it on the Mongolian steppe. Zhukov relieved the division commander and gradually over a month and a half retrained the division to perform on the battlefield.⁶

The success at Halhin Gol also gave Zhukov his first interview with Stalin. The impression was a powerful one: "Returning to the Hotel Moskva (Moscow), I could not get to sleep for a long time being under the influence of a conversation with members of the Politburo. The appearance of I. V. Stalin, his quiet voice, the concreteness and the depth of his judgments, his knowledge of military questions, the attention with which he heard the report, made a great impression on me."⁷

Considering Zhukov's state of mind at the time, having just returned to the capital in triumph, this was probably only a slightly exaggerated statement of his attitude toward the dictator. Zhukov was then not yet 43 years old.

Zhukov's sudden emergence into prominence through his victory over the Japanese on the Mongolian border in 1939, where his characteristic tactics made their appearance:

ruthlessness in decision making, thorough preparation, faultless timing, and the exploitation of every available source of military power from the buildup to the final blow.

As the Head of the General Staff and the Reserve Front

He spent about seven months in his position of the Chief of the General Staff during the most tense and complex times before the war and in the war's first days. J. Stalin, trying to delay the beginning of the war, rejected the proposal of the People's Commissar of Defense and of the Chief of the General Staff to bring bordering military districts up to combat readiness and strictly suppressed the initiative actions of the district commanders. As a result, by the beginning of the war, troops were in a peacetime status, that is in areas of continuous deployment, in military sectors and camps.

Arms and equipment were in depots and on reserve. By the time combat action began, the majority of units had begun to move to the border under the enemy's massive air and artillery strikes in order to meet the attacking tank groups head on, but did not manage to assume the designated defensive position in the border region. For the most part, this explains the catastrophic defeat of our troops at the beginning of the war.

Is there fault in all of this on the part of Zhukov, the chief of the General Staff? There is, indeed, much. Zhukov himself spoke more than once of his responsibility. But at that time, neither Zhukov, nor anybody else was able to resist Stalin's system of leadership. In 1941, 75% of Red Army officers had held their positions for less than a year. Officer levels already low in 1938 could not match the 1.5 million-man growth that occurred over the next three years. The

purges (1937-38) and wholesale creation of new units led to the promotion of many officers to positions beyond their ability.⁸

Zhukov's first little victory in WWII was the Yel'nia offensive operation (1941) near by Smolensk. Having examined the situation and become convinced of the stable situation of the troops on this front, G. Zhukov began preparations for the Yel'nia operation, which was conducted from August 30 through September 8, 1941. It is notable, first and foremost, for the fact that it was the first successfully conducted offensive operation during the Great Patriotic War. Up to this point, the numerous attempts by our troops to undertake offensive actions had ended in failure. At first, Stalin called Zhukov's proposal of defeating the Yel'nia group of the enemy rubbish, referring to the fact that our troops do not know how to conduct an offensive. Therefore, the Yel'nia offensive, though relatively limited in size, had not only an operational - strategic significance, but was also significant psychologically for morale. It strikingly demonstrated that the troops of the Red Army could not only defend themselves, but also successfully overpower the fascist German troops. G. Zhukov and the troops that he led literally wrenched the victory from the enemy at Yel'nia under the conditions of extremely difficult strategic circumstances, when troops were retreating everywhere and the very possibility of successfully beating the enemy and, moreover, to surround it and force it to retreat seemed to be something that couldn't be done.

The Defense of Leningrad

Russia is a country easy to enter but hard to leave.

Henry Jomini

One of the goals of the "Barbarossa" plan was the capture of Leningrad. "The Fuhrer has decided to wipe the City of Retersburg from the face of earth. After the defeat of Soviet Russia there will be no interest in the further existence of this large population center." (German Naval Headquarters Directive, September 22, 1941)

Stalin understood the significance and necessity of keeping Leningrad, but under the pressure of the circumstances that had developed, he began to become inclined to accept the possibility of giving up the city, yet continued to take all necessary measures not to allow this. What especially alarmed him was the fact that the commander of the troops at the front, Marshal Voroshilov, and a member of the military council, A. Zhdanov, began too hurriedly to make arrangements in the event that the city was to be given up. They mined factories, plants, bridges, and prepared ships for detonation. In talks with Zhukov, Stalin said that a few days would pass and Leningrad would have to be considered lost. The city, he said, is almost in a hopeless situation. Zhukov, who constantly followed the situation along the entire Soviet-German front, had from the very beginning told Stalin; "In no case can Leningrad be surrendered. If we abandon it, we will not be able to defend Moscow either."

Zhukov commanded the troops of the Leningrad front for all of about a month, but these were the most difficult, crisis-filled days and nights in the defense of the legendary city. Above all else, he centralized command and stopped all the speechifying that had gone on up to that point. He decisively eliminated all instances of multiple authority and strictly consolidated all direction in the defense of the city. Commanders that were responsible for the most important parts of the city came under his command. Zhukov was able to get the Stavka to subordinate the Baltic Fleet; the 2nd and 7th air fighter corps of the nation's air defense to the Leningrad front.

Zhukov demanded that all discussions of the possible surrender of the city be halted as well as all preparatory measures to this end. With his firm statements and practical actions he let everyone know that the city could and should hold out. Parts of the anti-aircraft and large caliber field artillery that were positioned in the city were moved out in direct laying to fortify anti-tank defense.

The resources of the Baltic fleet were more fully utilized for the defense of the city. Ship-borne artillery was used more for carrying out massive strikes against the enemy's land-based groups. Six separate rifle brigades were formed from the ships' crews to reinforce the efforts to defend the more dangerous areas of the city. Losses in rifle divisions that were defending the city were also replenished at the expense of seamen. Admiral I. Isakov and the commander of the Baltic Fleet, Admiral V. Tributs greatly helped the commander of the troops at the front. As a result of these and a number of others measures, the defense of Leningrad became not only more durable, but more active as well. The enemy, suffering heavy losses, was forced to halt its offensive. Thanks to the heroism of the city's defenders and its population, a mission of great historical importance was carried out by Soviet troops under the command of Zhukov.

The Battle of Moscow

On October 7, Stalin summoned Zhukov out of Leningrad to Moscow and ordered him to investigate the situation in the areas of the Western and Reserve fronts. Having visited the command points and traveled around the retreating troops, Zhukov noticed that the Mozhaisk line of defense was weakly covered and could not guarantee the capital from a penetration of

enemy armored troops toward Moscow. He suggested to Stalin that a number of measures be enacted to reinforce the defense of Moscow. The first thing was to form up the reserves more quickly, and from where possible, to gather troops to Moscow. With the aim of uniting the efforts of the troops who were defending the Moscow area and implementing a more precise command of these troops, the Stavka made the decision on October 10 to unite the troops of the Western and Reserve fronts into one Western front under Zhukov's command.

After the first week the Western front received 14 new rifle divisions, 16 tank brigades and over 40 artillery regiments. Later, additional troop and aviation forces were sent to the Moscow area from the Northwest, Southwest areas and from the depths of the country, including the Far East.

On the very first day that Zhukov arrived at the headquarters of the Western front, he found a large commission there headed by G. Malenkov to investigate the reasons for the lack of success of the troops at the front. The infamous L. Mekhlis was going everywhere threatening and scolding those in his way. Two days after Zhukov assumed his position as the troop commander of the Western front, he was called by V. Molotov who threatened to have him shot if he did not succeed in stopping the advancement of the fascist German troops toward Moscow. Zhukov would not have been Zhukov if he, fearing for his life, would have begun to justify himself. With dignity he answered that he was not frightened by threats and if Molotov was able to deal with the situation faster and better, then let him come and command. The situation in the Moscow area was extremely difficult. Here and there German panzer groups had broken through and the commander of the front had difficulties in countering them while maintaining defensive positions.

On November 18, the commander of the 16th army, General K. Rokossovskii addressed the commander of the front with a request to allow a withdrawal of his main forces to more advantageous positions behind the Istra water reservoir in connection with a powerful enemy onslaught. Zhukov did not allow this. Then the commander of the army directly addressed the request to the Chief of the General Staff, B. Shaposhnikov, and the latter gave permission for the withdrawal of troops. Zhukov, having learned of this, sent a telegram, "I am commanding the troops at the front! I repeal the order to withdraw troops to positions behind the Istra reservoir and order them to defend the positions that they have assumed and not to take a single step back." Zhukov's firmness was dictated not only by his personal virtues alone. He thought that it was inadmissible to decide such matters on the grounds of the operational situation of one army while not taking into consideration the circumstances of the whole front. A withdrawal of troops from the 16th army left the flanks of the 30th and 5th armies unprotected. But the main consideration that Zhukov had was the steadfast decisiveness of firmly defending the positions that had been assumed and to no longer retreat. Permission for a retreat in one area on the front often generated an inertia for retreats in other areas. Under the command of General Zhukov, the troops of the Western front conducted two defensive operations in October and November 1941 that were fraught with tense and desperate battles, but they did not allow the enemy to penetrate directly toward Moscow.

In the battle of Moscow, the operational and strategic features of Zhukov's military leadership skill were most evident in his immense self-control and confidence which, it would seem, allowed him, in the most hopeless of situations, to constantly find new strength, resources, and the most rational ways to solve the tasks that faced the troops at the front.

Secondly, he made an the effort to personally visit and to send officers from headquarters to the most dangerous sectors, to gather up half-defeated, retreating units and assign them tasks of defending the most important regions so that, at least for the short term, the rapid advancement of the mobile enemy groups that were penetrating into the interior of the country could be detained.

Thirdly, Zhukov proceeded from the principle that a good knowledge of the enemy allows for the largest conservation of forces and means and on the basis of establishing directions for the action of his main forces, chose the maximum concentration of his troops' efforts in decisive sectors of the front. A number of counter strikes were conducted on the most dangerous enemy groups and counterattacks and other actions were widely used.

In the previous offensive operations Hitler's troops had managed to advance hundreds of kilometers, but in the October offensive on Moscow they managed to wedge into our defenses only to a depth of 20-70 kilometers. Enemy strike force groups were weakened and suffered great losses. As a result of the steadfastness of our troops, the extensive utilization of aviation and artillery, and dependable aircover by air defense forces from the Moscow region, the further advancement of fascist German troops was stopped.

A second offensive in November by the fascist German troops had broken through in the area of the 30th army on the Kalinin front and on the right flank of the 16th army on the Western front, Stalin called up Zhukov and asked: "Are you certain that we can hold Moscow? I am asking you this with an ache in my soul. Tell me honestly, as a communist." "We will unconditionally hold Moscow," Zhukov reassured, "but we still need no less than 2 armies and at least 200 tanks." Stalin promised two armies, but Stalin said, "we still have no tanks."⁹ What an enormous responsibility that Zhukov had to take upon himself and what self-control he must

have had such that in the most complicated and contradictory of situations, when so much was yet uncertain, to express such confidence, which influenced many of Stalin's latter decisions and actions.

Catching the moment when the enemy had exhausted its resources for an offensive, Zhukov suggested to Stalin that a number of counterattacks be conducted and, developing them, to go on an overall counteroffensive. The method of action chosen by the military leader was the most complex. He requested that the plan be carried out in the tightest of timeframes with efficiency in issuing assignments to subordinates and a high level of organization in directing the troops. All of this was demonstrated by Zhukov and by his staff, headed by General Sokolovskii. On the evening of November 29, headquarters reported the transfer of a number of units from the 20th army and of the 1st strike and 10th armies to the front and demanded to be presented a plan for going into a counteroffensive. It was developed on November 30th, delivered to the General Staff the very same day and confirmed by the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. This was an efficiency that was unseen before in military history. Beginning the offensive on December 5, 1941, the troops of the Western front in coordination with adjacent fronts, overcame the stiff resistance of the enemy and routed them away from Moscow.

As a result of the battle of Moscow, for the first time since the beginning of the Second World War, the fascist German troops suffered a large defeat and were forced to retreat and go on the defensive. In the battle of Moscow, the German Army lost more than a half a million officers and soldiers: 1,300 tanks: 2,500 artillery pieces: over 15,000 motor vehicles, and a great deal more combat equipment. The enemy troops were rolled back west between 150 and 300 km from Moscow.¹⁰ The strategy of Blitzkrieg warfare had failed and now Hitler's command required the mobilization of all of Germany's resources and the resources of other occupied

territories for the entire remainder of the war. The strategic initiative passed into the hands of the Soviet command. The entire world saw that fascist Germany could be overcome.

From Moscow to Stalingrad

Zhukov is my George B. McClellan. Like McClellan he always wants more men, more guns. Also more planes. He never has enough. But Zhukov has never lost a battle.

Joseph Stalin¹¹

The German command planned to launch a large offensive in the south and reach the North Caucasus. After Soviet troops suffered defeat in the Crimea and in the vicinity of Kharkov in the summer of 1942, a dangerous situation developed in the Stalingrad region.

“It was clear to me that the battle for Stalingrad was of the greatest military and political significance. If Stalingrad fell, the enemy command would be able to cut off the south of the country from the center. We could lose the Volga – the important water artery, along which a large amount of goods flowed from the Caucasus,” stated Zhukov.¹²

Having arrived in a region north of Stalingrad, Zhukov began to consistently visit the troops and to take energetic measures to organize a repulsion of the increasing number of fierce attacks on the part of the enemy in their attempt to capture Stalingrad. But upon studying the defense and actions of the enemy, the status of our troops, and the very difficult flat and open areas, he became more inclined to think that to have the troops continue to carry out insufficiently prepared and weak strikes would lead to an expenditure of strength and means and would not provide an essential solution to the task of defeating the enemy's Stalingrad group. Coming to the conclusion that only after a consolidation of reserves and a more well-grounded

preparation was it necessary to carry out more powerful strikes, he shared his thoughts with the commander of the front, the commander of the armies and became even more convinced in the accuracy of his conclusions. He reported his considerations to Stalin. Stalin at first regarded it with caution and, warning that no one else should know of the plan, ordered work on it to continue.

In this specific circumstance, the General HQ's plan, which provided for strikes from the north and south in converging directions toward Kalach with a simultaneous allotment of troops to create an interior and exterior front of encirclement, was clearly the most optimal plan. And one may consider it an established fact that the main idea of this plan, unconditionally, belonged to the Stavka and, most of all, to G. Zhukov, A. Vasilevskii, and the General Staff. Zhukov and Vasilevskii had twice in September reported their proposals for the Stalingrad operation. After the plan for the operation was approved by the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, Zhukov, Vasilevskii, and the Marshal of artillery, N. Voronov, set off for the front to work out the methods for the action in more detail while on site and to organize combat actions with the participation of the front commanders and other commanders. Zhukov worked on the Southwest and Don fronts and put all of his energy and creativity into this endeavor.

After preparations for the operations were complete, Stalin ordered Vasilevskii to coordinate the actions of the fronts in the Stalingrad operation, and Zhukov was given the task of once again preparing for the offensive operation in the west with the aim of paralyzing the army group "Center" and depriving the fascist command of the opportunity to move their forces in the direction of Stalingrad.

The final draft of counteroffensive, now given the code name "Uran" (Uranus), was "noteworthy for its clarity of mission, boldness of concept, and breadth of scope."¹³ As a whole,

the battle of Stalingrad broke the Wehrmacht and allowed for the beginning of a radical change in direction during the Second World War in favor of the anti-fascist coalition. An enormous contribution to the achievement of this victory, along with Vasilevskii, was made by Zhukov.

“From November 19 (1942) to February 2 (1943) we destroyed 32 divisions and 3 brigades, and remaining 16 divisions in the German forces lost 50 to 75 per cent of their strength. Total enemy losses in the entire region of the Don, the Volga and Stalingrad amounted to 1.5 million men; 3,500 tanks and self-propelled guns; 12,000 guns and mortars; 3,000 planes and large amounts of other equipment.”¹⁴ “The defeat at Stalingrad threw a scare into both the German people and its army. Never before in the history of Germany had such a large number of troops suffered such a terrible fate,” wrote general Westphal.¹⁵

The Battle of Kursk

“After Stalingrad everything was different. After Stalingrad the Russians knew they were going to win the war and the Germans (except for Hitler) strongly suspected they might lose,”¹⁶ wrote Zhukov in his “...Battles.”

With the preparation of an offensive operation in the summer of 1943, the attention of the German command was confined to the Kursk salient. Writes Erich von Manstein: “Obviously, after so many major formations had been lost, there would no longer be forces available to mount another crucial offensive on the scale of 1941 and 1942. What did seem possible -- given proper leadership on the German side -- was that Soviet Union could be worn down to such an extent that it would tire of its already excessive sacrifices and be ready to accept a stalemate. At the time in question this was far from being wishful thinking.”¹⁷ Manstein believed that the

German command staffs and fighting forces were still superior to their Soviet counterparts: "The German command thus had very little time left in which to force a draw in the east. It could only do so if it succeeded, within the framework of a – now inevitable – strategic defensive, in dealing the enemy powerful blows of a localized character which would sap his strength to a decisive degree – first and foremost through losses in prisoners."¹⁸

The fact that Hitler's armies were in the position of surrounding our Kursk group of troops presented a serious threat. The German command decided to use the advantage in the operational position of their troops in the preparation for offensive operations in the summer of 1943. The scheme of operation Citadel was to surround and destroy the significant amount of Soviet troops on the Central and Voronezh Fronts by a simultaneous assault with strikes from fascist German troops from the north and from the south in converging directions. In operative order No. 6 from April 1, 1943, Hitler indicated, "I have decided to enact the first offensive of this year, Citadel. The significance of this offensive is decisive... Victory in Kursk must serve as a torch for the whole world."¹⁹

On Soviet-German front Germany and its allies had in 1943, 232 divisions, more than 5,300,000 men, more than 54,000 guns and mortars, 5,850 tanks and assault weapons, and approximately 3,000 combat planes. To conduct the operation planned against the Kursk Salient, the Nazi Command concentrated 50 of its best divisions, including 16 tank and motorized divisions, 11 tank battalions and assault weapons divisions comprising up to 2,700 tanks and assault weapons and more than 2,000 aircraft (almost 69 per cent of all the combat planes on the Eastern Front). More than 900,000 men were ready for battle.²⁰

Originally, the Stavka and General Staff had planned to conduct an offensive to forestall the enemy in the summer of 1943.

In its final form, the Soviet command's plan was reduced to the following: to go on the preventive strategic defense with the forces of the Central, Voronezh, and part of the Steppe fronts to repel the summer offensive of the fascist German troops, to bleed them and to strike the main enemy groupings by launching a counteroffensive.

In such a manner, what was planned and conducted was an expressed strategic defensive operation by the forces of several fronts. A large number of forces were allotted to conduct the operations. The manning of the Central (commanded by Rokossovskii) and the Voronezh (commanded by Vatutin) fronts by the beginning of July numbered over 1.3 million men, up to 20,000 artillery pieces and mortars, up to 3,600 tanks and self-propelled gun mounts, and 3130 aircraft.²¹

There were many principally new provisions in this decision for conducting operations and organizing the defense in Kursk that enriched the Soviet art of war. "Zhukov's strategy was victorious. The battle opened as he had anticipated, and he won it in his own way. It was probably the greatest battle of World War II – certainly the greatest armored engagement. More than six thousand tanks on both sides were brought into action. The defeat of the Germans was so appalling that never again were they able to seize the strategic initiative on the Eastern Front."²² Thanks to the flexibility and outstanding thinking of Zhukov in 1943, for the first time during the war, Soviet strategic thought overcame ideological prejudices in regard to strategic defense, which was viewed before this as something unworthy of our army. The new vision of strategic defense by Zhukov, new to the art of war in the battle of Kursk was that Soviet troops would go on the defensive not because they were forced to or because of lack of strength or means as was supposed to be done in accordance with existing theoretical outlooks, but deliberately, having at their disposal forces superior to that of the enemy.

Thus, the offensive by fascist German troops in the summer of 1943 ended with a crushing defeat. After the battle of Kursk until the end of the war, they were not able to launch a single large offensive of an operationally strategic scale.

After the battle of Kursk, Zhukov, pondering the experience and lessons of the operations that were conducted and the victories, thought more and more about how not to allow the enemy to consolidate new defensive positions and most of all to make a forced crossing of the Dnieper river. During the offensive in the south-west direction, Zhukov coordinated the actions of the Voronezh and Steppe fronts, acting in the direction of Kiev and ending with the liberation of the Ukrainian capital.

The Belorussian Operation

As a result of the radical change in the course of the war in favor of the Soviet Union, by 1944, favorable conditions had been created for the complete liberation of the country from fascist occupation and for a triumphant conclusion to the war. The enemy suffered immense losses but was still strong. When the matter of the succession of strikes to be carried out in the campaign of 1944 was discussed in the Stavka, Stalin originally suggested that the first strike be conducted in the direction of Lvov in order to proceed further in bypassing the Belorussian salient. Zhukov spoke out against this. The problem was that Hitler would have a large portion of his tank divisions at his disposal in this direction. The beginning of the first offensive here would lead to an extended battle with enemy panzer units without any kind of perspective for a successful development for an offensive. Therefore, Zhukov and the General Staff proposed that the first offensive operation begin on the northern flank of the Soviet-German front and that

there be an attempt to draw enemy reserves in this direction. With a few amendments, the Stavka as a whole adopted such a course of action.

The Belorussian operation was conducted with the aim of defeating the main forces of army group Center and to complete the liberation of Belarus and a portion of the territory of Lithuania. The scheme of the operation was to pin down the enemy in the center by the action of the 2nd Belorussian front and, delivering major strikes with the forces of the 3rd and 1st Belorussian fronts to route the most powerful enemy flank grouping and then surround and destroy them in the region of Vitebsk and Bobruisk. Later, while developing an offensive inland, to surround the Minsk enemy grouping so as not to allow them to retreat to the west. The realization of this idea led to the formation of a gap in the operational structure of the group Center that was up to 400 kilometers wide and created conditions for the rapid development of the operational success of our troops to the strategic one.

After the beginning of the operation, the Vitebsk and Bobruisk enemy groupings were surrounded and destroyed. As a result of the Belorussian operation, the main forces of the army group Center were defeated and serious damage was inflicted on parts of the forces from army groups North and Northern Ukraine. Belarus was liberated, as was a part of the territory of Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia. The offensive had taken place in an area of more than 1, 100 kilometers, and the troops had moved inward to a depth of 500-600 kilometers.

In August 1944, after the inclusion of the 1st Ukrainian front in the all out offensive, Zhukov began to coordinate the actions of this front and of the 1st Belorussian front in conducting the Lvov-Sandomir operation.

In the Direction of Warsaw and Berlin

The Vistula-Oder operation was conducted in January and in the beginning of February 1945 by the forces of the 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian fronts.

The Vistula-Oder operation became one of the most prominent operations of the Great Patriotic War and Second World War as a whole by the scope and level of the art of war that it involved as well as by the military and political results that it produced. Sixteen regular, four tank and two aviation armies, 2.3 million men in all, took part in the operation. Also involved were 7,000 tanks and self-propelled gun mounts, 33,500 pieces of artillery and mortars, and 5,000 aircraft. Combat during the operation developed over an area of more than 500 kilometers. In a rapid offensive, troops from the 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian Fronts routed the main forces of the fascist army group "A" and penetrated to a depth of up to 500 kilometers.²³ A significant portion of Poland was liberated and combat had crossed over onto the territory of fascist Germany. Soviet troops reached positions that were several dozens of kilometers from Berlin.

Starting from the boldness and breadth of the operation's plan, the ability to foresee the course of its development, the search of new methods of action that were unexpected by the enemy, and ending with the matter of the thoroughness and hard work involved in the preparation of the operation, its all-around provision, the firmness in guiding the troops during the operation, the mark of Zhukov's personality lies within all aspects of the operation.

The Berlin Operation

The Berlin operation was part of the final assault against Nazi Germany. The participation of most of the Soviet armed forces in that assault speeded the end of the war.

The fascist leadership had gathered all of its available forces for the defense of Berlin: over 1 million men, 11,400 pieces of artillery and mortars, 1,500 tanks and self-propelled guns, and 3,300 aircraft. What had been created for Berlin was a strong, not only highly echeloned, but, in essence, a compact defensive zone with a depth of 60-70 kilometers. It included the Oder-Neisse area with a depth of up to 20-40 kilometers, which had three regions, and the Berlin defensive region.

The goal of the fascist group was to make use of the discord that existed among the allies, to win time and attempt to conclude a peace, under any circumstances, with the USA and Great Britain. Secret negotiations between American special services with Himmler were known to have taken place. In turn, the allies, who had up to this point not rushed to open up a second front, were now scurrying to move as deep as possible into the territory of Germany, to capture Berlin, and by the end of the war, to gain the most advantageous strategic positions.

Under these conditions of complex and confused military and political circumstances, the Soviet leadership and command were able to suppress all secret diplomatic maneuvers and intrigues only by quickly routing the remainders of the fascist German army and by capturing Berlin. Troops of the 1st and 2nd Belorussian, the 1st Ukrainian fronts, forces from the Baltic fleet, the 18th long-range aviation army, and units of the country's air defense troops took part in the operation of Berlin. The main role was assigned to the troops of the 1st Belorussian front under the command of Marshal Zhukov.

He made the decision to start the offensive at night, conducting artillery preparatory fire two hours before sunrise. With the aim of blinding and stupefying the enemy, 143 anti-aircraft

spotlights were moved out to the forward regions. In other regards, the operation was prepared in the most thorough manner.

The operation of Berlin occurred in three stages. At the first stage from April 16 through April 19, there was a penetration of the Oder-Neisse defense zone. At the second stage from April 19 through April 25, military activity was directed at surrounding and dismembering the Berlin group of enemy troops. At the 3rd stage from April 26 through May 8, the surrounded enemy groupings were destroyed. After tense and persistent battles, the troops were able to capture Berlin and join up with the allies. Germany surrendered.

The successful completion of the Berlin operation led to the end of the war against fascist Germany. On May 8, 1945, Marshal G. Zhukov presided at the historical ceremony for the signing of the Act of unconditional surrender of fascist Germany and fulfilled this task with great merit.

Russian people value the merit of the large contribution to the victory that was made by the peoples and allies of the USA, Great Britain, France, China, and the other nations of the anti-Hitler coalition. We highly value the selfless battle conducted by the warriors and partisans of Yugoslavia against fascist Occupying forces. Troops from the Polish and Czechoslovakian armies fought bravely along side the Soviet Army. The actions of Bulgarian, Albanian, and Hungarian patriots and participants of the Resistance movement that occurred in occupied countries will forever be recorded in the chronicle of the anti-fascist battle.

The Great Patriotic War will always remain one of the most tragic and heroic periods in the history of our country. There were various pages in the history of the war, and their interpretation will continue to arouse heated debates and various opinions. But nothing can shake the magnitude and the significance of the victory. No one is within his rights to deny the main

factor, the Soviet people and its army that bore on its shoulders the main brunt of the war and made the decisive contribution to the liberation of the peoples of Europe and Asia, in achieving victory over fascist Germany, militant Japan, and their allies. The enormous role in achieving victory that was played by Russia's great son, Georgii Zhukov, a talented and prominent military leader during the Second World War, remains indubitable and widely acknowledged.

The unmasking of slander concerning Zhukov and the affirmation of the position allotted to him in military history by life itself is also important from a morality and educational viewpoint. For example, in the first half of the XIX century, the name of the great military leader Russian Marshal A. Suvorov was consigned to oblivion. And when, after a loss in the Crimean War, under conditions of an all-out decline and degradation in military affairs and morale, an inspiring example was needed to regenerate national merit and the Russian army, they thought first and foremost of Suvorov.

The same thing may be said of Zhukov. There is much about him that we need to comprehend all over again. In the troubled times that we are experiencing in Russia and especially in the incredibly difficult period for the Russian army, the inspiring example of selfless and brilliant service to one's motherland we find in Georgii Zhukov. The pride in the glorious sons of our people is needed by us now as never before as much as the air we breathe, like water to one thirsting in the desert.

There are many important lessons and conclusions that may be drawn from the military experience of the commander himself.

Firstly, the wars of the past, the military threats, and armed conflicts of our time are generated by various economic, international, ideological, territorial, religious and other contradictions, but all of these have their integrated expression in politics. Politics does not exist

in a pure form, it may be viable only if all these factors are considered as a whole, including the interests of military security and the defense of the country.

Afghanistan and Chechnya have taught us much. I think there can be no doubt that had Zhukov been the Minister of Defense during these years, such ventures would not have been possible. I am sure that he certainly would have honestly stated: what can we really count on, what will be the consequences. At the least, there would have been no assurances that it would be possible to take Grozny with one regiment and in two hours.

The Zhukov approach allows for an increased responsibility of both politicians, who are obliged to assign their armies with realistic missions and create favorable military and political conditions for them to be carried out, and of the military, which is called upon to bravely defend their proposals and solve the tasks assigned to them with inflexibility and creativity.

Secondly, military guidance may be effective only when there is observance of the principle of intelligent centralization, unity in the command of all forces and means for all types of armed forces and departments of power that participate in the defense of the nation. We have had to pay dearly for all this disjointedness, friability of direction, and confusion. To overcome this, Zhukov and other military leaders had to resort to the most extreme measures. In order to avoid such measures and not cause unjustified losses in a time of war, we need yet to put a unified system for command in place, especially on the territory of the military districts while obtaining concurrent and rational use of all available forces and means for defense purposes.

Thirdly, a professional army (from the point of view of a high level of organization, provision of equipment and training) begins with the professionalism of the military leaders and all of the officers of the corps. In any field of activity, it is considered inadmissible to master one's work superficially, but in the military it borders with crime, for the activity of the military

leader in a combat situation is linked to the lives of other people. Professional and business-like qualities must always be at the forefront. Moreover, a systematic operational and combat training must be an immutable law. Without this it would be unthinkable to maintain any armed force. In talks with K. Simonov, Zhukov said that war for an officer is a test; it is not known when it will be but is a test for which must be prepared one's entire life. The main thing in the making of a creatively thinking officer is training and education.

The army must not be kept in need, soldiers and officers must be taken care of tirelessly. The military leadership legacy of Zhukov maintains its timeliness in modern times, but to study and implement it one needs to do so critically, creatively, and with consideration of new missions and requirements. Then it will serve our army and the matter of defending the Fatherland for a long time.

Word Count 7,838

ENDNOTES

¹ William J. Spahr, Vzlet i padenie velikogo polkovodsta (The rise and fall of a great captain). (Moscow, 1993), 10.

² P. Ruslanov, Marshal Zhukov, (Russian Review, Vol.XV April, 1956), 124.

³ K. M. Simonov, Zametki k biografii G.K.Zhukova, (Notes for a biography of G.K.Zhukov) (Moscow: VIZh, no. 6, 1987), 54. (Hereinafter referred to as "Zametki".)

⁴ Ibid., 50.

⁵ Sovetskaia voennaia entsiklopedia (Soviet military encyclopedia) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1976-1980), (hereinafter SVE) 354.

⁶ Simonov, 51.

⁷ Simonov, 53.

⁸ Georgri K. Zhukov, Reminiscences and Reflections. (Volume 1) (Moscow, 1985) (Hereinafter Memoirs), 184.

⁹ Book Review

¹⁰ Zhukov Memoirs, (Volume 2), 35.

¹¹ William J. Spahr, Zhukov: The rise and fall of a great captain (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1993), 74.

¹² Zhukov G. Memoirs, (Volume 2), 64.

¹³ Otto P. Chaney, Zhukov. (Hereinafter Zhukov) (Norman: University of Oklahoma press, 1971), 38.

¹⁴ Ibid., 216.

¹⁵ Ibid., 230.

¹⁶ Georgri K. Zhukov, Marshal Zhukov's greatest battles
(Hereinafter *Battles*) (Harper: NY & Evanston, 1969), 192.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁹ Chaney, 249.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Itogi vtoroi mirovoi voiny. Sbornik statei. (Moscow, 1957),
82

²² SVE, 354.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Zhukov, Battles, 199.

²⁵ SVE, 354.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chaney, Otto P., Zhukov. Norman: University of Oklahoma press, 1971.

Itogi vtoroi mirovoi voiny. Sbornik statei. Moscow, 1957.

Ruslanov, P. Marshal Zhukov. Moscow: *Russian Review*, Vol.XV, April, 1956.

Simonov, K. M. Zametki k biografii G.K.Zhukova (Notes for a biography of G.K.Zhukov). Moscow: VIZh, 1987.

Sovetskaia voennaia entsiklopedia (Soviet military encyclopedia). Moscow: Voenizdat, 1976-1980.

Spahr, William J. Zhukov: The rise and fall of a great captain. Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1993.

Zhukov, Georgri K. Marshal Zhukov's greatest battles. Harper: NY & Evanston, 1969.

Zhukov, Georgri K. Reminiscences and Reflections. Moscow, 1985, Volume 1.

Zhukov, Georgri K. Reminiscences and Reflections. Moscow, 1985, Volume 2.