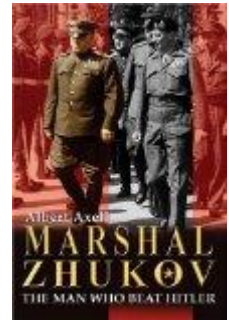


Albert Axell. *Marshal Zhukov: The Man Who Beat Hitler*. London: Longman, 2003. v + 255 pp. \$21.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-582-77233-5.



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The Savior of Moscow, Stalingrad, and the Soviet Union

Monographs about World War II and biographies of military men, from enlisted men and women to officers, have become increasingly popular in recent years. Writers such as Stephen Ambrose, who have strived to make history more accessible to the general public, have succeeded in sparking interest in World War II. People can read about "citizen soldiers," rangers, "ghost soldiers," pilots, nurses, and prisoners of war. Bookstore shelves are crammed with books about the war, but many of them present the war in Europe and the Pacific from the American perspective. Until recently, less attention has focused on the Eastern Front, on the clashes between German and Soviet forces. David Glantz, Antony Beevor, Reina Pennington, and other historians have attempted to turn attention to the fierce fighting, heroism, and tragedy of the Eastern Front. Albert Axell joins these renowned writers in presenting another perspective.

For over twenty-five years, Axell has devoted his energies to the study of Russia and the Soviet-Nazi front in World War II. During this period, he

interviewed numerous Soviet generals, many of whom served under Marshal Georgi Zhukov during the war. Axell's interviews and research have culminated in a series of books, including *Russia's Heroes, 1941-45*, *Stalin's War: Through the Eyes of His Commanders*, and, most recently, *Marshal Zhukov: The Man Who Beat Hitler*. Because of his obvious admiration of the Soviet marshal, Axell could have given his book a different title, such as *Marshal Zhukov: The Man Who Saved the Soviet Union* or *Marshal Zhukov: The Greatest Soviet General of the Second World War*.

Zhukov has been the topic of numerous works, both popular and historical. While some of them are biographies, others discuss Zhukov in the context of a particular Eastern Front battle. The brief access to Soviet archives enabled Glantz and others to provide a more accurate account of the battles from the Soviet perspective. Relying on Soviet archives, articles in Soviet newspapers, secondary materials, and interviews of Soviet generals and two of Zhukov's daughters, Axell discusses Zhukov's life and career. The author puts Zhukov

on a pedestal and quickly dismisses criticisms of the general's leadership and command style. On more than one occasion, he does, however, acknowledge that Zhukov's colleagues accused him of implementing battle plans at the expense of soldiers' lives. Although Axell refutes these accusations, he frequently does not provide enough substantiated evidence to prove his case.

In the course of his discussion, Axell challenges conclusions reached by other scholars, particularly those who suggest that "Zhukov lost one 'great battle' called Operation Mars in front of Moscow in the autumn of 1942" (p. 8). He also suggests that Glantz's "detailed argument ... does not hold water" because his statistics are faulty (p. 8). As evidence, Axell refers to Zhukov's explanation of events, but he fails to identify the source of the Soviet commander's story. Since he frequently quotes from Zhukov's memoirs, however, one has to assume that this document also provides Axell's evidence in this instance.

Perhaps one of the more interesting aspects of Axell's book is his discussion of the love/hate relationship that existed between Zhukov and Josef Stalin. According to Axell, Zhukov's willingness to challenge Stalin's orders during the war caused frequent conflicts between the two men. In addition, he suggests that Stalin's jealousy of Zhukov's popularity adversely affected the commander's post-war career. Although this relationship provides an interesting dynamic to the story, Axell's discussion falls short. Because of the limited number of sources, he relies too heavily on Zhukov's memoirs. Consequently, the reader only has access to Zhukov's version of events and his version of his relationship with Stalin.

The real challenge for Axell was to present a complete account of Zhukov's life in a short monograph. Unfortunately, he fails to meet the challenge. Although his research might be excellent, Axell's presentation of the material leaves a lot to be desired. Beginning with the introduction, the text is choppy and disjointed. The organization of

the book is quite confusing. Initially, Axell discusses events chronologically, but he switches to a thematic approach toward the end of the book. Consequently, he covers some events several times, and his discussion of other events seems out of place with the rest of the text. As a result, it is difficult to follow the story that Axell presents. In addition, at times, Axell fails to adequately identify his sources, and he fails to acknowledge that the information provided by interviewees might not always be accurate. He rarely provides substantiation of interviewees' statements, other than to quote from Zhukov's memoirs, which were written when he was out of favor with Stalin's government.

Because of the numerous problems with Axell's book, those interested in Zhukov and his career or the battles on the Eastern Front should consult other reputable works, such as Oto P. Chaney's *Zhukov*, David Glantz's *Zhukov's Greatest Defeat: The Red Army's Epic Disaster in Operation Mars*, and *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, Georgi Zhukov's *From Moscow to Berlin: Marshal Zhukov's Greatest Battles*, Antony Beevor's *Stalingrad*, and John Erickson's *The Road to Stalingrad*.

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