

Screenplay for the film "1945 - Marshal Georgy Zhukov. Historical Chronicles with Nikolai Svanidze" written by Marina Zhukova, translated by AI, and preceded by a summary also written by AI.

Screenplay Summary:

The text traces Marshal Georgy Zhukov's role in the final phase of World War II and, at the same time, explores the power struggle between Soviet generals, Stalin, and the official shaping of historical memory. In November 1944, Stalin removes Rokossovsky from command of the 1st Belorussian Front and places Zhukov there, giving him the crucial Berlin axis. By January 1945, Soviet troops have almost a clear road to the German capital, and both Zhukov and Konev propose to launch the decisive offensive as early as February. German defenses around Berlin are weak, and a detailed plan for a Berlin operation is ready by about 10 February.

Stalin, however, has other priorities: the Yalta Conference and the political control of post-war Europe. He diverts part of Rokossovsky's forces toward East Prussia in order to "stake out" that territory before negotiations with the Allies, thereby weakening the cover of Zhukov's right flank. He also does not wish to alarm the Western Allies, especially Roosevelt, by showing the Red Army's strength too quickly. He refuses Zhukov the additional army requested and effectively postpones the capture of Berlin. In the 1960s, when Marshal Chuikov publicly argues that Berlin could and should have been taken in February, he is politically reprimanded, and Zhukov, whose heavily edited memoirs must fit the official line, ends up implicitly defending Stalin, even though he remains haunted by the issue.

The offensive finally begins only in April 1945. The battle of the Seelow Heights is particularly bloody: three days of frontal assaults, 33,000 Soviet dead in that sector alone, and more than 250,000 Soviet deaths for the entire Berlin operation – the highest average daily losses of any offensive in World War II. In parallel, the text addresses looting, rape and violence perpetrated by Soviet and Allied soldiers in Germany, as well as efforts to impose discipline (orders from Stalin and Konev, military tribunals, and personal leaflets signed by Zhukov). It also describes the shock of Soviet soldiers discovering a European standard of living far above that of the USSR, which fuels both resentment and widespread "souvenir hunting".

Zhukov emerges as a highly ambivalent figure: a harsh commander who can slap a lieutenant general in the face, yet also the man who in December 1941 dares to contradict Stalin on the phone, tells him to stop "playing with toy soldiers" in the Kremlin, swears at him and hangs up – and later admits his share of responsibility for pre-war mistakes. The narrative shows how official history and Zhukov's own memoirs are reshaped under political pressure: the obligatory glorification of Brezhnev, the falsification of his family background to denounce his "bourgeois" uncle, and the silence surrounding atrocities and strategic disagreements.

A major portion of the text focuses on the discovery, identification and subsequent top-secret handling of Hitler's remains, in which the interpreter Elena Rzhevskaya plays a key role. While the investigative team believes it essential to clarify Hitler's death beyond doubt, Stalin chooses to keep the information secret, treating Hitler's corpse as a political asset. Twenty years later, Zhukov reads Rzhevskaya's book, realizes how the identification was actually done, and is forced to confront the

fact that he, the commander of the Berlin operation and deputy supreme commander, had been kept in the dark.

The narrative also touches on the Prague uprising and the paradoxical role of the 1st Division of Vlasov's army, which, after fighting on the German side and participating in the suppression of the Warsaw Uprising, ends up helping to liberate Prague against Vlasov's explicit wishes. Finally, the text ends with the Victory Parade of 24 June 1945, which Stalin, after an embarrassing fall from his horse, decides Zhukov will receive on his famous white horse. It recalls how Victory Day is later abolished by Stalin and only restored in 1965, precisely when the aging Zhukov briefly returns to public view before his death – once more both celebrated and betrayed by the same political system that had used and then sidelined him.

Screenplay:

1945 – Georgy Zhukov

In November 1944, Stalin, by telephone, removed Marshal Rokossovsky from his command of the 1st Belorussian Front, which had an open road to Berlin.

Zhukov writes in his book *Reminiscences and Reflections*:

“The Supreme Commander summoned me and said: ‘The 1st Belorussian Front is operating in the Berlin direction. We are thinking of putting you in charge of this direction.’”

So, on the eve of victory, Stalin appoints Zhukov as the main marshal – just as he once declared Mayakovsky, after his death, to be the principal poet, and Gorky, shortly before his death, to be the principal writer.

After the liberation of Warsaw in January 1945, the armies of the 1st Belorussian Front move swiftly forward through Poland.

Along the roads, wooden boards are driven into the ground with posters depicting a soldier squatting to retie his puttees. On the poster, the slogan: **“We will get to Berlin!”**

In those days of 1945, dressmakers in Polish towns acquire unexpected customers: our female traffic regulators. They ask that their field blouses be taken in and fitted to their figures. In the spring of 1945, they will have to stand there on display before the eyes of all Europe.

Near a Soviet checkpoint on the German border, on a half-ruined house, someone has scrawled with tar, in big clumsy letters: **“So this is cursed Germany!”**

At this time, Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front is less than a hundred kilometers from Berlin. It is being discussed that Berlin could be taken already in February. Zhukov writes in his memoirs: “Indeed, at that time, the enemy on the approaches to Berlin had only limited forces, and his defenses were weak. This was clear to us. Accordingly, the front command issued the following directive to the troops.”

In that document, signed by Zhukov, we read: **“By a lightning thrust on 15–16 February, seize Berlin.”**

Proposals for an offensive in the Berlin direction had been submitted to Stavka by Zhukov and by the commander of the 1st Ukrainian Front, Konev, as early as 26 and 28 January. They were

approved by Stavka.

The right flank of Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front bordered the area of operations of Rokossovsky's 2nd Belorussian Front. At that moment Rokossovsky was attacking the German grouping in Eastern Pomerania. To guard against a possible strike from this grouping, Zhukov appeals to Stalin:

"I ask that the offensive of the front not be halted. To secure our right flank, it is sufficient to reinforce the front with one additional army."

In other words, in order to take Berlin in February, Zhukov asks Stalin for one extra army. Zhukov writes:

"The Supreme Commander promised to think it over, but that day we received no answer. After further talks, the Supreme Commander ordered us to consider our right flank carefully, but refused to allocate additional forces."

Thus the decision of Stavka to begin the Berlin operation and the instructions to the fronts to take Berlin in February 1945 are not backed up by anything and simply hang in the air.

This question is extremely painful for Zhukov. In his memoirs he devotes a great deal of space to the dispute over whether Berlin could have been taken in February. In the 1960s he argues with Marshal Chuikov. Chuikov believes that "Berlin could have been taken already in February." Yet Zhukov, who in 1945 had in fact set his forces the objective of taking Berlin in February, in 1965 becomes Chuikov's harsh opponent.

The argument drags on for eight pages in Zhukov's memoirs. After reading them, one is left with the impression that Zhukov unexpectedly abandoned the February offensive on Berlin himself. He cites the threat to his flank that arose from the Pomeranian German grouping, against which Rokossovsky was then advancing.

Zhukov says in his dispute with Chuikov:

"Chuikov maintains that the question of the possibility of taking Berlin as early as February 1945 was first raised by him at a conference in Berlin in 1945, but that it did not receive wide publicity." This is how Zhukov's words appear in the version of his memoirs published in 1969 after thorough editorial polishing. In the perestroika years, the full version of Zhukov's memoirs is published.

In the full version, the passage about Chuikov sounds the same at first, but then continues. Yes, Chuikov spoke at a conference in 1945 about the possibility of taking Berlin in February, but it did not receive broad coverage because it was essentially linked to criticism of Stalin's actions. Zhukov writes nothing more about this even in the full version. Apparently, the threat of criticizing Stalin's actions is already sufficient reason for Zhukov to close off any topic. When Zhukov argues with Chuikov, he is, in fact, defending Stalin.

As for Marshal Chuikov, who wrote in 1965 that Berlin could and should have been taken in February 1945, he was immediately summoned "on the carpet" to the Chief of the Main Political Directorate of the Army, Yepishev. In the presence of other commanders he is subjected to a political "working-over." Chuikov insists:

"We had enough forces for an offensive on Berlin. Who held us up? The enemy or the command? The two and a half months of respite we gave the enemy helped him prepare the defense of Berlin." Yepishev replies:

"We must not blacken our history, otherwise there will be nothing on which to educate our youth."

In his memoirs, Zhukov naturally does not mention the plan of the Berlin operation which he had completed by 10 February 1945 and which would be carried out later. But Berlin, not taken in

February, will be taken in May at colossal cost. The dash on Berlin will be made when the Allies have come just as close to it as the Soviet armies.

At the beginning of February 1945, the Allies are still far from Berlin. Early February is the time of the meeting of Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt in Yalta. In Yalta, the boundaries of the occupation zones in Germany and Austria are agreed. Eastern Germany with Berlin, Pomerania and East Prussia are to come under Soviet control.

But on the eve of Yalta, Stalin decides to insure himself in East Prussia. He wants Soviet troops to be physically there before the territorial talks with the Allies begin. He takes part of Rokossovsky's armies, which are advancing west in Pomerania, and turns them almost 180 degrees toward East Prussia. He orders Rokossovsky's remaining forces to continue moving towards Berlin.

Rokossovsky will write in his memoirs:

"In my view, the liquidation of the encircled German grouping in Prussia could have been postponed, and the resolution on the Berlin axis accelerated."

That is, Rokossovsky believes that if not for Stalin's unexpected decision, a February offensive on Berlin would have been entirely realistic. But Rokossovsky reasons like a soldier, while Stalin reasons like a politician: he is staking out East Prussia. With his front weakened and split by Stalin, Rokossovsky now finds it difficult to cover Zhukov's northern flank. When Zhukov says he senses a German threat from the north, he is telling the truth. But he does not indicate – or does not reflect on – why this threat arose. And it arose because at that moment Stalin was more interested in Yalta than in Berlin.

In addition, on the eve of the Yalta Conference, Stalin decides not to frighten the Allies, above all Roosevelt, with the full might of the Red Army, and so, at that time, is in no hurry to take Berlin. Thus, for a combination of reasons, Stalin denies Zhukov the opportunity for a February thrust on Berlin and thereby lays a heavy burden on Zhukov's conscience. In April, when the Germans will have strengthened Berlin's defenses, the storming of the city will require enormous casualties. And Zhukov will pay that price.

On 7 March 1945, Stalin summons Zhukov to Moscow. He receives him at his dacha and tells him about the Yalta Conference. Zhukov writes:

"I realized that he was satisfied with its results."

The occupation zones in Germany are essentially agreed. A decision has been made on reparations. The question of Poland's border has been settled.

The conditions under which the Soviet Union will enter the war against Japan on the side of the Allies are agreed as well.

Zhukov writes:

"The Supreme Commander said: 'Let's stretch our legs a little, I feel kind of stale.' In his whole appearance, his movements and his speech, one sensed great physical fatigue. Over the four years of war, Stalin had thoroughly overworked. This could not but affect his nervous system."

Twenty years later, in a private conversation with the writer and former military interpreter of the 1st Belorussian Front, Elena Rzhevskaya, Zhukov will be more concrete:

"After the war he was ill. Stalin told me himself: 'I'm even afraid of my own shadow.'"

Marshal Zhukov tells Elena Rzhevskaya:

“Once I was riding in a car with Stalin. The windows in the car were like this – about ten centimeters thick. In front sat the chief of Stalin’s personal security, General Vlasik. Stalin motioned for me to take the back seat.”

The car had three rows of seats. So they rode like this: Vlasik in front, behind him Stalin, and behind Stalin – Zhukov. Later, Zhukov asked Vlasik:

‘Why did he put me back there?’

Vlasik replied:

‘That’s how he always does it. If they shoot from the front, they’ll hit me. And if they shoot from behind, they’ll hit you.’

Such was Stalin.

And Zhukov, at his own post, at the front, slaps the chief of an army staff, a lieutenant general, across the face with his leather gloves – and the general stands at attention in front of him. But this same Zhukov, on 4 December 1941, at the most critical moment of the war, will tell Stalin by telephone that it is he, Zhukov, who knows best what to do at the front, and that in the Kremlin one can play with tin soldiers.

And at the end of that conversation he unleashes a volley of obscene curses at Stalin and slams down the receiver. And Stalin swallows it.

This same Zhukov, on the eve of the war, when he was Chief of the General Staff in the spring and summer of 1941, just like Stalin, refused to react to information about the inevitability of an attack on the USSR.

Later, twenty years after the war, Zhukov will write in his memoirs that he does not seek “to remove from himself his share of responsibility for the failures of that period.”

The meeting of Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt in Yalta ended on 11 February. On 13 and 14 February, the Allies bombed Dresden. There was information that German tank units would be transferred through Dresden. Later this information was not confirmed. The Americans suggested canceling the bombing. The British did not revoke the decision. 135,000 civilians died in Dresden. This is comparable to the consequences of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, which would occur later that same year, 1945. Dresden is the textbook example of the annihilation of civilians on German territory. But there are also non-textbook examples – both on the Allied side and on ours.

The American writer John Dos Passos, after the war, recalls the words of a certain U.S. Army major:

“Many normal American families would be horrified if they knew with what complete indifference to everything human ‘our boys’ behaved here. Our army and the British army have both played their part in looting and rape. Although these crimes are not characteristic of our troops as a whole, the percentage is high enough to give our army a sinister reputation, so that we too can be considered an army of rapists.”

In July 1945, hearings are held in the U.S. Senate examining cases of violence committed by Allied troops on German territory. Witnesses are called in connection with the rape of 2,000 German women in Stuttgart.

According to official data from the Soviet military prosecutor’s office, in the first months of 1945, 4,148 Soviet officers and a large number of enlisted men of the Red Army were convicted by

military tribunals for atrocities against the local population. Several exemplary trials ended with death sentences.

The war swept away the “iron curtain” behind which those people who made up the Red Army in 1945 had lived for many years. They had grown up in the belief that in European countries there was hunger, strikes, unemployment. Now, as they marched into Europe, they saw a standard of living which, even in wartime 1945, was incomparably higher than the pre-war standard in the Soviet Union.

The writer Viktor Astafyev writes:

“Good heavens, mothers mine! In every household a concrete yard, its own pump, tiled stoves, everything neat and clean, the livestock in fine condition.”

White bread such as the soldiers had never seen even in peacetime. The soldiers don’t want to eat at the army field kitchens anymore.

They go mad over fresh bread and bacon. At the homes where they eat, they shout at the inhabitants:

“In my kolkhoz, my wife and kids are dropping dead of hunger, and you here are stuffing yourselves with white bread, you damned bourgeois! So why should we shed our blood for you, why should we liberate you? It’s us who need liberating!”

This blind despair gives rise to looting and violence. A new word enters Russian, *barakholit’* – “to scrounge, to clean out stuff,” replacing the military term “to maraud.”

In propaganda, the themes of retribution and vengeance are central. Ilya Ehrenburg writes in his article “To Berlin”: “We will hang them.” Women of all ages are raped.

There are many cases when soldiers kill officers who try to prevent rape. Some officers, out of helplessness, commit suicide. These cases are discussed at a meeting of the Military Council of the 1st Belorussian Front in Zhukov’s presence.

Battery commander Captain Alexander Solzhenitsyn is arrested in February 1945 in East Prussia for critical remarks, in letters, about Stalin’s abilities as a commander. He sits in a cell with three officers. They tell him:

“We had been drinking and broke into a bathhouse where there were two girls. The girls managed to get away. But one of them happened to belong to the army’s chief of counterintelligence.”

“Yes,” Solzhenitsyn later writes, “we all knew very well: had the girls been German, we could have raped them and then shot them, and that would have been almost like a combat distinction.”

The future writer Lev Kopelev, then a major, is arrested with the following indictment:

“You are accused of, at the moment when our troops entered German territory, taking steps to save Germans, undermining the moral level of our troops, and agitating against vengeance and hatred.”

Lev Kopelev writes:

“I am convinced that the scoundrels, the marauders, the rapists were a negligible minority, but they left an indelible impression.”

Despite the fact that as early as 19 January 1945 Stalin had signed an order “On Conduct on German Territory,” the situation in February–March slips out of control.

An order on conduct in Germany is also signed by the commander of the 1st Ukrainian Front, Konev. The order cites outrageous examples of violence and looting. Tanks are so stuffed with

plunder that, in the event of surprise, they are incapable of fighting. A drunken tank crew opens fire on its own troops and destroys four artillery crews. Officers ride around in old carriages, in uniform but wearing top hats and carrying ladies' parasols. Konev's order contains a long list of officers demoted and sent to penal companies.

The wave of lawlessness does not yield to orders. In the troops of the 1st Belorussian Front a leaflet is distributed under Zhukov's signature, in which the marshal personally calls on the soldiers not to burn houses, not to rape German women, not to destroy factory equipment. In the leaflet, Zhukov deliberately calls all this by the familiar and dangerous word "sabotage."

"Soldiers," Zhukov says, "see to it that, because of some German wench's skirts, you don't overlook what the Motherland sent you here for!"

In his memoirs Zhukov did not write a single word about this, and he could not have written about it, even if he had wanted to. The question of publishing Zhukov's memoirs was decided at the very top. The pressure on the four-time Hero of the Soviet Union, Marshal Zhukov, was immense. He could not withstand it. In the book of memoirs, of which Zhukov said "for me this is a matter of life," there appears an anecdotal but obligatory story about his meeting with Brezhnev during the war: Marshal Zhukov, deputy Supreme Commander-in-Chief, supposedly wants to consult with the chief of the political department of the 18th Army, Colonel Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev, and drives specially to see him – but does not find him, because Brezhnev is on the Malaya Zemlya bridgehead, where the heaviest fighting is going on.

In 1973, a year before his death, Zhukov will have a conversation with Brezhnev. Zhukov will ask Brezhnev to have him buried in the ground. Brezhnev will promise. But he will not keep his promise. Zhukov will be cremated.

Present during that 1973 telephone conversation between Zhukov and Brezhnev was Mikhail Pilikhin, a man close to Zhukov both in childhood and in old age, and his driver during the war. Mikhail Pilikhin was Zhukov's cousin. Mikhail's father – Zhukov's maternal uncle – was one of the most renowned furriers in pre-revolutionary Moscow. His workshop was in Kamergersky Lane, next to the Moscow Art Theatre. His friends included the famous conductor Golovanov and the singer Nezhdanova – they would preside over his funeral service.

In his memoirs, Zhukov writes pure untruths about his uncle's family. He writes that his uncle mercilessly fleeced his rich clients, that he ruthlessly exploited his workers, that he beat them and his wife beat them, that they treated minors inhumanely.

In reality, the uncle had taken Zhukov from the village as an apprentice, taught him alongside his own sons, and kept him on as a worker. He made his nephew an excellent specialist in women's fur coats, and by 1914 secured for him a comfortable future. In the workshop, the 15-year-old Zhukov was called "Georgy Konstantinovich."

Zhukov's cousin, Mikhail Pilikhin, forgave him for slandering his father. He said:

"That was the time. That's why he wrote that in his autobiography. After all, he had to join the Party."

The offensive on Berlin begins on the night of 16 April. Zhukov recalls:

"In the morning of 16 April, on all sectors of the front, the troops were successfully advancing. However, the enemy began to offer resistance from the Seelow Heights."

At 3 p.m. on 16 April, Zhukov telephoned Stalin and reported on the enemy's resistance on the Seelow Heights. Stalin listened calmly and said:

"Call me in the evening and tell me how things are going."

In the evening, Zhukov says to Stalin:

"Before tomorrow evening it will not be possible to capture the Seelow Heights."

Zhukov recalls:

"This time Stalin did not talk to me as calmly as he had in the daytime."

Stalin asks:

"Are you sure that you will take the Seelow positions tomorrow?"

Zhukov replies:

"Tomorrow, 17 April, by the end of the day the defense will be broken."

"Good-bye," Stalin says curtly and hangs up.

The Seelow Heights are taken by the morning of 18 April. In the published memoirs of Zhukov, there is nothing more about this line of defense.

On the Seelow Heights, infantry was sent first, across a minefield. Behind the infantry came the tanks. The first day brought no success, despite the unbelievable tenacity and sacrifice of the soldiers. Zhukov's front was unable to seize the line on the road to Berlin, even though Stalin's attention was completely focused on this point.

In a night conversation with Zhukov, Stalin says:

"We are thinking of ordering Konev to send his tank armies to Berlin from the south."

At this moment, Stalin has two things on his mind. First: American units may appear on the outskirts of the German capital, and Berlin is still not ours. And second: he wants to pit the two marshals, Zhukov and Konev, against each other in the battle for Berlin, to sharpen to the utmost the struggle of their ambitions. And he will succeed.

The commander of the 1st Ukrainian Front, Konev, will later write:

"Zhukov wanted no one, except the forces of the 1st Belorussian Front, to take part in the capture of Berlin. It must be said frankly that even when the forces of the 1st Ukrainian Front were fighting in Berlin, this enraged Zhukov."

On the Seelow Heights, frontal assaults go on for three days in a row. Thirty-three thousand Soviet soldiers lie there. Zhukov's Berlin operation as a whole costs more than 250,000 lives. The average daily losses in the fighting for Berlin are the highest of any offensive operation of the Second World War: 15,712 killed each day. In the battle for Moscow, 10,910 killed per day; at Stalingrad, 6,392. In the first week after the war, one-third of a million death notices will be delivered in Russia.

Konev's armies break into the southern outskirts of Berlin before Zhukov's forces enter from the east. Zhukov is furious. When units of Rybalko's 3rd Tank Army, part of the Ukrainian Front, approach the Reichstag, Zhukov shouts over the secure line:

"What are you doing here?!"

On 28 April, Stalin orders Konev to restrict his armies' actions to the south and southwest of Berlin. The city center is assigned to Zhukov. The Reichstag is taken by the forces of the 3rd Shock Army of the 1st Belorussian Front. The Reichstag will be seized on 30 April. The fighting for it will last from morning until 22:50.

In the night of 30 April to 1 May 1945, German forces surrounded in Berlin's government quarter offer their last desperate resistance. At 3:30 a.m., the chief of staff of the German Army, General Krebs, crosses the front line. He is brought to Chuikov's observation post. Krebs takes Chuikov for Zhukov and, on behalf of Goebbels and Bormann, informs him that the day before, 30 April at 3:30 p.m., Hitler committed suicide. Krebs says that Goebbels would like to contact the Soviet government. The reply is that only unconditional surrender is acceptable. After Goebbels and Bormann refuse to capitulate unconditionally, the final battle begins at 6:30 p.m. on 1 May. On the morning of 2 May, the Reich Chancellery is taken.

One of the first to burst into the building is a soldier named Kurkov. He is from the Urals. He liked to boast that he was the terror of his household, yet he wrote the tenderest letters to his wife.

And she wrote to him:

"Good evening, hello my dear husband Nikolai Petrovich. I send you my heartfelt greetings and wish you all the best in your life, and above all in your military successes. We kiss you 99 times, and would kiss once more, but you are too far away from us."

Nikolai Kurkov, from a gold mine in the Urals, is mortally wounded in the Reich Chancellery by an SS man from Hitler's personal guard. He dies when our flag is already flying over the Reichstag.

In the garden of the Reich Chancellery, Major Bystrov, Lieutenant Colonel Klimenko and Major Khazin find the half-burned bodies of Goebbels and his wife, who have committed suicide. A few moments more, and the torrent of Red Army soldiers pouring into the Chancellery "would have trampled them without looking down, without noticing them." This is how Elena Rzhevskaya, interpreter of the 3rd Shock Army of the 1st Belorussian Front, tells it. In those days in Hitler's bunker she is sorting through piles of documents: Bormann's correspondence, Hitler's personal papers.

Goebbels's body is carried out into a Berlin street. Shreds of a charred Nazi uniform. Around his neck, a yellow tie. Elena Rzhevskaya writes:

"What I remember most of all is that tie – a yellow silk loop on a black, charred neck – fastened with a round metal badge with a swastika."

Before their suicide, the Goebbels couple killed their six children. The dead children lay under blankets in the basement of the Reich Chancellery. Zhukov went down into the basement. He categorically refused to look at Goebbels's dead children.

As for Hitler's corpse, nothing is known yet.

Twenty years later, on 1 November 1965, Zhukov telephones Elena Rzhevskaya, now a writer. "This is Zhukov speaking," he says. And asks to see her.

The next day she comes to his dacha. Zhukov is in a checked civilian suit, in a shirt without a tie. This is unusual; in our minds he is fused with his military uniform. At the dacha are his mother-in-law and his daughter Masha, eight years old. Zhukov is sixty-nine.

After the glory of the victor in 1945, he was sent in 1946 to command the Odessa Military District. Then, in 1948, he was sent even further away – to the Ural Military District. After Stalin's death, Zhukov became Minister of Defense. But in 1957 Khrushchev removed him from his post and barred him from all state and public activity. In 1965, under Brezhnev, he appears on the presidium at the ceremonial meeting for the 20th anniversary of Victory. The hall greets Zhukov with rapture.

So rapturously that for the November parade Brezhnev does not invite him. Zhukov has a heart attack. Elena Rzhevskaya meets him six days before the heart attack. Zhukov says:

“I am writing my memoirs. And right now I have just reached Berlin. That’s why I wanted to see you. I did not know that in May 1945 Hitler’s body had been found. But I read about it in your book and I believed you.”

In the book that Marshal Zhukov read, Elena Rzhevskaya tells by whom and how Hitler’s corpse was discovered in the days of Berlin’s fall, and how his remains were identified. She took part in this as a military interpreter.

The marshal repeats:

“I did not know that Hitler had been found. And at the press conference in May 1945 I said that nothing was known about Hitler. But now I must decide how to write about this in my memoirs.”

After a pause, Marshal Zhukov, who commanded the armies storming Berlin in 1945 and was Deputy Supreme Commander-in-Chief, asks the former interpreter:

“How could it have happened that I did not know this?”

Zhukov recalls the night of 1 May 1945:

“I reported to Stalin that we had received a message about Hitler’s suicide. I asked for his instructions. Stalin replied: ‘So he played it out to the end, the scoundrel. Where is Hitler’s body?’ ‘According to the information we have, Hitler’s body was burned on a pyre,’ I answered. ‘If nothing extraordinary happens,’ Stalin said, ‘don’t call until morning. I want to get some rest. Today we have the May Day parade.’”

After that, not another word about Hitler.

Meanwhile, in Berlin, on Stalin’s orders, the search for Hitler’s body is underway. The work is headed by Colonel Gorbushin. From 1 to 4 May, witnesses from Hitler’s personal guard are sought and found. One of them, Harry Mengerhausen, an eyewitness to the burning of Hitler’s and Eva Braun’s bodies, is questioned in one of the courtyards. He draws on the ground a plan of the Reich Chancellery garden, where the bodies were buried. They are found and exhumed.

On 8 May, the Soviet press publishes a statement that Hitler is hiding somewhere. That same day Colonel Gorbushin summons Elena Rzhevskaya. He hands her a dark burgundy box and tells her that inside are Hitler’s teeth, and that she is personally responsible, with her head, for their safekeeping.

In that very headquarters, the telegraph operator Raya tries on a white evening gown belonging to Eva Braun, which a love-struck Senior Lieutenant Kurashov has brought her. The dress is long, with a deep décolleté. Raya does not like it. It does not interest her as a historical item.

That same day, 8 May, close to midnight Berlin time – already 9 May Moscow time – the radio announces the signing of the act of unconditional surrender of the German armed forces. The act is signed in the dining hall of the military engineering school in Karlshorst. On the Soviet side, Zhukov receives the surrender. When Field Marshal Keitel signs the document, behind him stands the Deputy People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs, Serov. After the signing ceremony, our people and the Allies will celebrate until morning. Zhukov will dance.

Identifying Hitler’s teeth is made possible by the help of Käte Heusermann, assistant to Hitler’s dentist. The dental office was in central Berlin, at Kurfürstendamm 213. During the war, Heusermann and her sister had helped Jewish doctors to hide. At the end of April she refused an

offer to leave Berlin by plane. Now, in the ruined building of the Reich Chancellery, she finds the X-rays of Hitler's teeth. The identification of Hitler's remains is completed.

All those who are carrying out the mission to locate and identify Hitler's remains are convinced that any obscurity about his death would be harmful, because it would agitate a population that had, for so many years, believed in him hysterically. And above all, the Soviet people have the right to know that a final full stop has been put to the war. The Soviet people have earned that right with their blood. Stalin holds a different opinion. He does not yet know how he will use this information, what use he will find for Hitler's body, but, by force of habit, he makes all the information completely secret – just in case. He will fondle Hitler's corpse, seeking a way to make use of it. As for responsibility before the victorious people and before the whole world, Stalin does not feel it.

The material evidence – that is, Hitler's jaw – together with the Germans who helped in the identification, are sent to Moscow.

In mid-July 1945, Stalin asks Zhukov:

“So where is Hitler?”

Twenty years later, Marshal Zhukov ponders:

“But he did ask me: So where is Hitler? Why?”

Zhukov says:

“If this was going through the NKVD, then Beria was present at my conversation with Stalin. But Beria kept silent.”

Marshal Zhukov sincerely believes that since Beria kept silent, he did not know about it. Yet we know that Beria was in the know. Zhukov continues:

“And Serov was in Berlin. He still lives in the same building as I do on Granovsky Street. I asked him. He doesn't know.”

General Serov, who in May 1945 was Beria's deputy, was also in the know.

In 1965 Zhukov says:

“It can't be that Stalin knew. I was very close to Stalin.”

Zhukov wants to believe that Stalin, too, did not know. But what Elena Rzhevskaya tells him forces Zhukov to believe her. This is confirmed by the lines on page 272 in Volume III of the 10th and most complete edition of Zhukov's memoirs:

“How the investigation was conducted is described with exhaustive completeness by Elena Rzhevskaya in her book *The End of Hitler – Without Myth or Detective Story*. I have become convinced that there are no grounds to doubt Hitler's suicide.”

On 4 May 1945, the anti-fascist uprising in Prague begins. SS divisions have been moved up to Prague. The insurgent city cannot hold out long against German troops.

Forty kilometers southwest of the capital of Czechoslovakia stands the 1st Division of Andrey Vlasov's army. Vlasov is a Soviet general, a favorite of Stalin, a participant in the battle of Moscow whose army, in 1942, is encircled on the Volkhov Front. Captured, he goes over to the Germans. In Europe, the Vlasov forces become known for their operations against Yugoslav partisans. In 1944, they take an active part in the bloody suppression of the anti-fascist uprising in Warsaw.

On 5 May 1945, Czech officers arrive at the 1st Division, near insurgent Prague, to ask for help. A healthy hatred of fascism suddenly breaks out in men who had marched behind Vlasov for three

years. They go to Prague and liberate the city together with the insurgents. Many die in Prague. On 7 May the 1st Division leaves the city, into which, according to a Soviet-American agreement, Soviet troops will enter.

Vlasov himself is categorically opposed to helping the anti-fascist Prague uprising. At the last staff meeting, before the division sets off for Prague, Vlasov says:

“If my orders are not binding on you, then I have no business here!”

Vlasov was not with those units of his army that liberated Prague.

The Victory Parade is scheduled for 24 June 1945. A few days before that, Stalin summons Zhukov and asks whether he still knows how to ride a horse.

“No, I haven’t forgotten,” Zhukov answers.

“Well then, you will have to receive the Victory Parade. Rokossovsky will command the parade,” Stalin says.

Zhukov thanks him for the honor and asks whether it would not be better if the Supreme Commander-in-Chief himself reviewed the parade. Stalin replies:

“I am too old to take parades. You take it; you are younger.”

In the full version of his memoirs, Zhukov adds the sequel. At the Central airfield, where the parade rehearsals are taking place, Zhukov meets Stalin’s son Vasily. Vasily says to Zhukov:

“Father was himself preparing to receive the Victory Parade. But there was an incident. The other day, while riding, the horse bolted around the arena. Father grabbed its mane but could not hold on and fell off. When he got up, he spat and said: ‘Let Zhukov take the parade.’”

On 24 June 1945, at the tenth stroke of the Spassky Tower clock, to thunderous applause and to Glinka’s “Glory,” Zhukov rides out onto Red Square on a white horse. From marshals to enlisted men, the entire flower of the army – those who survived – stand motionless before him. Then Zhukov climbs up onto the Mausoleum and stands beside Stalin.

A torrential rain is falling. Zhukov wants to flick the water from the brim of his cap, but he glances at Stalin and does not dare. Stalin does not move, and the rain pours off his visor in streams.

Victory Day will be celebrated twice more. At the end of 1947, Stalin abolishes it.

Victory Day, as a nationwide holiday, will return only in 1965, twenty years after the end of the war.